Stony Brook University

Unmasking the Nation: Disputing of National Myths in the Work of Cristina García

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Hispanic Languages and Literature

Stony Brook University

December 2013

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis examines the ways in which *Dreaming in Cuban, Monkey Hunting* and *A Handbook to Luck*, three novels by Cristina Garcia, contradict and deconstruct popular national myths. In each novel, characters move between nations at key moments in each nation's history. Tracking these individuals' movements within a larger geopolitical framework allows for a new understanding of subaltern migration patterns. In each chapter, a specific aspect of movement is studied illustrating ways in which subaltern people are motivated and/or coerced to move from one nation or another, how their story becomes coopted by the larger national myth and where their small acts of rebellion can be traced in the counter responses by larger geo-political forces interested in the subjection of individuals. The patterns that emerge when tracking subaltern movement exist in direct conflict with established myths of nation-building. The ultimate end of this thesis is to shed light on Garcia's nation debunking project and begin a conversation on the true motivation behind the emigration of subaltern subjects.

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Unmasking the Nation: Disputing of National Myths in the Work of Cristina García

This thesis examines several key themes in Cristina García's novels *Dreaming in Cuban*, *Monkey Hunting* and *A Handbook to Luck*: movement, transformation, the creation of alternative spaces of being, the power of names, and the role of subjugated, ahistorical female in order to demonstrate García's deconstruction of nationhood and family relations. Rather than a establishing a tacit complicity with the traditional myths of nation building, discussed later on, García exposes the true underpinnings of the national structure: subjugated migration. In depicting her characters' migrations not as acts of free will of the migrating individuals, but instead as choreographed and manipulated by larger geopolitical forces, García classifies her characters' migrations as coerced, nuanced iterations of slavery, and brings to light the true motivating factors for the migrations that both construct and deconstruct the Nation and the family. Historical data on capitalism in Latin America, Bhabha's concept of the "narration" of nations, Marx's ideas of the "superstructure," J.W. Powell's studies on the nature of motion, Spivak's subaltern and De Certeau's model of place and space all combine in this thesis to provide the basis of the theoretical framework for discussing what García is asking her reader to consider: nations are not constructed and deconstructed on the

foundation of cacophonic and random events but by a carefully orchestrated symphony of migrations.

Timothy Brennan in “The National Longing for Form”, quotes Homi Bhabha while defining the term ‘nation’ that he explains “refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the ‘*natio*’ – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging” (quoted in Brennan 45). From this idea, one can infer that the linear trajectory of a patriarchal family represents the truest path of the nation: one man begins a family with one (or more) women, through hard work and vision he creates capital, and acquires possessions that his offspring will inherit and multiply. This is how the nation has traditionally been written, as an extension and reproduction of the family. However, as Bhabha argues, “If…we are alive to the *metaphoricity* of the peoples of imagined communities—migrant or metropolitan—then we shall find that the space of the modern nationpeople is never simply horizontal” (“DissemiNation” 293). In other words, there are always other factors at play in the building of a nation that are excluded from the written history of that nation. Similarly, we could say that, as García presents dislocated and disjointed family myths, she simultaneously dislocates the nation.

In all three novels the movement of people across national borders serves as a mechanism by which to debunk conventional notions of rational, preplanned nation building, thus exposing three things: the chaotic way in which nations are truly formed, the large scale economic and political maneuvers that directly influence the global movement of peoples and those places where we can sense the impact of individuals on the larger, seemingly invulnerable political and economic 'superstructures'. The word superstructure in this thesis is meant to represent the macrological forces at play in national and global politics, in other words it consists of the web of political, religious, economic and cultural processes upon which our modern nations are sustained[i]. While I do not wish to anthropomorphize the concept, I tend to conceive of the superstructure as an almost separate entity, a conglomeration of power constructed in any society, be it local or global that is only capable of acting in the best interests of those in power. The bigger the superstructure gets, the more invisible its actions, the harder to trace in everyday life. These invisible actions are the ones that García attempts to expose in the three novels discussed in this thesis. Continuing with the individual→famiy→nation continuum, in García's work we can observe a particular phenomenon: as a family grows into a nation, the family becomes absorbed in the national structure, abdicating its own best

interests in favor of the nation's interests. We will see this highlighted further on in the case of the Domingo Chen and Pilar Puente as their respective families confront and attempt to negotiate the Cuban Revolution. Furthermore, as a nation moves into the realm of global politics, it defers its own interests to that of global hegemonic powers. As this happens, our 'original' structures, the individual and the family both become inconsequential and expendable, as we will see in the case of Marta Santos, Chen Pan and their descendants. As the individual's interests become consumed by national and global interests, global hegemonic powers can work silently to maintain power and fulfill their own desires and, by necessity, turn the individual into the subaltern. In Bhabha's words:

> The marginal or 'minority' is not the space of a celebratory or utopian self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past—that rationalize the authoritarian, 'normalizing' tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest of the ethnic prerogative. (*Nation* 4)

The aim of this thesis is to investigate García's project to debunk the national myth, the myth of nation formation, by exposing these processes. Returning to Timothy Brennan, the term myth when applied to the Nation can be "confusing because of [its] multiple meanings, which multiply still further when considered together: myth as distortion or lie; myth as mythology, legend or oral tradition; myth as literature *per se;* myth as shibboleth – all of these meaning are present at different times in the writing of modern political culture." (Brennan 44) When I speak of The "creation myth" of a nation, I refer to a chronicle of events that, when chained together offer up a seemingly predestined trajectory beginning with a small dream of a few men and ending with a great Nation. As the individual reacts to and acts on the Nation the present changes and the national myth must reinvent itself to make room for these new events, reappropriating and retelling them so that they fit seamlessly into the National Myth.

García's *Dreaming in Cuban* is set in New York and Cuba and is primarily the story of Pilar Puentes and her grandmother, Celia del Pino. Pilar lives in New York, having emigrated with her mother and father shortly after the Revolution. Celia, a staunch supporter of the Revolution communicates telepathically with Pilar throughout the novel. Pilar and her

own mother, Lourdes (Celia's daughter), unfortunately, have difficulty seeing eye-to-eye. Pilar's father, Rufino Puente, is a mainly absent character owing mainly to the difficulty he experienced after emigrating. According to Pilar, "He could not be translated." (*Dreaming in Cuban* 129). *Dreaming in Cuban* is a novel about women and their place in the Revolution and in History, that refuses to take a side in the Revolution:

> Rather than viewing Cristina García's failure to advocate a particular political position or a single reading as a lapse or flaw, one might suggest that *Dreaming in Cuban* consciously aims to disrupt and, perhaps, dismantle Western Colonial History and its discourse. (Herrera 85)

In choosing not to take a side, García places the onus on the reader. She compels us to look past political fanfare and spectacle and investigate the hidden motives and the true beneficiaries of political unrest. Furthermore, *Dreaming in Cuban* relegates the male voice to the outer fringes of the story in order to question and dispute traditional male storytelling and official histories: "the various narrative forms which she employs throughout the novel obviate the traditional chronological patterns of

Western History, with its impulse to systematize hierarchically and selectively" (Herrera 85).

With *Dreaming in Cuban*, García begins a journey into the essence of historicity that continues in her later works. This journey asks the reader to reconsider History and male power, hierarchy and logic in order to grant women reentry into the typically male-dominated sphere of writing and thereby controlling History.

Monkey Hunting tells the story, primarily, of Chen Pan, a Chinese farmer who decides to set out for Cuba to try his luck in a new land. In an array of flash-forwards, García situates the reader in a series of discontinuous moments in the lives of Chen Pan and his descendants, most notably Chen Fang and Domingo Chen. While Monica Wood in *The San Francisco Chronicle* laments that, "[i]nevitably, the book will be called an 'intergenerational family saga," she is correct in asserting that it is not only that. Rather, the novel's family, dispersed through time and space, represents a counterresponse to the predominant myths of national identity. Much like *Dreaming in Cuban*, *Monkey Hunting* uses rhetorical and literary techniques[ii] to call history and the myth of nation-building into question. According to Sean Moiles, the novel belongs to the metahistorical romance genre and thus, "the polyvocal nonlinear form of

Monkey Hunting suggests that history, since it can be communicated only through discourse, is not attainable" (Moiles 170). Furthermore, the plethora of voices, male and female, and viewpoints, modern and historical, exists in direct opposition to the monovocal and predominantly male account of history to which most readers are exclusively exposed. (Moiles 171). As such, "the novel's polyvocal aesthetics, then, are inseparable from its antitotalitarian politics." (Moiles 171)

García's subsequent novel, *A Handbook To Luck*, does not span as large a timeframe as *Monkey Hunting*, however, it seems to pick up where *Monkey Hunting* leaves off. The novel begins in 1968 and tells the story of Enrique and Fernando Florit, Cuban immigrants living in Las Vegas, Marta and Evaristo Santos, siblings from El Salvador who, at different times, 'cross over' into the US and Leila Rezvani, an Iranian woman from a wealthy family who travels and studies in Europe and the U.S. The geopolitics of the novel move outside of the realm of Cuban politics into a new territory for García's novels. However, the theme of deconstructing history and the search for an alternative point of view remains intact as García continues to "[hint] at the possibilities that can follow the dismantling of binary thinking and rigid adherence to political, racial, national and gender ideologies." (Moiles 182-183)

While her novels have compelling plots and sympathetic characters, what García tells us about these characters is not as important as what she *does not* tell us. In moving, without warning, between times, places, nations and war zones, García patches together a discontinuous continuum of family identity and nationhood, simultaneously debunking the myth of a linear formation of families and nations. In a way, it is almost a counter-continuum in that is goes against the common nation continuum, telling the story from within, focusing on the individual, rather than from without, focusing on that which benefits the nation's idea of itself. The reader is thus allowed to both witness and bypass the nation "in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" (*Nation and Narration*, 3).

All three novels have in common the desire to expunge the reader of his or her perception of national boundaries and linear concept of time. She asks, who is really at the helm of these migrations? How are they mitigated? What determines a political or geographical boundary and what purpose do these boundaries serve? In exploring historical traces as well as non-linear movement through time and across political boundaries, García calls our attention to "the multiple possibilities of interchangeable loyalties and personal appropriations of the nationalist text" and "makes possible the act of decentering the nationalist attempt to produce an illusion of singularity—a national consensus of purpose and shared

mythologies (…)" (Mitchell 58) Thus the reader, confronted with a new cacophony of voices, has no choice but to reevaluate that which he has accepted as historical truth.

Migrations: Movement Through Space and Internal Transformation

Motion is the

Neurosis of

Time.

It is a

Sign of pride
In being.

Stationary

Silence is

Creation's

Pride in

Itself

-unknown

One of the greatest forces behind modern nation building has been immigration. Trade in goods, capital and humans has been essential to the construction of the infrastructure required in a new nation. While the impact of the subaltern immigrant on both the nation of origin and the new

nation is not always clearly defined, it is quite clear that without this particular traveler, the nation as we know it would not exist. In "DissemiNation", Bhabha asserts that "the emergence of the later phase of the modern nation from the mid-nineteenth century is also one of the most sustained periods of mass migration within the West and colonial expansion in the East." (291)

These migrations come to life in *Monkey Hunting*, through a wide range of movements, movement through space, movement across borders, movement across time, reasons for movement, macro and micrological results of said movement, etc. The novel begins and ends with Chen Pan and gives various glances at the lives of several of Chen Pan's descendants, most notably, his granddaughter, Chen Fang, and his great-grandson, Domingo Chen, spanning over a century in real time (1857-1970). Similarly, *Handbook* presents a dizzying series of migrations, albeit in a more linear and compact timeframe of just under two decades and displayed in chronological order (1968-1987). However, despite shifting characters and times, motion remains a common theme in both novels.

García employs migration as a technique to reveal the ulterior motives of the superstructure. She intuits the basic laws of motion, how

and why people move when they do, and suggests that the superstructure does as well. In giving us access to the moments in which some of her characters leave their homelands, García allows us to see that the superstructure acts on its subaltern subject in accordance with these basic principles of motion at work in all individuals. As we will soon see in the case of Chen Pan, García proves that those in power have historically manipulated those forces in order to move individuals across borders for the benefit of the Nation. Socially conditioned individuals will act in predictable ways, all they need is the proper set-up. Powell's study on the motion of objects lays out just how beings move, what it takes to get them moving, and what happens to their internal energy when their bodies appear to be at rest. When García exhibits her characters in motion, it is precisely because of a manipulation of their social conditioning, their inherent energy and their adherence to the laws of motion.

J.W. Powell in his 1896 study on the illusions of rest and the nature of movement, states that there is a force of inertia "inherent in every particle of matter as speed of motion, which can be changed in direction only through agency of collision" (428). In other words, an object contains a certain amount of movement even when it is at rest. Let us call this 'internal movement'. An object changes course, or moves through space, only as a result of contact, which changes its 'internal movement' to an

external, observable one, through space. These collisions both mold and destroy the characters in the novel and the supposed 'nations' from which they hail. The collisions that move García's characters from one place to another are of particular interest in that they expose the mechanisms by which people move from one country to another. García's collisions provide the reader with an insight that traditional national myths do not: more often than not, the emigration of poor people is not an act of free will, but the last of a series of events set in motion by larger geopolitical and economic forces. While it may seem that Chen Pan and Domingo Chen in *Monkey Hunting* or Marta and Evaristo Santos in *Handbook* make the decision to leave their countries in order to better their stations in life, García paints a different picture.

Powell's theory of movement is made especially manifest in the character of Chen Pan. Prior to leaving China, García writes Chen Pan's movements as unclear, unfocused and difficult to distinguish in the muddle of movements in Amoy. In other words, his movement was mainly internal (contained within Amoy and within his own body), he has not yet been set into any long-distance external movement. *Monkey Hunting* begins with Chen Pan, in Amoy, China after having just left "J-----" where, "winter rains had flooded the wheat fields, rotting the stalks already choked with darnel. Bandits were roaming the countryside, setting fires and stealing horses"

(4). At the same time, in Amoy “foreign sailors patrolled the port in their tasseled uniforms. Bedraggled men hauled crates and burlap bundles, loading the British ships”. (4)

García’s choice to present Chen Pan’s Amoy in a state of chaos and destruction with foreigners moving about enables the reader to understand a key element necessary for questioning our idea of how nations are formed. As we will see, it was not the lust for adventure or a desire to participate in the building of a new nation that compelled Chen Pan to emigrate to Cuba, a common national myth (such as the refrain “go west, young man, and grow up with the country”). Rather, as is more often the case, an outside force acted as a catalyst agent, converting the motion of his inner being into a projectile motion, propelling him out of his nation of origin and into another. This agent could be a chance encounter, or something planned, set in motion by forces at work behind the scene. According to Powell, “[t]he motion of the body as such, therefore, is accomplished by diminishing the deflections within the body and straightening their paths. The translatory motion of a body is a straightening of the paths of the particles of which the body is composed” (432).

In other words, energy within a body (internal movement) remains contained within that body until acted on by an outside force. This contact converts internal movement or energy into an external movement. This quote is useful to understand Chen Pan's decision to travel in that it enables the reader to understand that whatever personal energy Chen Pan possessed was harnessed and set into motion by an outside agent. However, this movement, this collision that set Chen Pan in to motion was not entirely random. Chen Pan's hometown, which he has already abandoned and whose name is already a forgotten element in global discourse thereby rendering it unavailable to the novel's narrator, is in the process of being destroyed. Similarly, the town in which he finds himself at the beginning of the novel, Amoy, is also falling prey to the imposition of western domination:

> Outside the circus tent, the hills of Amoy scalloped down to the rim of the sea. Foreign sailors patrolled the port in their tasseled uniforms. Bedraggled men hauled crates and burlap bundles, loading British ships. Near the docks, a tavern painted with scenes of spring served warmed wine from jade jars. The owner coaxed Chen Pan to a back room lined with silk cushions. The night before, he'd gotten lucky throwing dice against a barge captain. The winnings were

> still in his pocket…the owner offered Chan Pan a carved opium pipe. He took one puff, then another. Soon the sweet hot smoke had him searching the clouds for immortals. In the delicate haze of the ensuing hours, his gambling gold slowly vanished in the arms of a lush dancing girl. (*Monkey* 4)

This passage depicts the forces at work in both the destruction of Chen Pan's homeland and his decision to emigrate. While the foreign presence in Amoy seems to bring Chen Pan luck and money when gambling with the captain of one of the foreign ships, the tavern, near the docks, seduces Chen Pan with 'lush dancing girl[s]', enveloping him in a cloud of opium smoke and reclaiming the money that Chen won from the foreigners, creating a circular movement of foreign capital that somehow always ends up back in the hands of the foreigners. This flow of capital, drugs and sex leaves the subaltern, Chen Pan, in a state of desperation: out of money, and physically and mentally drained. In terms of Powell's movement study, one could imagine that Chen Pan's energy is ripe for the harvesting at this point, his internal movement is ready to be converted into external movement. Since he no longer has the wherewithal to protect himself against outside influence on his decision-making, he is much more vulnerable to being used in order to satiate the desires of the

superstructure. In depicting this cycle of foreign capital, García asserts that Chen Pan's emigration was not a product of his own free will. His movement was the result of a collision, a collision whose circumstances were not random, rather part of a larger framework designed to relieve Chen Pan of his assets (power) and align his desires and movements in order to serve the best interests of that framework.

Even after reading these initial passages, readers could surmise that cultural and economic turmoil could still be the main motivators for Chen Pan's migrations, first from his hometown to Amoy and later from Amoy to Cuba. It could be easy for the reader to accept that the breakdown of his homeland, family structure and traditions all act as agents in his decision to move. However, García does not let readers off the hook with such a superficial conclusion. Consider the fact that the last person with whom Chen Pan has contact in Amoy is the man in the "Western-style suit" whose "age was impossible to guess" (*Monkey* 5); and, in the end, the 'western-styled' man provides Chen Pan with the foreign currency and the final push necessary to begin his "translation". In other words, there is a simple recipe, contrary to what the casual reader might hold as a motive for moving peoples from one place to another, i.e. from China to Cuba: create the necessary economic and social conditions so as to make it impossible to stay in one place while at the same time

placing key agents of collision in the paths of those most easily moved, the poor. Those collisions will turn each being's inherent internal movement into a projectile, and the resulting movement will be to the economic benefit of those in power in the host country, thus a young farmer from China suddenly finds himself a slave in the sugarcane fields of Cuba. In 1857, the year in which we first encounter Chen Pan, Cuba was an emerging hotspot in the international flow of capital. According to Rémy Herrera, Cuba was a subdominant player in global capitalism during the 18th and 19th centuries:

> After a series of productive cycles (gold, copper, wood, leather, etc.) opened by a plunder and closed by a no-industrialization order, Cuba began specializing—roughly between 1760 and 1860—in the production of sugar by an alliance between the Cuban dominant classes (*latifundios* owners) and the superdominant classes of the center of the capitalist world system (Spanish, then Anglo-American). This sugar specialization operated through a strategy of international relationships that placed the colony in a subordinated but very dynamic position. It occurred under the combined effects of endogenous factors, which had terminated the old relations of production and released the

> productive forces, and of extremely powerful exogenous shocks. Among the latter, the English military occupation of Havana (1762) and the Haitian revolution (1791) played significant roles, but the most decisive was the connection of Cuba (after 1776) to the near, vast, and rising market of the United States. (Herrera 25)

In terms of movement, then, it is important to note the 'dynamic' state of Cuban affairs during the time that Chen Pan appears in the novel. The force of Cuba's movements in the international flow of capital provided the energy behind the collision that moved Chen Pan into the sugarcane-driven slave trade. While Cuba played a subdominant role, Spain and later the United States assumed the 'superdominant' role, ultimately controlling the entire market. Thus, the man in the 'Western suit' comes to symbolize a long history of Western domination in Cuba (and by extension Chen Pan's China) that provided the catalysts for mass global movements of subaltern working class subjects. It is interesting that García chose to begin her novel at a time of transition between Spanish-dominated Cuba and United States domination. In so doing, García positions the reader at a vantage point from which to observe the major motivating economic and political factors in the movement of peoples, thereby facilitating the reader's understanding of the superstructure's role in said emigrations.

With an understanding of the laws of motion like the one presented in Powell's study, those who stand to gain the most by the global migrations of a subaltern workforce can put in place the necessary agents of collision to move people across geopolitical borders. As long as the colliding agents are in the precise location to act on the subaltern, the powerful, those who are truly in control, leave little trace of their involvement. As such, rather than accepting the creation myth of the nation, García urges the reader to contemplate the more sinister workings of global politics and economics during this time of transition from Spanish to United States domination in Cuba that marks a shift from one type of domination to another outlined in the following passage from Herrera's study:

> After 1776, the United States turned itself toward Cuba, which quickly became the main international outlet of its products, thus replacing the English Antilles. However, in the same movement, the island rocked into a new dependence—*an economic one, even more deep and constraining than the political colonial domination*. The United States bought into Cuba sugar (exclusively crude) for its refinery industry and its East coast markets; in exchange, it provided Cuba with the means of production necessary to produce sugar, that is to say, slaves (payable with credits on

> future sugar export earnings), farm equipment, food for the captives, boxes and bags, and so forth. *The bonds were woven that chained up this periphery to its center through unequal trade*, and the island's productive structure was imbricated into that of the North, as an overseas territorial extension of the United States, with narrow commercial exchanges tied little by little between the Cuban sugar producers (*sacarócratas*) and U.S. industrialists, merchants, farmers, ship owners, bankers, and slave traders. *Slave overexploitation constituted the basis on which these relations were built and spread*. (Herrera 25, my italics)

This shift constitutes a change in nation form that we will see later on in the thesis, as the superstructure constricts around and tightens its grip on its citizens in order to gain more economic leverage and power. The shift was an uncomplicated one in that Cuba moved from the hands of one hegemonic nation to another, but it marks a no-turning-back point in Cuba's history where any hope for economic and/or political sovereignty, if there ever was any, is now entirely diminished.

Similar traces of superstructure constriction are detected in *A Handbook to Luck*. Much like Chen Pan's beginnings, one of *Handbook's*

central characters, Marta Santos, begins her story in San Salvador, a city in the process of a violent (self?) destruction: "the night before, a friend of their uncle's was hacked to pieces by drunks with machetes in the center of town. Was it bad luck or God's will?" (27). With this quote we see the confusion surrounding the beginning of the town's decay, with those who are witnessing it looking for a metaphysical explanation for the town's implosion, evidence that as the superstructure grows stronger, its movements become harder to trace.

The history of El Salvador's dependent position in the global marketplace is quite similar to Cuba's with one exception: prior to European and U.S. involvement, El Salvador was not a major player in global capitalism. Rather it existed on the periphery, which allowed it to maintain a non-capitalist structure with respect to land ownership and the division of capital. According to Bradford Burns in "The Modernization of Underdevelopment: El Salvador 1858-1931," El Salvador was an almost forgotten part of Latin America, producing and exporting a variety of goods including indigo, cacao, sugar and rice. Furthermore, Salvadorian farmers mainly grew enough product to sustain their families with a little left over to sell for profit or trade in local markets. Lands were communally owned and farmed and foreign visitors viewing El Salvador for the first time in the nineteenth century commented on its relative lack of both poverty and

riches. However, in 1858, El Salvador's story began to ring familiar as El Salvadoran elites looked towards Europe for inspiration to improve their standing in the global marketplace:

> They admired French culture, while they looked to England for their economic vigor. As the nineteenth century waxed, their collective desire grew to create in the New World a replica of Europe north of the Pyrenees. To emulate the "progress" the elites believed characteristic of their model nations, *they needed capital*. They obtained it through loans, investments and trade, all three of which linked them ever more closely to North Atlantic capitalism. (295, my italics)

Just as in Cuba, in order to participate in global economics, El Salvador first needed to indebt itself to North Atlantic nations, namely The United States and Britain. Thus, within three decades (1860-1890), El Salvador took on the persona of the subdominant Latin American country, trading and playing to the whims of the larger superdominant nations displaying such traits as:

> A dynamic modernizing export sector based on monoculture and the predominance of the large estate producing for

> foreign trade; a subservient, impoverished, landless rural labor force; concentration of economic and political power within the hands of the principal planters who exercised it from a single dominant city, the capital…and a political understanding and tolerance between an increasingly professional military and politicoeconomic elites. In a number of fundamental aspects, El Salvador became nearly indistinguishable from the other Spanish-speaking nations. (Burns 296)

This pattern became fixed in the late 1850s when El Salvador discovered its propensity for cultivating coffee. It was this crop that would become the point of entry for Salvadorian elites into North Atlantic capitalism as well as the mechanism by which to move all communal lands into the hands of a handful of families that would dominate El Salvador's economy and political structure for the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. However, as Burns puts it, this progress was nothing more than a "modernized but underdeveloped economy…that readily responded to foreign whims but failed to serve Salvadoran needs" (308). Eventually, by the 1930s the process by which El Salvador "progressed and modernized" its economy, politics and agriculture led to the "social and economic disintegration of the life style of the overwhelming majority of the

Salvadorans" as they were moved off their lands and forced into the cities in search of work (307). Fast forward not quite 40 years and we find García's Marta Santos in *A Handbook to Luck*, living in San Salvador and witnessing first hand the destruction of her city:

> That evening Marta looked out the window of her apartment on calle sur. Political slogans covered the walls of the Catholic elementary school across the street. It was five minutes after curfew. The bread vendor from Santa Tecla was hurrying along the sidewalk with a last basket of loaves on her head. A single carnation enlivened her display. Marta thought of running downstairs to buy bread for her journey when – *Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!* – the basket tipped and a cascade of loaves fell to the pavement, as if a hundred years were passing. Ay, what hapless string of days had led this poor woman to her fate? (93)

The mention of the political slogans, the Catholic school and the curfew provides the reader with a trifecta of culprits for the destruction and domination of the people of San Salvador: the government, the church and the military. As a result, Marta Santos and her brother, Evaristo, will also leave their assigned places of origin, albeit in very different ways.

Marta will abandon El Salvador for The United States and Evaristo will symbolically escape San Salvador by hiding in the tree tops, above the city. Marta's movement therefore turns into that of a projectile, while Evaristo's movement becomes even more internal and difficult to understand. I will return to Evaristo later on when discussing *Monkey Hunting's* Domingo Chen. For now, let us return to Marta's decision to leave El Salvador. Just as Chen Pan's last contact before leaving China was a "Western-style" man, Marta's collision with Mrs. Sheffield, the wife of a British ambassador, raises questions of foreign imperialism and domination and implicates them in the devastation of San Salvador. I will revisit this in more detail further down.

In both *Monkey Hunting* and *Handbook*, the destruction of cities serves as a metaphor for the breakdown of national identities and power structures, which then frees the characters from the geopolitical boundaries that formerly inhibited their movements. If a subaltern character like Chen Pan or Marta experiences a conflation of national and individual identity, as is often the case, then the destruction of the national identity leaves the individual ripe for the harvest. Moreover, foreign presence in both cities, Amoy and San Salvador, provides necessary collisions to convert the characters' internal movements to projectile ones. At the moment that we are introduced to these characters, their

movements are contained within the boundaries of their respective nations. Returning to Powell's study, it is worth considering his description of the motion of a ball in terms of the motion of man or a group of men in order to form a mental image of the mechanism of the conversion of Chen Pan and Marta's movement from one that is contained within a delineated place and one that moves beyond that place: "imagine a man walking in a circle of a ten feet radius. The sphere of his motion is within the circumference. He may soon walk a mile and never be more than twenty feet away from any given point in the circumference" (432).

This type of movement is both internal and external. It is internal in the sense that it is movement within a confined space, the borders of a city or of a nation; it is external in that, while the bodies are moving through space there is no mention made of any internal movements within the bodies themselves. Due to their conditioned cultural identities and tight control of national boundaries, this type of movement is the only one available to Chen Pan and Marta when the reader first encounters them. However, Powell continues his discussion with a description of what happens when a change occurs in the path of a body's movement that changes direction: "so that his path is straightened, and he may soon be a mile away" (432). García deftly captures a particular aspect of the movement of peoples, the moment in which a body shifts its movement in

order to move beyond the place that has been designated as his or her origin when that place is in the process of destruction. García seems to look down on these movements in much the same way that de Certeau looks down on New York City from the World Trade Center and sees "a texturology in which extremes coincide—extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space." (91) In so doing, García shows us that the collision of extremes, Marta and Mrs. Sheffield, Chen Pan and the western-style man, coupled with the destruction of the cities that previously blocked out the characters' movements provides the means and impetus for the characters' movements outside of their respective places of origin.

Consider the last image provided to the reader before Chen Pan boards a ship bound for Cuba: "Then Chen Pan took his first coin, still warm from the hands of the man in the Western Suit. He would go beyond the edge of the world to Cuba." (6) Indeed, as mentioned earlier, García paints a vibrant picture of the collisions that facilitate these sporadic projectile movements, while coyly hinting at the acting agents that force abandonment of homeland, migration and the establishments of roots in a new community. In *Monkey Hunting*, Chen Pan's last contact in

China is with the “man in the Western style suit” who, in fact provides Chen Pan with the currency to begin his journey. In *A Handbook to Luck*, the conversion of Marta’s movement is a direct result of her contact with Mrs. Sheffield, an Englishwoman that Marta met outside of the British embassy:

> …they spoke for a few minutes – Mrs. Sheffield’s Spanish was excellent – and she ended up offering Marta a job cleaning her home every Sunday. It was this extra day of work, paid to her in dollars, that made it possible for her to save enough money to leave the country. (86-87)

Not only did Mrs. Sheffield provide Marta with the foreign currency, dollars, for the trip to the U.S., she also provided her with the language skills necessary: “her *patrona* had given her English-language tapes and a second-hand cassette player” (89). While Mrs. Sheffield is not presented as being in any way sinister, unlike the man in the “Western-style suit”, the reader is nevertheless left to wonder at what she was doing in San Salvador, and the fact that she paid Marta in dollars raises suspicions as to who might have participated in the destruction of the third-world city. As we have seen, in both *Monkey Hunting* and *Handbook*, political affiliation and economic status can all combine to dictate and delineate the space in

which one can leave the nation of their birth in order to settle in and send out roots in a foreign nation. It is a theme that repeats itself throughout the novel.

When we read *Monkey Hunting* and *A Handbook to Luck* along with Powell's observations on the nature of movement while keeping in mind the major forces at work in global capitalism, especially in the cases of Cuba and El Salvador, we see that García is asking us to look at subaltern movement through a different lens. Perhaps the "hapless string of events" that led to the bread vendor's death wasn't so hapless after all. As we take note of García's attempt to deconstruct the myths of nation building, we become increasingly aware of the lack of agency available to the subaltern at the precise moment that he or she decides to emigrate and start over in a new place. More often then not, the subaltern "choice" more closely resembles a forced hand, a lack of choice, that pushes him out of his familiar territory and into a new land where he has even less agency. This creates a new, more pliable individual more accessible and apt to respond to the whim of the superstructure.

The Vessel: Creation of the Docile Body

The ship was thus central to a profound, interrelated set of economic changes essential to the rise of capitalism: the seizure of new lands, the expropriation of millions of people and their redeployment in growing market-oriented sectors of the economy; the mining of gold and silver, the cultivating of tobacco and sugar; the concomitant rise of long-distance commerce; and finally a planned accumulation of wealth and capital beyond anything the world had ever witnessed.
The Slave Ship: A Human History

As mentioned before, we encounter Chen Pan in a port city which is a place of circulation and danger according to Foucault: "[a] port, and a military port is – with it's circulation of goods, men signed up willingly or by force, sailors embarking and disembarking, diseases and epidemics – a place of desertion, smuggling, contagion: it is a crossroads for dangerous mixtures, a meeting-place for forbidden circulations" (144). But, for whom precisely is this mixture dangerous? Since, it is to the advantage of those in power to create docile bodies, the port is most dangerous for the subaltern in transit. In order to have a pliable work force for global capitalist interests the port is a space of great opportunity.

García carefully lays out the series of events that illustrates the move of individuals from their homeland to a new place. However, before these individuals arrive, they must be transformed into "docile bodies" or, bodies whose various functions will exclusively serve the interests of the powers that be. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault offers a

description of the significance of making a body “docile” or vulnerable to subjection by larger political and economic forces in the nineteenth century, the time when Chen Pan is beginning his forced migration:

> The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, *it reverses the course of the energy,* the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labor, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination. (138, my italics)

We see here the importance of transforming individuals into pliable, obedient members of the superstructure. This is the means by which power is taken from the individual and aligned with the interests of those in power. Reconsidering Powell's comments on energy and Chen Pan and Marta's trajectories, we see here the need to not only convert their movement or energy from internal to projectile, but also to convert their internal energy from independent to dependent.

In the previous section we saw that Chen Pan and Marta existed in nations undergoing the process of national transformation from autonomous, if such a thing exists, to dependent on, and subject to, foreign dominance. This process not only entails certain movements on the larger geopolitical scale, but also smaller scale operations on the individual level in order to convert people into currency and labor capital. That process begins for Chen Pan and Marta in their homelands in Cuba and the United States and continues as they journey to what will be their new homes. But, what specific transformation takes place during that journey?

This section deals with what occurs when Marta and Chen Pan embark on their journey from their homelands to a new land. They cannot

simply show up in the new land as their old selves because they would not be pliable enough. There must be a transition or translation in order for them to be able to blend into their new surroundings. They must be made into docile bodies. This conversion takes place in the vessel, the container created specifically for the type of journey in which this metamorphosis occurs. Chen Pan and Marta both cross over to their new lands in some form of the slave ship. In Chen Pan's case, it was an actual slave ship, in Marta's case it was the *camión* filled with undocumented immigrants crossing the Mexican border. Indeed, according to Foucault, "Discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed upon itself." (141)

This "enclosure" takes the form of a vessel. In the case of Chen Pan's migration from China to Cuba, the vessel is the slave ship. In its containment, the ship's hold represents a microcosmic, decaying society. The hold functions as a moving prison in which the only apparent alternative to complete stillness is inner travel through memory and story-telling ("[b]ecause the days were so long and the men so constricted, they entertained each other with stories…" (17)) or the escape of suicide, ("[b]ut not even Chien Shih-kuang could save the suicides. Chen Pan counted six altogether" (14)). I will discuss the theme of suicide in the case of Leila in a later section. Here it is important to stress that while in

motion, the interior spaces of the ship stagnate and illness festers with no possible way out of the contained unit ("[o]n board, the recruits began to suffer every manner of illness. Cholera. Typhus. Dysentery" (13)). This decaying obliges the men on the ship to break ties with their homelands, leaving them vulnerable to new predators and leaving their identities up for grabs. Within the moving prison of the ship, perhaps as an effect of the act of rotting, those on board the ship are transformed from men with names to "chinos", from human beings to merchandise. Once they arrive in Cuba they are sold in public auction and suddenly Chen Pan is without a country:

> A dozen Cubans on horseback, armed with whips, led the men like a herd of cattle to the *barracón* to be sold. Inside, Chen Pan was forced to strip and be examined for strength, like horses or oxen that were for sale in the country districts of China. Chen Pan burned red with shame, but he didn't complain. Here he could no longer rely on the known ways. Who was he now without his country? (20-21)

The ship, then, is a sort of *primum motum immotum*. As the rigid ship cuts a path through the sea, it incarcerates and appears to freeze its inhabitants who move in ever tighter spaces. This is not the romanticized,

nation-building “Go West, young man, and grow up with the country”, this movement is the unseen creator of the nation through subjugation. Because their movement does not fit into the myth, it represents an unforeseen danger to the identity of the nation. If these movements are not controlled, either physically, or in their retelling, they threaten to have the power to bring down the nation completely since a population in possession of the truth is much more difficult to manipulate. An individual allowed to remain in control of his own story, a story that does not keep him bound to the accepted national myth, is not as likely to express allegiance to that nation. A nation replete with individuals with agency and separate identities leaves little opportunity for the superstructure’s covert machinations. As such, it is necessary to maintain a consistent national narrative. In order to maintain the myth of linear nation building, that myth requires constant propagation with no existing contradictions.

However, J.W. Powell explains that “the phenomenon of rest in molar bodies [. . .] is not the annihilation of motion, but change in the direction of motion, and that the ordinary concept of rest in molar bodies is an illusion (“Certitudes” 428). In other words, there is no freezing or destruction of the movement of energy within a body. Therefore, the energy of both the ship and its prisoners turns inward and becomes an eventual catalyst for change. Another way to think of it is as a

pressurization—when we think of a ship we generally think of forward motion, destination, but when the forces of globalization are acting on it and the subaltern make up the ship's cargo an internal movement takes place.

This metamorphosis can be seen aboard the ship in the manifestation of disease; and in Chen Pan and the other men, the change manifests itself in a complete distortion of identity. As I mentioned, precisely because these men are no longer tied to their homelands they have more fluid identities and when they arrive in their new land, their identities will be open to interpretation. Furthermore, when they arrive in Cuba, they will have been stripped of any autonomy or power that they may have possessed in China, an autonomy based on a common language, family ties, etc. Thus, while they began their journey as men, in possession of a solid identity and destiny, they will and end it as subaltern beings, in this case animals: "Together, [Chen Pan] and his shipmates looked like a spilled barrel of crabs" (20).

A similar transformation takes place in *Handbook* in the description of Marta's 'crossing over' from México to the U.S. After Marta and her group, led by the coyote, have walked for miles without rest, "a truck would be waiting to take them to Mexicali, where they would be stacked three high in its false bottom container" (96). One cannot avoid making

the connection between this vessel and Chen Pan's slave ship. In fact, the cargo of this particular vessel is also transformed from human to animal, although García uses a slightly different technique to create the change. The mention of Marta's vessel is just that, a brief mention, whereas the time Chen Pan spends on the slave ship is described in great detail. I posit that the slave ship is an accepted, albeit atrocious, part of world and national history, and while all agree that slave trade in the Americas was horrific, enough time has passed in order to allow its entrance into national identities, as if the years that have passed since the active running of slave ships serves as a softening agent.

Thus, at least in the national discourse, the slave ship is a static object that we can see, study, and investigate. In *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes the uproar that ensued when Disney proposed opening a slavery-themed park in Virginia. While the intended consumer (white, middle-class America) had, over time, effectively woven slavery into it's narrative, the African American community saw the park differently. Trouillot notes that

> The time that elapsed between the demise of slavery and the planning of the Virginia park shaped the meaning of Disney's representation of slavery. Time here is not mere chronological continuity. It is the range of disjointed

> moments, practices, and symbols that thread *the historical relations between events and narrative*. (146, my italics)

In other words, much as with Chen Pan's Slave Ship, the passage of time allowed for a comfortable narrative to be established. However, the current iteration of the slave ship, Marta's *camión*, represents for mainstream (white) America what the slave ship from Africa still represents for African Americans: the conundrum of the living ghost, "both the past and a living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent that ghost, something that is and yet is not" (147)

The trucks that carry undocumented immigrants into the U.S. are still active, and while we can acknowledge their existence, the nation has not had sufficient time to negotiate their place in national (or international imagery). We cannot see them as vehicles of slavery or repression because we have not yet rationalized them. Marta's slave ship does, however, reemerge in the following chapter. As Enrique Florit and Leila are driving through the desert, Enrique sees "an eighteen-wheeler in his rear-view mirror, barreling down on them with all its crude power, its brakes gone." (130) Enrique maneuvers the car out of the way of the truck and it crashes farther down the road. As Enrique and Leila approach the toppled vehicle, "the truck's back doors blew open and dozens of monkeys

clambered out, screeching and scurrying into the desert like a pack of deranged jackrabbits…But where would they go? There were no trees for them to hide in, only the Joshua trees, which were impossible to hide in" (130-131). Just as Chen Pan and his cargo entered the slave ship as men and left it as animalized cargo, so too do the immigrants become dehumanized commodity upon crossing over into the US a vessel whose "crude power" is now apparently uncontrollable. According to Arjun Appadurai "Where there have been sustained cultural transactions across large parts of the globe, they have usually involved the long-distance journey of commodities." (27) In García's novels, we see that when a body crosses a national border and said crossing takes place in a tightly contained vessel, the forces that act upon this container compress its contents enough to alter them so that when they emerge on the other side, their appearance, or their translation is quite different than when they left. Of course appearance depends almost solely on the viewer, not on what is being viewed. Therefore, we can assume that it is in translation that a man or woman undergoes what Appadurai refers to as "commodization." (32). In other words, it is not so much that their inner being has changed, rather in entering a new economy, a new nation, their inherent human value gets translated into an exchange value in the global marketplace.

Creating Alternative Spaces

Perhaps this is the bottom line to mental illness: incomprehensible events occur; your life becomes a bin for hoax-like fluctuations of what used to be reality. *And not only that--as if that weren't enough--but you ... ponder forever over these fluctuations in an effort to order them into a coherancy, when in fact the only sense they make is the sense you impose on them, out of necessity to restore everything into shapes and processes you can recognize*. *The first thing to depart in mental illness is the familiar*. *And what takes its place is bad news because not only can you not understand it, you also cannot communicate it to other people*. *The madman experiences something, but what it is or where it comes from he does not know*.

Philip K. Dick*, Valis*

According to Michel de Certeau, there is a fundamental difference between place and space. Place denotes a delimitation, a border. One place exists by definition only when excluding another. Therefore, a place "excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location" (*Practice*, 117). Conversely, "a *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements" (ibid). In other words, place is an apparently static entity, a rigid, immobile, *stable* form; and, space is defined as a place of interior movement and fluidity. Perhaps the most noteworthy appearance of what de Certeau describes as mobile interior space occurs in the first chapter of *Monkey Hunting*.

After living for months as a slave on a sugar plantation, Chen Pan escapes. The escape itself is surprisingly simple: on a march to a sugar field Chen Pan simply ducks out of sight and hides in the grass (38). In an instant Chen Pan undergoes yet another reversal of identity. After the escape, Chen Pan lives for nearly a year in the forest, surviving on wild fruits and what few animals he can hunt and eat (*Monkey*, 38-42). In this in-between time, Chen Pan completely sheds his Chinese identity and is now ready to assume a new identity as a Cuban citizen. He has found what could be called a "blind spot" where transformations are possible.

During the first nine months of his time in the forest, Chen Pan is followed and taunted by an owl that he believes to be the spirit of his mother. Until the moment of his escape, Chen Pan had been a slave. However, the Spanish landowners were not his only captors. Chen Pan had been a slave since before he left China. "[Chen Pan's] mother ruled the farm from her bed, knees tucked to her chest, lotus feet curled and useless from the painful binding long ago" (13). On the surface it appears that Chen Pan's mother controlled the lives of her family. While this was true, there is a deeper undercurrent of power and oppression at work in this sentence. Writing of mother's "lotus feet," García evokes centuries of Chinese tradition of control and dominance. Upon reading this, the reader understands intuitively that there is much more at work here than the

rantings of one controlling woman. The mangled feet symbolize both maternal oppression and an imposed national identity from which Chen Pan needs to liberate himself, something that he is able to do in this kind of blind spot that is the forest. Having already freed himself from slavery, Chen Pan now must break free of the shackles of his culturally created identity. As such, Chen Pan vows to kill the owl, put an end to its relentless reproaches, and begin to create a new identity for himself. That very night the owl is silenced: "[t]he forest turned cemetery-quiet. Moonlight unsettled the trees. Birds flew overhead soundlessly. This was much worse than his mother's scoldings, Chen Pan thought. At dawn he slept a little, dreamed of lotuses and speeding geese" (41).

As demonstrated by this quote, the initial absence of his mother is a source of anxiety for Chen Pan. That is, until he remembers the words of his father: "*[i]t is in death alone that we return home*" (41). The symbolic decision to kill his mother provides Chen Pan with the psychological means to completely liberate himself from slavery. The nine months that Chen Pan spends running from his mother serves as a gestational space in which Chen Pan can give a new form to his exterior as well as interior self. Geographically, Chen Pan has discovered one of the nation's blind spots which allows him to reemerge into Cuban society as a free man. In

other words, the creation of this intimate space, unreachable by the outside world, gave birth to Chen Pan's exterior transformation.

Evaristo also moved for a time in his nation's blindspot, perched up in a tree, although what he witnessed from his perch gave way to a different sort of negative transformation, since from the blind spot he witnesses terrible events that scar him forever. It is interesting to note that both Evaristo and Chen Pan hid themselves or attempted to hide themselves from the strong arm of the nation by hiding among the trees. Consider this with the last line of Enrique's quote after watching the monkeys pour out of the overturned truck: "But where would they go? There were no trees for them to hide in…" (130-131). There seem to be no blind spots left for the monkeys in a new country just as for Evaristo who feels lost in America. Returning to *Monkey_Hunting*, on the novel's penultimate page Chen Pan, nearing death, wonders at those "fugitive days in the forest, the long months of his mother's taunting, calling him to her eternal emptiness. Now who could walk the way he'd walked in Cuba anymore? Who could hide for three hundred days, avoiding men and ghosts, living on nothing but memories and his five senses?" (250).

Through Chen Pan, García alludes to the existence and subsequent disappearance of free spaces, or spaces in which an individual might be free to consciously create an identity outside of the culturally,

politically and geographically consigned identity with which he arrived in Cuba. In *Handbook*, through the character of Evaristo, García laments the loss of this alternative space in the public domain, on the map, while pointing the reader to what has become, out of necessity, the only space left for the creation of a private identity: the internal space. Unfortunately for Evaristo, any identity created inside this space, outside of the map, loses coherence when translated from the internal to the external, thereby exiling Evaristo to the realm of the fragmented, the insane.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Felicia, the daughter of Celia del Pino who stayed behind in Cuba after the revolution, also inhabits this internal alternative space that is seen on the outside as insanity:

> Felicia del Pino doesn't know what brings on her delusions. She knows only that suddenly she can hear things very vividly. (…) She can hear everything in this world (…)The colors, too, escape their objects. The red floats above the carnations on her windowsill. (…) Nothing is solid until she touches it. (75)

Both Evaristo and Felicia's journeys into madness were catalyzed by an abusive man. In Evaristo's case, that man was his stepfather. In Felicia's case, that man was her first husband, an adulterer whose

many dalliances infected and left Felicia mad with syphilis. However, Felcia's "madness" is not owing entirely to her syphilis. Much like Evaristo, Felicia's character witnessed and experienced too much at a tender age. As such, her madness is simply an internalization of a world gone mad. Examining Felicia's entrance into the world of adult relationships we see that, at the age of fifteen, she spent a short time as a prostitute for wealthy North American clients. Considering García's penchant for expressing the macrological forces at work behind every seemingly micrological movement, in this case an individual's "decision" to prostitute herself, Felicia's turn as a prostitute deserves a closer look.

According to Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, García's choice to investigate prostitution speaks to a larger global pattern: "[i[n addition to alluding to an actual reality in Cuba (the prostitution of young girls who have no other means to support themselves), García's use of metaphor seems to imply that despite the Revolution, Cuba continues to prostitute itself to the United States" (85). In other words, Felicia is not simply "choosing" to be a prostitute. Rather she is reacting to and internalizing a set of culturally consigned rules set in motion long before her debut into the world of sex work. In a place (both geographic and social)

without agency, the space that Felicia carves out for herself is rife with traces of domination and abuse.

Gayatri Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” investigates the forces that place people in a marginalized space without representation concluding that one such force is global capitalism (Spivak, 67). Further, she states that

> the relationship between global capitalism (exploitation in economics) and nation-state alliances (domination in geo-politics) is so macrological that it cannot account for the micrological texture of power. To move toward such an accounting one must move toward theories of ideology – of subject formations that micrologically and often erratically operate the interest that congeal the macrologies. (74)

In alignment with the major theme of this thesis, this passage reflects Spivak’s efforts to pinpoint and expose the macrological forces of the superstructure at work behind the movement (decisions) of the individuals who are entrenched in that superstructure. This idea should be kept in mind when examining Chen Pan, Marta, Domingo and Evaristo’s movements in García’s novel and it is one that I will come back to.

Similarly, Robert Jensen, in *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege*, states that one should not look to

cultural (micrological) explanations for subalterneity and inequality in race, gender, sexuality and class. Rather, one must search out political (macrological) explanations for such injustices:

> Instead of talking about diversity in race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, we should critique white supremacy, economic inequality in capitalism, patriarchy, and heterosexism. We should talk about systems and structures of power, about ideologies of domination and subordination—and about the injuries done to those in subordinate groups, and the benefits and privilege that accrue to those in dominant groups. (78)

It is clear that Chen Pan and Marta as subalterns are exploited during their journeys by hegemonic groups who use them for economic gain and yet, their motives for going to Cuba and the U.S., respectively, are clear. Therefore, their paths are straight, their movements decisive. One might even conclude, albeit incorrectly, that they are acting in accordance with their own desires, thus embodying common nation-building myths discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Questioning whether or not a subaltern subject can know his or her desires, much less

act on them in a coherent, unfragmented way leads Spivak to her titular preoccupation:

> Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat. According to Foucault and Deleuze … the oppressed, if given the chance…and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here), *can speak and know their conditions*. We must now confront the following question: on the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing and earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak*? (78)

This inquiry is especially pertinent in the case of Domingo Chen, Chen Pan's great-grandson, and Marta's brother Evaristo. García does not allow the reader to be present at the precise moments of collision that dictate Domingo and Evaristo's decisions to travel, for Domingo, first to New York, and later to Vietnam and for Evaristo to the States and back to El Salvador. In *Monkey Hunting*, it is only through flashbacks that the

reader is able to piece together the motives for Domingo and his father's decision to leave Cuba. The reader is to infer that this migration was a result of the changing political climate in Cuba after the Cuban Revolution when Domingo's father was on the wrong side of the Revolution:

> His father had worked for seventeen years as a short-order cook at the American naval base in Guantánamo. Once a year he used to bring Domingo to work, usually on the Fourth of July(. . .)On weekends Papi had brought home sirloin steaks, buckets of mashed potatoes, and buttered peas from the officers' events…Mamá refused to eat any of the Yankees' food…Domingo fell asleep to his parents' bitter arguing…When the revolutionary officials had ordered his father to give up his job with the Americans, Papi had refused. Working the grill had made him a traitor? No amount of haranguing from the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution could convince him of that. (*Monkey* 54-55)

Similarly, while we are privy to Domingo's father's suicide, we can only assume that the suicide was the catalyst for Domingo's enlisting for a tour of duty in Vietnam that happened shortly after.

Because García does not provide a specific, cathartic moment by which to understand Domingo's migrations, the reader is left with an unclear vision of his migratory patterns. He is thus seen as a wanderer, with little direction. In the following passage Domingo, at work in a restaurant kitchen in New York, ponders the unusual duration of the full moon:

> There'd been nothing in the news about celestial aberrations. Domingo would've heard about it because there was always a radio pumping, around the clock. At the Havana Dragon, the music rumba-plena-merengued all night, ricocheted off the moon and bounced back to fry cutlets. And when the music wasn't playing, the bad news was blaring—subway decapitations and hijackings to Cuba and all the tragic static of Vietnam (*Monkey*, 43-44).

As the music ricochets from the earth to the moon, so too Domingo ricochets between Cuba, the U.S. and Vietnam. There are two main vehicles for Domingo's ricocheting: his memory and locomotory movement. Of course, the mention of a "subway decapitation" and "the tragic static of Vietnam" serves to foreshadow the events that will mark Domingo's life. García offers the reader Domingo's connection to the

naval base at Guantánamo, the rift in his family, and his lack of a steady path toward the future, so that the reader may intuit Domingo's weightlessness and understand how one becomes a mobile pawn for global economics and politics. Since Domingo has no anchor in the form of a stable family unit (his parents fought bitterly), or in the form of a stable ethno-cultural identity ("Domingo wanted…to say that his blood was a mix of this and that. So how was he supposed to choose who he wanted to be?" (*Monkey* 47)), he becomes pliable and easier to move from one nation to the next. However, no matter how pliable and easily manipulated a subaltern subject may be, each subject, usually in conjunction with others, leaves his or her mark on the superstructure. Evidence of this may not be gathered empirically, thus one must study the movements of the superstructure in order to understand where it shifts to accommodate for the free will of its subjects.

The effects that migration, travel and translation have on the characters in García's novel, can also be traced on society at large. Objects that collide, no matter the difference in their size do not remain the same. Returning to Powell's investigation on movement:

> In every collision of one particle or body with another there is a double correlative involved. When A and B collide, A acts on B and B acts on A, so that there is both action and

> passion in A and B which are coexistent. Then we have to consider A before the collision and A after the collision, and B before the collision and B after the collision (428).

In other words, no two beings, regardless of their difference in size, can interact without each leaving its mark on the other. Since the superstructure of a dominant society is much larger than the individual, it is very difficult to quantify any one individual's impact on that superstructure. For that reason, it is necessary to seek out other means by which to measure the effect of individual movements on the rational plan of society. In order to do this, we can conceive of the superstructure as a map and individuals as a movement on the map. According to Michel de Certeau, maps exist as a space in which to "*exhibit the products* of knowledge, form tables of *legible* results. Stories about space exhibit on the contrary the operations that allow it, within a constraining and non-"proper" place, to mingle its elements anyway" (*Practices*, 121). Thus, we can interpret the reconfiguration of nations in the novel to be, at least in part, in response to the unpredictable, unforeseen movement of its characters. Let us look at an example from *Monkey_Hunting*. Consider the passage regarding the confiscation of the *conga* drums in Cuba:

> Last year, [Domingo's] Tío Eutemio had been forced to give up his congas. The authorities in Guantánamo had decided

> that the drums were cultural artifacts because they'd once belonged to Domingo's great uncle, the legendary El Tumbador. Now the congas were on display at a folklore museum where *el pueblo* could admire them but never hear their *boom-tak-tak-a-tak* again (56).

On the surface this appears to be merely an imposition of ideology on the part of the communist regime in Cuba, of which several are mentioned in *Monkey Hunting*. However, the following passage in the novel allows us to imagine an alternative interpretation:

> [Domingo's] Tío Eutemio had told him that during slavery days, drumming had been forbidden altogether. The sugar mill owners hadn't wanted their "property" getting overly excited and sending messages to slaves on other plantations. In those times, to own a drum, to play a drum, were acts of rebellion punishable by death (205).

A great distance separates these two quotes in the novel. Furthermore, the passage found first in the novel happens last in the linear passage of time. Both the anachronism of, and the distance between the two passages impedes the casual reader from connecting them easily. However, if we were to read the latter passage first and immediately afterward, the first passage, we would get the idea that the dominant

culture, both colonial or postcolonial, intended to quiet the drumming once and for all. The drumming here represents communication via pathways that were not originally foreseen by the oppressive structure:

> In traditional Africa the drum is the instrument symbolizing the tribe, linking man to the gods and the living spirits of ancestors. The drum calls to war, echoes out at weddings and funerals, and sends messages to nearby villages. More than any other musical instrument, it represents a living being who is to be fed with proper sacrfices and surrounded by a complex ceremonial, not only in order to watch over the whole but also to play for the ceremonies. The well-being of the group is intimately linked to that of the drum; its loss or destruction could very easily bring about misfortune, and even death. (Nodal 162)

In fact, some musical communication *intends* to subvert that structure:

> It is well known that Africans have drum languages, by which news is transmitted great distances. These languages were used by the slaves in Cuba from the earliest times. The restless workers on coffee and sugar plantations kept in contact that way, to such an extent that the authorities forbid it. In Cuba, blacks who are acquainted with the music and

> liturgy of their African religions say that certain drums "speak" on given occasions, even though they are played without any vocal accompaniment. (Nodal 170)

As a consequence, the superstructure outlaws the drumming and severely castigates any who transgress and the nation loses part of its cultural heritage. However, this communication remains on the fringe, essentially unreachable and out of the imminent domain of the dominant culture. Years later during the Castro regime the suppression of the drumming is finalized. The voracious superstructure appropriates the drumming, bringing it into its infrastructure. Under the auspices of granting access to the people (placing it in a museum), the superstructure actually attempts to deny access, thereby obliterating that particular subversive exercise. The end result is that the subaltern has lost one autonomous space, while the dominant superstructure has morphed itself in order to consume this new presence. A has acted on B. As a result both A and B are forever altered and intertwined. In this case we see that the superstructure attempts to constrict the actions/movements of the subaltern, which in turn shifts its patterns in order to maintain a certain amount of autonomy and, as a result, the superstructure moves once again to constrict. If not for the unseen movements of the subaltern, no doubt a perceived danger to those in power, the superstructure would not

have to continue to act and readjust, thus demonstrating the subaltern's capacity for effecting change on the superstructure. This is the untold story of nation-building that I believe García is exposing. As long as it feels threatened, the superstructure continues to tighten its grip on its subjects while its subjects find other ways to adjust.

Notwithstanding, the marginal space where freedom of movement is possible for the subaltern has not been entirely obliterated. The sentence that follows the passage quoted above reads: "[a]nd so the drummers learned to whisper instead" (205). It is from this internal space that the drumming continues to resonate in Domingo. This resonation, in turn, becomes the locomotory force that propels him. As the powers that be constrict the subalterns outward movements, their movement become internalized, which could give new meaning to Spivak's "silent, silenced center". That is precisely why it is so difficult to pinpoint Domingo's exact motivations for action; and García refuses to fabricate any pre-packaged, romantic reasons for his states of being and actions. She prefers instead to leave the reader with the same cloudy, jumbled mess of objects, sounds and places that are part of Domingo´s life. According to Maria Caminero-Santangelo, Domingo is the character who has most "internalized an ideology of *stable* national identity" (109). I posit that it is precisely this acceptance of and desire for a mythical fixed national

identity that causes his apparent lack of focus. In Domingo we see the near impossibility of extracting any one event or moment out of the chaotic combination that travels through him as he attempts to contain it. This interior movement, this inward traveling seems to be in direct response to the attempt to constrain and fix motion and, as a result, it creates an intimate inner space that is repeated in several places in García's work.

In *Handbook*, Evaristo moves in a space that is all his own, away from the nation and even separate from his family. Much like Domingo, within Evaristo is contained a national history. Evaristo, in order to escape his step-father, leaves his mother's house and goes to live in a tree in the center of town. Much like Domingo, Evaristo's family is breaking down, certainly a metaphor for the breakdown of the Nation. While he has escaped confinement and his movements are no longer immediately dictated by his perceived tormentor, from his position above the city he witnesses first hand the atrocities commited by the *guardia* which alludes to historical events happening in El Salvador:

> During the mid to late 1970s and early 1980s, most violence against the general population [had] been carried out by the Salvadoran military and by paramilitary death squads. For example, for the second half of 1982, the guerilla forces were responsible for twenty-six killings…In contrast, the "security forces"

> [García's *guardia*] killed 2,340 civilians during the same period. Killings by military and paramilitary forces have been accompanied by widespread torture, rape, forced "disappearance," and the destruction of vital crops and property. Much of the [was] random, designed to terrorize the population into submission. (Stanley 135-136)

García fictionalizes these facts in the following passage. As Marta is returning home one day, she passes by the tree where her brother is living:

> A moment later, Evaristo's head appeared upside down from a branch. His hair was sparse and what was left of his clothes was in tatters. His feet, black with dirt, curled around the branch like claws. Marta offered her brother a few tortillas but Evaristo wasn't hungry. He said the guardias had rounded up schoolgirls from a bus stop that day, called them Communists and whores. He said he would do everything he could to find out who those girls were and memorize their names. (92)

In this quote we see Evaristo not only internalizing the movement of his nation, but also trying to fix it in place, contain it, within his memory so that nothing will be lost. However, as we see later on in the novel, much like

Domingo, much like Chen Pan's slave ship and Marta's truck to Mexicali, the attempt to contain and fix any sort of body or entity, whether it be human or memory, ultimately accelerates the process of deterioration. Let us consider the following passages regarding Enrique at the end of *Handbook*:

> Evaristo had a difficult time remembering things. He was only twenty-six but it seemed to him that he was forgetting many lives' worth of detail and incident. Perhaps it was this forgetting that was congesting his skull, splitting it with pain and dizziness. (256)
>
> When the pain in his head subsided, memories taunted him like sharp filaments of light. The priests with sticks up their asses. The schoolgirls taken away by the *guardias* and raped. The year in the border prison awaiting deportation. (258)

It is evident by these quotes that there has been a speeding up of Evaristo's deterioration, at the age of twenty-six his memory both fails and torments him, causing an irrevocable fragmentation of being. This inner space then appears to be a point of convergence and an intermingling of national and individual identity. Spivak can once again be invoked: the necessarily dislocated machine of history moves because the 'identity of

interests' of these [subaltern subjects] 'fails to produce a feeling of community, national links, or a political organization.' (72) I would go further and say that the 'identity of interests' of the subaltern has been so conflated with the superstructure's interests that a coherent individual identity is replaced with the fragmented and confused jumble of movements and desires that we see embodied in García's Evaristo and Domingo.

The Power of Names

"Awright, lemme have it."

"Have what?"

"De name, African, what you call her?"

"Kizzy."

"Kizzy! Ain't nobody never heard no name like dat!"

Kunta explained that in Manika "Kizzy" meant "you sit down," or "you stay put," which, in turn, meant that unlike Bell's previous two babies, this child would never get sold away.

Alex Haley*, Roots*

In her project to expose how the superstructure and the individual actually interact, García makes the act of naming a key element. The ability to utter names, forget names, change names all point to an urge on the part of the individual to either assert power in a powerless situation or conflate their identity with that of a more powerful entity like the Nation or the Church. The power to name is indeed just that, a power, and in claiming or relinquishing that power, García's characters express a flexible alignment with both national identities and personal desires. In turn, the flexibility displayed by García's characters speaks also to the flexibility of the Nation. As individuals act, global economic interests shift, so does the Nation and its names. This is in direct opposition to the stable, static national myth discussed earlier. The suggestion, or exposition, that things

can change so easily and have such flexibility signals to the reader that the nation is unstable and changes not only by the whim of the powerful, but also in reaction to the unforeseen machinations of the individual as we saw in the case of the drums with Domingo Chen. Thus, the act of naming becomes, at times, polemical for the Nation and the individual.

In *Naming Properties,* Earl Miner begins his investigation into the problematic of names by asking of the name, "what does it include, and what indeed does it exclude?" (3) The power to give a name is in essence the power to ascribe identity to a place or being. Furthermore, in uttering certain names, we exercise our own power to connect with that place or being. In each of the instances below, naming a piece of property, a person or a place, or perhaps not being able to name them provides the reader with an understanding of the power dynamics at work in the lives of the individuals doing, or not doing, the naming.

Socrates, in Plato's *Cratylus*, speaks with Hermogenes and Cratylus of the essence of naming. He states, at first, that a name is nothing more than what men agree upon: "we frequently change the names of our slaves, and the newly-imposed name is as good as the old: for there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and habit of the users" (n. pag.) This quote illustrates two key points. First, that names are given according to the whim of the powerful. Second, that

names are *imposed*. Accordingly, Earl Miner asserts that, "[w]e name our names and speak our sentences with the premise that our references are assured. Human usage implies motivation, purpose, intention" (*Naming*, 49). It is in this vein, the usefulness and power of naming humans, that García begins to debunk the dominant power structure in *Monkey Hunting*.

Beginning with Chen Pan and the slave ship and continuing throughout the novel, Chinese towns are referred to by their first letter and long dash (*Monkey* 4, 9, 13, 17, 18, 29, 37, 131, 170, 239). What exactly is García is trying to convey by refusing to name the towns from which these men have proceeded? Indeed, when a person recalls the name of a town or city, he or she is recalling not only a specific geographical place, but also a specific place in time. In so doing, he is reconnecting with that place and time, that space. In *Monkey Hunting*, the narrator's refusal to 'speak' the names of their places of origin is a sign of the characters' rupture from said origin. When looked at on a map, a city looks to be a stable and static entity. In fact, it is for this reason that cartographers have never found themselves out of work: there has never been a lack of interest in stabilizing motion, in limiting mobility. However, we know that towns and cities, like people, do not remain the same. Taking this into consideration, and considering the deep rupture felt by these *chinos* in Cuba, the refusal to name places of origin is, in reality, an *inability* to name

them. How can one continue to call by name that which he no longer knows? Miner asks, "[d]o words exist without a world to which they refer?" (35). Since the transplanted Chinese have no claim to their territory, they can no longer partake in naming it. Indeed, there is an underlying play of power and authority involved in the naming of people and places. The town's name exists only by man's relation to it. If name is identity and identity is existence, then the town, and by extension the Nation only exists if people are willing to name it. In other words, the Nation depends on its inhabitants and vice versa. Each one looks to the other in order to construct its identity. Again, this goes against the national myth project and fits in with García's project to debunk said myth.

When Chen Pan and his compatriots arrive in Cuba, their identity is erased. This, of course, provides them with a perfect opportunity to re-create themselves:

> A few Chinese adopted Spanish names, cut off their queues, adapted their palates to the local food. They took the names of wealthy Cubans, hoping for their same prosperity. Yü Ming-hsing became Estéban Sariñana. Li Chao-ch'un renamed himself Perfecto Díaz and slicked his hair back with perfumed grease. Thickheaded Kuo Chan insisted on being called Juan-Juan Capote.

"Why Juan-Juan?" Chen Pan asked him.

"Twice as much luck," he replied (36).

If Chen Pan's emergence from the forest after nine months of refuge can be interpreted as a birth, then this re-naming is certainly a baptism for his compatriots. Much as a Christian baptism signifies the entrance into the protection of the Church, the appropriation of Spanish names on the part of the *chinos* signals the desire for protection of the new nation. However, a name is often misleading. For example, Chen Pan wonders at the names that Cuban store owners give to their businesses: "Chen Pan was perplexed by the names Cubans gave to their shops. La Rectitud. La Buena Fé. Todos Me Elogian. How could anybody guess what was sold inside? Once he'd walked into a shop called La Mano Poderosa, only to find huge wheels of Portuguese cheese for sale" (72).

There appears in the names of these businesses to be a disconnect between the business's name and its respective identity. However, each of the names has a religious connotation, signaling a desire on the part of the proprietor to connect his or her business with a higher power. This need for protection speaks to the uncertainty of an emerging business class. This class may or may not thrive, depending on the whims of the market, or the ruling economic classes. Tying a business

to a protective entity such as religion, the Church, or to God seems an attempt to thwart the inevitable.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* both Felicia's own name and the names she gives to her twin daughters speak to, in particular, a woman's desire to exert power over her own life in a system that most often renders her powerless. Consider how Felicia received her own name. Celia, Felicia's mother became mentally ill after the birth of her first child, Lourdes. Left alone wither abusive mother- and sister-in-law, Celia has no choice but to turn inward in order to escape their debasement of her. In turn, she is placed in a locked mental facility where she meets another abused woman. In a letter to her ex-lover, Celia writes of her new friend: "I've made a friend here, Felicia Gutiérrez. She killed her husband. Doused him with gasoline. Lit a match. She is unrepentant. We're planning to escape" (51).

Celia, locked away in a mad house, slave to the whims of a mother- and sister-in-law that disparage and drive her mad, a husband that has relinquished her to their care, and a lover to whom she speaks but who does not speak back, exercises the only power to which she has access: the power to name her second daughter. In naming her child Felicia, Celia is, perhaps for the first and only time, freed from the weight of her

own insanity, an insanity whose very catalyst was Celia's lack of power. In naming her daughter after an "unrepentant" woman, Celia asks that this daughter may "escape" of the terror of powerlessness.

Felicia, in turn, appears not to have an escape, an alternative to her repression. After being prostituted, abused, ravaged by syphilis and abandoned, Felicia names her twin daughters Luz and Milagro, suggesting that the only means of salvation available to her daughters, at least in Felicia's eyes, is to tether them to the ultimate male protector: God. Perhaps Felicia was aware of her namesake's own fate: "[t[hey killed Felicia. She burned in her bed. They say it was a cigarette but none of the guards will admit to giving her one. Four men carried her ashes and bones" (51).

Felicia's choice to give her children religious names seems to suggest a relinquishing of power, an admittance to her own frailty, her vulnerable position within her own country, and perhaps her country's vulnerability in the global marketplace. Couple this with her deep connection to Santería and we see the picture of a woman who is trying to access a power greater than her own in order to navigate her own impotence in a society in which the cards are stacked against her from the

start. As individuals come in and out of alignment with larger, more powerful entities, their own identities can become lost or muddled.

Returning to *Monkey Hunting* with this in mind, a century after Chen Pan can no longer name his natal city, Domingo is surrounded by "black soldiers who'd been named after presidents—Washingtons and Roosevelts, Lincolns and Jeffersons" (151). With this mixing of identities, it becomes difficult to separate the history of the Nation from the history of its citizens. García's female characters in both *Monkey Hunting* and *Dreaming in Cuban* accentuate further how national identity is both difficult to extract from more often than not detrimental to the formation of individual identity.

Women: History from the Perspective of the Ahistorical Figure

"For most of history, Anonymous was a woman."

Virginia Woolf

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, *Monkey Hunting* and *A Handbook to Luck* García's inclusion of and oft times preference for the female voice suggests a desire to rewrite at least some of the male dominated discourse characteristic of historical accounts:

> (. . .) in literature and life women, both inside and outside, the Caribbean have traditionally been excluded from the main currents of economic and political life. Virtually denied entrance to the public domain—the space, almost exclusively reserved for males, where History is made—women have essentially been rendered ahistorical. (Herrera 70)

In bringing women back into the fold, in including their stories and voices, García provides with what may be her most effective tool for countering National myths and male-dominated historical discourse. Indeed, García does not merely write women's stories, but rather, "[she links] women's experiences in the domestic sphere to broader racial, ethnic, and political issues. She accomplishes this through a microcosm/macrocosm paradigm

which draws a direct parallel between women's activities and experiences in the home and larger Historical events (. . .)" (Herrera 71)

Where it pertains to the treatment of women, the microcosm/macrocosm dichotomy takes two different forms: family/Nation and woman/family. It is not, therefore, a coincidence that Pilar, often thought of as García's most autobiographical character, states bluntly: "The family is hostile to the individual." (*Dreaming in Cuban* 134)

In male-dominated economies, be it the microcosmic family or the macrocosmic Nation, put forth in García's novels, a woman occupies a marginal space of little or no representation. In the introduction to her book *This Sex Which is Not One*, Luce Irigaray paints a picture of the fragmentation of the female sexuality. According to Irigaray, "[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (23). Since a woman's sexuality is essentially a multiple one, while a man's is singular, the woman is capable of entering the male discourse only in fragments (Irigaray 30). For Irigaray, woman is only:

> a mirror invested by the (masculine) "subject" to reflect himself, to copy himself. Moreover, the role of "femininity" is prescribed by this masculine specula(riza)tion and corresponds scarcely at all to

> woman's desire, which my be recovered only in secret,
>
> in hiding, with anxiety and guilt (30).

In *Monkey Hunting* the 'recovery' of the female happens in the margins of the novel, if it happens at all. All three of the female characters in the novel are, at one time or another, in prison, either real or metaphorical. Lucrecia enters the novel in 1867 as a mulatta slave whom Chen Pan purchases. Later, she buys her freedom from Chen Pan; and, rather than setting off on her own, she stays. The two fall in love and Lucrecia gives birth to three children, "creat[ing] a whole new race—brown children with Chinese eyes who spoke Spanish and a smattering of Abakuá" (*Monkey*, 209).

Over a century later, Domingo Chen meets Tham Thanh Lan, a Vietnamese prostitute: "Tham Thanh Lan's eyes widened as if she recognized [Domingo] but quickly settled back into a wary tiredness. Her mouth was full and poppy red. She seemed familiar to Domingo, like he'd known her as a child" (*Monkey*, 155).

The moment of recognition between Tham Thanh Lan and Domingo provides the reader with a connection between past and present: Tham Thanh Lan is a modern-day version of Lucrecia. For women, prostitution can be read as a contemporary equivalent to slavery, especially in economically depressed regions and countries. In the novel,

both Lucrecia and Tham Thanh Lan have entered the male economy as sexualized beings. Both women's entrance was paid for by men. Lucrecia's freedom was purchased by Chen Pan. Tham Thanh Lan, obviously, sells her sex as a means of survival. Lucrecia almost effortlessly transition from slavery into heterosexual coupling and motherhood, although her refusal to get married to Chen Pan can be interpreted as a refusal to give up her freedom. Tham Thanh Lan, however, is not exactly independent at the end of the novel since she is still destined to live in near poverty and most likely return to prostitution.

Somewhere between colonial Cuba and war-stricken Vietnam, the powers that dominate women's lives readjusted. Blatant slavery was abolished; repression of women would have to take a new form. The description of Tham Thanh Lan's apartment gives us the first hint of this new and more insidious domination:

> There were bits of military trash scattered on her kitchen shelves—belt buckles, canteens, a handful of spent ammunition, a helmet printed with numbers crossed off at fifty-six. On a hook in the corner hung a four-foot-long snakeskin, its yellow diamonds faded to gold. A huge, wrinkled map of Vietnam covered most of another wall, pockmarked with blots of ink. Next to it

was a bed the size of a child's, narrow and neat, the sheets stained with sweat. (157)

Much like Domingo, Tham Thanh Lan walks among the remnants of centuries of prepotent nationhood. However, her movements are completely restricted, her map completely shrunken. As the military paraphernalia chokes her small room, the military maneuvers in Vietnam choke her life. Her only agency is to become pregnant and create a "small world." (*Monkey*, 163). Her ability to give birth to and raise a male child is her currency in the male economy.[iii]

Conversely, Chen Fang, Chen Pan's great grand-daughter who lives and dies in China, never escapes the fringe. In midlife, she wonders at her place in society. "In China they say the greatest glory for a woman is to bear and raise sons for the future. So where, I ask, is my place? I am neither woman nor man but a stone…" (149). As a child, Chen Fang's mother reassigns her a male identity. This affords her the opportunity for an education and, later, a profession. However, her life exists in direct contradiction to prescribed female roles: neither her feet nor her life are bound by tradition. Notwithstanding, her biological gender does not allow her full access to male power. Moreover, her lack of "femininity" excludes her from societal protection: "[i]n China women do not stand alone. They obey their fathers, husbands, their eldest sons. I lived outside the dictates

of men, and so my life has proved as unsteady as an egg on an ox" (226). This prison in the guise of protection is where the novel leaves Tham Thanh Lan. Chen Fang's prison, in the end, is not Tham Thanh Lan's figurative prison but a real one. Chen Fang can claim no connection to the power of the male child that she gave up shortly after his birth. As a result, she dies in prison, an enemy of the Nation. (*Monkey*, 232)

A Handbook to Luck revisits many of the same problematics of female identity. Leila Rezvani is born and dies in Iran, although during her life she leaves Iran several times. As a teenager, she is sent to boarding school in Switzerland; and, as an adult, she lived and studied in California. Before entering boarding school Leila's mother has her nose fixed and, later while at boarding school Leila loses her virginity through rape. The comingling of these events comingling on the same page speaks to their connectedness (79). Leila's mother violates her daughter's body so that she may enter society without being stigmatized by the ethnic implications of the size and shape of her nose. This violation forces Leila to enter society as a physically fragmented being, unable to negotiate her body on her own terms. Thus, the subsequent sexualization of her body, which also happens while she is in an alcohol-induced altered state, occurs without her explicit consent. Her mother than can be seen as an accomplice to her daughter's fragmented identity. In fact, it seems as

though García is implicates women's complicity in the oppression of other women in several moments in the book, particularly those dealing with virginity. Consider the Leila's first memory of an encounter with the word "virgin": "Yesterday Leila had learned the word virgin from Yasmine, who'd heard it form an older cousin. It was curious to her that people could be defined as much by what they were as by what they weren't" (32) Here Leila indoctrination comes to her from the mouth of a female cousin. Of course, this does not mean that women are entirely to blame for the repression of sexual desire in other women. Rather, women's identities are so tied up in nationalistic ideas of the sexual use-value of women that they promulgate the stories even outside of the immediate physical reach of men. Marta Santos also receives her "education" on the limits of female sexuality and sexual power from a female relative:

> Why did people make such a fuss about virgins, anyway? Not the virgin Mary, but regular women. In their own family, scandals erupted over women whose "pitchers" were discovered broken on their wedding nights. Tía Matilde had told her the story of poor Luz, whose husband marched her back to her parents the night of her wedding. He'd beaten the truth out of her: that the one who'd gotten her first was the parish priest. Of course, Luz was to blame no matter which

> *picaflor* had trapped her. She left her parents' house in disgrace and noboty knew what became of her. (25)

Both women question the importance placed on female virginity, but neither one is able to fully escape the male-dominated ideology concerning female sexuality. Marta, for her part, seems devoid of any sexual desire at all, rather she marries a man whom she treats as if he were her child. Throughout the book she longs for nothing more than to have her own child. In the end, after her male child almost drowns, she finally learns how to swim. In other words, only after experiencing the threat of the loss of her male child, one of her few forms of currency in a male world, does she learn to swim herself. On the other hand, Leila who marries the man of her mother's choosing, returns to Iran and, much like Tham Than Lanh, lives the rest of her life in a tiny room described as "closet-sized, intended for a servant, with no windows and a cupboard for storage." (185). This closet proves to be a metaphor for the repression and constricted movements of women in Iran. When Leila returns to Iran, she is denied permission from her husband to work as she did in the U.S. Instead, "he liked seeing her in a chador, voluminously entombed in black, captive and invisible…How many times had she been called a whore, first by her mother and now by her husband." (183). In the end, Leila's life proves so constrictive and suffocating that, just as the men in Chen Pan's

slave ship, she takes her own life, rather than spend the rest of it confined. Interestingly, Leila feels like a prisoner of her husband and also of her small daughter whom prays to be made into a boy and demonstrates the same severity and violence as her husband. Furthermore, "Leila suspected that her daughter shared her father's disdain toward her." (227)

Just as Leila's daughter hates her mother, Felicia's daughters, Luz and Milagro, do not hide their disdain for their mother. They openly defy her, preferring an abusive, yet powerful man over their mentally unstable and vulnerable mother. Rather than assign their father guilt or even responsibility for his violent treatment of their mother, Luz and Milagro, much like Leila's daughter, place all blame for their situations squarely on their mother's shoulders. Luz explains, "my father had been a handsome man. I have the picture to prove it. It was mamá who destroyed him." (*Dreaming* 120). In both novels, the youngest generation of women becomes complicit in the abuse of the generations of women that came before them and, ironically, all that may come after. In her search for reconciliation, García allows the future of women to remain nebulous. Rather than creating a novel in which women unite, García's women turn on each other, eagerly offering up other women to the sacrificial altar of male dominance.

To conclude, this thesis will examine one final detail of García's technique. As I have already mentioned, *Monkey Hunting* is not told chronologically; many family sagas are told in a series of flashbacks and flash forwards. Nonetheless, as Monica Wood so succinctly pointed out, this is not just a family saga. The disjointed quality of the novel enables the reader to see the fallacy of the Nation. According to Étienne Balibar, the Nation is always presented, after its formation, as a linear, chronological chain of events ("The Nation Form," 86). Accordingly, the concatenation of victories provides the Nation with an indestructible identity. Once that identity is firmly in place, one looks back at the formation of the Nation as a preordained event. However, Balibar contests this fiction by stating that, "we have to renounce linear developmental schemas once and for all," (90). He adds that, "the imaginary singularity of national formations is constructed daily, by moving back from the present into the past" (87). It is for this reason that García is able to contest the illusion of national identity in *Dreaming in* Cuban, *Monkey Hunting*, *A Handbook to Luck*. Just as Chen Pan discovered the national blind spot in the forest of Cuba, García exposes the blind spot in the Nation Form.

García does not simply tell the personal story of a handful of immigrants and exiles in her novels, she tells the story of power and

coercion, of struggle of the subaltern to etch out an identity and find a place of agency while the superstructure works constantly to deny the subaltern access to said agency. García asks the reader to consider that each individual's "decision" to migrate was simply a final and calculated step in the workings of the Nation. In fact the Nation's need for cheap labor galvanizes the movement of individuals who have been stripped of their identities and separated violently from their homelands. These individuals, in turn, provide the work force that creates the infrastructure and cements the identity of the Nation. The vessel that carries the subaltern subjects from their homelands to a new land, then, functions to finalize the stripping of identity and leaves the individual exposed and vulnerable. Once the individual begins to establish himself in his new nation, he may begin to negotiate with the superstructure in unforeseen ways. This presents an obvious threat the superstructure that must be corrected. We see this in the case of Domingo Chen and the drumming, in Evaristo and his treetop space, a space of his own creation from which he witnesses some of the more sinister workings of his nation. Evaristo's viewpoint, then, becomes the reader's viewpoint, and García has achieved her goal: to allow the reader to see beneath the surface of national creation myths and catch a glimpse, no matter how fragmented, of the true motivating factors of national and international immigration, of national

identity. As the superstructure continues to seek out individuals who present a threat to its survival, it bears down on them. We then see certain individuals react in such a way as to suggest that they are aware of and feel impotent against the overpowering national machine. Thus, they begin to use one of the last powers available to them: naming. Women present a particularly intricate polemic. They are essential to the national project in providing new bodies and renewing labor forces, but their service to the nation needs to come from within. In the end, García suggests that the newest form of suppression will come from women themselves as the younger generations of girls take on the suppressive tactics aimed at keeping females subservient and pliant. All this together makes a collage of oppression that is difficult for the reader to ignore and impossible for the character to escape.

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[i] The notion of the "superstructure" is based in large part on Marx's preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in which he states:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of productions correspond to a definite stage of development of their material power of productions. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. (xvii-xviii)

[ii] Sean Moiles in "Search for Utopia, Desire for the Sublime," points out that the novel "employs third- and first-person points of view, male and female voices, and fragmented sequencing (…) [and] it blends genres, including slave narrative, family saga, historical and immigrant fiction, prose and poetry." (167)

[iii] This idea is inspired by Irigaray's assertion that "[w]oman lives her own desire only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess an equivalent to the male organ" ("This Sex Which is Not One," 24).