Paradox of the Abject:
Postcolonial Subjectivity in
Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*
and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

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To my mother
for teaching me how to *read*

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I can no other answer make but thanks,
And thanks, and ever thanks. And oft good turns
Are shuffled off with such uncurrent pay.
- *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare

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ABSTRACT

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva defines abjection as the seductive and destructive remainder of the process of entering the symbolic space of the father and leaving the pre-symbolic space of the mother, resulting in a desire to return to the jouissance of the pre-symbolic space. In this project, I read Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* as an attempt to link Xuela's psychic abjection with the postcolonial identity. Xuela exists on the boundaries of the colonial dichotomy, embracing the space of the abject because she is haunted by her dead mother. She cannot return to her mother, so she inhabits the space of the abject, creating an abject lineage and symbolically writing the history of the Carib people. I use this novel as a stepping off point for a reading of Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*. Celia and Jorge are abjected as their bodies are tied to the nation; therefore, they produce abject children. Each of Celia's children tries to return to the psychic, pre-symbolic space linked to the mother but cannot; therefore, they inhabit the space of the abject in a manner similar to how Xuela inhabits it, and their abjection is represented through their relationship to sugar. Only Pilar, as an artist, is able to move past abjection – the negative space of loss – to hybridity – the positive space of creation – to end the cycle. The significance of this reading of abjection in postcolonial literary studies is that these two postcolonial women's texts both illustrate and attempt to resolve the problem of postcolonial female subjectivity, although to different degrees of success.

"One does not know [the abject], one does not desire it, one joys in it.

Violently and painfully. A passion."

"Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection."

— Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*

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INTRODUCTION

How does the postcolonial woman construct subjectivity within the colonial dichotomy or, as Gayatri Spivak famously asked, "Can the subaltern speak?" In this project, I will argue that psychologically, the postcolonial woman is constantly set outside of the subject/object dichotomy through a history of trauma and oppression, and that there is a modicum of power available to her by inhabiting the space of the abject that is outside of the subject/object dichotomy; however, occupying this space proves to be destructive. First, I will use *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid to illustrate how a canonically recognized postcolonial author problematizes female identity construction. I will then suggest that Cristina García, a Cuban-American author not often recognized as postcolonial but more often as a "multicultural" or simply Hispanic writer, makes use of this same space of abjection in her first novel *Dreaming in Cuban*. I read these texts through Kristeva's definitions of abjection in order to examine the seductiveness as well as the dangers of living outside of dichotomies and outside of the subject/object relation. Moreover, this condition is inherited within families: parents that struggle with abjection produce children obsessed with the abject. However, especially for García's characters, this inability to reconcile their subjectivity ultimately leads to these children's complete destruction; only those characters that move past abjection to what has been called "hybridity" can survive.

In Chapter One, I analyze the way that Jamaica Kincaid uses Xuela to break down all colonial/postcolonial dichotomies. At times neither man nor woman, neither white nor black, Xuela is a political Other in the colonial dichotomy, outside of the binary of

colonizer or colonized. The only way that she is able to enter the symbolic is by objectifying herself through sex; she is in control of her sexual relationships, but she must gain this control through her body. Through an obsession with her body, she relishes her abjection in order to inhabit the outside space in which she is neither subject nor object. For her, it becomes a means of denying the oppressive power of the colonizers and the colonized, and by not aligning herself with victim or creating new victims through the colonial power structure. She recognizes the abject in others as well, as she is haunted through the entire text by her mother and the memory of the Carib people. She is unable to identify completely with her mother, who died at the moment of her birth, so she relies on her ability to inhabit the abject as a means of experiencing the jouissance of this pre-symbolic space. Xuela creates a ghost lineage in the space of the abject, recovering her mother and receiving her father, brother, and unborn children into the borderland outside the subject/object dichotomy. She has symbolically written the history of the Caribbean, always haunted by the memory of the Carib people, with her own body and that of her family. In this way, the space of the abject is very comforting and seductive, but one must ask how comforting a family of ghosts can be.

Chapter Two offers a means of reading García's characters' relationships to each other and their national affiliations in contrast to Kincaid's novel. Because *Dreaming in Cuban* is set in the post-Revolution/pre-Special Period, the historical moment of throwing off the neo-colonial American influence in Cuba demonstrates similarities to the postcolonial structures of the Caribbean in Kincaid's novel. García primarily focuses on three generations of female characters; like Xuela, these postcolonial women are also

seduced by the space of the abject, symbolically represented by their relationships to sugar. Celia's children struggle to find a means of connection to each other and to their mother because Celia is obsessed with her own abjection, thus creating abject children. However, García implies that recognizing binaries but moving past abjection into a space of hybridity offers the younger generation a way to break the cycle of abjection and to actualize the self.

Defining Abjection

This project puts forward interpretations of abjection in two postcolonial women's texts. For the purpose of this thesis, I have focused on the description of abjection as explained by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*. This section will outline Kristeva's definitions as I understand them; I will quote from *Powers of Horror* at length in order to illustrate my interpretations. My reading of Kristeva revolves around three main points: abjection as the psychic process that causes a person to see herself as nothing more than a body; abjection as the psychological remainder that haunts the subject/object dichotomy; and abjection as a seductive and destructive space. I will also argue that Kristeva's definitions can be used to connect national trauma to personal bodies. A key point in the following argument is that in these novels abjection is irrefutably linked to the loss of the mother; this inaugural loss leads to a cycle of abjection in which a mother's abjection creates abject children.

Kristeva first argues that abjection is the psychic process that causes a person to see herself as nothing more than a body, illustrated through the corpse and the dissolution of the body in life. As things rot, instinct dictates to us to turn away. However, the rotting flesh also holds a strange fascination. Kristeva writes that "[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (4). From Kristeva's view, the corpse is not the signifier of death; it is the ultimate representation of abjection – that thing which is neither a subject nor an object. As the corpse infects life with death, the abject haunts the psyche, constantly calling and repulsing at the same time. Kristeva writes,

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until,

> from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. (Kristeva 3)

The idea of death, the symbolic end of life, does not represent abjection; only through the rotting corpse can we understand the abject – that which characterizes the body but which we must forget, disown, or mask in order to live as subjects, as seemingly self-determining beings. The corpse, or the wound that reminds of the corpse, acts as a reminder that we are nothing more than constantly decaying flesh. The symbolic orders that create order out of chaos cannot stand in the face of this realization. Therefore, in order to remain within the symbolic, one must reject the abject. However, characters in both Kincaid's and García's novels embrace the abjection of their bodies, the rot and decay and dissolution, to the degree that some of the characters inhabit the space of the abject.[1] But they cannot *live* in this space, since in order to live, one must reject the abject; therefore, their characters are constantly dying, approaching the status of the cadaver.

Second, abjection is the psychological space that exists outside of the subject/object dichotomy, always haunting identity. Those characters who embrace the abject also inhabit the space outside of dichotomies. Kincaid and García imply that this is

[1] In this thesis, I have encountered the problem of identifying a useful verb that indicates the psychological process of abjectifying oneself. Just as Kristeva's language is ambiguous, I have decided to say that the characters choose to abject their bodies physically because unconsciously they desire a return to the pre-symbolic space of the mother and instead inhabit the space of the abject as a proxy. However, it seems necessary to point out that this choice does not seem to be made consciously. I also recognize that by having language, each of these characters have entered the symbolic order and cannot be cast out of it. My discussion of the symbolic, then, rests on the metaphor of psychological subjectivity and political power.

an especially significant psychological space to the postcolonial woman – who cannot truly identify with either colonizer or colonized. The multiple layers of oppression she experiences hold her outside of any symbolic orders defined by the discourse of political power; therefore, she can inhabit the realm of the abject. Kristeva observes that "[w]hat is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. … , what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). The abject is not simply the opposite of subject or object; it exists outside of this dichotomy, only indicating individuality in its insistence that it is not "I." The space of the abject, therefore, is the space where one cannot psychically enter the symbolic order nor politically position oneself in the subject/object categories established by political power. This space haunts the periphery of the colonial dichotomy just as it occupies the borderlands of the psychological. While I realize that the discourses of politics and psychology are discrete, the subjectivity established through positioning oneself on either side of a binary works similiarly in both cases. Therefore, a political reading of the abject places it, if only symbolically, outside the categories of colonizer and colonized.

Kincaid and García imply that this outer space where meaning collapses produces a sense of unease in the postcolonial woman. She is always searching for a means of self-definition. According to Kristeva, the space of the abject creates "[a] massive and sudden emergence of *uncanniness*, which … harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me.

Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness … On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, *annihilates* me" (2, my emphasis). The position of the postcolonial woman might be understood as uncanny. She cannot think of herself as object or subject; she is radically separate and loathsome according to the binary logic of colonial discourse. However, if she embraces the abject, the only thing outside of this dichotomy, she is psychically annihilated.

Third, the danger of annihilation by inhabiting the space of the abject demonstrates the paradox of its seductiveness and destructiveness. Kincaid and García imply that the space of the abject becomes a place with which the postcolonial woman can identify. However, the danger inherent in living in the space of "[t]he repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck, [t]he shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery, [t]he fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them" (2) creates a psychological disturbance that cannot be reconciled without turning away from the abject – that which repulses and fascinates. Fully actualized subjects are able to cast aside the abject and enter into the symbolic; those who teeter between subjectivity and objectivity are drawn to the abject as that which disturbs these limiting psychic categories. Kristeva recognizes the paradox of abjection – the seductiveness and destructiveness – as she writes of the

> dark revolt of being … a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible … It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and

> *fascinates desire*, which, nevertheless does not let itself be *seduced*. *Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects*. … Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a *vortex of summons and repulsion* places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (1, my emphasis)

The paradox of the abject is that just as one should turn away, one realizes that the abject can never be expelled because it lies within. This remainder left over from the split from pre-symbolic to symbolic haunts identity constantly; only by constantly rejecting the abject do we establish subjectivity. Realizing the instability of our own psychic categories, the abject tempts us to attempt a return to the pre-symbolic state, to give in to the death drive and relinquish our bodies to the ultimate rest. But giving in also means giving up life.

The seductiveness of a rest from always trying to identify oneself in a binary opposition calls to the postcolonial woman. Kincaid and García imply that the postcolonial woman, as she is denied positioning in the political symbolic, also resists the psychic symbolic; unable to identify with the colonizer or with the colonized male, she turns within and finds the abject – this seductive but destructive space of being that exists outside of the symbolic's dichotomies. Kristeva understands that "[i]f it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject" (5). However, Kristeva does not suggest that the position of the abject and that of the postcolonial

woman is a hopeless one. She writes, "Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones" (Kristeva 9). Reiterating the paradox of the abject, after a constant political struggle to work within the confines of colonialism, the postcolonial woman seeks psychic respite, a place where she can exist on her own terms. However, this place is that of death and decay; as restive as it may seem, it is always the place of the annihilation of subjectivity.

Kincaid and García seem to say that the postcolonial woman inhabits the place of abjection as a political statement, Kristeva herself recognizes the way that abjection can be written onto the national situation. She writes that "[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). The postcolonial woman's position disturbs the order of colonizer and colonized, as she exists somewhere outside because of her double oppression. Embracing the in-between position offers her a means of identification. However, this ambiguous position most often results in the dissolution of subjectivity. The inability to define oneself within the symbolic order can create madness and strife.

Ultimately, for Kristeva, embracing abjection represents the desire to return to the pre-symbolic state, which psychoanalysis identifies with the mother. She observes that "[t]he abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the

foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (Kristeva 5). What is lost initially is the jouissance of the pre-symbolic state, the pleasure of being in a space of undifferentiation between inside and outside, child and mother, self and other. The foundational moment of loss is when child separates from mother, the child enters the realm of the symbolic, and the self/other distinction is made. This distinction will have a remainder, a remembrance of the pre-symbolic state; the abject is the trace of the pre-symbolic in the symbolic, the trace that cannot be contained within the subject/object binary and that haunts its closure. This produces *want* – both desire and lack – that is the ultimate struggle of the abject position. When one psychologically inhabits the space of the abject, then "[w]hat he has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father; that is what he tries to cleanse himself of, tirelessly. What solace does he come upon within such loathing? Perhaps a father, existing but unsettled, loving but unsteady, merely an apparition but an apparition that remains" (Kristeva 6). Embracing the abject leads to a rejection of the maternal but an incomplete embrace of the paternal, producing a psychic tension that cannot be reconciled. The realm of the father then exists as a contradiction, a figure of ineffective wholeness, closure, power. In postcolonial women's texts, this psychic struggle against the realm of the mother is often literalized in daughters' struggles against their actual mothers.

The Texts

Writing about Modernism and later Caribbean texts, Mary Lou Emery observes that representing the Other's voice "becomes all the more significant for women writers who resist the conventions constituting narrative agency as masculine and who attempt to reclaim from colonialist textual discourses the colonized female body and to present a suppressed female consciousness emanating from the Caribbean" (209). Caribbean women writers attempt to reclaim the voice of postcolonial women so long kept silent by the dichotomous structures that allowed them no agency. I chose to begin this project with an analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's novel *The Autobiography of My Mother* because it is canonically recognized as a postcolonial text from the Caribbean. Kincaid's work provides a jumping off point for me to connect Kristevan theory to postcolonial texts, which I will then translate into a reading of García's novel.

Jamaica Kincaid, recognized as an important voice from the Caribbean, uses her works to explore these voices while working out her own personal traumas. Her 1996 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother* reclaims the voice of the Carib people and of Xuela's dead mother, while giving Xuela agency through her rejection of the colonial dichotomous structures that seek to oppress her. Xuela exists outside of these political structures as she is constantly Othered by the people around her. Only through her sexual relationships does she enter the symbolic space, and then only by defining her Self as desiring flesh. In all other ways, she inhabits the space of the abject outside of the subject/object dichotomy. As the abject, she is able to recognize abjection in others,

haunted by her mother's ghost and choosing to embrace her brother and father at the borderland of abjection, but rejecting Moira. Xuela generates a family of abjects – her mother, father, brother, and children – in effect writing the history of the Carib people in Dominica and claiming her legacy from the space of abjection. However, this ghost family does not offer her any solace, and she can claim her legacy only through dreams; therefore, inhabiting the space of the abject both annihilates her self and relegates her to oblivion in the historical narrative.

García's debut novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, is most often recognized as a multicultural tale of exile. However, in my reading, I wish to place it firmly within the canon of postcolonial texts. The novel is set just after the Cuban Revolution in which American neo-colonial influence on Cuban culture is overthrown. Furthermore, García's characters follow patterns familiar in postcolonial texts: they travel to the neo-colonial metropolis in search of political power or they remain in the newly formed nation and work towards its uplift. In this way, the novel is clearly a postcolonial novel from the neo-colonial project.

García places the novel in a period of upheaval similar to that of a traditional postcolonial novel set just after gaining independence. Cuba had been colonized by the Spanish since Christopher Columbus sailed to the Caribbean in 1492. The development of sugar plantations led Cuba to become the greatest exporter of cane sugar in the world by the 1700s, resulting in the shipment of millions of slaves to Cuba to meet production demands. Cuba gained its independence from Spain in 1898, but the United States quickly pressed Cuba into submission to its capitalist power in the Western Hemisphere,

passing the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 and ensuring that other world powers would not seek further colonization in the Western Hemisphere. After the Spanish-American War in 1902, the Platt Amendment placed the US in charge of Cuba's economy and foreign relations. American investors moved into the island, taking over mechanization and production, controlling the only cash crop of Cuba. Fernando Ortiz, in his study of sugar and tobacco production and Cuban society, writes that "[n]o solo es extranjero la intervención de las entidades azucareras, ejercida allá en Estados Unidos, desde ese centro de irradiación de potencia crematística que se ha dado en llamar Wall Street … Es extranjero el banco que financia las zafras, extranjero el mercado consumidor, extranjero el personal administrativo que se establece en Cuba, extranjera la maquinaria que se implanta, extranjero el capital que se invierte" (54).[2] According to Ortiz, the United States influenced every aspect of Cuban life by controlling the nation's wealth. After decades of corruption and pandering to American policy, Fidel Castro sparked the Cuban Revolution, in which he recognized this American control, calling out the American imperialists and demanding that Cuba control its own destiny. American investors were driven out of Cuba after Castro overthrew Batista on January 1, 1959, ending the neo-colonial influence of the United States. However, as the US levied embargoes on the island, Castro was forced to turn to a new neo-colonial power – the USSR – for help.

[2] "[n]ot only was the foreign intervention in the sugar industries, [which was] exercised outside of Cuba in the United States from that irradiating center of economic power that has been called Wall Street … Foreign was the bank that financed the harvest, foreign the consumer market, foreign the administrators that settled in Cuba, foreign the machinery they implemented, foreign the capital they invested" (my translation). All further translations appearing in footnotes are my own.

Much as the United States controlled Cuba's policies in the early 1900s, the Soviet Union dictated sugar prices and global economy in Cuba in the second half of the century, until the USSR collapsed in 1991. Clearly, Cuba's history reads much the same as other colonies in the Caribbean.

Celia and Jorge, who both experience abjection in their lives, produce abjected children. Celia's abjection leads her to a vigorous support of the Cuban Revolution, which further separates her from her children. As their children struggle to find a way to return to their mother, they experience the dissolution of their bodies and minds. Their relationship to their mother and to their abjection is symbolically represented in their relationship to sugar, Cuba's colonial product that has produced so much violence and strife. However, unlike Kincaid, García includes the voice of the third generation. Pilar is able to overcome the family's cycle of abjection because she moves past the seduction of the abject and into the space of the hybrid. She does not embrace a position outside of the either/or dichotomies, but instead inhabits the divide between them, taking into her self the pieces of each side of the dichotomy and creating something new.

CHAPTER ONE

Haunted by the Abject: Xuela's Ghost Family in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*

Postcolonial women's texts seek to reclaim a voice that has been written over by the literary tradition. Often, these voices are those of the downtrodden and suffering, seeking a way to gain power in a patriarchal political dichotomy that doubly oppresses them.[3] However, many authors find power written into the spaces of Otherness, embracing that which makes their characters stand outside psychic and political binaries.[4] Jamaica Kincaid's 1997 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother* gives voice to a people long ignored by representing the Caribs, the native inhabitants of the Caribbean. These people represent the ultimate Other. Almost completely exterminated by the colonial project, they occupy a pre-colonized space, thus neither historically represented as colonizer nor colonized. In this chapter, I will argue that Xuela is politically Othered by being identified with the Carib people. She uses this space outside of the colonial dichotomy to assert control over her own life, only entering the symbolic space in her sexual relationships. Because she enters the symbolic dichotomy by redefining herself as

[3] Rose-Myriam Réjouis claims that Kincaid's novels avoid the use of vernacular language because her goal is to privilege an oppressed female voice that stands outside of class or culture, which seems to be implied in the vernacular. Louise Bernard attempts to look past the analysis of mother/daughter relationships and into a framework of postmodern narrative, giving Kincaid a new lens through which to be examined.

[4] Elizabeth West reads Xuela's search for self through the lens of her lack of spiritual connection. Louise Yelin gives an excellent review of literature examining the positioning of the postcolonial woman in political power structures. Veronica Gregg looks at Jamaica Kincaid's position in the Caribbean canon, arguing that Kincaid's work merges her personal experience with the history of the Caribbean.

a desiring body, her hold on the subject/object dichotomy is tenuous. Therefore, the space of the abject seduces her back to the borderland; she recognizes her own abjection and that of others. Abjection provides her with a semi-satisfying psychic return to the mother, the mother that haunts the text as the ultimate representation of abjection.[5] Xuela creates a family of abjects as she takes her dead father, brother and children into the borderland space outside of the subject/object dichotomy. Her ghost family then becomes a representation of the history of the Carib people always haunting the history of Dominica. However, Xuela's family is necessarily annihilated through abjection; her legacy becomes one of death and destruction.

Xuela's political Othering in the novel results in her later abjection. Xuela is constantly set outside of the power of the colonizer/colonized binary, through language, through race, through her body. Physically, Xuela is neither black nor white, neither the color of the colonized nor of the colonizer. She represents herself as a daughter of the Carib people, the aboriginal people of the island of Dominica. The children in her school, who come from the African people, Other her, even though "I was of the African people, but not exclusively. My mother was a Carib woman, and when they looked at me this is what they saw: The Carib people had been defeated and then exterminated, thrown away like weeds in a garden; the African people had been defeated but had survived. When they looked at me, they saw only the Carib people" (Kincaid 16). In a setting where political power depends on people being identified as either one thing or another, Xuela

[5] Laura Niesen de Abruna writes that "the alienation from the mother becomes a metaphor for the young woman's alienation from an island culture that has been completely dominated by the imperialist power of England" (173).

is between categories. The group to which Xuela belongs, the Caribs, has been wiped out by the political power of colonization; therefore, she is constantly rejected by those who are left, those who have survived. She often reiterates that she is "of the vanquished, I am of the defeated. The past is a fixed point, the future is open-ended; for me the future must remain capable of casting a light on the past such that in my defeat lies the seed of my great victory, in my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge" (Kincaid 216). Her revenge lies in constantly breaking down the race dichotomy undergirding colonial power by asserting a third identity. She embraces her Otherness, making herself the uncanny that destabilizes the colonial reality.[6] As she refuses to be categorized by either colonized or colonizer, she moves outside of the power structures that ensure the supremacy of the colonizer.

Her Otherness is also demonstrated in the novel through her use of language with each of her mother-figures, Ma Eunice, her stepmother, and Madame LaBatte.[7] Because her mother is dead, Xuela's father first takes her to surrogate mother Ma Eunice. However, Ma Eunice cannot nourish Xuela because "in my mouth [her milk] tasted sour and I would not drink it" (Kincaid 5). Xuela refuses to speak to Ma Eunice, recognizing that this woman can never be her mother. When she finally does speak, she asks, "'Where

[6] Izabella Penier recognizes that Kincaid's novel interrogates the pigmentization of power structures, suggesting that the dichotomy of colonizer/colonized is expressed not through color but through behavior.

[7] For more on mother-figures and the use of language in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, see Giselle Liza Anatol, who argues that Xuela's use of language correlates to her position in the colonial power structures, and Cherene Sherrard, who argues that the colonial tyranny is replicated between Xuela and her mother-figures who oppress her by asserting a hierarchical position of power.

is my father?' I said it in English – not French patois or English patois, but plain English, a language I had never heard anyone speak" (Kincaid 7). This incident serves to illustrate both Xuela's Otherness and her ability to code-switch, choosing the language that will best benefit her situation. Her stepmother also uses language to create a hierarchy between them. When Xuela comes into her father's house, her stepmother "spoke to me then in French patois; in his presence she had spoken to me in English. She would do this to me through all the time we knew each other, but that first time, … I recognized this to be an attempt on her part to make an illegitimate out of me, to associate me with the made-up language of people regarded as not real – the shadow people, the forever humiliated, the forever low" (Kincaid 31). In both cases, language is a means of establishing a division between the women; Ma Eunice and Xuela's stepmother both enact a colonial hierarchy within their homes, creating an Other out of Xuela. However, Xuela recognizes and revels in this difference, using it to her advantage. She is able to gain power in these relationships by refusing to speak the language to which the mother-figures have relegated her.

With Madame LaBatte, her experience of language is somewhat different. Madame LaBatte at first seems to be a comforting mother-figure, one who could conceivably take the place of Xuela's lost mother. However, LaBatte ultimately desires the use of Xuela's body to produce children. At first, Xuela and Madame LaBatte have perfect communication; they are able to understand each other telepathically, refusing to let language create a hierarchy between them. Xuela notes that "[w]hen we were alone we spoke to each other in French patios, the language of the captive, the illegitimate; we

never spoke of what we were doing, we never spoke for long, we spoke of the things in front of us and then we were silent" (Kincaid 74). Yet, in a moment of perfect clarity and non-voiced communication, Xuela realizes that Madame LaBatte "had wanted a child, had wanted children; I could hear her say that. I was not a child, I could no longer be a child; she could hear me say that. She wanted something again from me, she wanted a child I might have" (Kincaid 77). When Xuela finally does conceive a child with Monsieur LaBatte, language once again illustrates power hierarchies between the women, as Madame LaBatte tells Xuela "I was 'with child'; she said it in English" (Kincaid 81). Xuela has fulfilled Madame LaBatte's fantasy and gained a position of power within the family; therefore, Madame LaBatte uses English, the language of the colonizer, to communicate with her because Xuela now inhabits the coveted space of power – she can produce a child that Madame LaBatte cannot. This repeated motif of language hierarchies serves as a clear example of the way that Xuela is Othered by those around her, in some ways putting her outside of the realm of the symbolic. However, Madame LaBatte also tries to colonize Xuela's body, using her to provide Madame LaBatte with a child. Xuela later refuses to allow her body to be used, but she does make use of it for herself.

The only way that Xuela enters the subject/object dichotomy in the novel is through her sexual relationships with men: Roland, Monsieur LaBatte and Philip. She becomes the conqueror in each case, refusing to give her partners power in their relationship. But this power play comes through her body, which correlates to her abjection. Xuela recognizes the hollowness of Monsieur LaBatte's power in the colonial and patriarchal hierarchy by objectifying him in their sex act, therefore placing herself in

the position of subject. Monsieur LaBatte is a virile and philandering man who creates little bastard children who, if they are male, carry his name, a man who amasses wealth that gives him power in the colonial structure. However, Xuela recognizes that Monsieur LaBatte's power comes only from the social structures of patriarchy and colonialism; she understands that his body is nothing different from any other. When they first have sex, she breaks down the myth of the valorized penis[8] by which Monseuir LaBatte has lived, observing that

> He was the first man I had ever seen unclothed and he surprised me: the body of a man is not what makes him desirable, it is what his body might make you feel when it touches you that is the thrill … But when I first saw him … the limp folds of the flesh on his stomach, the hardening flesh between his legs, I was surprised at how unbeautiful he was all by himself, just standing there; it was anticipation that was the thrill, it was anticipation that kept me enthralled. (Kincaid 71)

Monsieur LaBatte's body looks ugly and weak; Xuela turns the sex act into something to give herself pleasure instead of worshipping the phallus/penis. Later, after they are done, Xuela returns to her room and finds pleasure in her own body, as she notes that "[t]he place between my legs ached, my lips ached, my wrists ached; when he had not wanted

[8] Arthur Brittan interrogates the myth of the valorized penis in *Masculinity and Power*. He suggests that male sexuality has become so equated with power that the penis has become a symbol of both male sexuality and male power, in effect transforming into the phallus. Brittan argues that this construction is contrived and that men cannot live up to it; Xuela, too, understands this in her analysis of her sexual encounter with Monsieur LaBatte.

me to touch him, he had placed his own large hands over my wrists and kept them pinned to the floor; when my cries had distracted him, he had clamped my lips shut with his mouth. It was through all the parts of my body that I relived the deep pleasure I had just experienced" (Kincaid 72). Her self-love allows her to take pleasure in her own body, taking away power from the man who has just taken her virginity. He becomes nothing more than a body for her; his money, the symbol of his colonial power, and his phallus, the symbol of his patriarchal power, hold no interest for Xuela. She knows that Monsieur LaBatte is nothing but a weak body and destabilizes his belief that he is representative of colonial power outside of his ultimate humanity.

Xuela's relationship with Roland seems to be the most equitable in the novel; he does not come to her as a colonizer seeking to own her body. However, Xuela becomes a female conqueror in her pursuit of Roland. When they meet, she recognizes her attraction to him through the reaction of her body, as she "started to perspire because I felt hot, and I started to perspire because I felt happy" (Kincaid 165). She calls out her name to him repeatedly, until "my name was like a chain around him, as the sight of his mouth was like a chain around me" (Kincaid 166). It seems that this relationship might represent people coming to each other as equals, but Xuela knows that their gazes at each other ask "who would betray whom, who would be captive, who would be captor" (Kincaid 167). The chains that connect them also dictate that someone must hold a position of power; Xuela demands this position, just as she does with Monsieur LaBatte and Philip. She is insatiable with Roland and takes her pleasure from him, even in his exhaustion. When she is confronted by Roland's wife, she realizes that she will not marry for love because "I

chose to possess myself" (Kincaid 174). As they sit on the jetty and Roland masturbates her through her dress, Xuela simply falls out of love with him and their relationship ends. She uses her body to hold power over Roland, just as she does with Philip.

Philip, as the white colonial male, has the most power in the dichotomous structures of colonialism, but Xuela breaks down the images of his power as well, taking away any semblance of his power in the end. Xuela knows that he is "of the victors, and so much a part of him was this situation, the situation of the conqueror, that only through a book of history could he be reminded of a time when he might have been something other, something like me, the vanquished, the defeated" (Kincaid 217). Yet he allows Xuela to hold great power over him through their sexual relationship.[9] Xuela maintains control over their intimacy; when he bores her with his talk of England, she "would put a stop to it by removing my clothes and stand before him and stretch my arms all the way up to the ceiling and order him to his knees to eat and there make him stay until I was completely satisfied" (Kincaid 145). Their first sex act reverses the power dynamic of Xuela's initial sex act with Monsieur LaBatte, who held her wrists down and covered her mouth when she makes too much noise. In this case, Xuela takes agency by binding her own wrists with Philip's belt and biting his hand when he covers her mouth.[10] She places

[9] Izabella Penier writes that Xuela "not only refuses to be a bearer of children but also uses her sexuality to subvert traditional colonial scripting of femininity. … [and] Xuela uses her sexuality to subjugate and exploit [Philip]" (66-7). Kathryn Morris also examines Xuela's sexual conquering of the men, suggesting that Kincaid uses Xuela to subvert the colonial representation of Caribs as hyper-sexualized.

[10] Holcomb and Holcomb argue that in Philip and Xuela's first sex act, Kincaid explores the transgressivity of S/M, as Xuela binds her own wrists but still takes control of the sex act, allowing her to rewrite history as she masters Philip.

herself in the position of object, but by her own choice. Therefore, she takes complete control of the sexual act and maintains this control throughout their entire relationship. Therefore, his position as subject to her object is only for show; he becomes a body for her to use, and she denies him any position of power in their relationship.

Philip and Xuela marry after Moira dies, and still Xuela refuses to allow Philip any power. Philip is drawn to ornamental gardening, he manipulates fruits to grow in larger- or smaller-than-life sizes, and he collects and names species of animals on the island, all acts of conquest, but Xuela subverts his actions constantly. She finds the fruit he manipulates tasteless, and she frequently releases his captures and replaces them with others. She recognizes that "[the land] would always remain strange to him, this land on which he had spent most of his life. He would stumble, he did not know its contours, the feel of it never became familiar to him; he was not born on it, he would only die on it and asked to be buried facing east, in the direction of the land in which he was born" (Kincaid 218). As it did with the mother-figures in her life, language impedes her communication with Philip. In this case, Xuela uses language to assert her dominance over him. She notes that "[h]e spoke to me, I spoke to him; he spoke to me in English, I spoke to him in patois. We understood each other much better that way, speaking to each other in the language of our thoughts" (Kincaid 219), but also that "[h]e now lived in a world in which he could not speak the language. I mediated for him, I translated for him. I did not always tell him the truth, I did not always tell him everything. I blocked his entrance to the world in which he lived; eventually I blocked his entrance into all the worlds he had come to know" (Kincaid 224). She is able to use language to assert her own Otherness

and completely destroy any semblance of power that Philip might have held. He lives out his days isolated and lonely in a land of which he will never be a part, a kind of punishment for the violence wrought by his accepting his colonial inheritance. In her relationships with Monsieur LaBatte, Roland, and Philip, Xuela enters the space of the symbolic by taking control. However, this power comes only through her body, and through her body, Xuela is also forced to recognize her abjection, which places her outside of the subject/object dichotomy.

Xuela inhabits the space of abjection by embracing her own body. She takes great pleasure in her body and its smells and fluids – the very things that make it nothing more than a collection of organs and flesh. She observes that

> whatever I was told to hate I loved and loved the most. I loved the smell of the thin dirt behind my ears, the smell of my unwashed mouth, the smell that came from between my legs, the smell in the pit of my arm, the smell of my unwashed feet. Whatever about me caused offense, whatever was native to me, whatever I could not help and was not a moral failing – those things about me I loved with the fervor of the devoted. (Kincaid 33)

As she reaches puberty, her scent changes "as if something was in the process of fermenting, slowly; in private, then as now, my hands almost never left those places, and when I was in public, these same hands were always not far from my nose, I so enjoyed the way I smelled, then and now" (Kincaid 59). As she is told to turn away from the representations of rot and decay, she relishes in them. She recognizes that this abjection is native to her body. By taking it into herself, by literally inhaling the defilement into

herself, she embraces the abject. This physical abjection gives her the power to refuse society's mores of good behavior. However, the danger of embracing this abjection comes from being unable to integrate into society. By ignoring the rules of decorum, by refusing to deny the abject, she is pushed farther outside of the social bonds in which she must exist.

When she aligns herself with the dead and throws off all gender markers, Xuela experiences a moment of perfect isolation in the space of the abject. After she leaves the LaBattes for the last time, sneaking out in the dead of night, she once again abjects her body and rejects her gender. Securing a job sifting sand for road construction for a pittance, Xuela represents herself as being the happiest she has ever been. Gender-bending, she buys

> from his wife the garments of a man who had just died: his old nankeen drawers, his one old pair of khaki pants, his old shirt of some kind of cotton. … It was these clothes, the clothes of a dead man, that I wore to work each day. I cut off the two plaits of hair on my head; they fell to my feet looking like two headless serpents. I wrapped my almost hairless head in a piece of old cloth. I did not look like a man, I did not look like a woman. (Kincaid 99)

This rejection of her femininity makes her androgynous; the clothes of the dead man align her once again with the abject. Later in her life, Xuela recognizes that she has caused her body no longer to represent the definition of woman that so differentiated her from Moira ("two breasts, a small opening between my legs, one womb; it never varies

and they are always in the same place" [Kincaid 159]) because "[b]y the time I had married, my own womb had dried up, shriveled like an old piece of vegetable matter left out too long" (Kincaid 206). She constantly associates her body with death and the decay.

Once Xuela recognizes her own Otherness, she is able to recognize the abjection of others. This acceptance allows Xuela to control the space of the abject; she does not allow just anyone into this space. In the novel, those who represent themselves in positions of power, who recognize and move within the power structures of colonialism, are quickly shown to be fooling themselves. Every time she comes into contact with someone who could hold power over her in the colonial setting, Xuela breaks down their supremacy by showing the tenuousness of their power, demonstrating that they are only bodies working within the cogs of colonialism. But even as Xuela recognizes them as bodies, she does not embrace them in the space of the abject because they are not part of her family. Only those that are related to her through blood, however diluted, are able to inhabit the space of the abject with her.

Moira serves as a foil for Xuela, as she fully embraces her position as a colonial woman. Xuela notes that "[Moira] was very pleased to be who she was, and by that she meant she was pleased to be of the English people, and that made sense, because it is among the first tools you need to transgress against another human being – to be very pleased with who you are" (Kincaid 156). Moira sets herself apart from the people of Dominica, but Xuela argues that she looks "almost like something that used to be and had been long lost and then found, a remnant, fossil-like" (Kincaid 157). Moira, then, becomes a symbol for the ossification of the colonial power that no longer maintains its

ascendancy in the Caribbean. It also serves to demonstrate Moira's ultimate but unacknowledged abjection, associating her with the dead and decayed. Xuela also recognizes that Moira's relationship to her body and her gender is based on colonial rhetoric that places a white woman in a position of power, as Moira is a *lady*. But this power is nothing more than "a combination of elaborate fabrications, a collection of externals, facial arrangements, and body parts, distortions, lies, and empty effort" (Kincaid 159).

Moira eventually becomes a drug addict. In a turn of fate, the hallucinogenic tea she drinks "turned her skin black before she died. She had lived among people whose skin was such a color for most of her life, and for that very reason only she had despised them; … but this was the color she became before she died, black, and perhaps she liked it and perhaps she didn't, but all the same, she died anyway" (Kincaid 207). This woman, who "drew her sense of who she was from the power of her country of origin, a country which at her time of birth had the ability to determine the everyday existence of one quarter of the world's human population," dies "without any awareness of the limitations of her own self or any sympathy for her own fragility" (Kincaid 208). She never realizes that colonial rhetoric has poisoned her identity, never understands that on the most basic level she is nothing more than a body, the same as all the other Dominican bodies. In contrast, Xuela, as the abject, understands Moira's abjection and that Moira's power is nothing but a construct and she is nothing but a body. However, Xuela refuses to allow Moira to inhabit the space of the abject into which she takes her brother and father because Moira is not a part of her family. They do not share blood as do her mother,

brother, and father, and therefore Moira cannot become part of Xuela's ghostly collection.

Xuela finds a way to connect to her brother and father through their deaths. When alive, they move within the political dichotomy of colonizer/colonized and are alien to her, but in death, she can embrace them as her family. Early in the novel, Xuela recognizes her brother Alfred's ability to gain power within the colonial structure. As a boy, he copies his father's dress, hair, mannerisms and beliefs, which of course all come from the father's imitation of colonial power. Xuela recognizes that "[her father] believed himself to be a man of freedom, honest and brave; … and nothing could convince him that just the opposite was the truth. This was not something his wife and her son would have known, or could have known, and so this boy from his beginning lived a painful life, a copied life, a life whose origins he did not know" (Kincaid 54). Alfred walks a tense and fragile line between subject and object in this case; he has power in the space of the colonized, but he will never be a self-determining subject. After Xuela decides to give up her androgynous life, she learns that her brother is deathly ill. Just as she has begun to embrace the abjection of her own body, he is abjected in sickness and now occupies some liminal space of death in life. His disease makes him the very definition of abjection, as "small lesions grew larger, the flesh on his left shin slowly began to vanish as if devoured by an invisible being, revealing the bone, and then that also began to vanish. This disease was indifferent to every principle; no science, no god of any kind could alter its course" (Kincaid 109). Just before he dies, his body starts to excrete pus, and a worm crawls out of his leg. As Alfred experiences the dissolution of his body, he moves firmly into the

space of the abject. He can no longer find any social power; he is quickly becoming nothing but a decrepit body. His father and mother grieve for him, recognizing him as a symbolic representation of death, but after his death Xuela comes to him an equal, as a body. She is able finally to find connection to her brother, as she notes that "[m]y brother died. In death he became my brother. When he was alive, I did not know him at all" (Kincaid 110). His body has reached the final stage of abjection: he is a corpse. In this state, Xuela can welcome him into the liminal space which she inhabits, at the border of power, somewhere outside the dichotomies that had previously defined his life.

Her brother Alfred's imitation of colonial power comes from following his father's example, and just as Xuela is unable to connect with her brother in his life, she represents her father as the character most concerned with amassing colonial power. However, when her father dies, Xuela is finally able to connect to him, bringing him into her symbolic borderland. Bringing to mind Fanon, Xuela notes that her father "mastered the mask that he wore as a face for the remainder of his life" (Kincaid 39) [11] and "wore a fine white linen suit, so well tailored to fit him – it was not his skin but it could have been" (Kincaid 118).[12] Xuela even goes as far as to say that "[m]y father was an incredible mimic" (Kincaid 239), remarking that

[11] Frantz Fanon's work *Black Skin, White Masks* examines the black man's psychology in the face of colonial oppression; he suggests that the black man struggles with a kind of double-consciousness of desiring to be white and wearing a mask of whiteness while recognizing that his blackness will always prevent him from gaining true power in the colonial dichotomy.

[12] See Paul Sharrad's article for an interesting close reading of the way that Kincaid uses cloth to indicate characters' self-perceptions. Nicole Matos also argues that cloth and the body are used to represent the struggle between colonizer/colonized in the text.

> [i]nside my father, the Scots-man and the African people met; I do not know how he felt about that … ; his complexion, which was the color of corruption: gold, copper, ore … made him look more like the victor (the Scots-man) than the vanquished (the African people), but that was not the reason to choose the one over the other. My father rejected the complications of the vanquished; he chose the ease of the victor. (Kincaid 186)

He chooses the power of the victor, associating himself in the either/or dichotomy with the colonizer, but he cannot gain true power in this dichotomy because he will never be white. When he dies, Xuela says "I saw the breath leave his body, I felt his skin turn from warm to cold. For a long time, hours after he was dead, he looked the way he had when he was alive, just there, still, and then he looked like something else, anything else, everything else when it is dead" (Kincaid 211).

This moment of uncanniness, when the body loses its personhood and becomes a corpse, allows Xuela to reevaluate her relationship with him. He is still her father, but he is nothing more than a body. She retracts her previous observations, noting that "[h]is skin then, just after he had died, looked like the color of something useful: cooking utensils, copra, the earth, the color of the day early in the morning when it is no longer dark but not yet light" (Kincaid 212). His death removes him from the struggle for power within the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. He becomes a clear representation Kristeva's definition of the abject, and Xuela "came to love my father, but only when he was dead, at that moment when he still looked like himself but a self that could no longer cause

harm, only a still self, dead" (Kincaid 214). Xuela has recognized the abject in her own body and therefore recognizes it in her brother and her father; in death, she is able to embrace them. They now all inhabit the borderland space of the abject, but Xuela does not experience this abject in the same way that they do since she still breathes. Therefore, Xuela can find power in the abject; she can use it to *live* outside of the dichotomies, while her brother and her father can only move to the border in death.

In the end, Xuela's mother is the true abject. She is death infecting life. She is the uncanny.[13] She is the return to the mother that is impossible. Xuela's dead mother haunts the text as the perfect illustration of Kristeva's argument that abjection comes from the moment of the inaugural loss and death infecting life. From the very first pages, Xuela recognizes that "[m]y mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity … I came to feel that for my whole life I had been standing on a precipice" (Kincaid 3). This becomes her mantra throughout the entire text; Xuela obsessively searches for her dead mother, always attempting to return to the mother. This return, however, is of course impossible. Therefore, Xuela finds herself in longing for the space of the abject, the trace of the pre-symbolic space of the mother within the symbolic itself. The abject becomes the way Xuela can connect to the psychic association with her mother. By identifying with the Carib people whose very memory destabilizes the colonial power, she also politically aligns herself to her mother's heritage. Her mother's ghost uncannily haunts Xuela's

[13] See Shu-li Chang's article for a discussion of spectral aesthetics and Kincaid's use of the ghostly mother to represent the personal and national trauma of loss.

dreams, much the way the memory of the Caribs haunts Dominica's colonial history. Even the novel's title indicates the mixture of mother-daughter identity.

Xuela understands that

> [t]his account of my life has been an account of my mother's life as much as it has been an account of mine, and even so, again it is an account of the life of the children I did not have, as it is their account of me. In me is the voice I never heard, the face I never saw, the being I came from. In me are the voices that should have come out of me, the faces I never allowed to form, the eyes I never allowed to see me. This account is an account of the person who was never allowed to be and an account of the person I did not allow myself to become." (228)

Her narrative conflates her self and her mother, as she becomes both mother and daughter. However, Xuela herself refuses to bring a child into the colonial dichotomies that oppress her. Instead, she births the abject, creating the final generation of her ghostly genealogy. After she conceives a child with Monsieur LaBatte, she goes to a woman who helps her abort the baby. During this process, she loses her self and becomes nothing more than a body. She states, "I did not smell of the dead, because for something to be dead, life would have had to come first. I had only made the life that was just beginning in me, not dead, just not to be at all" (Kincaid 91). Her unborn child is the ultimate uncanny representation of abjection – that which takes over her own body as a semi-parasitic force, growing but not yet independently alive. As the aborted pregnancy leaks out of her, she notes that "[t]he old blood gave off a sweet rotten stink, and this I loved

and would breathe in deeply when it came to dominate the other smells in the room; perhaps I only loved it because it was mine" (Kincaid 91). She and her unborn child are nothing but bodily fluids and vessels for secretion.

During this time, she also dreams of walking across the island. In this act, she "[claims] my birthright, East and West, Above and Below, Water and Land: In a dream, I walked through my inheritance, an island of villages and rivers and mountains and people … I claimed it in a dream. Exhausted from the agony of expelling from my body a child I could not love and so did not want, I dreamed of all the things that were mine" (Kincaid 89). This birthright is made up solely of dichotomies: east/west, above/below, water/land. In life, she cannot claim an inheritance because she is a woman of the defeated; therefore, she possesses these things only in her dream and only after she has abjected her body to the extreme.

Abjected parents birth abject children. Xuela's mother haunts her throughout the novel, making Xuela recognize her own abjection. Therefore, Xuela births the abject and recognizes her father and brother in their abjection. She inhabits the borderland outside of the subject/object dichotomy that can be read also to represent the colonizer/colonized dichotomy, in which Xuela has been Othered by nature of being a Carib. Xuela's abjection becomes a form of resistance to the colonial power; in creating her ghostly genealogy, she writes the history of the Caribbean always haunted by the ghosts of the Carib people. However, her resistance also demands the complete annihilation of her subjectivity; therefore, abjection becomes a negative third space of destruction. In Chapter Two, I will argue that García's characters are able to move out of the cycle of

abjection and into a space of hybridity – a positive third space of creation. Hybridity, then, becomes a way to still remain outside of dichotomies, but to create a new, totally disparate identity instead of completely relinquishing one's subjectivity.

CHAPTER TWO

Sugar Crazed: Revulsions and Revolutions in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

With lyrical prose and complex characters, Cristina García's first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban,* follows three generations of Cubans through the post-Revolution era. The novel begins with a family tree; the last pages of the novel combine the national and familial as Celia writes of Pilar's birth and the Revolution. In this way, the family's destiny is tied irrevocably to the Cuban Revolution.[14] Celia, the family's matriarch, remains in Cuba and actively participates in revolutionary movements; her husband, Jorge, emigrates to the United States for cancer treatments. Their oldest and youngest children, Lourdes and Jorge, travel to the neo-colonial metropolis in search of a better life, while Felicia stays in Cuba, listless and indolent. The novel uses abjection to conflate the personal body and the national trauma;[15] each of the characters is seduced by the space of the abject and/or destroyed by it. Celia's and Jorge's abjection creates a cycle of abjection that results in abject children. Celia's children's relationship to the abject can be shown through their relationship to sugar, the colonial product that once again reifies national trauma.[16] For each of the children, their abjection and their

[14] Concepción Ciria suggests that "the microcosm of the del Pino family stands as a symbol of the discord of the Cuban people on both sides of the Strait" (512).
[15] By the national trauma of Cuba I mean the psychological damage from the colonial project and the economic damage from the production of sugar as the only national product, as well as the neo-colonial American influence that resulted in the Cuban Revolution.
[16] See Elena Machado Sáez, Karen Skinazi, and Delores Phillips's dissertation for additional readings of food in García's novel.

relationship to sugar symbolizes an attempt to return to their mother, who cannot nourish them because she is too consumed by the Revolution. However, García's novel does end with hope that the cycle of abjection will end: Pilar is able to find nourishment from her mother, and she can move past abjection to hybridity. She is able to recognize her Otherness and in-betweenness, taking parts of each of the subject and object positions to create a new subjectivity.[17]

In this chapter I will argue that García's postcolonial text moves her characters past a ghostly heritage of abjection into a new future of hybridity. According to Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, "[the] interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (5); he goes on to argue that in "a place of hybridity … [there can be] the construction of a political object that is new, *neither one nor the other*" (37). I distinguish abjection from hybridity because one represents loss and the other gain. My understanding of abjection places it outside of the subject/object dichotomy as a third space; however, this space is predicated on the inaugural loss of the mother and haunted by the remainder of the pre-symbolic in the symbolic order. The rhetoric of abjection is necessarily negative, loss. On the other hand, hybridity occupies a third space similar to abjection, but this space is based on creation instead of loss.

[17] A master's thesis by Melissa Anne Howsam entitled "Reading Through Abjection" suggests abjection as a space of victimization because of the inability to find power in the female sexual space. She, too, suggests that Pilar avoids abjection by being an artist, but argues that this leads to a female empowerment. I read Pilar's revolution as more than just female empowerment, but a new positioning for the postcolonial subject through hybridity.

Hybridity is both a psychic space and a political one – the identity formed by hybridity can code-switch between subject and object as well as colonizer or colonized. While the abject is the space outside the dichotomy, the hybrid is the slash between; abjection results in the annihilation of subjectivity, but hybridity creates a totally new subject.

Kristeva's theory of abjection works in a number of ways in this text. Similar to Kincaid's novel, the characters experience the psychological crisis of identification that results in their being recognized as nothing more than rotting bodies. García represents this crisis of identification both through their political positioning and their familial trauma: the family's relationships mirror their relation to Cuba and its politics so that Jorge and Lourdes are Americanized, Celia and Javier are Revolutionary, and Felicia, as the middle child, oscillates between the two without fully identifying with either. Additionally, Kristeva points out that abjection occurs because of the desire to return to the pre-symbolic state of the mother; the impossibility of this return creates maternal hatred, which each of Celia's children experiences because she abandons them in favor of the Revolution. The father cannot provide solace for this maternal hatred and becomes "merely an apparition but an apparition that remains" (Kristeva 6): Jorge literally appears in the novel as a ghost that haunts Lourdes, providing her with comfort and advice, beseeching her to return home to Cuba and reconcile with Celia. Finally, Kristeva argues that "[f]ood loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (2), and García's characters exhibit dangerously obsessive relationships with food that physically manifest their psychological abjection. Once again, the space of the abject seduces García's characters, struggling to find subjectivity, but also results in the

annihilation of their selves and the destruction of their familial bonds.

The novel begins with Celia and Jorge's combined abjection, clearly illustrating its seductiveness and destructiveness. García paints a grotesque picture of Celia as she guards the coastline from a yanqui invasion, dressed in her best housedress and pearl earrings, red lipstick smeared on her face and her mole darkened with an eyebrow pencil. Her husband, Jorge, suddenly appears on the horizon, a ghost, introducing the abject into the first pages of the novel. He becomes the abject that haunts the text, death infecting life. Jorge tries to speak to Celia, but she "cannot read his immense lips" (García 5). This breakdown of language places Jorge and Celia outside of the symbolic; communication is not possible between them because of their abjection. Yelling that she cannot hear him, Celia chases him into the sea, foreshadowing the end of the novel; her experience with Jorge tempts her to release her life to the ocean, but she resists. The seduction of embracing the abject almost leads Celia to suicide. The space of the abject is also seductive because Jorge's ghost has transcended the disease that ravaged his body, once again appearing healthy and whole.

Abjection results only in the dissolution of both Jorge and Celia and ultimately their deaths, for in Jorge's and Celia's narratives, García conflates the nation and body. Jorge begins the Revolution with clear political allegiances, while his body is slowly abjected. When confronted by Jorge's ghost, Celia thinks about Jorge's "mixed-up allegiances [and how] [h]e'd wanted to be a model Cuban, to prove to his gringo boss that they were cut from the same cloth" (García 6). Jorge's body is tied to the political in this way because he wears his suit on the hottest days in order to demonstrate his business

acumen to the American proprietor and sells electric brooms and portable fans, representations of American consumerism and American capitalism. Jorge becomes a perfect representation of Bhabha's idea of mimicry in that he uses the colonizer's discourse – in this case American style and capitalism – to demonstrate his perfect Cubanness.[18] However, Bhabha writes that "[t]he desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry … is the final irony of partial representation" (126). In Jorge's case, he cannot become American, and when the Revolution pushes American business out of Cuba, he cannot become a successful capitalist either. His crisis of identification and inability to find an authentic self results in his abjection; compulsively obsessed with the tropical environment, his psychological strife manifests in physical sickness. Desperately afraid of the bacteria and disease that he feels is rampant in the warm tropical environment, Jorge at first is repulsed by the abject in food. He washes his hands obsessively and complains "about [Celia's] culinary ambushes: chicken bloody at the bone, undercooked vegetables, unpeeled fruit served with room-temperature cream cheese" (García 22). He buys American products like a refrigerator to combat Cuban heat and disease, again attempting to align himself with Americanization. However, stomach cancer quickly abjects him, turning him into a face "dry and brittle like old parchment" smelling like "burnt eggs and oranges" (García 33). He has to leave Cuba for treatment because the island is full of "[b]utchers and veterinarians" (García 6), but in the United States

[18] He becomes an *almost the same, but not quite* character. Celia reads his Americanization as a threat to the Cuban Revolution, but his position produces the slippage of ambivalence that Bhabha recognizes because he can put on a successful image of the American businessman in the tropical heat, suggesting that the supremacy of American capitalism is false.

hospitals, he suffers as well, as when "a nurse inserted a suppository to loosen his bowels and did not return, although he cramped his finger ringing the buzzer, until after he had soiled his pajamas" (García 22). The United States fails to release him from his abjection; instead, he becomes the ultimate abject when he dies. But after his death, his psychic abjection seduces him to remain and haunt the text. He returns to Lourdes as a ghost, attempting to offer her the solace of which Kristeva writes in response to her maternal hatred, but he ultimately fails to comfort her. Yet he remains, death infecting life, the abject corpse. However, he is not the most representative abject character in the text; I will return to Jorge's abjection in my discussion of Lourdes.

Celia's first experience with abjection seems the opposite of Jorge's; she is first physically abjected and then turns to her national, political representation.[19] Young Celia falls in love with Spanish lawyer Gustavo Sierra de Armas, and when he returns to Spain at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, she takes to her bed for eight months. Her physical abjection in this period causes her to shrink, turns her into a "fragile pile of opaque bones, with yellowed nails and no monthly blood" (García 36). She refuses to eat, even though her neighbors attempt to cure her through dishes laden with sugar: "coconut custard, *guayaba* and cheese tortes, bread pudding, and pineapple cakes" (García 37). Prefiguring the situation of Felicia's later attempted homicide, a neighbor sets Celia's kitchen on fire with a baked Alaska, but a santera concludes that Celia "will survive the hard flames" because she has "a wet landscape in [her] palm" (García 37). The neighbors

[19] Fatima Mujcinovic also reads the way that the nation is written onto female bodies in García's novel, looking at the exile's desire to return to both the mother and the motherland.

believe that food products with sugar will heal Celia, but her refusal to consume them shows her psychologically inhabiting the space of the abject. Celia's loss of her menstrual flow foreshadows the fraught relationships she will have later with her children; at this point in her life, she tries to will herself to die, rejecting her identities as woman and future mother.

When she becomes pregnant, Celia is further abjected. While patriarchal values often disallow any negative portrayals of pregnancy, it can represent the ultimate uncanniness of abjection, as a child that is not yet breathing but still very much alive grows inside the mother's body, which has now become a receptacle for the protection and nourishment of the child. Certainly this is how Celia understands her pregnancy as a reduction of her humanity and agency. When Lourdes is finally born, Celia experiences a complete breakdown, no longer able to construct her own subjectivity, having spent so much time on the borderland between subject and object. Celia rejects further abjection of her self through motherhood, as she tells Jorge that "the baby had no shadow, how the earth in its hunger had consumed it. She held her child by one leg, handed her to Jorge, and said, 'I will not remember her name'" (García 43). In her delusional state she claims that the earth has consumed Lourdes's shadow – a symbol of Lourdes's personhood. Denying the symbolic, the realm of the Name, she can no longer stand to be represented as Lourdes's mother, an identity that completely subsumes her own identity as Celia, and she refuses to offer her body as a feed sack for the child. Celia's first set of letters to Gustavo explain how her experiences of motherhood abject her. On January 11, 1936, she writes to Gustavo a single line: "I am pregnant" (García 50). In August, she represents

the baby as a "fat wax" inside her that is "looting her veins," and she claims that "[t]hey poison my food and milk but still I swell. The baby lives on venom" (García 50). This connection between the bodily experience of a growing child and consumption illustrates Celia's faltering subjectivity; in her final letter before entering the asylum, she does not even sign her name, having completely lost her own identity.

This psychological break leads Jorge to commit Celia to an asylum. Her December 11, 1936, letter uses only initials to identify herself, Jorge, and Gustavo, and she writes that "[m]alaria feeds the hungry clocks, the feverish hands spin and stop. They flay my skin and hang it to dry. I see it whipping on the line. The food is inedible. They digest their own faces here. How's the weather there? Send me olives stuffed with anchovies" (García 51). She has become nothing but skin that can be removed and hung on a line to dry. These images of defilement (the sickness of malaria and fever and the digestion of their own faces) also conflate the abject and food, a conflation that will later characterize the psychologies of Celia's children. One month later, Celia writes that she lies to the doctors, telling them that "my father raped me, that I eat rusted sunsets, scald children in my womb" (García 51). She outlines instances of abjection, sexual, consumable, and maternal; the doctors use shock treatment and tell her that she is "improving" (García 51). Indeed, she is improving, moving closer to a subject position; she signs this letter "*Tu* Celia" implying that she has regained her name but pushing the possession of her self onto Gustavo.

However, it is Celia's most graphic experience of the abject that paradoxically allows her to enter the symbolic. Her friend Felicia burns in her bed, and four men must

carry her "ashes and bones" out of the hospital. In the process, "she [trails] a white liquid that I could not read" (García 51). Celia's experience with such extreme abjection re-establishes the borders of subject/object. The liquefied body is a kind of language that she cannot read, and it acts to create an order out of the chaos that has been Celia's existence, pushing her to reestablish the lines between subject and object. Like Jorge, Felicia becomes the abject that haunts the text, and her destiny foreshadows that of Felicia del Pino, Celia's daughter. After this, Celia can reenter society, and she leaves the asylum with Jorge.

Celia's abjection can be tied to the inaugural loss that Kristeva writes provides the impetus for inhabiting the space of the abject. Celia was sent away from her mother early in life, put on a train to Havana at age four to go live with her Tía Alicia. García writes that as she passes by the latifundios or sugar plantations "[o]n the long train ride from the countryside, Celia *lost* her mother's face" (92), and in a letter to Gustavo, Celia tells him, "[o]f my mother I remember next to nothing, … When she put me on the daybreak train to Havana, I called to her from the window but she didn't turn around. … On the way to Havana, I forgot her. Only the birth of my son makes me remember" (García 100). Celia has experienced the actual loss of the mother that Kristeva suggests is a psychic stage of early subject formation. Such a loss produces a desire to return to that moment, which is then manifested in embracing the abject – that which gestures back to the pre-symbolic. Celia's later abjection as an adult woman results in a similar separation of her as mother from her own child. Celia's rejection of Lourdes creates the resentment in Lourdes that she holds onto for the rest of her life; she rejects her mother just as her mother rejected

her. A cycle of abandonment and abjection is created that produces such tension between mother and daughter that they can never be reconciled.

Celia's rejection of her children in favor of the Revolution is illustrated in the chapter "The House on Palmas Street," which shows how the loss of nation and mother are both symbolized and compensated by sugar. The narrative oscillates between the present, where Felicia is slowly going crazy in the house on Palmas Street, and the past, where Celia, a new bride, struggles with her mother- and sister-in-law in the same house. In the present, Celia spends the night with Felicia, but as she sleeps, she is haunted by her history in this house. In the morning, she wanders through Havana, eventually ending up on a truck headed for the sugarcane fields. García writes that "Celia consigns her body to the sugarcane" (44). Upon waking, she clearly enters the political symbolic by joining the campesinos in revolutionary activity. Cutting the sugarcane, as a source of collective nourishment, heals Celia. She turns away from the space of the abject on which she had been reminiscing the night before in the house on Palmas Street in favor of the collective, relinquishing her body to become hardened and ripped for national success. She recognizes her work in the sugarcane as a step in the economic nourishment of Cuba, imagining that "three-hundred-pound sacks of refined white sugar deep in the hulls of ships [will reach p]eople in Mexico and Russia and Poland [who] will spoon out her sugar for coffee, or to bake in their birthday cakes. And Cuba will grow prosperous. Not the false prosperity of previous years, but a prosperity that those with her on these hot, still mornings can share" (45). Her revolutionary activity places her in the realm of the symbolic and gives her agency; with this agency, she is able to connect to Pilar, who also

believes in the Revolution, in the realm of the symbolic through their telepathic conversations.

However, Celia's unfaltering belief in the Revolution comes through her own delusion. The sugar is meant to nourish Cuba, but as a holdover from colonialism and as a cash crop in the revolutionary State's economy, it cannot, just as Celia cannot nourish her children. Cuba's national economy experiences a haunting by its colonial past through the production of sugar. As the British Empire expanded around the world, the demand for sugar to put in tea grew exponentially. Cuba proved to be an ideal place to grow and refine sugarcane, resulting in the exportation of more slaves to Cuba from 1763 to 1862 than in 250 years of slavery in North America (McGillivray 18). Sugar production entered Cuba into the world economy, but the production methods were always controlled by imperialist forces – the Spanish colonists or American investors. After the Revolution, Castro collectivized sugar plantations in an attempt to exploit the national product for the State, but with an American embargo, Cuba relied on the USSR to set prices and market demand for its product. Ultimately, the production of sugar in Cuba does not serve to reintegrate it into the global economy.

In *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y azúcar*, Fernando Ortiz writes that

> el azúcar nace sin apellido propio, como esclava. … Tampoco tiene nombre. Ni en el cañaveral, donde no es sino caña; ni en el trapiche, donde solo es guarapo; ni en el tacho donde no es más que meladura. … El azúcar muere como nace y vive: anónima; como avergonzada de vivir sin apellido, arrojada a un líquido o a una masa batida donde se diluye y

> desaparece como predestinada al suicidio en las aguas de un lago o en los turbiones de la sociedad. (35) [20]

If sugar has no name and disappears into batter like a suicide, Ortiz reads its positioning as similar to the struggle of subjectivity and ultimate abjection. By aligning Celia with both abjection and sugar, she is at once both lacking subjectivity and gaining agency through collectivization and State politics. The sugarcane fields become a site of abjection where Celia can reject her duties as mother in favor of her duties as revolutionary. She abandons her children and becomes the progenitor of this cycle of abjection in her children, who will manifest their desires to return to the mother through their relationships with sugar.

About halfway through the novel, Celia considers her inability to connect to her children; the moment is directly correlated with sugar and the national trauma of Cuba. Celia goes into her kitchen and "warms a little milk on the stove, then sweetens it with a few lumps of sugar," asking herself "[h]ow is it possible that she can help her neighbors and be of no use at all to her children? Lourdes and Felicia and Javier are middle-aged now and desolate, deaf and blind to the world, to each other, to her. There is no solace among them, only a past infected with disillusion" (García 117). This moment illustrates all of the problems with Cuba and the del Pino family. Milk and sugar represent the

[20] sugar is born without a last name, like a slave. … Neither does it have a first name. For on the plantation, it is only cane, and in the mill, it is only juice, and in the boilers, it is nothing more than syrup. … Sugar dies how it is born and lives: anonymous. As if ashamed to live without a name, thrown into a liquid or a masa batter where it is diluted and disappears like a predestined suicide in the waters of a lake or in society's storms. (my translation)

products of sustenance of both mother and Cuba, while the infected past is both Celia's familial history and the history of colonization in Cuba. In García's novel, Celia has turned from her own physical and psychological abjection and thrown herself into fulfilling her revolutionary duty, helping her neighbors resolve issues as judge in the People's Court. However, her national responsibility has taken her away from her children. They experience the maternal loss, not through death, as does Xuela in Kincaid's novel, but through abandonment as does Celia. Celia has refused the position of mother in order to become a good revolutionary.[21] While this decision alienates her from her children, the agency she gains through her political subjectivity allows her to connect to Pilar in the realm of the symbolic.

As Celia finds agency through the Revolution, her youngest child Javier attempts to form the same subjectivity by immigrating to Eastern Europe, but his attempt to enter the symbolic order fails. He eventually returns to the mother and the motherland, but his return to Cuba is fraught by his abjection, represented by his alcoholism. In 1966, Javier moves to Czechoslovakia to be close to the USSR, the birthplace of the Communism through which Celia is restored, in order to establish himself as a professor of biochemistry. In 1978, he returns home, cuckolded, broken and afflicted. Because he cannot achieve the clarity through Revolution that Celia claims, he cannot enter the political symbolic in which she finds herself. Javier returns to his mother, where he is able to be comforted in a manner similar to the pre-symbolic. Celia drags him to her bed,

[21] See Rocío Davis for a reading of mothers in the novel and Andrea O'Reilly Herrera for more on the women's role in the Revolution.

where, similar to Celia's own depression, he remains for weeks while "Celia boils mild chicken broths … feeding him one spoonful at a time [as he] eats instinctively, without comprehension" (García 156). Celia "remembers how her own eyes were once like her sons – hollow sockets that attracted despair like a magnet" (García 157). Their abjection is equated here, and Celia must mother him just like he was a young child. In effect, he has entered a space similar to the pre-symbolic, but this space is marked by his abjection, as he turns to rum to drown his sadness.[22] The intermingling of sugar, neo-colonization, and loss suggest that Javier's abjection comes from a past infected by personal loss and colonization; since he uses American money to purchase his rum, the neo-colonial power aids him in embracing the space of the abject, where his alcoholism turns him into "a small boy again" (García 158). However, he and Celia diverge in that she can enter the symbolic through her revolutionary activity, and she worries that "when she holds her son's face in her hands, [she] sees only an opaque resentment. Is it his, she wonders, or her own?" (García 159). Celia is forced to give up her revolutionary activities as civil judge in Santa Teresa del Mar in order to take care of Javier, thus destabilizing her purchase on the realm of the symbolic. Celia's resentment at having to give up her own social identity in order to care for her son demonstrates once again her rejection of motherhood and her choice of Revolution over her children, reminding us of Celia's original abjection through pregnancy. In the hopes of saving him (and perhaps herself),

[22] Rum, distilled from the by-products of sugar production, was first produced in Cuba by the Bacardi rum factories. However, after the fall of Batista and the redistribution of land in Cuba, the Bacardi family moved production to Puerto Rico and rum became impossible to purchase with regular Cuban ration cards ("Our History").

Celia calls the same santera that healed her after Gustavo left. After seeing Javier, the santera spontaneously combusts (reminiscent of Felicia's fire), and Javier disappears. The space of the abject and the return to the mother has seduced Javier, but it has also destroyed him. Immediately after he disappears, Celia discovers a lump in her chest similar to the unexplained pulpy scar that she found on Javier's back. The doctors remove her breast to take out the cancer; this loss serves as a very painful and explicit illustration of how Celia has failed to nourish her children, once again connecting mother's milk and sugar through the rum to abjected bodies and psychologies that are both completely seductive and dangerously destructive.

Lourdes represents the child most traumatized by Celia's rejection, and her turn to sugar illustrates a similar unconscious desire to return to her mother. She does return to the motherland, but never reconciles with Celia. However, she finds some comfort from her maternal hatred in her love of her father, just as Kristeva argues. As a young child, Lourdes becomes a "daddy's girl," her father's favorite. When he comes to the United States for cancer treatments, they find connection through baseball. She turns to him because she has been rejected by her mother. He comforts her, but he cannot assuage her maternal hatred of Celia because he, in effect, wants to replace her mother by claiming possession of Lourdes. However, this is impossible, and instead, Lourdes struggles even more with her relationship with her mother. After death, he returns to Lourdes as a ghost. He tries to help her connect to her daughter Pilar and encourages her to return to Celia and reconcile. He admits to Lourdes that he caused the tension between mother and daughter, telling Lourdes that "I took you from her while you were still part of her. I

wanted to own you for myself. And you've always been mine, *hija*" (García 196). But Jorge's solace can only provide so much comfort for Lourdes. She does return to her motherland, but not to her mother. Her anger and resentment can never be healed.

As an adult, Lourdes strays farthest from the revolutionary spirit that her mother so embodies because of objectification that she suffers through the Revolution. In her rape by the soldiers, the Revolution is literally written onto her body. She experiences complete objectification as the man "sliced Lourdes's riding pants off to her knees and tied them over her mouth … , cut through her blouse without dislodging a single button and slit her bra and panties in two … [and] placed the knife flat across her belly and raped her" (García 71). She cannot see or speak, but she can smell, and she smells "the salt of his perspiring back … , his milky clots and the decay of his teeth … , his face on his wedding day, his tears when his son drowned in the park … , his rotting leg in Africa, where it would be blown off his body on a moonless savanna night. She smelled him when he was old and unbathed and the flies blackened his eyes" (García 72). As she becomes nothing more than an object for him to consume, she recognizes this man's own abjection, hallucinating his rotting body. After he is done raping her, he takes his knife and begins to "scratch at Lourdes's belly with great concentration. A primeval scraping. Crimson hieroglyphics" (García 72). He brands her, makes her nothing more than a body onto which he can write his own language, an object for his narrative. This language does not re-establish order like Celia's white liquid, but instead Lourdes scrubs "her skin and hair with detergents meant for the walls and the tile floors" trying to rid herself of the decay of her rapist, of the shame of her objectification; she cannot read what he has

inscribed onto her body. Because of her violent objectification, she experiences abjection and finds the space of the abject a place of psychic respite, reiterating its seductiveness.

Two months before they flee Cuba, Lourdes loses her second child in-utero as soldiers hold her husband hostage. The pregnancy once again brings to mind Celia's abjection through pregnancy, the uncanny growth without life; however, Lourdes does not carry this child to term. She is riding in a field when she is thrown by her horse and feels "a density between her breasts harden to a sharp, round pain"; she races home, intuitively understanding that her husband and their ranch is under attack. As she stands in front of Rufino, protecting him, she feels "the clot dislodge and liquefy beneath her breasts, float through her belly, and slide down her thighs. There was a pool of dark blood at her feet" (García 70). The Revolution has caused her to lose her baby, and the doctors must evacuate her uterus. Later in the novel, at the museum with Pilar, Lourdes thinks back to her lost child, remembering

> what the doctors in Cuba had told her. That the baby inside her had died. That they'd have to inject her with a saline solution to expel her baby's remains. That she would have no more children. Lourdes sees the face of her unborn child, pale and blank as an egg, buoyed by the fountain waters. Her child calls to her, waves a bare little branch in greeting. Lourdes fills her heart to bursting with the sight of him. She reaches out and calls his name, but he disappears before she can rescue him. (García 174)

Lourdes's body has been abjected by the child growing in her, making her nothing more than a carrier for new life, but the Revolution has stolen that new life from her, debasing

her even further. When she returns to the Puente finca after years in the United States, she realizes that "[w]hat she fears most is this: that her rape, her baby's death were absorbed quietly by the earth, that they are ultimately no more meaningful than falling leaves on an autumn day. She hungers for a violence of nature, terrible and permanent, to record the evil. Nothing less would satisfy her" (García 227). She needs the very earth to recognize the violence that has been done against her, but she is only a body that will decompose and return to the immutable earth. The loss of her child, similar to the inaugural loss of her mother, pushes her towards the space of the abject; she flees Cuba in search of a way to fill the emptiness.

Lourdes enters the neo-colonial center in search of power, and she embraces the American dream of prosperity and wealth by opening her Yankee Doodle Bakery.[23] She attempts to assimilate completely, rejecting anything pro-Revolutionary and selling fancy pastries like "Grand Marnier cakes and napoleons with striped icing and Chantilly cream … , Sacher tortes and a Saint Honoré studded with profiteroles, Linzer bars with raspberry jam, éclairs, and marzipan cookies in neon pink … , fresh peach strudel and blueberry tarts … , pumpkin pies and frosted cupcakes with toothpick turkeys" (García 18). Lourdes's choice of products demonstrates her rejection of anything Cuban; she sells fancy French pastries and Americana desserts, not a single tropical fruit or flan. To Celia, "[e]ach glistening éclair is a grenade aimed at [her] political beliefs, each strawberry shortcake proof – in butter, cream, and eggs – of Lourdes's success in America, and a

[23] Many critics analyze the position of the immigrant trying to assimilate in this novel. See Katherine Payant, Lyn Di Iorio Sandín, Josefina Acosta Hess, Marta Caminero-Santangelo, and Josefa Lago-Graña.

reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba" (García 117). Lourdes's extravagant pastries seem to be the complete antithesis of the Cuban ration cards that Celia must use to purchase food. More than that, Lourdes has used sugar to make a profit not in Cuba but in the neo-colonial center – the United States. Even the name of her bakery brings to mind classic Americana; Yankee Doodle, as a symbol of American patriotism and revolutionary spirit, could not be farther from El Líder.

Lourdes takes refuge in the bakery, but this refuge is created on the back of the colonial product that signifies all of Lourdes's difficult personal and national history, and Lourdes embodies her struggle with sugar and her mother through the extreme fluctuation of her weight. Although she is more successful than Javier in entering the political symbolic – her bakeries are so popular she decides to open a second shop and dreams of a chain of Yankee Doodle Bakeries across the United States – her body betrays her, manifesting her psychological abjection in dangerous ways, as viciously as she tries to deny it. García writes that when her father comes to New York for cancer treatments,

> her appetite for sex and baked goods increased dramatically [and] the flesh amassed rapidly on her hips and buttocks, muting the angles of her bones. It collected on her thighs, fusing them above the knees. It hung from her arms like hammocks. She dreamt continually of bread, of grainy ryes and pumpernickels, whole wheat and challah in woven straw baskets. They multiplied prodigiously, hung abundantly from the trees, crowded the skies until they were redolent of yeast. Lourdes had gained 118 pounds. …

> It was not a question of control. Lourdes did not battle her cravings; rather, she submitted to them like a somnambulist to a dream. (García 21)

She embraces American gluttony until it has become grotesque. Overindulgence, a rebuttal to the meager rations available in Cuba, makes Lourdes's body balloon out so that she is "as fat as a Macy's Thanksgiving Day float from all the pecan sticky buns she eats. I'm convinced they're doing something to her brain" (García 27). The pecan sticky buns are, in fact, doing something to her brain. As she worries over Pilar's disappearance, she mindlessly eats more sticky buns. When her father returns as a ghost, "Lourdes opens the refrigerator, finds nothing to her liking. Everything tastes the same to her these days" (García 65). She eats to fill an unconscious lack, so nothing satisfies her. The act of consumption then becomes a mechanism for dealing with the emptiness of her womb after having lost her baby in Cuba and the emptiness of her heart after having been denied the love of her mother. Lourdes eats to fill her soul, but the sugar cannot nourish her, just as Celia could not nourish her. She inhabits the space of the abject because she cannot return to her mother, but this abjection, while seducing her, also destroys her.

After Lourdes opens her second bakery and defends Pilar's painting, she goes from gluttony to anorexia, absolutely refusing to eat. Her extreme weight loss proves to be just as damaging as her 118-pound gain, as she "welcomes the purity, the hollowness of her stomach. It's been a month since she stopped eating, and she's already lost thirty-four pounds. She envisions the muscled walls of her stomach shrinking, contracting, sickly clean from the absence of food and the gallons of springwater she drinks. She feels transparent" (García 167). She recognizes the dissolution of her body through her

embrace of the abject to the point that food becomes repulsive to her. She thinks that "[t]he smell of food repels her. She can't even look at it without her mouth filling with the acrid saliva that precedes vomiting. These days, it's nearly impossible to endure even her own bakeries – the wormy curves of the buttery croissants, the gluey honey buns with fat pecans trapped like roaches in the cinnamon crevices" (García 169). Even food that is not rotting becomes abjected to her. The space of the abject is seductive to her because it offers her a way to take control over her body, but just as the weight gain was unconscious, "Lourdes did not plan to stop eating. It just happened … This time, though, Lourdes longs for a profound emptiness, to be clean and hollow as a flute" (García 169). She buys a stationary bike and tracks her miles as a trip across the United States, imagining that her sweat is like "rivulets of fat, like the yellow liquid that pours from roasting chickens and turkeys, oozing from her pores as she rides through Nebraska" (García 170). She has once again been made grotesque by her obsessions. Her relationship to sugar illustrates this space of abjection; now instead of eating to try to stave off the emptiness, she craves this cleansing as a means of purging the complex history that haunts her.

This purging is impossible, however, and Lourdes's obsessions come to a head on Thanksgiving Day – the American holiday especially recognized for the overindulgent consumption of food. Lourdes has lost all of the weight that she gained during her father's cancer treatments; "her metamorphosis is complete" (García 172). She decides that "[s]he will eat today for the first time in months. The aroma of food is appealing again, but Lourdes is afraid of its temptations, of straying too far from the blue liquid

[protein shakes], from the pitchers of cleansing ice water. There is a purity within her, a careful enzymatic balance she does not wish to disturb" (García 172). Lourdes hangs dangerously over the precipice between gluttony and asceticism; like floodgates opening, her appetite is soon activated. She thinks about all of the mechanized instant foods that she prepared when she first came to New York – instant potatoes and Shake-and-Bake chicken and frozen carrots – that "had all tasted the same to her, blanched and waxen and gray" (García 173). But the food that Rufino prepares for their Thanksgiving feast is different, full of flavor, and as Lourdes "turns her attention to a sliver of turkey on her plate … [she] tastes a small chunk. It's juicy and salty and goes straight to her veins. She decides to have another piece" (García 173), the months of starvation overcome her, and she begins to eat like a madwoman. She stuffs her stomach, "her mouth … moving feverishly, like a terrible furnace. She stokes it with more hunks of turkey and whole candied yams… , a mound of creamed spinach, dabbing it with a quickly diminishing loaf of sourdough … , leek-and-mustard pie, with its hint of chives … For dessert, there's a rhubarb-apple betty topped with cinnamon crème anglaise. Lourdes devours every last morsel" (García 173). The next day, she and Pilar go to an exhibit at the Frick museum, and on the way, "Lourdes stops to buy hot dogs (with mustard, relish, sauerkraut, fried onions, and ketchup), two chocolate cream sodas, a potato knish, and a cup of San Marino cherry ice. Lourdes eats, eats, eats, like a Hindu goddess with eight arms, eats, eats, eats, as if famine were imminent" (García 174).

Her body, however, rebels against her, and her mind snaps; she becomes gluttonous once again. This time, her inability to control her eating leads her to a mental

breakdown where she sees the face of her unborn child in the fountain at the museum. As Pilar says, "immigration scrambles the appetite" (García 173). Lourdes's attempted assimilation, using the colonial product of sugar to make money in the neo-colonial setting, has caused such an obsession that she physically harms herself with her weight gain and loss. Most of all, though, the struggles that she faces or ignores cause her to experience such mental anguish that her body cannot cope. Embracing the abject, she has brought about her own destruction.

When she and Pilar finally return to Cuba, the spell of sugar is broken; her return to the motherland helps her recognize the struggle that she has been unconsciously enacting. As they walk down Calle Madrid, Lourdes purchases a stalk of sugarcane from a *guajiro*. Pilar observes, "[s]he chooses one and he removes the woody husk for her with a machete. Mom chews the cane until she tastes the *guarapo*, the sticky syrup inside. 'Try some, Pilar, but it's not as sweet as I remember.' Mom tells me how she used to stand on this corner and tell tourists that her mother was dead. They felt sorry for her and bought her ice cream" (García 219). Lourdes admits her betrayal of her mother to Pilar, and the sugar no longer tastes as sweet. She expresses her distaste for Cuba, but Lourdes recognizes that she has been complicit with her disillusionment. Her extreme weight loss and gain illustrate the unconscious obsession she has with sugar and its consumption; her obsession is written onto her body irremediably. Her return to her motherland helps her recognize, at least in part, that she cannot gain nourishment from the sugarcane or from her mother. She will never be able to relate to Celia: her past, national and personal, is much too fraught with strife and struggle, making her present bitter.

Celia's youngest and oldest children are able to find some comfort in the space of the abject: Javier returns to the mother, and Lourdes has solace in her father. Felicia, as the middle child whose whole life is haunted by the abject for whom she is named (Felicia Guitierrez – the woman whose abjection in the asylum helps Celia return to subjectivity), has no one in whom to find comfort. Felicia constantly vacillates between subject and object, never able to find purchase on either side of the dichotomy, just as she is not able to connect to either parent. Instead, Felicia's inability to create any sense of subjectivity leads to her abjection and madness.[24]

Felicia's relationship to sugar becomes the most dangerous, as she attempts to commit murder/suicide with coconut ice cream.[25] In her madness, Felicia cannot nourish her children with food, instead trading "in her remaining food coupons for every last [coconut]" and then going door-to-door begging for more. When she and Ivanito return home, they use the coconut flesh to make ice cream, a perversion of sugar that has no nutritional value, and Felicia serves the ice cream "day after day, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. [She] believes the coconuts will purify them, that the sweet white milk will heal them" (García 85). Felicia craves purity like Lourdes, but her sugar proves to be even more dangerous than Lourdes's bakery, and she poisons herself and her son, who is ultimately taken away from her because she is unfit to take care of him and conscripted into compulsory participation in the Revolution. Felicia's relationship with sugar does not connect her to the nation as clearly as Lourdes's and Javier's for the very reason that she

[24] See Kimberle López for a reading of madness and the Cuban Revolution.
[25] Adriana Méndez-Rodenas suggests that the coconuts become a fetish signifying mother's milk (51).

stands in the middle without mooring from either mother or father or Revolution or assimilation. However, she does choose a particularly tropical product – coconuts – with which to use sugar, and her inability to nourish her children with healthy food mirrors the way that Cuba's ration card system relegates produce to sticky chicken that must be sterilized and bruised vegetables.

Felicia's connection to the woman whose abjection provides Celia with a chance of self-identifying suggests that she is destined for trouble; the chapter narrating Felicia's descent into madness is titled "The Fire Between Them," and her violent outbursts always commute fire, food, and the abjection of the body. Her first abjection comes at the hands of her first husband, Hugo Villaverde. She encounters him in the restaurant in which she is a waitress. He asks her, "Have you eaten?" and Felicia is suddenly under his spell, "[removing] her apron as if commanded by Saint Sebastian himself and [following] Hugo Villaverde out the door" (García 78). Hugo then uses her body for his own pleasure, biting, bruising and marking her, and entering her from behind. She is nothing but a body for him; he claims her as his "bitch," then leaves her the next morning (García 80). Hugo objectifies her, in a manner similar to Lourdes's rape, and this objectification directly results in Felicia's abjection.

Seven months later, when Hugo returns, Felicia is pregnant and working at a butcher shop where "[c]hickens dangled in the window, bumping her shoulder … [and] Felicia watched the thickset butchers cleave and carve the flesh like sculptors, could scarcely tell them apart, in fact, from the marbled slabs of beef at their elbows. Her customers, too, began to look like their purchases" (García 80). The people in the shop

look like the carcasses, and Felicia recognizes that her body, even filled with life, is just a body, saying to herself, "I'm red meat" (García 81). Hugo, in impregnating her, has caused her to be completely abjected. Her body is nothing more than a slab of meat, and soon her identity will be sublimated by that of her children, once again calling to mind Celia's abjection through pregnancy.

This abjection is repeated again when Felicia is pregnant with Ivanito and "infected with syphilis and the diseases Hugo brought back from Morocco and other women" (García 82). Hugo's objectification has caused Felicia real physical illness. As she fries plantains in a skillet and he sleeps on the couch, Felicia decides to kill him, to abject his body as he has her own. In this moment, she moves with agency, creating a sick subjectivity by deciding to commit murder. Just like her namesake, she tries to burn her husband alive, covering him with the frying oil and lighting him with a match. She feels no remorse, but laughs as her husband runs screaming from the house on Palmas Street (García 82). Hugo's children that she carries cause her to recognize her own abjection; they also lead her to an incendiary act of violence meant to free her from his oppressive power. However, Felicia does not find freedom without her husband. Instead, she descends further into madness.

Felicia once again gains agency through violence as she is surrounded by fire when Ernesto, her second husband, dies in a grease fire, inciting Felicia's paranoia as she claims El Líder had her husband murdered. In her madness, she blames Graciela Moreira and, in revenge, "mixes lye with her own menstrual blood into a caustic brown paste, then thickly coats Graciela's head" (García 151). However, the agency she gains by

committing violence further leads to her descent into madness, and as she attacks Graciela, Felicia completely disassociates from her self and loses her memory. Once again, she becomes object because she cannot remember who she is. This loss of self then leads to her last act of violence against Otto Cruz. When she awakens, completely unaware of where she is after having disappeared from Havana for months, she finds "[n]othing to tell her who she is, or where she is from" (García 152). She goes out to find out where she is, stumbling upon her husband, Otto. Her memory slowly returns, until she sees her son's face in the middle of Otto's sex act. After this memory returns, Felicia kills Otto, admitting to the santera during a holy trance later in the novel that "she'd pushed this man, her third husband, from the top of a roller coaster and watched him die on a bed of high-voltage wires …; his body turned to gray ash, and then the wind blew him north, just as he'd wished" (García 186). Her three husbands both cause and are the victims of her madness. As each man suffers in fiery agony, Felicia moves closer to a reconnection of her self, just as Celia's experiences with abjection and fire allow her to slowly put her own self back together. But Felicia cannot move fully back into subjectivity; instead of the abject leading her back to the symbolic, Felicia fails to successfully reintegrate in the symbolic.

Felicia is unable to move into the political symbolic like Javier or Lourdes because she does not have a parent with whom to identify. She is completely outside of the power structures of subjectivity, thus causing her madness. Kristeva writes that

> Owing to the ambiguous opposition I/Other, Inside/Outside—an opposition that is vigorous but pervious, violent but uncertain—there are

> contents, 'normally' unconscious in neurotics, that become explicit if not conscious in 'borderline' patients' speeches and behavior. Such contents are often openly manifested through symbolic practices, without by the same token being integrated into the judging consciousness of those particular subjects. Since they make the conscious/unconscious distinction irrelevant, borderline subjects and their speech constitute propitious ground for a sublimating discourse ('aesthetic' or 'mystical,' etc.), rather than a scientific or rationalist one. (7)

Because she oscillates violently between subject and object, never creating real subjectivity, she experiences madness to the point of becoming a borderline personality. She struggles to identify with others and participates in symbolic practices like Santería without fully embracing the belief system. During the summer of coconuts especially, her speech, gleaned from her mother's poetry recitations, takes on an aesthetic quality that no one else can understand.

Felicia's relationship with language is explained by Kristeva's notion of sublimating discourse resulting from the failure to reenter the Symbolic. During the summer of coconuts, she and Ivanito "speak in colors," creating a language that only the two of them can understand. This aesthetic language represents a discourse of madness that traps both Felicia and Ivanito. When her psychosis sets in, Felicia begins to hear a voice in her head, which she believes is Saint Sebastian, and "[s]he can't stop his words, which come in rhymes sometimes or jumbled together like twisted yarn. He doesn't let her think" (García 77). The words of others overtake her thoughts, her identity. She

makes poetic statements to Ivanito: "[i]magination, like memory, can transform lies to truths," and "[y]ou must imagine winter, Ivanito … , [w]inter and its white extinguishings" (García 88). These statements are aesthetically pleasing and seem lyrically opaque. Felicia has learned this "florid language" from her mother, who sat reading her poetry at night, and "[s]he would borrow freely from the poems she'd heard, stringing words together like laundry on a line, connecting ideas and descriptions she couldn't have planned" (García 110). Celia's poetry does not help Felicia acquire and appropriate language into an effective social discourse; instead, Felicia confuses the phrases that she has learned into a worthless parroting. Language is out of her control; she does not consciously understand what she is saying.

Additionally, Felicia's hesitant practice of Santería is also a way that she engages in but is not integrated within symbolic practices. She is not a conscious practitioner, as she "believes in the god's benevolent powers [but] she just can't stand the blood" (García 12). At the first ritual in the novel, Felicia passes out when the goat's blood spurts from its neck (García 15). After she tries to murder Hugo Villaverde, Felicia visits a santero to get help finding a new husband. The santero tells her that the cowries and ota stone foretell misfortune and that she must perform a cleansing ritual, but on her way home, she meets Ernesto and never completes the ritual. His death causes her to lose her sense of self and wander aimlessly to Cienfuegos, eventually killing Otto. When Felicia returns to Havana, she has Herminia take her straight to La Madrina and begins the initiation ritual. In a symbolic form of abjection, Felicia's body is possessed by the orisha Obatalá during her asiento ceremony, becoming simply a receptacle for the god. Therefore,

Felicia's most active participation in Santería also results in her loss of self and her eventual death. Her body becomes emaciated, just like Celia's, Jorge's, Lourdes's and Javier's: "her eyes dried out like an old woman's and her fingers curled like claws until she could hardly pick up a spoon. Even her hair, which had been as black as a crow's, grew colorless in scruffy patches on her skull. Whenever she spoke, her lips blurred to a dull line in her face" (García 189). All of the santeras make sacrifices to help Felicia heal, but she continues to fade away. On the day that Felicia dies, Celia enters her home in a rage, "wild-eyed, like a woman who gives birth to an unwanted child" (García 190). Felicia's body is completely abjected in her death, broken and swollen. She embodies all that is abject as a corpse. She has not fulfilled the rituals to the standard of the orishas because she has participated in the symbolic practices without being integrated in the judging consciousness. At her funeral, the true santeras perform a ritual that returns Felicia's body back to its beautiful and original state, without the lumps on her head or the desiccated skin. In death, after her complete and total abjection, she can finally be integrated into the group. Felicia, because she cannot return to her mother, instead seeking out the proxy mother-figure of La Madrina, embraces the space of the abject. But only in death is she able to finally reconnect to her parents; Felicia is made whole in death, like Jorge, while Celia mothers her once again, holding her body close to her breast. Once she has become totally abject, she finally finds comfort.

Celia has created a cycle of abjection by first experiencing her own abjection and then rejecting her children for the Revolution. Felicia and Lourdes then repeat this cycle with their own children because they cannot successfully escape their abjection and enter

the symbolic, but the youngest generation resists abjection for the most part. As much as their parents and grandparents represent symbols of Cuban pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary identity, the younger characters – and Herminia – represent those characters that are able to create new identities in the global context. Herminia comes to the novel always already hybridized because of her African lineage. She represents the result of the slave trade in Cuba; the other children "made fun of my hair, oiled and plaited in neat rows, and of my skin, black as my father's" (García 184). Her father, the babalawo or Santería priest, introduces elements of both the syncretic religion of Santería and the Afro-Cuban society so prevalent in Cuba. Felicia's daughters, Luz and Milagro, also illustrate the complexity of Cuba's history. Their father, the man Felicia attacks with the burning oil, is a sailor who travels all around the world, sending them little gifts like Chinese silk scarves with cranes. Their refusal to recognize Felicia and insistence on keeping their father's name aligns them with the cosmopolitan, globalized world that their father encountered outside of Cuba. Ivanito, too, embraces the Soviet influence in Cuba. He excels in school, learns English from grammar textbooks and Russian in school. His teacher encourages him to pursue his facility with languages and telling him stories about Russia; Ivanito thinks that "I felt that I was meant to live in this colder world, a world that preserved history. In Cuba, everything seemed temporal, distorted by the sun" (García 146). Ivanito also comes very close to abjection, when Felicia tries to commit murder-suicide, but returns from the precipice. Pilar helps him to leave Cuba during the Mariel boatlift, refusing to resign him to a life trapped on the island. While

Felicia's children do not find connection to their mother, they are able to recognize a hybridized identity that offers them hope; they are not abjected as their parents are.

Pilar's Revolution

Lourdes's artist daughter Pilar most represents the novel's optimistic belief that the cycle of abjection will end. She brings together all of the feminine narrative and family lines in order to come to the understanding that she will always be a hybrid with the ability to choose the pieces of her identity that she will privilege. When she cannot find nourishment from her mother, she is able to connect to her grandmother back in Cuba. Lourdes does eventually offer her metaphysical nourishment by defending her painting at the bakery, creating a new non-destructive relationship with sugar. Finally, unlike Felicia, she is able to successfully complete a Santería ritual that brings her back to Cuba. Her return to the island helps her realize that the Cuba of her imagination is not the true Cuba and that she belongs in the United States "not *instead* of here, but *more* than here" (García 236).[26]

Pilar recognizes that her mother cannot nourish her and that Brooklyn does not feel like a place where she belongs. Pilar was two years old when Lourdes fled Cuba, and throughout the novel, she constantly thinks about life in Cuba, realizing that "[e]ven though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out. If I could only see Abuela Celia again, I'd know

[26] For an additional reading of the exile's return and hybridity, see Stacey Alba Skar's work *Voces Híbridas: La Literatura de chicanas y Latinas en Estados Unidos*.

where I belonged" (García 58). She has telepathic conversations with Celia back in Cuba, hearing "her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She … tells me not to mind my mother too much. … My grandmother is the one who encouraged me to go to painting classes" (García 29). Her linguistic connection to Celia, a mother-figure representing her motherland, helps Pilar remain firmly in the realm of the symbolic, which is predicated on the fact that Celia has entered the political symbolic through her revolutionary activity. Because of this connection to the symbolic through Celia, Pilar's assimilation is destabilized right from the beginning; thus, she struggles to connect to her mother, who is so focused on becoming American at the expense of her Cuban identity.

As much as the bakery represents Lourdes's problems with Celia, it also symbolizes the difficult relationship between Lourdes and Pilar. Pilar feels like she cannot gain sustenance from the food that Lourdes cooks because "Mom makes food only people in Ohio eat, like Jell-O molds with miniature marshmallows or recipes she clips from *Family Circle*. And she barbecues anything she can get her hands on. Then we sit around behind the warehouse and stare at each other with nothing to say. Like this is it? We're living the American dream?" (García 137). She refuses to eat from the bakery, in a sense avoiding the abjection that her mother and the other characters experience through their relationship with sugar. Lourdes tries to use the bakery to instill American values into Pilar, forcing her to work selling pastries and vowing to punish her when she does not follow her instructions. Lourdes believes that forcing Pilar to work hard at the bakery for little pay will "teach me responsibility, clear my head of filthy thoughts. Like

I'll get pure pushing her donuts around" (García 27). Lourdes tries to get Pilar to assimilate into American culture as she has, but this demand for Americanization only serves to push Pilar farther away. When she is discovered by her aunts after she runs away to Miami in her quest to return to Cuba, Pilar thinks, "[s]hit. It's back to Brooklyn for me. Back to the bakery. Back to my fucking crazy mother" (García 64). She asks herself, "Like what am I? A fugitive from my mother's bakery?" (García 62). Lourdes's bakery, this American use of sugar in pursuit of capitalism, stands between Lourdes and Pilar. It serves as a symbol for the failed relationship between Lourdes and both her mother and daughter – the two characters who are most interested in Cuba and its Revolution.

However, in the bakery, Pilar finally finds nourishment from her mother. When Lourdes decides to open a second Yankee Doodle Bakery, she commissions a painting from Pilar. For the first time, she seems to encourage Pilar's artistic pursuits. Pilar agrees to do the painting as long as Lourdes agrees not to see it before the grand opening event. She decides to paint the Statue of Liberty, the American colonial symbol of immigration that stands over the skyline of New York City, but with a few improvisations. She paints "black stick figures pulsing in the air around Liberty, thorny scars that look like barbed wire. I want to go all the way with this, to stop mucking around and do what I feel, so at the base of the statue I put my favorite punk rallying cry: I'm a mess. And then carefully, very carefully, I paint a safety pin through Liberty's nose" (García 141). This rewriting of the colonial image offers Pilar a way to find connection to it, forcing it to her represent her own life instead of that of the American ideal. When the painting is finally unveiled,

the bakery patrons are shocked and outraged; "[a] lumpish man charges Liberty with a pocketknife … [but b]efore anyone can react, Mom swings her new handbag and clubs the guy cold inches from the painting. Then, as if in slow motion, she tumbles forward, a thrashing avalanche of patriotism and motherhood, crushing three spectators and a table of apple tartlets. And I, I love my mother very much at that moment" (García 144). Lourdes defends Pilar's painting like a mother bear protecting her cubs; for the first time, Pilar finds spiritual nourishment from her mother. It is not coincident that this nourishment takes place in the bakery. Pilar's punk paining of the quintessential American icon of its neo-colonial status represents the desecration of all of the American values for which it stands. She has taken the complex national history of the United States and molded it in her own image, writing the history that, she lamented to Minnie, was missing from her history books. Placing that re-inscription at the bakery, the site of the commercialization of the colonial production of sugar, allows her to embrace Cuban history as well. She has taken the national trauma and abjection that destroys the lives of everyone else in her family and formed it into her own narrative. Lourdes protects this narrative, offering Pilar the acceptance and reassurance that she needs.

After this, Pilar is able to successfully complete her Santería ritual and return with her mother to Cuba. She goes to a botánica where a man labels her a daughter of Changó and tells her, "[y]ou must finish what you began" (García 200). He outlines the ritual for her, telling her to "[b]egin with a bitter bath … [b]athe with these herbs for nine consecutive nights. Add the holy water and a drop of ammonia, then light the candle. On the last day, you will know what to do" (García 200). Similar to Felicia, who consults a

santera in order to learn the ritual to find a new husband and then meets Ernesto Brito before she can finish the ceremony, Pilar has a sexual experience on her way home from the botánica, as she is accosted in the park by three boys who hold her down and suckle her breasts. However, unlike Felicia, she returns home and completes the ritual, taking a bath that

> turns a clear green from the herbs. It has the sharp scent of an open field in spring. When I pour it on my hair, I feel a sticky cold like dry ice, then a soporific heat. I'm walking naked as a beam of light along brick paths and squares of grass, phosphorescent and clean. At midnight, I awake and paint a large canvas ignited with reds and whites, each color betraying the other. I do this for eight more nights. On the ninth day of my baths, I call my mother and tell her we're going to Cuba. (García 203)

Pilar's ritual abstractly calls to mind Celia's stay in the asylum. Brick paths and phosphorescent squares of grass are reminiscent of the nature that is "at right angles here [in the asylum]" (García 51). The reds and whites of Pilar's painting invoke the flames that engulf the original Felicia and the whitish liquid that Celia cannot read. Pilar's ritual effectively takes her back to Celia at the asylum so that later, when Celia tells Jorge about Pilar, she really is remembering the future. This ritual also leads Pilar to understand what she must do. She returns to Cuba with her mother in order to find answers.

In Cuba, Pilar thinks about the tragedies of history that have created the national trauma of colonization and violent revolution. She wonders "about the voyages to old colonies. Ocean liners gliding toward Africa and India. The women on board wore black

elbow-length gloves. They drank from porcelain teacups, longed for moist earth to eat. They lingered with their impulses against the railings. … Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all" (García 219). She thinks "about the *Granma*, the American yacht El Líder took from Mexico to Cuba in 1956 on his second attempt to topple Batista. Some boat owner in Florida misspells 'Grandma' and look what happens: a myth is born, a province renamed, a Communist party newspaper is launched. What if the boat had been called *Barbara Ann* or *Sweetie Pie* or *Daisy*? Would history be different? We're all tied to the past by flukes" (García 220). She understands that history is just a narrative told by those with the most power at the time, that one must always question the truth of these stories. Her ability to reinvent history in her own image with the Statue of Liberty has given her the liberty to also question the national history that has so haunted her family.

She also brings together all of the personal history that has created such a rift between her family. Her ritual has allowed her to "hear fragments of people's thoughts, glimpse scraps of the future" (García 216), and she imagines "Abuela Celia, underwater, standing on a reef with tiny chrome fish darting by her face like flashes of light. Her hair is waving in the tide and her eyes are wide open. She calls to me but I can't hear her. Is she talking to me from her dreams?" (García 220). Pilar paints her grandmother in this image, while Celia tells her the stories of her life. Pilar recognizes that she "can feel my grandmother's life passing to me through her hands. It's like a steady electricity, humming and true" while Celia tells her that "[w]omen who outlive their daughters are orphans. … ; [o]nly their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the

first fire" (García 222). Pilar does guard the knowledge of her family, asking Ivanito to tell her about the summer of coconuts, visiting Herminia to find out the truth about Felicia, accepting Celia's stories and her box of letters to Gustavo. In the end, Pilar "will remember everything" (García 245). Born on the same day as her grandmother and at the very beginning of the Cuban Revolution, Pilar symbolizes the true revolution. She resists the national and personal trauma that leads her family members to the space of abjection, knowing that "[a]rt … is the ultimate revolution" (García 235). She is able to recreate history, pick and choose until she finds the real story, the true story. However, in the moment when art fails her, in the chaos of violence at the embassy when she realizes that "[n]othing can record this … , [n]ot words, not paintings, not photographs" (García 241), in this moment she must betray her grandmother so that Ivanito may have a chance to overcome this trauma as well. Cuba cannot support itself on sugar, with a past so "infected with disillusion" (García 117), and Celia cannot overcome her own past, thus causing her children to be infected also. In the end, Javier and Felicia die from their obsessions, and Lourdes cannot reconcile with her mother. Celia – the progenitor of all their troubles – embraces the "wet landscape in [her] palm" (García 37) and passes her body gently into the sea. But Pilar has amassed all of the national and personal history that she needs in order to complete her narrative.

She recognizes that she will always be hybrid, always be somewhere in between, but instead of being stifled by this realization, she is freed by it. As the artist, she can overcome the disillusion and find true meaning. Her position as the artist helps her recognize her space always outside, the space of the exile that Kristeva argues inhabits

the borders of abjection. However, Pilar is neither seduced nor destroyed by the abject; because she is an artist, she can create a new subjectivity by embracing this outside space and selecting parts of the either/or dichotomy – either American or Cuban, either subject or object – to her advantage. She does not desire a return to the mother because she can stand on her own two feet in the space of hybridity. The hybrid is an amalgamating figure, and Pilar mixes pieces of her Cuban identity and her American identity, encompassing all of the national trauma that goes with them both, and pieces of her mother and her grandmother, along with all of the abjection that they represent, into a new identity. She realizes that the US is the place that she belongs "not *instead* of here, but *more* than here" (García 236) and that her new hybrid self is not one or the other but both.

Pilar's hybridity comes through her political positioning and through her use of language. In *Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin sees hybridity as the

> double-accented, double-styled … utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems … ; there is no formal – compositional and syntactic – boundary between these utterances, styles, languages, belief systems; the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence. (305)

Pilar, in a single sentence, utters her own hybridity by stating that New York is where she belongs *not instead of [Cuba] but more than [Cuba*]. Because she collects her family's narratives, and Celia states that "Pilar will remember everything" (García 245), Pilar has become a linguistic repository for the national and personal trauma of her family; she becomes the single speaker who must combine two disparate languages and belief systems into a unified utterance, just as she must create a unified family narrative from the competing stories and a unified identity from her separate positions in the political symbolic. As García writes the nation onto the bodies of her characters, Pilar becomes a contact zone[27] where her American and Cuban identities are no longer competing but complementary. She has stepped outside of the dichotomous rhetoric that pushed her family members into abjection and created a totally new identity.[28]

In her translation of Fernando Ortiz's seminal work *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, Harriet de Onís translates Ortiz's "el azúcar es medicinal y hasta elemento constitutivo de nuestro organismo fisiológico, llegándose a determinar dolencias mortales así por su carencia como por su exceso en nuestra vida orgánica" (Ortiz 8) as "[s]ugar, too, has its medicinal side and is even a basic element of our physiological make-up, producing psychological disturbances by its deficiency as by its excess" (de Onís10). Translating *dolencias mortales* as *psychological disturbances* is an interesting maneuver; I might just write *deadly ailments*. However, the suggestion that

[27] Mary Louise Pratt's definition of contact zones reads them as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (1).

[28] Bhabha focuses on the need for a totally new construction through hybridity; thus, hybridity is a space of creation.

sugar is linked intricately to the Cuban psyche certainly demonstrates the spirit of Ortiz's work. The history of violence and dependence on a colonial power features in both Ortiz's argument and the Cuban collective knowledge. Therefore, whether in the body or in the nation, an abundance or scarcity of sugar creates a disturbance, psychological or physiological. García's novel illustrates these disturbances through Kristeva's definitions of abjection. The characters all experience the inaugural loss of the mother, and their desire to return to their mother results in their embracing the space of the abject. This space proves to be both seductive and destructive as it places them outside of the subject/object dichotomy in a representative space of the pre-symbolic. However, their physical abjection, characterized by their relationships with sugar, brings about their destruction. Even as they gain strength in the space of the abject, they are annihilated. Only the younger generations escape the cycle of abjection created by parents fostering abjected children. Pilar, as the artist, is able to move past abjection to a space of hybridity; she recognizes the dichotomies that surround her, but instead of existing outside of them through rejection, she embraces pieces of each dichotomy and creates hybridity. Because of her creative capacity, she is able to objectively observe the national trauma that results in the collective psychological damage surrounding sugar and the personal trauma of her family represented through their relationships to sugar. She becomes the story-keeper, creator of a new narrative that, while still outside, does not destroy.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have argued that Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection encompasses both the seductive and destructive nature of the space of the abject. As much as the abject must be rejected, it can never truly be pushed aside since the abject is a part of us. The abject is the space in between subject and object that represents the pre-symbolic space before the split with the mother; our obsession with the space of the abject, then, becomes an obsession with getting back to the mother. In both Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban,* the characters attempt to recover their lost mothers. Xuela is constantly haunted by her dead mother, and her embrace of the space of the abject proves to be the only way to recover the maternal figure. However, by living on the borders and isolating herself from those around her and by refusing to have children, she ultimately annihilates herself in the space of the abject. Kincaid's novel offers a way of reading the postcolonial woman's position in between colonial dichotomies that can then be applied to other postcolonial texts.

Dreaming in Cuban takes place as Cuba throws off the American neo-colonial influence, making it a new postcolonial novel. Focusing on the women of the del Pino family the most, the novel investigates the way that the Revolution affects the characters' interactions. Each of the characters can be read as representative of the postcolonial narrative as García effectively ties their personal struggles to the national drama. Their bodies are written with the struggles of the Revolution, but García also foregrounds the personal trauma of their loss of Celia through her focus on the Revolution. Each of

Celia's children attempts to recover their lost mother, but their inhabiting the space of abjection ensures their destruction. Their relationship to their mother and the abject is represented in the novel through their relationship with sugar in a way that ties the characters' struggles to the national consciousness. The sugar consumes them as they consume it, and they are destroyed in the end. Only Pilar manages to use sugar to her advantage when her mother defends her painting in the newly opened bakery. As the artist, Pilar can choose the parts of the colonial dichotomies that will make up her identity; she recognizes colonial rhetoric in the way that history is written, and by becoming a linguistic repository, she can collect the true narratives of her family and create a new history. In this way, she moves past the cycle of abjection, where the outside is a negative space of loss, into hybridity, where the outside becomes a positive space of creation.

This method of reading through abjection can also be used to read García's second novel *The Agüero Sisters*, as Constancia – whose name is reminiscent of one of Cuba's largest latifundios – is completely subsumed by her mother's face throughout the novel. I have focused on García's first novel in this project because *The Agüero Sisters* seems to have the same narrative arc, almost as if García is working out her own struggles with the same problems the characters encounter. However, I believe this reading method can also be applied to many women's novels coming from the Caribbean. The space of the abject seems to be the space of the postcolonial woman; it offers a sense of power outside of the colonial dichotomies that only oppress women, but it is also fraught with danger. As women navigate this space, they must constantly re-evaluate

their positioning, which is dependent on loss and sacrifice. Yet, there is hope for those characters who embrace their hybridity. Therefore, the postcolonial women who can find strength in a new positioning that is outside of dichotomies of power but encompassing pieces of those dichotomies can successfully navigate this newly globalized world. These struggles can be read in novels like Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*. I believe this project can be expanded into a dissertation on the space of abjection in Caribbean women's texts, interrogating why postcolonial women in the Caribbean seem to inhabit the space of the abject as a place of power even though it contains such danger.

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VITA

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