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Re-examining and Redefining the Concepts of Community, Justice, and Masculinity in the Works of René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines

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Re-examining and Redefining the Concepts of Community, Justice, and
Masculinity in the Works of René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest
Gaines

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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by

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ABSTRACT

In *La Communauté desoeuvrée* (1983) French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy describes how a community is created by bringing its members together under a collective identity. The invention of myths, such as the myth of racial superiority and the mythic revolutionary community, functions to sustain the hegemonic dominance wielded in Haiti by the United States and later by François Duvalier, the Porfiriato and its aftermath in Mexico, and white society in the United States Deep South. These myths often engender policies founded in the inhospitable treatment of those who are deemed lesser or ‘other’. Nancy’s conception of *being singular plural* posits that our exposure to the other remedies the mythic community, because such a configuration requires the perpetual exposure of the self to others, which maintains the fluidity of interpersonal relations and in turn keeps the community future-oriented. Jacques Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* (1967), *Force de loi* (1990), and *Politiques de l’amitié* (1994) offer a reconceptualization of the political implications of subjectivity, community, and responsibility allows us to identify individual behaviors that can foster the development of a democracy “to come” and which also align with Nancy’s re-inscription of community.

This project examines how the mythic community is portrayed in René Depestre’s *Le Mât de cocagne* and *Un arc-en-ciel pour l’Occident chrétien*, Mariano Azuela’s *Los de abajo*, Carlos Fuentes’s *La región más transparente del aire* and *Gringo viejo*, and Ernest Gaines’s *A Gathering of Old Men* and *A Lesson Before Dying*. The authors’ representations of racial disharmony, marginalization, and violence function as a critique of colonialism, the mythic multicultural American community, and of “imperialist capitalist hegemonic patriarchy” to paraphrase bell hooks’s term. This project explores how the reverence for certain myths is linked to a rigid conception of hegemonic masculinity in which manhood is synonymous with domination. Thus, it is necessary to identify the conditions that marginalized men cultivate to achieve masculine subjectivity, and how patriarchal hegemonic masculinity may be challenged by new formulations of masculinities, which may allow such marginalized men to resist totalitarian powers and foster the sort of communal existence founded upon peace and tolerance of the Other.

INTRODUCTION

In his speech delivered at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1967, titled “Where Do We Go From Here?” King declared

The stability of the world house which is ours will involve a revolution of values to accompany the scientific and freedom revolution energizing the earth. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered (186).

Many scholars and activists, such as Martin Luther King Jr., have warned of the dangers of capitalism-induced homogeneity, which is the natural tendency of an increasingly globalized world. In *La Création du monde ou la mondialisation* [*The Creation of the World or Globalization*] (2002), Jean-Luc Nancy considers the dangers of our modern conception of globalization in terms of the difference between two concepts that are seemingly synonymous, and thus used interchangeably, namely, “globalization” and “*mondialisation*”, but which in fact designate the concept *mondalisation* as the only possible solution of the tendency towards globality, or the end-state (completion) of globalization. However, where globalization is defined as such in French, *mondalisation* is defined as the phenomenon of “world-forming”. Nancy claims that globalization denotes the tendency towards the enclosure “in the undifferentiated sphere of a unitotality”, or an indistinct totality, in which the trajectory towards general equivalence constitutes a “global injustice” that leads towards the opposite of what he conceives of as an uninhabitable world (63). For the purpose of this argument, the definition of globalization is based off of Nancy’s conception, which is used to denote the idea of

the global contemporary exchange of information and the unification of all regions of the world. The tendency towards such universal homogenization calls into question how Nancy's *mondalisation* differs from globalization in terms of its interpretation of pluralism. Inscribed in the reality of globalization is a danger, Nancy warns, because *mondalisation* names the polar opposite of the uninhabitable world produced as a result of globalization, since authentic world-forming maintains a crucial reference to the interminable process that describes the expansion of the world, in which the world of human beings, nations, and cultures is ceaselessly recreated through interactions in a common space made possible by technological exchange and increasing proximity (63).

Whereas Nancy provides an ontological rendering of the significance of the distinction between the two terms, Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012) considers the implications of the tendency towards globalization in terms of its effects on nation-building and nationalism. In an article published in *The Los Angeles Times* in 1990, Fuentes describes globalization as the consequence of the "global integration of national economies", and he warns that resurrected nationalisms will emerge in resistance to this tendency towards global integration in the attempts to protect national interests. As Gavin O'Toole explains in *The Reinvention of Mexico: National Ideology in a Neoliberal Era* (2010), Fuentes understood the "paradox of globalization, which challenged concepts of independence, autonomy, and sovereignty in favor of commerce and economic decision-making, so that economic globalization became associated with cultural universalism" (135). Furthermore, he recognized the need to reconcile the homogenizing effects of globalization with efforts to protect national identity in order to foster Mexico's economic interdependence with other global entities. Still, he warned of the necessity to

be cautious of the backlash that can occur when nations promote nationalistic sentiments in retaliation to perceived threats to cultural erasure by more economically robust nations and global superpowers. O'Toole explains that Fuentes's solution to this paradox was a "revived federalism within which the nation still had a role, and clear limits to integration" (154).

Argument and Structure

This dissertation endeavors to answer how the René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines portray viable alternative patterns of masculinity that emerge within marginalized populations of men as they are shaped by the effects that global changes have on Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States during the mid-twentieth century. In their discussions of community, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida interrogate the foundations that give rise to categories of inclusion and identity and allow us to investigate how such categories relate to the paradoxical ideas that Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines associate with Haiti, Mexico, and the United States's transition to a globalized world. Nancy's philosophy on the inoperative community challenges the notion of the global by interrogating the limit at which hypocrisies inherent to notions of globalization and the merits of universality can be exposed. By describing how Nancy's thought extends beyond Derrida's conceptualization of hospitality in binary terms, which encourages us to think about hospitality in terms of an *aporia*, or the conditions of the welcome of the other, it is possible to identify how the societies portrayed in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines grapple with socioeconomic conditions that limit hospitality and in turn give rise to communities defined by exclusionary terms. Hence,

this project describes how these three authors rewrite notions of community by recasting concepts that support the mythical community, including *négritude*, the Mexican Revolution, and the Jim Crow legal system that sustains the myth of racial superiority in Haiti, Mexico, and the United States, respectively. Finally, this dissertation examines representations of masculinity in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines to determine how their male protagonists contend and negotiate with the existing configuration of hegemonic masculinity in each nation. The forms of hegemonic patriarchal masculinity that are depicted in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines are defined in terms of power, control, male domination, and the will to use violence to protect traditional white patriarchal power structures. In investigating how these masculine representations coincide with or differ from bell hooks's and Raewyn (R.W.) Connell's theory of gender hierarchy, it becomes possible to assess how certain displays of non-patriarchal hegemonic masculinity reshape the existing hegemonic masculine bloc. Ultimately, Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines present reimagined conceptions of masculinity that can be considered in their own right, and which are not determined by patriarchal hegemonic masculinity but which are characterized by behaviors that align with Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of community.

The first section of this project will identify manifestations of Jean-Luc Nancy's mythic community in the aforementioned selected works to explore how such myths have worked to sustain the influence of hegemonic patriarchal masculinity, and how they have influenced configurations of hegemonic and marginalized masculinities in Haiti, Mexico, and the American South. The foundational myths that sustain the patriarchal social structures upon which authoritarian regimes rest rely on the conflation of the justification

of law with the origin of law and the use of force to sustain this false perception of the origin of law. Thus, the authors' representations of racial disharmony, violence, and alienation serve as a measure of the degree to which the perceived unity of a community is held intact by myth.

In the second section, Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of community and the political appears as a dialectic with Jacques Derrida's idea of politics, which Derrida describes as being concerned with perpetual struggle, dissension, and negotiation. Nancy and Derrida's critique of community and politics constitutes a theoretical framework that can be confronted with each author's works as a means to identify and describe responsible behaviors as those which reinforce a democracy "to come" and which align with Nancy's re-inscription of community.

Finally, this project is an investigation into how masculinity and gender roles are defined in the national context of each place, and how they relate to Nancy and Derrida's notion of responsibility. Further, this project will explore how the protagonists of the selected works utilize alternative methods of resistance, such as collective gathering, the reverence for feminine love, the reconsideration and reformulation of the role of the father to combat totalitarian forces and triumph over despotism and oppressiveness in ruling hegemonic masculinities.

The tendency towards the valorization of certain myths that support nationalism intensifies when the promises of capitalism fail to materialize, or when socioeconomic woes, war, or terrorism threaten the internal stability of a nation. Throughout the mid to late twentieth century, the political regimes of Haiti, Mexico, and the United States have communicated certain kinds of nationalistic rhetoric that has resulted in the formation of

policies founded in the exclusion of those who do not conform to a certain conception of citizenship. The results of such policies, compounded with the effects of globalization in Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States have influenced how masculinity is expressed in each nation, and how such formulations of masculinity have taken on alternative forms that reflect the socioeconomic realities of each geographical place. In the process of reconciling the paradox between globalization and nationalistic reactionary policies, the works examined in this project demonstrate why it is necessary to reimagine the intersection between masculinity and community in the efforts to resist the sort of totalitarian forces that can corrode cultural identities or create and sustain widespread oppression.

René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines all write in an era in which the world is entering a new phase of globalization, and this fact is integral to each author's nuanced rewritings of the ideals undergirding the political workings of their respective countries. Their works portray how the forces of modernization and globalization threaten to exacerbate the social ills which plague each place, such as totalitarianism, racism, and poverty, and how certain groups of marginalized men suffer from social and political oppression. Furthermore, the relationship between civil unrest, national identity, and masculinity in Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States will be conducted by examining how the creative works of René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines portray the role that myth has played in securing the dominance of hegemonic powers in each respective country during particular political transformations that took place during the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, this project focuses on how each author treats the myths of community that sustain the hegemonic political forces in Haiti, Mexico, and

Louisiana during the eras of Duvalierism, post-Revolutionary Mexico, and the Jim Crow system that reinforced racial segregation after the emancipation of the slaves to investigate how these myths are linked to the emergence of capitalist development, the recalibration of class divisions, and an increasing desire to protect American foreign interests. Furthermore, the authors present protagonists whose quests for achieving selfhood are directly influenced by revolutionary shifts in their national situation. Finally, the authors' depictions of masculinity are influenced by the onset of an increasingly modernizing global society in Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States. In particular, this project will explore how the aforementioned authors' protagonists navigate societies that suffer from a disengagement from the past and its separation from the present, especially with regards to the complex dynamics of inheritance in Mexico, the immobility of the black community on the rural plantation in the U.S. South, and the irreconcilability of the Duvalier regime with pre-Duvalier Haiti. Thus, an in-depth analysis of the political ramifications of Duvalierism in Haiti, the Mexican Revolution, and Jim Crow laws in the United States will be developed to describe how such regimes have strongly influenced notions of masculine responsibility and duty in Haiti, Mexico, and Southern United States throughout the mid-twentieth century. It is imperative that we investigate the effects that the myths that are created by nations in response to an increasingly globalized world have on representations of men in these societies in order to posit new ways of understanding how individuals can function to counteract such consequences and ultimately create a more harmonious global community.

Depestre's works reimagine new patterns of masculinity that challenge and expose the failings of existing patterns of hegemonic patriarchal masculinity in Haiti as

they are expressed in the Christian West and the Duvalier dictatorship. His portrayal of the Haitian male subject's nomadic sense of place and his spiritual and bodily degradation allows him to be open to new versions of masculine identity that deny or transcend racial and national allegiances. In *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* and *Le Mât de cocagne*, the subordinate forms of masculinity that are embodied by his protagonists contrast with hegemonic forms, which can be characterized in terms of phallogentric representations of power, a fearsome American-Christian religious order, and the grotesque and violent means by which Haiti's leaders and oppressors have thwarted political opposition. Most notably, Depestre's portrayal of "zombification", eroticism, and his use of marvelous realism inform a revised conceptualization of masculinity that aligns with Nancy's idea of the community. Upon examining how Depestre presents masculine characters whose actions accord with his own advocacy of national solidarity among the Haitian people, masculinity can be redefined in terms of how such masculine behaviors are portrayed as a joint celebration of love and the erotic, in which the freedom of eroticism is analogous to social liberation, considered in terms of the liberation from pre-determined projects of revolution.

The 1958 publication of Carlos Fuentes's debut novel *La región más transparente del aire* sparked a nationwide controversy due to its Marxist undertones and its critical depiction of Mexico City's revolutionary history. The ambitious novel grapples with notions of national and individual identity, the quest for self-understanding, and Mexico's political responsibilities to its people as it transitions to a modern capitalist economy. Specifically, the story portrays Mexico City during the mid-twentieth century as Mexico undergoes rapid capitalist growth in both industrial and economic sectors under the

President Miguel Alemán. With the increase in the nation's economic development, a new social class is borne – a highly ambitious bourgeoisie whose selective amnesia for their country's tumultuous, peasant past allows them to set their sights on reaping the benefits of the prosperity that accompanies capitalist expansion. When we meet the high-power banker Frederico Robles, we learn that the deals he has made with foreign investors are rife with corruption and betrayal, and in the conversations he shares with his family and associates, he is routinely condemned for denouncing his native origins and for failing to carry out the ideals of the Revolution in his career pursuits. Robles is able to achieve economic success as his nation transitions into a modern capitalist state through a commitment to a certain idea of progress that necessitates the sacrifice of one's political ideals, as well as the passive resignation to the unfulfilled and incomplete objectives of the Mexican Revolution. By denying his own connivance of the history of Mexico's self-affirming political systems that have perpetuated the cycle of destruction and despair among the peasants in particular, Robles must betray the ideals of the Revolution for which he formerly fought in his youth. *La región más transparente del aire* depicts a society torn between its ancient founding mythology and the contemporary world, replete with the dramatic vicissitudes of social classes that were spawned by the Mexican Revolution.

Next, *Gringo viejo* (1994) is set during the early period of the Mexican Revolution, as President Porfirio Díaz's formerly indomitable façade has begun to deteriorate and reveal its weaknesses and limitations. The two main characters of the novel, Ambrose Bierce and General Tomás Arroyo, orient their actions in relation to the opportunities that arise as a result of the crumbling aura of invincible hegemonic

domination once embodied by the Díaz regime. Whereas Bierce, the “Old Gringo”, takes the opportunity to cross the Mexican-American border in a final quest for self-discovery, Arroyo uses the chaotic backdrop of the war as a pretext for revolting against the implications of his bloodline and his former imprisonment on the *hacienda*. Arroyo embodies the discrepancy between the Revolution’s ideal to reclaim land from wealthy *hacienda* owners and the pursuit of individual security through Mexico’s legacy of patriarchal inheritance. The degree to which each character perceives of his own agency in achieving his private objectives is determined by his sense of the liberties and opportunities that are afforded him by his national identity.

Ernest Gaines’s *A Lesson Before Dying* explores the interconnectivity of institutionalized racism, violence, and community in the Jim Crow South and its impact on black masculine selfhood. The novel is based on an actual legal case that took place in the mid-1940s in which a young and illiterate black man is involved in the murder of a white man and sentenced to die in the electric chair. Also set in the fictional town of Bayonne, Louisiana, the story portrays the racial barriers that force the town’s black community members to navigate the racist legal system in the attempt to lay claim to their humanity and sense of dignity. The institutions and laws that work to sustain the chasm between whites and blacks in the sleepy plantation town effectually demonize and dehumanize those who pose any semblance of a threat to the dominant white order. In the story, Jefferson, the main protagonist, accompanies two friends whose botched robbery ends in the murder of a white man, which leads to his fatal indictment. In prison, Jefferson is provided a context in which critical reflection can take place, and this process is aided by Grant Wiggins, a college-educated schoolteacher who has returned to his

hometown to seek a teaching job. Grant Wiggins' college education distinguishes him from the other members of his community, all of whom, except for his former schoolteacher, have never attained any formal education beyond high school. Despite the roadblocks he encounters at every turn he takes after resolving to befriend Jefferson, Grant is repeatedly reminded that his blackness constitutes the predominant identifying trait that determines, guarantees, and reinforces his subordinated social position. Jefferson's resignation to his impending execution and Grant's exasperated early failings to get through to him lends credence to the cynical outlook of Grant's former teacher, Matthew Antoine, who reminds Grant that the intractable and entrenched Jim Crow system will never fail to wreak havoc on the souls of black men.

Ernest Gaines illuminates the complicated racial politics that have historically shaped the social fabric of Louisiana's rural communities. Despite the racial divisions and discrimination that plagued the American South, the interdependence of whites, blacks, and Creoles in rural plantation societies is a testament to the significance of land and the interracial relationships that formed as a consequence of agriculture's role in supporting the livelihoods of Southerners of all races. The legal and social dynamics that can be attributed to reinforcing the neo-slavery form of existence that characterizes the lives of the elderly sharecroppers in *A Gathering of Old Men* are challenged and inevitably exposed when the black community takes a collective stand against the tyrannical white Cajuns and the complicit arm of the law. In the novel, the elderly sharecroppers have long been powerless and unable to secure true freedom from the economic, physical, and emotional oppression meted out by the white folks who are members of both the plantation-owning and lower-class Cajun communities.

Philosophical Framework

In this dissertation, Nancy's ontological exposition will serve as the conceptual foundation of such further theorizing of community. This project explores how the effects of globalization have influenced nation-building as well as reactionary nationalistic movements in which geographically distinct places, specifically Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States, have relied on certain myths of community to ensure and sustain the hegemony of the ruling elite. Moreover, globalization has modified notions of gender norms, altered the definition of patriarchal masculinity, and destabilized expectations for what it means to be a man in various societies throughout the world. A cohesive conceptualization of the meaning and formulation of what is meant by *patriarchy* will be presented in subsequent chapters; however, for the moment and in a general sense, the notion of patriarchy should be considered as a question of politics and who controls society.

Certain countries resist globalization by relying on particular myths of identity that support and protect the sanctity of particular cultural, regional, and national communities. The resurrection of nationalistic movements is often corollary to the impetus to seek out such myths of an original or ideal community as a means of defense against perceived global threats to these communities. However, such communities whose members are determined by particular identifying traits reveal the inherent marginalization of certain members of their populations whenever fear comes into play. In *Être singulier pluriel* [*Being Singular Plural*] (1996), Nancy describes the relationship between human beings and other beings in terms of a double exposure that constitutes our

existence and which in turn creates the world. Existence is a decision that occurs in the fundamental exposure to each other, in which our exposure denotes a relational and non-absolute sharing that creates the world. He writes « le “sens” est le partage de l’être » [meaning is the sharing of being] (98). For Nancy, sharing is definitive of healthy communities that function according to the ontological fact of our primordial exposure to others, which implies an inescapable sharing of our existence with others. However, people who are identifiably distinct from the majority may become marginalized not due to the majority’s fear of difference, but due to its fear of otherness that exposes our singularity, despite our best efforts to disguise this difference by defining ourselves in terms of reductive, finite definitions of our identities that in turn position others as the unwelcome Other. Thus, there is a need to reconsider community in light of the fear that surrounds it in a world defined by an ever-increasing proliferation of social, economic, and technological connections that transcend national borders.

Shifts in gender dynamics caused by social and political changes have resulted in an emergence of new conceptions of masculinity that reflect the particular socioeconomic environment of a certain place. The aim of this project is to examine how alternatives to masculinity, particularly to *patriarchal masculinity*, have opened up the space for alternative gender discourses, as well for as revised conceptions of community and nation.

In order to reformulate the notion of masculinity, the reader must perceive the standards and values which underlie the performance of this rearticulated masculinity. René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines explore the particular challenges, performances, and conflicts of community and the necessary conditions for the creation

of a sense of masculine self. In their writings, it is possible to identify the processes of negotiation that are involved in creating, maintaining, and challenging patriarchal hegemonic masculinity. The depictions of masculine behaviors exhibited by marginalized men in their works challenge or change the existing hegemonic patriarchal masculine code. Ultimately, the three authors reformulate masculinity, and argue that a marginalized man who does not or cannot exhibit hegemonic patriarchal masculinity due to his social status may thrive in spite of such a context. This “new man’s” actions and behaviors can provide him with the power, righteousness, and strength of self to interrupt myths that empower and uphold oppressive forces of dominant or authoritarian regimes.

The intersecting discourses of French philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida concerning their conceptions of ontology, community, and responsibility will constitute the theoretical framework of this project. Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* [*Of Grammatologie*] (1976) is regarded as the foundational text of his deconstructive philosophy, and it is here where he presents his thinking of the imprecise and often illogical relationship between language and truth. In this seminal text, Derrida explains that since language is not a fixed system in that words (*signifiers*) do not always and simply correlate with their definitional meanings (*signified*). Consequently, Derrida’s criticism of the presumed relationship between writing and language grounds his deconstructive philosophy which demands that we seek the truth of concepts by thinking according to the *aporia* of given concepts.

Whereas Nancy insists on the ontological pre-originary nature of community in *La Communauté désœuvrée* [*The Inoperative Community*] (1983), Derrida discusses the incessant need to interrogate the limits of such a concepts as community (and democracy,

responsibility, hospitality, etc.) in *Politiques de l'amitié* [*The Politics of Friendship*] (1994). In this text, Derrida claims that such a deconstruction is missing from Nancy's works. The implications of the disjunction between Nancy and Derrida's thought on community will be taken up in this project. In other works, including Nancy's *Le Sens du monde* [*The Sense of the World*] (1993), and *La Création du monde ou la mondialisation* [*The Creation of the World or Globalization*] (2002) and Derrida's *De L'hospitalité* [*Of Hospitality*] (1997), both thinkers consider the implications of globalization on freedom, justice, and configurations of community.

The roots of Nancy's thinking of community as presented in *La Communauté desoeuvrée* are situated in the event or rupture of Western philosophical thinking marked by twentieth century philosophers Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, who decenter the foundation of being by positing "thrownness" as the fact that brings forth all existence (260). In his seminal work *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*] (1927), Heidegger uses the word "with" to describe the permeability between the self and others. He names "being-with" as the ontological fact that the self's engagement with the Other is coextensive with being, which reconciles what Heidegger conceives of as the ontological condition of "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*). The significance of Heidegger's thinking for both Derrida and Nancy is in his ability to situate the ontological fact of being, or the conditions that imply our subjectivity, in terms of our primordial relation to the Other. Nancy's idea of the relation to exteriority as definitive of the sense of community breaks with Heidegger's ontology because Nancy posits that it is "being-with", rather than our "thrownness" into a pre-originary existence, that describes the ontological fact of our relation to the world. In formulating the ontology of being singular plural, Nancy

indicates in *Être singulier pluriel* the necessity of reinterpreting Heidegger's thinking of "being-with":

Et c'est encore cela même qui indique d'où il faut re-commencer : il faut refaire l'ontologie fondamentale (et ce qui va avec, l'analytique existentielle aussi bien que l'histoire de l'être et que la pensée de *l'Ereignis*), résolument cette fois à partir du singulier pluriel des origines, c'est-à-dire à partir de l'être-avec (45).

[This very point, then, indicates to us that place from which first philosophy must recommence: It is necessary to refigure fundamental ontology (as well as the existential analytic, the history of Being, and the thinking of *Ereignis*) that goes along with a thorough resolve that *starts from the plural singular of origins*, from *being-with*] (26).

In other words, we are not thrown into a pre-existing community with which we must then engage; rather, it is the fact that we are preeminently exposed to others who posit community as a fundamental exposure that implies sharing as the mode of existence. A more detailed discussion of these ideas will be provided in Chapter 2.

Nancy's conception of community is useful in framing an idea of togetherness that is both inclusive and which can foster democratic tenets of decision-making and coexistence. Reflecting upon such a community can help us reconcile the paradox between an increasingly globalized world and counteractive efforts to resurrect nationalisms that arise in reaction to encroachments on liberties caused by hegemonic dominating forces - such as the tendency to embrace a mythic national community in the pursuit of collective identities. It is necessary to formulate new conceptions of masculinities that may be inscribed into a reimagined idea of community that is capable of preserving cultural identities and resisting totalitarianism. In particular, the homogenizing effects of globalization play a major role in sustaining what bell hooks refers to as "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" in Haiti, Mexico, and the American South, and in turn contribute to the oppression and disempowerment of men

who are unable to portray certain hegemonic masculine behaviors favored by the patriarchal system. Although hooks's phrase reflects her worldview of patriarchy as it functions in particular in the United States, in many of her works that precede *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, she describes the reasons for her use of the term extensively in her essay "Understanding Patriarchy". "Imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" describes the interlocking political systems that she claims constitute the foundation of the United States' political system. She writes

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (18).

The term that will be used in this dissertation to describe the dominant political-social systems of Haiti, Mexico, and the United States is the nation-neutral term "hegemonic patriarchy", and more specifically, "hegemonic patriarchal masculinity." Thus, it is necessary to determine how patriarchal hegemonic masculinity is reflected in certain national contexts.

The political revolutionary contexts of Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States during the latter half of the twentieth century are reflected in the works of René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines in terms of the effects that nationalism, revolution, and capitalism have on the constitution of masculinity, which will be dealt with in detail in the third chapter of this project. These three authors all write during an era in which their respective nations' political ideals are sustained by certain myths. Jean-Luc Nancy first introduces the nostalgia for a lost community in *La Communauté désoeuvrée*, in which he defines myth as the narrative that describes an original

community of people who recognize themselves as belonging together (11). Nancy's conception of the mythical community is that which proposes either a founding fiction of an ideal community to be recovered, or a fiction that conceals the self-constituting fact of the existing regime. Exposing such myths and the conditions that sustain them is necessary to fostering a discourse that can lead to new conceptions of community, justice, and masculinity that are not constructed in the name of sustaining or supporting such myths.

Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy each conceive of the relationship between the self and the other as that which marks the space in which community and politics can be thought. Whereas Derrida acknowledges the dissymmetrical relation between the self and the other as that which marks the ethical dynamic of sociality, Jean-Luc Nancy conceives of the origins of being as the primordial exposure of the self and the other and, adopting the term from Heidegger, names this fundamental relationship being-with. In *Donner la mort*, Derrida posits that responsibility exists in our relation to the wholly other Other (« tout autre est tout autre ») in our primordial obligation to respond to the singular other among the multitude of wholly others results in the sacrifice of the singular other. Because one must decide in the face of the absolute alterity of the other, the secret of the other can never be directly accessed, and thus responsibility for Derrida is of the order of sacrifice (98). Understanding this distinction is necessary to identifying and describing the conditions that drive people and political regimes to violence in an effort to attain certain obsolete notions of race and nationality.

The pursuit of exclusionary identities is often sought as a means to prevent the erasure of certain identities caused by an increasingly homogenized world. Nancy and

Derrida's thought will be used as a basis for my own conception of the evolution of the notion of community. Derrida's strategy of deconstruction is based on the perpetual consideration of the *aporia* of all concepts, in which thinking the limits, or the binary oppositional definitions undergirding concepts like community and responsibility, reveals the conditions of these concepts' possibility (or impossibility). In *La Communauté désœuvrée*, Nancy discusses how community is culturally constructed, but is firstly the fact of a social dynamic expressed through sharing and exposure to others. Thus, Nancy endeavors to reformulate the thinking of community as that which resists the propensity to slide towards totalitarianism in the pursuit of consigning its members to exclusionary categories. He considers how community can avoid the tendency towards immanency by critiquing the notion of a mythical community and calling for its "interruption", or suspension of the inclination towards a community as work, on the premise that the myth is what gives rise to this sense of alienation. Interrupting the mythical community prevents the marginalization of those deemed unworthy or dangerous to the communal identity, and thus Nancy's reformulated definition of community helps create a more inclusionary world in the era of an increasingly globalized one ("Le mythe interrompu," in *La Communauté désœuvrée* 109). Therefore, reading Nancy and Derrida together allows us to imagine fully the conditions by which an open, dynamic community can be maintained.

Nancy's conception of the mythical community as it is represented in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines can illuminate how the retaliation against a country's founding myth(s) can nurture environments that give rise to the conditions that lead to totalitarian modes of government. Furthermore, Nancy's idea of community allows us to

conceive of the way in which each author portrays the consequences that stem from the failure to think and function according to *being singular plural*. The concept of being singular plural grounds Nancy's critique of the community, which is not solely concerned with the individual's orientation, to or role within, the community. Rather, Nancy posits that each singularity is always among a plurality of others, and thus being can only refer to being-with, or to being-in-common. As Nancy's idea of the mythic community would suggest, the oppression suffered by the protagonists in the novels under study interrupts their own ascription to their society's mythologizing inclinations and compels them to challenge existing conceptions of community and masculinity that can potentially serve the interests of marginalized populations and ultimately give rise to Nancy's community.

Masculinity

This dissertation utilizes a philosophical and sociological approach to analyze fictional works that showcase male protagonists whose actions and conceptions of manhood are unsupported, informed, or oppressed by the patriarchal system as described by Raewyn Connell in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (1987) and *Masculinities* (1993). In her earliest writings, for example, in *Which Way Is Up? Essays on Sex, Class, and Culture* (1983), Connell defines *hegemonic masculinity* as the limited set of masculine traits often used to describe the ideal man. Over thirty years later, in the article titled "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" (2005), which she co-authored with James W. Messerschmidt, Connell revisits the notion of hegemonic masculinity and examines how it has been used by other gender theorists. Furthermore, David Buchbinder's 2013 book *Studying Men and Masculinities* offers a

deeply informed evaluation of the idea that a “crisis in masculinity” persists in our contemporary world. This idea will be analyzed at length in the third section of this project in conjunction with bell hooks’s conceptualization of patriarchy, which she discusses in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (2004) and the marginalization of black men in America as discussed in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004).

The notion of patriarchy and its effects on marginalized groups of men has been studied at length by gender theorists, including David Buchbinder, bell hooks, Michael Kimmel, and Raewyn Connell. These scholars explore how the processes of globalization shift and transform traditional gender orders and are responsible for shaping new forms of hegemony. Hegemony is interrelational, in which it contains transcultural dimensions that relate to concepts such as utopia, globalization, and nationalism. In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, postcolonial scholar Bill Ashcroft cites Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who developed the term hegemony in the 1930s while imprisoned in Italy by Benito Mussolini for his political activity. Before his death in 1937, Gramsci spent his time in prison developing his political ideas in thirty-two notebooks (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*), which were not published until 1971. His conception of hegemony describes how the ruling class successfully promoted its own interests in society. Ashcroft succinctly defines Gramsci’s conception of hegemony as “the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all” in which domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class’s interest is presented as the

common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted (116). Gramsci emphasized the ruling class's use of culture as part of the naturalization of its agenda so that it can maintain a dominant position through consent. In this way, the subordinate classes maintain complicity to the hegemonic order by believing that such an order is the way it "should be". It is important to note that the construction of hegemony is a complex process in which the ruling class reproduces itself through institutions, as well as attitudes and behaviors of individuals and groups. As David Buchbinder explains in *Studying Men and Masculinities*, "the resulting effect is the complicity of those classes in their own subordination" (92). However, Gramsci's definition of hegemony held that a particular hegemonic regime did not imply a permanent order of things; rather, such a regime achieved its hegemonic ascendancy by negotiating its own place towards the top of the hierarchy with other subordinated groups. As a result of such negotiations, when a new hegemonic regime rises to the top of the hierarchy, new standards of behavior are set, which in turn determine one's social status. Nonetheless, because patriarchal masculinity is generally defined as the accomplishment of manhood through the possession of power, it becomes ever more important to understand how hegemonic patriarchal manhood affects disempowered marginalized populations in the modern world in order to conceive of how certain behaviors may be effective in challenging these new and changing hegemonic forms.

As this project will demonstrate, hegemonic masculinities have had an impact on the construction of marginalized masculine identities in Haiti, Mexico, and the American South since the mid-twentieth century. For the purposes of this project, the term "masculinity" will refer to the ways in which men orient themselves in relation to others

through discursive behaviors and practices that construct a certain ideal of manhood. Various patterns of masculinities have been identified and categorized since the 1980s in multiple different cultural contexts throughout the world, and numerous studies have posited that there are certain patterns of masculinities that are more closely associated with social authority and dominance than others. Andrew Tolson was one of the first scholars to illuminate how class difference influences the expression of masculinity in *The Limits of Masculinity* (1977). Furthermore, women scholars of color, including Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Maxine Baca Zinn draw attention to the need to consider race in the criticism of the relationship between power and gender.¹

For the purpose of this project, sociologist Raewyn Connell's *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (1987) develops the concept of hegemonic masculinity and posits that a hierarchy of masculinities exists which is based on a pattern of hegemony, rather than on a pattern of simple domination secured by force. She further argues that the idea of hegemonic masculinity presumes other categories that describe non-hegemonic masculinities. If hegemonic masculinity describes the most respected means of being a man, it also implies that all other men must consider their own orientation to certain archetypal forms or conceptual frameworks of masculinity. Connell's sociological treatment of masculinity is especially pertinent to the aims of this project because the examination of the social background against which different types of masculinities emerge, makes it possible to determine the influence that social and political forces have on the constructed nature of masculinity. In *Masculinities* (1995), Connell considers marginalized groups of men to be people who are incapable of fitting into the mold of hegemonic masculinity due to their race, ethnicity, or nationality (80-

81). Consequently, when certain populations of men are economically disempowered, suffer from unemployment, tyrannical rule, poverty, or racism, these men are more likely to exert power over women and other groups of men economically, socially, and physically as a means to maintain some semblance of power and honor.

The construction of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities cannot be understood without acknowledging that patriarchy as a system remains intact throughout most cultures and nations, as well as in religious, school, and family systems. It is necessary to define and describe how patriarchy works and is upheld in order to identify how Connell's gender hierarchy fits in this system in terms of its constructions, functions, and consequences. bell hooks's work on gender theory acknowledges that patriarchy as a system is well intact throughout most societies, and that the majority of people believe in the necessity of patriarchy to guarantee the survival of the human race. However, hooks notes in *The Will to Change* that this belief is both ironic as well as absurd, "given that patriarchal methods of organizing nations, especially the insistence on violence as a means of social control, has actually led to the slaughter of millions of people on the planet" (30). She reiterates that masculinity itself is not the problem; rather, that patriarchal masculinity as the system to which most men *and* women subscribe is problematic because it necessitates "male dominance by any means necessary, hence it supports, promotes, and condones sexist violence" (hooks 24).

Patriarchy benefits those in power, but the consequences that stem from this control-based system are detrimental to men and women alike. In particular, because patriarchy prescribes the behaviors and actions that are necessary to uphold it, men are prevented from fully utilizing their free will, and the institutionalization of the patriarchal

system makes it exceedingly difficult to revolt against the system and/or its purveyors. As hooks underlines in *We Real Cool*, psychotherapist John Bradshaw discusses the foundation upon which patriarchy stands in *Creating Love*: “Blind obedience—the foundation upon which patriarchy stands; the repression of all emotions except fear; the destruction of individual willpower; and the repression of thinking whenever it departs from the authority figure’s way of thinking” (137). This unquestioning adherence to the unwritten dictums is the consequence of being born into the system, and our tacit complicity to the patriarchal system means that we also ascribe to the acceptable patterns of behavior for men and women as well as to society’s cultural values. hooks explains that the reason why so many men, regardless of their socioeconomic background, continue to succumb to patriarchal thinking has to do with the fear that comes with anticipating that relinquishing what little “power” they may have in the existing system will leave them with nothing (137).

Moreover, hooks notes that if patriarchy were actually rewarding to men, the violence exerted onto women, children, families, and men themselves in the efforts to perpetuate it would not exist. She cites psychologist Terrence Real who writes in *How Can I Get Through to You?: Closing the Intimacy Gap Between Men and Women* (2002) about the emotional rules restrictions of psychological patriarchy that are suffered by both men and women:

Psychological patriarchy is a “dance of contempt,” a perverse form of connection that replaces true intimacy with complex, covert layers of dominance and submission, collusion and manipulation. It is the unacknowledged paradigm of relationships that has suffused Western civilization generation after generation, deforming both sexes, and destroying the passionate bond between them (qtd. in hooks 33).

Hence, hooks argues that because patriarchy prevents one from being whole by

precluding the creation of spaces where men can express themselves and love without fear of being regarded as weak or inept as men, it is necessary to imagine alternatives to patriarchal masculinity.

This project focuses predominantly on hooks's understanding of the definition, construction, and implications of patriarchy as well as on Raewyn Connell's rendering of the relationship between marginalized and hegemonic masculinities in order to frame the discussion of masculinity in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines. In order to articulate a definition of masculinity for the purposes of this project, it is necessary to describe the value system inscribed in the reigning form of hegemonic masculinity to which the marginalized masculinities depicted in the writings of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines will be compared. The value system for hegemonic masculinity in each country can loosely be described in terms of positive masculine behaviors, including self-reliance, stoicism, individualism, virility, fatherhood, and socioeconomic dominance over others. By contrast, marginalized masculinities can be described as the ways of being a man that are deemed inferior to those ways exhibited by more privileged men. Furthermore, "marginalized masculinities" characterize those populations that have been denied the vehicles for expressing their goals and desires due to their subordinated statuses. This concept of marginalized masculinity echoes both Connell and hooks's understanding of hegemonic masculinity as that which devolves into negative forms of dominance such as violence, aggression towards women *and* men, selfishness, and condescension when the purveyors of hegemonic patriarchy or marginalized populations of men overcompensate for their perceived lack of power. It is important to note that such behavior can occur on the individual, collective, or systematic level. Thus, although

violence and aggression are often used to sustain a reigning system of domination, negative manifestations of hegemonic masculinity may actually be considered a measure of the system's prevailing weaknesses or failings. In order to assess the influence that dominant social and political forces have on the constructed nature of masculinity confidently, it is necessary to analyze the history of the social background against which different types of masculinities emerge. In this way, it becomes possible to examine how the male protagonists in René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines's works negotiate with the existing configuration of hegemonic masculinity in Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States during the eras in which their novels are set.

Overview of Geographical and Historical Contexts

The complex racial and identity politics that characterize the populations of Haiti, Mexico, and the American South are of particular interest because each place's marginalized populations contend with hegemonic masculinity norms whose survival is contingent upon their sustained oppression. First, in Haiti, the American Invasion and Occupation (1915-1934) and the Duvalier regime (1957-1986) constitute the two major forces that ruled Haitian society throughout the greater part of the era during which Depestre writes, in which he weighs in heavily on the American Occupation's role in cultivating the political milieu that gave way to the totalitarian regime of François Duvalier. This occupation resulted in the direct intervention of the United States into Haiti's financial affairs, which served as a thinly veiled scheme intended to ensure that Haiti paid its debt to America and France by wielding its power through the persistent threat of violence. The pretenses upon which the United States forced its way into Haiti

were grounded in greed and bigotry, and followed suit with its other European colonizing powers when the United States demanded reparations and threatened to inflict various forms of economic and political punishments on Haiti if it failed to pay back its debts. Claiming a trumped up concern for American financial interests in an increasingly unstable Haiti, the United States invaded the small island nation in June of 1915 and remained in control of Haiti until 1934, though its financial and political hegemony persisted long after the official termination of the occupation. Consequently, the United States' policies during the Occupation resulted in widespread political, economic, and social instability, the effects of which are still evident in Haiti today. According to Laurent Dubois in *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, the U.S. Marines used systematic, ruthless violence wielded to suppress resistance, and built a network of Haitian spies which divided the country and cultivated an endemic sense of distrust among the people (233-235). Furthermore, the U.S. Marines began strictly enforcing regulations against the practice of *Vodoun*, which profoundly troubled the country's cultural identity. After the Americans finally exited Haiti in 1934, the nation's political and economic order was in shambles, rural poverty worsened, and the government was stronger than ever before, which sowed the seeds for totalitarian control (Dubois 225). After the U.S. forces withdrew in 1934, President Sténio Vincent (1930-1941) spearheaded an anti-*Vodoun* campaign that persecuted the superstitious practices of *Vodoun*, whose leaders bore the brunt of the attacks. Vincent's campaign made it apparent that nearly a decade after Haiti's "Second Independence" in which the United States left Haiti, the social and religious divisions that plagued the nation ran deeper than ever.² Moreover, after President Élie Lescot took over as President in 1941, the chasm continued to widen

between the wealthy elites and the rural, impoverished populations, the latter of which had suffered from massacres along the Dominican border in 1937 and the 1941 religious persecution. Consequently, the revolutionary dreams that the majority of the population had harbored in the wake of the Second Independence seemed unattainable, and by the mid-1940s, many Haitians found themselves frustrated and desperate for change.

During this period, a new wave of student activists grew increasingly distrustful of Haiti's ruling elite. René Depestre was among this generation of student activists who blamed the political leaders of Haiti for the country's economic demise, as both Presidents Lescot and Paul Magloire's (1950-1956) continued support of U.S. and other foreign countries' involvement in Haiti increased the nation's foreign dependency as well as its debt, decimated Haiti's arable land and natural resources, and shifted focus away from the devastating poverty of the rural populations. Depestre's public opposition to the post-Occupation presidency of Élie Lescot influenced his involvement in the politically radical student publication *La Ruche*, which was a key factor that contributed to both Lescot's overthrow and Depestre's exile to France in 1946. However, due in part to the educational opportunities that were afforded him upon being ousted from the country, Depestre's time at the Sorbonne in Paris, and his subsequent travels in Latin America brought him into contact with prominent intellectuals whose philosophies on communism, Marxism, and *négritude* had a profound impact on his writing.³ Depestre found *négritude*, a literary, cultural, social, and philosophical movement initiated by Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon Damas of French Guiana in the 1930s, to be particularly alluring.⁴ These young, black, French intellectuals challenged ideologies that postulated the legitimacy of a race hierarchy and black

inferiority and railed against the detrimental effects of colonialism on the African peoples while denouncing Western domination after suffering racism and witnessing colonial injustices in their own French educational experiences. Inspired by ethnographers like Leo Frobenius, whose publication of *The Cultural History of Africa* lauded the social and cultural achievements of pre-colonial African societies, these young intellectuals established their movement on the premise that the best way to resist French colonialism was to embrace a shared racial identity for Africans worldwide. Also during this time, similar movements were taking place around the globe. For instance, in Martinique, the manifesto *Légitime Défense* published by René Ménil, Thélus Léro, Etienne Léro in 1932 denounced colonialism and those of the mulatto class who pandered to the white French bourgeoisie, and also warned of the dangers of assimilation with regards to its propensity to dilute consciousness and African culture by shaping values to accord with those of the master class.⁶

Although Césaire, Senghor, and Damas each had his own ideas about the purpose and styles of *négritude*, Depestre began to distance himself from the philosophy's ideals in the mid-1950s when he became critical that the movement was founded in an appeal for a sort of utopian end goal, culminating in a finite conception of racial unity. In particular, he believed that Césaire's notion of a Caribbean sense of place as empty and detached from its African origins resonated with the hypocrisies of the global communist movement which was aimed towards a fundamental unity based on difference, rather than sought in coexistence. In his 1968 essay titled "Jean Price-Mars et le mythe de l'Orphée noir ou les aventures de la négritude", Depestre writes

La négritude posait la nécessité de dépasser cette contradiction, non par une nouvelle opération mythique, mais à travers une action, une praxis révolutionnaire

collective. Malheureusement, le plus souvent le concept de la négritude est utilisé comme un mythe qui sert à dissimuler la présence sur la scène de l'histoire de bourgeois noirs, qui en Haïti, et dans de nombreux pays d'Afrique, se sont constituées en classe dominante, et comme toute classe qui opprime une autre, a besoin d'une mystification idéologique pour camoufler la nature réelle des rapports établis dans la société (176).

[Négritude posed the need to exceed this contradiction not by a mythical new operation, but through action, a collective revolutionary praxis. Unfortunately, most often the concept of négritude is used as a myth which serves to conceal the presence on the stage of the history of black citizens, which in Haiti, are constituted in a dominant class, which, as any class that oppresses another, needs an ideological mystification to hide the real nature of the relationship established in society. (*Translation mine*)]

Depestre's concerns with *négritude* partially echoed French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's characterization of the movement, which he feared would take shape as « racism antiraciste » [anti-racist racism] in its pursuit of racial unity.⁶ In his essay "Engagement, Exile and Errance: Some Trends in Haitian Poetry 1946-1986" which appeared in *Callaloo* in 2010, J. Michael Dash distinguishes between the attitudes towards *négritude* held by Aimé Césaire, James Baldwin, and René Depestre to explain that Depestre's assertion of the uniqueness of Haiti's social and literary history and his denial of the universality of black culture led him to oppose the myth of an all-embracing black culture because of the problems that Haiti had already witnessed prior to the *négritude* movement with such adherences to confined racial categories.

Depestre's return to Haiti coincided with François Duvalier's ascension to the presidency. In the years leading up to Duvalier's election, the laboring classes' fatigue with inept leaders, mulatto elitism, political violence, and debilitating poverty made Duvalier, the dark-skinned, educated doctor an alluring prospect for the presidency. Duvalier was also known for the columns he published in various newspapers during the Magloire years, which focused on constructive solutions to Haiti's problems, as well as

scathing condemnations of the elite for their uselessness and arrogance (Dubois 320). Most notably, however, he took an adamant stance on the need for more black leadership, which was undergirded by the idea that class and color were one and the same, and that light-skinned governing elites were responsible for marginalizing the majority of the laboring class, most of whom were black descendants of Africans. Duvalier propounded that it was time to break the pattern of mulatto reign and black oppression, and as he launched himself onto the political scene, he exploited the social resentments of dark-skinned working class Haitians by means of appealing for the removal of the light-skinned elite. Consequently, the unification of the majority of Haitians under the racial classification of “black” resulted in a shift in political power, which elevated and sustained a black non-elite middle class to power and reinvigorated the black lower classes. François Duvalier’s reverence for blackness constituted the dictator’s nationalistic platform, which Depestre grew to distrust due to its crude political role in sustaining Duvalier’s dominance. Thus, while many Haitians joined together in favor of Duvalier’s corrupted version of *négritude*, which celebrated blackness and denounced the forces of power that oppressed them – the Americans and the dominant Haitian mulatto elite–, Depestre encouraged Haitians to resist the regime. The period in Haitian history during which François and Jean-Claude Duvalier ruled – starting in 1957 when François Duvalier (“Papa Doc”) served as president, to 1986, when Papa Doc’s successor, Jean-Claude Duvalier (“Baby Doc”) was overthrown – marks an era in Haiti’s history that is characterized by terror, corruption, and severe destitution among the peasant classes. Papa Doc maintained his tyrannical leadership role by manipulating the social, political, mythic, and imaginary domains of the entirety of Haitian society and resorting to

despotism to oversee a reign of terror against any political opposition. In the epic poem *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* (1967) and the novel *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979), Depestre treats the effects of colonization on Haitian society and investigates how and to what degree the country's post-colonial occupants as well as its succession of tyrannical leaders are responsible for supplanting Haiti's rich cultural and religious value system with inherited histories and exploited myths of racial unity that have hindered Haiti's transition to a more democratic society. Depestre's writing criticizes the American Occupation, the influence of communism on the black republic, and the totalitarianism of the Duvalier regime for preventing Haitian citizens from escaping a legacy of abject poverty and severe political and cultural oppression.

Next, there are parallels between Haiti and Mexico's colonial history, revolution, and the agricultural and social policies of the twentieth century that have led to a turbulent transition to a more globalized world. Mexico's prior to the conquest of Mexico by Spain in the sixteenth century, the tapestry of Mexican civilization consisted of a multivariate collective of different tribes, societies and empires, with the Aztecs dominating the better part of the Valley of Mexico prior to the arrival of the Spaniard Hernán Cortés in 1519. Cortés's landing in Veracruz on this infamous day marked the beginning of the subjugation of Mexico's Indian populations and the obliteration of the Nahautl culture and the Aztec empire. The history of Spain's colonization of Mexico resulted in the arbitrary division of indigenous lands and the problematic notion of the mixed blood *mestizo* heritage that remains significant to the social status of Mexicans today.

Prior to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Mexico was a collective of diverse

and isolated communities whose native populations lived on and laid claim to land through customary right, a practice dating back to colonial times. The possibility of owning land was only available to poor Indian peasants on the occasion that the *hacendado*, who owned the *hacienda*, might abandon his land. Spain's colonization of Mexico resulted in the arbitrary division of indigenous lands, followed by the redistribution of these lands to the *hacienda* in order to garner much needed political support from the *hacendados*. Porfirio Díaz ruled Mexico from 1876-1880, and again from 1884-1911 during a period known as the "Porfiriato". During his thirty-year dictatorship, Porfirio Díaz denounced the primitive colonial institution of the *hacienda* and the legacy of land inheritance in order to promote a new ideology that linked economic prosperity to the cultivation of a singular modern state economy. Although Díaz supported various modernization projects, such developments inevitably benefitted only the upper echelons of Mexican society, drastically widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Furthermore, the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie and progressive-minded capitalists threatened the *hacendados'* stronghold in the antiquated plantation economy. However, Díaz soon realized that in spite of the old-world class of the *hacendados*, who aimed to retain the inefficient, peonage-dependent *hacienda* system, he needed their support to maintain power, and thus he became preoccupied with securing their backing. Consequently, Díaz diverted his attention to the redistribution of ancient Indian lands that the rural villages had, for centuries, self-governed through customary right. The *hacendados*, with the support of Díaz, succeeded in asserting ownership of these peasant lands by claiming that the villages had failed to file titles with the central government. In *Villa and Zapata: A History of the Mexican Revolution* (2000), Frank

McClynn explains that Díaz's system of land redistribution, combined with the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie and progressive-minded capitalists, triggered widespread discontent among the agrarian classes, thus setting the stage for widespread rebellion (14-16). When the Mexican Revolution officially broke out in 1910, half of the rural population was completely dependent on the *hacienda* for its livelihood.

Díaz's power throughout his three-decade reign was sustained via his assumption of full authority over his subjects and his ability to quash opposition via force. Furthermore, he maintained his power through the legitimization of the *mestizo* as a means to defend the centralized power of the government. Thus, many of Fuentes's works criticize both the legacy of the one-party system and the valorization of Spanish bloodlines in both of these factors' complicity in sustaining the myth of national unity. In *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space*, Claudio Lomnitz-Adler suggests that a redefinition of nationality emerged during the Mexican Revolution in which the *mestizo* became the representative subject of a unified national history and a rhetorical device that was used to validate the push towards a centralized, protectionist state (9). The inherent dangers of this reformulated conception of nationality are evident in the succession of regimes that have denigrated the rights and privileges of the diverse populations of Mexican society. Notably, Fuentes's works portray the discourse of a monolithic *mestizo* nation as problematic, as it ignores the concerns of the vast and complex histories of Mexico's indigenous populations. His representation of Mexico's multitude of diverse communities in *La región más transparente del aire* and *Gringo viejo* reflects his concern with the complex history that shapes Mexico's national identity in light of the threat that homogenizing forces, such as authoritarian regimes,

one-party political systems, and globalization have posed to the endurance of Mexico's diverse ethnic makeup. Fuentes scholar Maarten van Delden posits that *La región más transparente del aire* presents the multiplicity of Mexican time as one of unceasing metamorphosis, in which Mexico's diverse cultures and societies and their respective pasts meet in present-day Mexico City. He underscores the novel's significance in its reiteration of Fuentes's belief that historical time in Mexico must be considered not in terms of chronological time, but as endless metamorphosis, in which all of Mexico's diverse indigenous and ethnic groups coincide and co-exist in present-day Mexico City. He explains in *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*:

Fuentes attacks the proponents of modernization in Mexico, with their cult of the present and of progress, for having suppressed the multiplicity of Mexican time. To return to the cultural and historical multiplicity of Mexico constitutes an act of liberation, a rebellion against the enslaving prejudices of modernity. Fuentes believes that such a rebellion in fact took place during the Mexican Revolution: Only the Revolution – and that is why, in spite of everything it deserves a capital R – made all the pasts of Mexico present (31).

Thus, van Delden's corpus of scholarly work on Carlos Fuentes's depiction of plural communities frames this project's exploration of the relationship between Fuentes's treatment of the paradoxical and often fraught relationship between subjectivity and the encounter with the other.

Furthermore, Fuentes's representation of the destabilization of masculinity and the demise of hegemonic revolutionary ideology, which has long been espoused by the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI), is pertinent to our understanding of the role that masculinity plays in Mexico. The major changes that Mexico underwent after adopting a neoliberal doctrine can be characterized in terms of increased privatization, free trade, and deregulation. The portrayal of men in Fuentes's novels is integral to the

reformulation of the modern Mexican nation and provides insight to the reconceptualization of an alternative masculinity that can best thrive in a democratic Mexico.

Next, Jim Crow was a cruel system that subjugated and exploited Southern blacks by employing actual and hypothetical violence to control their behavior. The term “Jim Crow” is based on the name of a black minstrel character song-and-dance act written and performed during the mid-nineteenth century by a white man named T.D. Rice, who would use black face and dance a ridiculous jig while singing lyrics to the song “Jump Jim Crow”. In the Southern United States during the years between the end of Reconstruction and the passage of the revolutionary Civil Rights Act in 1964, Jim Crow was instituted in the United States as a system of legalized segregation that sanctioned racial discrimination and prevented African Americans from being endowed with a status equal to that of white Americans.⁷ The Jim Crow legal system emerged from the endorsement of a fiction of black otherness that perpetuated the myth of racial inferiority and sustained the political inequalities that prevented blacks from accessing the same liberties and economic opportunities as their white counterparts. In his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois describes how the law enforcement system of the American South at the turn of the twentieth century functioned to sustain racial oppression via its Southern law enforcement system, which “tacitly assumed that every white man was *ha* member of that police. Thus grew up the double system of justice which erred on the white side by undue leniency and the practical immunity of red-handed criminals, and erred on the black side by undue severity and injustice” (178). Furthermore, the justice system still utilized the same racially coded mechanisms to settle convictions following

slavery. In *The New Jim Crow* (2010), Michelle Alexander discusses the practice of convict leasing, in which large numbers of black men were arrested for petty crimes, such as loitering or jaywalking. She explains that after their arrest, they would often be leased to plantations, where they were made to not only work off their sentence, but were also coerced to labor in the fields as compensation for clothing and shelter provided for them by their jailers. Although the men were told they could eventually earn back their freedom, the rigged system tended to ensure that the men remained indebted to the plantation owners for many years beyond their initial sentence (31-32). Thus, black Americans “came to look upon courts as instruments of injustice and oppression, and upon those convicted in them as martyrs and victims” (117).

In Ernest Gaines’s works, we see how sharecropping, the system which sustained black farm workers’ indebtedness to the white patriarchal system of plantation owners, has lasting consequences on the economic livelihoods and masculine subjectivity of elderly black men who have toiled in sugarcane fields of Southern Louisiana throughout their entire lives. While the tensions that exist between rural black sharecroppers and other ethnic groups who control the operations of the plantation arise from the persistent mistreatment of the black men, we should consider Gaines’s portrayal of the oppression suffered by the rural black community in his novels as just one sector of American society in which racially coded laws and customs have structured and dictated the lives of black Americans, and how the denial of socioeconomic opportunities continues to pose detrimental consequences to black communities all across America today.

While Gaines’s works depict the Jim Crow era and the struggles borne by black people as a result of their oppression by the system, he also structures his narratives so as

to dismantle archetypal depictions of black men as tragic racial victims. As Keith Clark explains in the book *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson* (2002), Gaines's writing "challenges the black male as an inexorable product of his environment defined by financial, sexual, and social exigencies" (69). Thus, we must address Gaines as a writer whose aesthetic vision is anchored in a reconceptualization of the protest narrative, and whose preoccupation with the instruction of moral decision-making considered in the context of concrete social history calls upon his readers to imagine progressive change through the agency of his characters.

René Depestre

Born during the United States Occupation of Haiti in 1926, René Depestre's political radicalism is evident in his earliest works, which are imbued with fiery invectives against Élie Lescot's presidency and the lingering detrimental effects of the American Occupation of Haiti. Depestre emerged on Haiti's literary scene in the mid-1940s after publishing the collections of poems *Étincelles* (1945) and *Gerbe de sang* (1946), the latter in which Depestre showcased his politically radical tone and assumed the role of spokesperson for the revolutionary-minded youth of his generation. *Gerbe de sang* epitomizes Depestre's poetic activism against all institutions and regimes that devalue or stifle individual freedoms, and the works that followed are imbued with a similar revolutionary fervor in which he aspires to advocate for a liberated Haiti through the revitalization of its past.

Les Griots, of which François Duvalier was a member at one point, was a group of Haitian intellectuals formed during the American Occupation that posited a racial

essence as that which undergirded Haiti's inherent national mysticism. However, Depestre and Jacques-Stephen Alexis, echoing Jean-Price Mars's evocation in *La Vocation de l'élite* claimed that in order to avoid "fragmentation", it was necessary to create a national consciousness rooted in the pursuit of solidarity among the various social classes. Martin Munro explains in *Exile and Post-1946 Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier* (2013) that Depestre challenged *Les Griots*'s ideology, charging that it threatened to serve as a divisive force in Haitian society and further separate mulattoes and blacks (17).

Although Depestre's poetry centers on the reverence for Haiti's spiritualism and *Vodoun* folklore, the American Occupation and its condemnation of *Vodoun* forced him to unearth his culture on his own. Depestre's concern with articulating Haiti's specific cultural uniqueness clashed with the ideologies touted by prominent black intellectuals and politicians whose promotion of *négritude* and a universal black culture threatened to obscure the history of specific national communities. Hence, Depestre's concern with *négritude* was that its veneration of the "essence" of blackness could create fissures within Haitian society and ultimately expose it to the debilitating forces of totalitarian leaders, who could exploit race in order to divide and conquer.

Depestre is often addressed in terms of his exile to France and to Cuba, which provided him with a unique lens from which to view both his own and Haiti's place in the world. After having returned to Haiti from France in his thirties, Depestre hoped to build a stronger nation alongside his longtime friend, François Duvalier by advising him to lead the country toward socialism. However, the violence with which Duvalier carried out his reign devastated the economy, drove out foreign investors, and compromised agrarian

production. Upon bearing witness to Duvalier's corrupted policies and increasing megalomania, Depestre refused to align with him, and was thereafter exiled to Cuba. In his exile, Depestre soon became disillusioned with communism's promise of social revolution, which he believed was too often used by self-interested totalitarian rulers to deny people their autonomy in places such as the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba.

His treatment of place is also informed by the dissolution of the Cuban communist state, which led him to become critical of all political systems that promised utopian ideals while necessitating the inhibition of individual freedoms. Depestre's writing advocates for the amalgamation of the various discrete communities that constitute Haitian society as an alternative to *négritude* in order to cultivate a society whose strength is garnered from an openness to diversity. Having spent much of his professional life as a displaced person, the term "*realutopia*" features heavily in Depestre's writing. He defines *realutopia* in an interview for the *UNESCO courier* as an aesthetic concept that allowed him to "unite the various parts of [his] Franco-Haitian creole-ness as a writer" (45).⁸ He further explains that *realutopia* refers to an aesthetic and literary synergy which embraces the multitude of his lived experiences, and which ultimately allows his writing to advocate for a society that fosters the pluralism and diversity of cultures, experiences, and perspectives. The influence of surrealism led Depestre to his pluralistic political beliefs. Depestre was in dialogue with both surrealism and the works of such writers as Alejo Carpentier in Cuba, whose 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo* [The Kingdom of this World] demonstrated one of the first examples of South American "magical realism" (*lo real maravilloso*). Depestre is often addressed in terms of his use of *le réel merveilleux*, which is borrowed from French surrealism – "le

merveilleux”. Depestre’s utilization of marvelous realism (« réel merveilleux ») enables him to create an image of Haiti and of man that presents alternative modes of being from those informed by the hegemonic powers and systems at play. For instance, in *Le métier à métisser*, Depestre defines the role of the *réel merveilleux* in his works as that which negates the historical circumstances of colonial conquest, specifically with regards to the romantic notion of Christopher Columbus’ adventurous “discovery” of the Americas. He underscores the importance of considering the origins of racial, ethnic, and cultural hierarchies that order society, and of reimagining a world society that has not been structured according to a world order created by force and sustained by mythical notions of cultural and racial superiority. In *Le métier à métisser* he cites Alejo Carpentier, who posed the following rhetorical question in *El reino de este mundo*: « Qu'est l'histoire de l'Amérique tout entière si ce n'est une chronique du réel merveilleux ? Sa question éclairait sous un jour original le vieux dilemme civilisation/barbarie qui, depuis le siècle dernier, courait en filigrane dans les débats littéraires des intelligentsias américaines » [What is the history of America in all its entirety if not a chronicle of magical realism? This question conjures up the old civilization/barbarism debate, which, since the last century, has been woven into the literary discussions of the American intelligentsia (*Translation mine*)] (113). Hence, Depestre suggests that the conditions that necessitated his use of *le réel merveilleux* in his writing is a consequence of the displacement of all black peoples, but particularly Haitians, from their African homeland.

During his exile, Depestre’s writings focused heavily on both the myth of the Christian West and the destructiveness of the Duvalier regime. He believed that anti-humanist truths undergirded the dominance of the West, evidenced by the racism and

imperialist attitudes that characterized much of Europe and the United States, as well as the colonial forces still in place and governing a significant part of the African diaspora. His criticism of the Christian West is presented in *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* (1967), which begins as a verbal assailment against the United States but inevitably takes shape as a poetic form of his own philosophy that communicates both the justification for and the means by which a decolonization of the colonized mind can happen. Nearly twenty years later, Depestre wrote *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979), which depicts the widespread degradation of Haitian culture and infrastructure that occurred during the Duvalier dictatorship, the effects of which are still evident in Haiti today. In the novel, Depestre portrays the nation's decline during this period by situating the degraded hero in a purulent mutation of urban space whose plight worsens upon publicly demonstrating his resistance to the presidency. He employs *le réel merveilleux* to juxtapose the notions of real versus spiritual death which compels his audience to consider the possibility of alternative truths.

Depestre looks to Haiti's cultural history and traditions to ground his protagonists' sources of strength in their faith in kinship networks, ancestral relations, and the power of defiance against Western models of domination. His protagonists' subjective experiences are determined by how these historical legacies influence their dealings with the oppressive Other. *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* is a response to the United States' Occupation, particularly with regards to its attempt to convert Haitians to Catholicism. The epic poem, which consists of over two thousand lines, is a collection of passages that are infiltrated by *Vodoun* expressions and Christian symbols, and, as the title suggests, represents an *offering* to the West. This rainbow that is 'offered'

to the Christian (American) West signifies the cry to subvert the tyrannical neo-colonial powers of the United States by calling for a reverence of Haiti's specific cultural strengths, such as its *Vodoun* religious and cultural practices. Two decades after his exile from Haiti, the affirmations of self, blackness, Haiti, and the quest for peace communicated throughout *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* intimates that Depestre has indeed discovered both himself and his culture.

Moreover, Depestre perceived the failure to present the mythical valorization of race as intimately intertwined with its history of social relations as one of the predominant factors responsible for Haiti's identity crisis. In *Le Mât de cocagne*, Depestre demonstrates how promulgating the link between race and nation inevitably engenders ruinous consequences for a people who endeavor to triumph over their heritage of failure. The origins of the novel's title dates back to the Middle Ages, and alludes to a game played at European festivals in which contestants climbed a pole in an attempt to snatch prizes that suspended from a wheel cart at the top of the pole. The pole was often smoothed down and greased with various lubricants to making climbing difficult. However, in the novel, a government-sponsored festival is held in which men attempt to climb a pole; however, achieving this feat will yield not prizes, but state-sponsored death. The pole is situated in the center of Port-au-Roi, the capital of Zacharyland, and has been smeared with tar and oil and rigged with dangerous booby traps. The narrative centers on Henri Postel's quest for "un-zombification" via his participation in the annual contest. Henri is an ex-senator and political enemy of President Zoocrates Zachary, whose ruthless exercise of power serves as an allusion to the tyrannical Duvalier regime. When we meet Henri, we discover that he has been "zombified", or relegated to the lowliest of

existences for the remainder of his days as a means to prevent him from exerting influence over the people of “Zacharyland”. His entrance into the festival is a one-man show intended to inspire the people’s resistance in the people against the systematic and pervasive violence wielded by the dictator to sustain power. Although Henri inevitably succeeds in ascending the pole, he nonetheless compels Zachary to take extreme measures to thwart his climb. Thus, his display of courage symbolizes the revolutionary potential of individual action.

Carlos Fuentes

Carlos Fuentes is one of numerous Mexican writers and artists whose works have situated the Mexican Revolution at the center of the issue of Mexican nationalism. Many of his novels and short stories consider the role that the Mexican Revolution played in forging the concept of a singular Mexico unified in its shared history and the paradoxical political ideologies that arose following the termination of the Revolution.

Fuentes’s novels portray the complications that arise due to the fundamental incompatibility between the loosely formulated ideals of the Mexican Revolution and the failure to institute them as policies following the Revolution, and how such complications influence both the nation and the individual. In *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*, Maarten van Delden investigates the conditions that allow the individual to achieve authentic subjectivity as he endeavors to rectify his past in a Mexico increasingly at odds with a globalized world. In his research on Fuentes’s works, van Delden explores how Fuentes depicts the ways in which the myth of national unity suppresses controversy and ultimately prevents the sort of social change that is necessary to implement a strong,

democratic government that serves the interests of its many diverse indigenous populations, as well as its middle and upper classes, and also to present alternatives to the old utopian tradition of paternalistic power.

Several specific problems that afflict post-revolutionary Mexico, such as class inequality, political corruption, and the problematic relationship between Mexico and the United States recur throughout Carlos Fuentes's works, and can be attributed to the myth of national unity and the entrenchment of patriarchal inheritance. Fuentes's depictions of the mythical Mexican community, the anxiety of isolationism, and the literal and figurative border are all themes with which Fuentes grapples in his writings about Mexico in the age of rapid capitalist development. Each of these themes resonates with Fuentes's promulgation that Mexico must cultivate an environment capable of sustaining the positive interactions among a plurality of Mexican communities in order for the country to navigate an increasingly globalized world.

Fuentes's works often present veiled criticisms of hegemonic discourses of revolutionary and post-revolutionary nationalism that tangentially destabilize hegemonic discourses of gender. For instance, the novel *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* [*The Death of Artemio Cruz*] (1962), is a rags-to-riches story about the sinister financier Artemio Cruz, whose impending death compels him to reflect on his life and re-live his most momentous experiences, inevitably revealing to the audience that his quest for personal advancement has led him to sacrifice people that he loved as well as his own personal values. Cruz himself can be thought of as a microcosm of Mexico, whose struggle to reconcile the ideals of the Mexican Revolution with practical politics has rendered him a disreputable man in the eyes of those who mattered most.

Carlos Fuentes' works also deal with the contrast between modernity and the past, in which the modern Mexican man endeavors to affirm and situate his identity within a national context in a nation that must perpetually contend with the legacy of colonialism and the unrealized ideals of revolution. Fuentes's treatment of the ambiguity of "revolution", namely in terms of his characterization of the concept's contemporaneous relevancy to the modern era, constitutes the condition for his paradoxical ideological synthesis of freedom and survival.

Fuentes addresses this conundrum by challenging the status quo in which one's social position is determined by his ancestral lineage and social caste. In particular, his works portray Mexico as a coming-of-age story; first in the Revolutionary era, and later in its foray into a globalized world, and both of these major movements in Mexico's history affects the construction of the male self. The relationship between masculinity, national identity, and revolution necessitates a perpetual harkening to the past because of the importance that is placed on family lineage, and how inheritance mobilizes the cyclicity of Mexican history. He challenges the privilege that is afforded to inheritance and class by presenting male protagonists who function outside the realm of predictability, but who in doing so, risk being cast aside from their own families and communities. Thus, in being forced to function and survive in the liminal space between spiritual freedom and economic survival, Fuentes presents the failure to triumph over such a zero-sum game as a justification for reimagining the modern Mexican man as one who cannot become self-realized while remaining wholly tethered to the expectations of capitalism or utopian notions of perpetual revolution.

This project will trace the evolution of hegemonic masculinities in Mexico in

order to explain how non-hegemonic, subordinate masculinities which challenge hegemonic patterns consist of behaviors that subvert conventional conceptions of bravery and paternal responsibility, maintain an interpretation of the Revolution's ideals that is fundamentally rooted in the pursuit of democracy, and favor human values of love, openness, and generosity over self-interested pursuits of fame, fortune, and power.

Ernest Gaines

Similar to Haiti and Mexico, the racial fabric of the United States has long been stratified according to a particular caste system. In the United States, particularly in the Deep South, black Americans have historically tended to be relegated the margins of society. The American South plantation setting of Ernest Gaines's novels appears largely unchanged from the era of slavery in terms of its rigid, racially stratified communities and its reliance on the threat of violence to maintain control over black bodies and sustain racial segregation. A persistent motif throughout Gaines's works is the myth of white supremacy and its complicity in maintaining the economic inequalities, institutionalized racism, and the cycle of poverty that characterizes Gaines's rural Louisiana plantation setting.

The rural southern Louisiana setting in which nearly all of Gaines's novels and short stories are set presents the complicated interactions between black, Creole, Cajun, and Southern white culture. Most of Gaines's works are situated in the era of Jim Crow, in which the Southern institution of de facto segregation sustains a society that systematically denies black Americans access to the economic and social freedoms enjoyed by whites, and severely limits the potential of blacks to persevere in their efforts

to overcome the status quo. Many of Gaines's novels take place in the fictional town of Bayonne, which is inspired by a small town located in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. The structural relics of the past remain hauntingly present in Gaines's works, often speaking louder in their stoicism and steadfast presence than the characters themselves. Specifically, the cane fields, the former-slave-turned-sharecroppers' quarters, and the decaying antebellum plantation houses remind the reader that in Gaines's Bayonne, racial politics have been as slow to change as the land itself.

Similar to Depestre, Gaines endeavors to insert a constructive social vision into his works with the intention of proffering an alternative to the course of American racial history. Therefore, his fiction possesses a self-conscious element, in which the scenarios and conflicts he portrays are historically accurate and feasible, but often conclude in deliberately contrived resolutions that aim to educate and influence his audience to consider alternative means of achieving agency.

Gaines's fiction depicts black men's struggles to free themselves from the psychological and legal shackles of white hegemonic patriarchal supremacy and affirm their autonomy despite their dissociation from the realm of power. Keith Clark explores how Gaines presents black American masculine subjectivity as that which challenges conventional white American conceptions of masculinity defined by traits such as individualism, self-reliance, and stoicism. Clark attests that Gaines achieves this by problematizing a uniform conception of black male subjectivity as informed by the master-narrative and black men's historical denial of the vehicles for expressing internal desires outside of protesting their social marginality. To showcase the consequences of such a rigid conception of black masculinity, Gaines's works portray the turmoil and

trauma of the black man's experience in the American South and how it manifests in violence, ineptitude, and escapist tendencies. Such manifestations stem from a history of institutionalized oppression and disempowerment that compels black men to distance themselves from the institutions of nation and family.

In John Lowe's *Conversations with Ernest Gaines* (1994), the author himself discusses masculinity in *A Lesson Before Dying* (1997) and states, "Being a man is more an outreaching to other people, accepting responsibility, and passing something on" (321). His musings on the makings of manhood resurge again and again throughout his works, and Gaines repeatedly reimagines black masculinity as that which offers alternative conceptions of manhood that are not defined solely in positive or negative references to white masculine hegemony. Gaines's portrayal of both weak and strong, old and young, and educated and uneducated male characters in *A Lesson Before Dying* and *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983) implores us to consider black American masculine subjectivity as cultivated in the persistent negotiation between strength and sensitivity, external power and internal introspection, and in reference to a seemingly indomitable and unchanging white hegemonic patriarchal social structures. The dichotomy in temperament and status that exists between specific characters in both novels provides us with a point of reference for perceiving how the social dynamics work to oppress and limit all black men, regardless of their character or position in the social hierarchy of their communities. Specifically, the negotiation between different personality traits and the often conflicting aims of his black male characters serves to obscure, confuse, and evade the persistent efforts of white purveyors of law and order to uphold the racial code of behavior.

This project explores how Gaines reveals the ways in which black Southern men are as much victims of the oppressive manifestations of hegemonic masculinity as they are agents of change. In the novel, the men share a myriad of stories about how their sisters, wives, brothers, sons, or daughters have been mistreated by whites, with the types of mistreatment ranging from humiliation to rape and murder. The totality of individual anecdotes is emblematic of the infinite number of similarly horrific tales that define the long history of lack of opportunity and suffering experienced by the generations of inhabitants of former Southern plantations.

The totality of personal narratives provokes the elderly men in *A Gathering of Old Men* to each take a stand in opposition to the law by defending one of their peers from being persecuted for the crime of killing a white man, despite the uncertainty surrounding the circumstances of the murder. The strength of the unified personality shared among the elderly men is derived from the men's fear of the implications that one man's supposed guilt poses to the fate of the entire black community.

The forms of white hegemonic patriarchal masculinity that are depicted in Gaines's works are defined in terms of power, control, male domination, and the will to use violence to protect traditional white patriarchal power structures. This project demonstrates how Gaines defies the tendency to define black masculinity as informed by white hegemonic patriarchal masculinity, which he achieves by examining the black male psyche from emotional and psychological perspectives and their relationships to members of the black community. Gaines's depiction of black men in various familial and community roles articulates the conditions of black masculine subjectivity by portraying novel and alternate means of achieving the mental and spiritual liberation that can

transcend the physical oppression of the black body. Gaines presents reimagined conceptions of southern black masculinity that can be considered in their own right, separate from the impulse to relate and compare such alternative notions of manhood directly and automatically with the myth of the master-narrative. Ultimately, those characters that assert their intolerance for the existing white paternal social order subvert the patriarchal code by challenging the political foundations that allow for such oppression to continue.

Notes

1. Angela Davis, *Women, Class, and Race* (New York: Vintage, 1983); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: South End Press, 1983); and Maxine Baca Zinn, "Chicano Men and Masculinity" in *Journal of Ethnic Studies* Vol. 10:2 (1982), 29-44. Davis's 1983 text presents a study of the U.S. women's movement from the abolitionist era to the present that illustrates how the movement has always been impeded by the racist, sexist, and classist policies and biases of the country's leaders. hooks critiques the uses of the "white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" inscribed in the operative American political framework, and how the patriarchy affects and influences the feminist movement, revolutionary movements, and the effects of sexism on men. Zinn's 1982 text focuses on the contradictions inherent to Chicano masculine dominance, and how Chicano masculine dominance is a cultural phenomenon that is the result of socioeconomic inequalities that contribute to sexual stratification.

2. In 1935, President Vincent passed a new decree in which superstitious practices were outlawed. These practices were defined as "the ceremonies, rites, dances, and meetings in the course of which are practiced, in offering to so-called divinities, sacrifices of cattle or fowl." The 1935 law also targeted all practices that "exploited the public by making them think that it is possible, by occult means, either to change the luck or situation of a person, or prevent something bad from happening through procedures unknown to medical science." See Dubois, 305.

3. Matthew J. Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 62-65.

4. The term *négritude* was first by Césaire in the third issue of *L'Étudiant noir*, a magazine which he started in Paris with Léopold Senghor and Léon Damas.

5. See *Légitime Défense*, réédition par Jean-Michel Place en 1979.

6. Sartre wrote the “Preface” to Senghor’s 1948 publication of *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* in 1948, which was titled "Orphée Noir" [Black Orpheus]. See Léopold Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache; précédée par Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris, Presse Universitaires de France, 1948).

7. Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 66.

8. Jasmina Sopova, “Between utopia and reality: An interview with René Depestre” in *The UNESCO Courier*, 1997.

Chapter 1. REIMAGINING THE COMMUNITY

I. Interrupting the Mythic Community

The philosophical dialectic between Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida on the question of the community comprises a framework that can be used to examine the relationship between the processes of globalization and constructions of ethnic, cultural, and racial identities. In *La Communauté désœuvrée* and *Être singulier pluriel*, Nancy considers the ontological dynamics of identity in the relationship between the singular individual and the plural community, and he uses the term “being-with” to name the ontological condition of the freedom of a singularity as always-already implied in the entanglement with the plural Other. Similar to Nancy, Derrida’s constructive mode of thinking interrogates the limits of the community. *La Communauté désœuvrée* interrogates the question of how we can think in terms of a plural “we” without regarding the “we” as a singular identity. He further develops his conception of the community in *Être singulier pluriel*, in which he names “being-with” as the ontological dynamic of community that preserves the freedom of the “I”. Derrida, however, conceives of a radically different conceptualization of the plural dynamic of singularities, which constitutes a community and implies a political relation, and which he investigates in *Politiques de la amitié* [*Politics of Friendship*] (1994), *Papier Machine* [*Paper Machine*] (2001), and in an interview with Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris in *A Taste for the Secret* (2001).¹ Derrida examines the notion of fraternity as it relates to conditions of communal belonging and to the political; however, in *Politiques de la amitié*, he criticizes the fraternal component of Nancy’s community.

Derrida and Nancy's dialectic on community encourages us to rethink notions of subjectivity, nationhood, and political responsibility as individuals contend with social and political forces that influence the construction of certain identities within society. Nancy's conception of the ontological construction of the unworked community allows us to preserve the ethical dimension of the political decision and to resist the sort of insular thinking that sustains the reverence for certain myths that foster totalitarianism. The discourses of the myths that undergird notions of nationalism are integral to understanding how national identity is formulated and articulated in Mexico, Haiti, and the United States in the twentieth century. Subsequent chapters will discuss how such myths inform the construction of patriarchal masculinity and how interrupting these myths fosters the re-articulation of alternatives to hegemonic masculinity in each nation. Nancy and Derrida's dialectic on community frames the analysis of the crises of hegemony that Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines treat in their portrayals of the problematic political hegemonic discourse that sustains the Duvalier regime in Haiti, the PRI in Mexico, and Jim Crow laws in the United States. In sum, Derrida and Nancy's dialectic on community illuminates the need to interrogate the ontological foundations of community in order for democracy to be pursued.

The foundational myths of the political systems that govern nations often strive towards the perfect accomplishment of an infinite subject, which, as history has proven time and again, inevitably leads to the limit upon which that desire works to undo itself. For instance, during the Cold War, the ideals of the communist revolution were realized at the expense of the negation of the individual man's sovereignty, which led one-party governments to devolve into corrupt, omnipotent, and repressive regimes. Such regimes

derived their legitimacy from evocative and utopian communitarian principles, and thus totalitarian forms of government took root in various enclaves across the world. In Mexico, the long-enduring reverence for nationalism stems from the Revolutionary era, during which the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was founded to institutionalize the agreements established during the Mexican Revolution.² Mexican social scientist Roger Bartra discusses the link between the construction of national identity and the immanence of nationalism in the political makings of the modern Mexican nation. In *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition*, written a year before the Partido de Acción (PAN) beat the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in the 2000 presidential election, Bartra writes:

Nationalism is the transfiguration of the supposed characteristics of national identity onto the terrain of ideology. Nationalism is a political tendency that establishes a structural relationship between the nature of culture and the peculiarities of the state. In our country the official expressions of nationalism tell us: If you are Mexican, you must vote for the institutionalized revolution. Those who do not either are traitors to their deepest essence or are not Mexican. Nationalism is, then, an ideology that disguises itself with culture to hide its intimate means of domination. (8).

In a similar vein, the idea that the United States is a promised land of opportunity is supported by an ideology that equates the impetus to protect America's stronghold in the global economy aggressively by invading competitors and controlling its neighboring countries under the unsolicited guarantee of democracy and libertarian ideals. Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida's dialectic on community provides a framework that enables us to identify the political and social conditions that cultivate the immanent community.

In his 2014 edition of *La communauté désavouée* [*The Disavowed Community*], Jean-Luc Nancy explains the pertinence of his critique of Maurice Blanchot's 1983 volume *La communauté inavouable* [*The Unavowable Community*] to our contemporary

preoccupation with community. Nancy's debate in *La Communauté désœuvrée* in response to the communitarian discussion presented by Maurice Blanchot in *La communauté inavouable*, as well as the difference between Nancy's thinking of the Other in *La communauté désœuvrée* compared with Derrida's discussion of sacrifice as presented in his 1999 volume of *Donner la mort* [*The Gift of Death*] allows us to understand the political implications inscribed in these thinkers' revised conceptions of community. Furthermore, Nancy and Blanchot sought to rethink the notion of community that is informed by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* and French intellectual Georges Bataille's *Oeuvres complètes*, 1970 [*Complete Works*], *L'expérience intérieure*, 1943 [*Inner Experience*], *Le coupable*, 1944 [*Guilty*], and *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings* (1927-1939). In *La communauté désœuvrée*, Nancy discusses the relationship between myth and community as well as the link between the interruption of myth and the unworked community. The significance of Nancy's reading of Bataille will be discussed before situating his analysis in relation to Blanchot's response in *La communauté inavouable* (1983).

In 1983, Maurice Blanchot published *La communauté inavouable* in response to Nancy's communitarian discussion presented in *La communauté désœuvrée*. Blanchot and Nancy's debate is shaped by a common desire to reconsider the moral and practical principles of communism while acknowledging the fundamental problem of naming community. The crux of the debate between Blanchot and Nancy is situated in the quest for the possibility of community for the contemporary individual self. Specifically, the point of contention between Blanchot and Nancy centers on the question of the absence of community. The dialectic between Nancy and Blanchot allows us to explain and

establish why Nancy's community is considered a positive concept that can be useful in imagining enduring notions of belonging. In reference to Nancy's discussion of the community as the primordial fact of "being-with", Blanchot argues that the community exists prior to the logic of being; hence, community as such only exists as an absence – as *nothing*. In positing the fundamental absence of community, Blanchot emphasizes that it is first the alterity of the Other that is responsible for ecstatic self-dispossession and hence the loss of self. Similar to Jacques Derrida, Blanchot claims that the asymmetrical relation to the absolute Other implies that the community exists as an absence, which is not a grounds for existence, but still posits the community is an *inavouable* [unavowable] work. Thus, its absence still implies that community is a sort of work, but of the kind that consists in the relation to the Other which one can only experience in solitude. Blanchot therefore rejects ontology in favor of an account of the ethical relation to the infinite Other, and claims that by denying the immanence of community, we still avow for it as an absence. In *La communauté inavouable*, Blanchot says we must conceive of the "nothingness" of community as coming before being, not as an unworking, but as wholly primordial and unavowable, due to the impossibility of naming the nothingness of community. Blanchot explains in *La communauté inavouable* :

La communauté inavouable : est-ce que cela veut dire qu'elle ne s'avoue pas ou bien qu'elle est telle qu'il n'est pas d'aveux qui la révèlent, puisque, chaque fois qu'on a parlé de sa manière d'être, on présente qu'on n'a saisi d'elle que ce qui la fait exister par défaut? Alors, mieux aurait valu se taire? [...] c'est qu'en définitive, pour se taire, il faut parler. Mais de quelle sorte de paroles? (92)

The *unavowable community*: does that mean that it does not acknowledge itself or that it is such that no avowal may reveal it, given that each time we have talked about its way of being, one has had the feeling that one grasped only what makes it exist by default? So, would it have been better to remain silent? [...] in the final analysis one has to talk in order to remain silent. But with what kinds of words?" (47)

Although Nancy recognizes that traditional notions of the homogenous, staid community are challenged by the undeniable dynamism of sociality, which is another way of speaking of the fellowship that happens through the perpetual sharing and exposure to others, in his discussion of community in *La Communauté désœuvrée*, he posits that the community is naturally constructed according to cultural affinities. Therefore, upon considering the essence of the debate between Nancy, Blanchot, and Derrida on the question of community, it is necessary to describe the pertinence of Nancy's attestation to the tendency of people to organize along categories of identity, as well as to reconcile this tendency with his vision of community in order to conceive of how such a community can be realized in modern society.

Nancy's Community

It is important to note that Nancy's writing on the community in *La Communauté désœuvrée* was inspired by the political atmosphere surrounding the practical appearances of communism, in which the actual manifestation of communism was contingent on the betrayal of its ideal. As Ignaas Devisch explains in *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, Nancy uses the terms "communism" to describe "the auto-production of a specific identity" in which "communism postulates the fusion of the individual with a pure collective identity" (60). For Nancy, the notion of an operative identity which establishes its own foundation is dangerous because it remains constitutive of the desire for an immanent social identity. Nancy's philosophical debates with Blanchot and Derrida on the community critique communism and re-conceptualize a community

beyond individualism and the socioeconomic problems of the modern world that led communism, whenever it failed to fulfill its ideals, to descend toward totalitarianism.

Nancy begins *La Communauté désœuvrée* by critiquing the contemporary European political situation and impugning liberal capitalism for debasing sociality to the point that the value of human beings had become contingent on their role in the production of community. He then considers the Romantic conception of community and the opposition between the conception of societies and communities that had already been established by Ferdinand Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* [*Community and Society*] (1887) and Max Weber in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* [*Economy and Society*] (1922). Tönnies differentiates between communities (*Gemeinschaften*) and societies (*Gesellschaften*) by defining society as comprised of individuals who are related on the basis of self-interest and whose capacity for reason enables them to live in harmony beside one another, whereas community is defined as that which joins people together based on their shared sentiment of belonging and intimacy, and which are strictly at odds with the modern conception of a rational society of interests.

Nancy's critique of the opposition between society and community marks the point at which Nancy considers the ontological foundation of Bataille's community, and henceforth enables him to posit a reconstructed conception of community that avoids the dangers implied in the exclusionary aspects of both terms. First, both Nancy and Blanchot examine the implications of Bataille's thinking of death in an essay on Nietzsche titled "Nietzschean Chronicle" in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings (1927-1939)* as that which reveals the community. Nancy finds Bataille's understanding of death interesting, because it moves humans beyond contemporary notions of the lost

community, since the death of the Other limits individuals from making sense of death, or from incorporating the death of the Other back into the community as a productive construct. A closer examination of the notion of ecstasy helps to further explain this point. In tracing the philosophical history of ecstasy before and during Bataille's time, Nancy explains that the concept of ecstasy « définit strictement l'impossibilité, aussi bien ontologique que gnoséologique, d'une immanence absolue (ou : de l'absolu, donc de l'immanence), et par conséquent d'une individualité au sens exact aussi bien que d'une pure totalité collective » [strictly defines the impossibility, both ontological and gnosological, of absolute immanence (or of the absolute, and therefore of immanence) and consequently the impossibility either of an individuality, in the precise sense of the term, or of a pure collective totality] (22; 6). According to Nancy, because existence comes to know itself in relation to, and as in and of itself an exposure to alterity, then such exposure is at once unavoidable and impossible to appropriate. Thus, the concepts of the individual and of communism imply the denial of ecstasy, since ecstasy refers to an excess and infinite relation that cannot be contained or completed in the affirmation of a pure definition or subject. Specifically, Bataille posits that if ecstasy is defined as the opening and exposure of the subject which situates the subject outside of itself, then the ecstatic individual is only ever alone in relation to something else; therefore, he is never truly alone. Thus, the death of the Other places one outside of himself; death reveals to us difference, and is an opening or an exposure that preserves the separations and distinctions among individuals. In sum, death is a sharing in which individuals experience their own finitude in relation to the Other's finitude. Bataille's views on the ontological implications of death lead us to consider the idea of the unworked community, which can

be thought in terms of pure loss, and hence negativity. As Marie Morin-Eve explains in *Jean-Luc Nancy*, Bataille wants to think death as “a negativity that does not let itself be put to work so as to give rise to a higher positivity (the community, the State)” (79).

However, this is the point where Nancy takes issue with Bataille. Nancy reasons that *loss* risks remaining adhered to thinking the idea of a lost community that still risks the creation of a work out of death, as if death (sacrifice) can imply some positive effect, as something that can be re-assimilated into the community. For Nancy, the community is the area in which ecstasy takes place and is prevented from ever fully opening out into the exterior. Thus, the community limits ecstasy and vice versa, so that the only possible community for Nancy is one that is perpetually *incomplete*. Community, then, is nothing if not the very process of negotiations among singularities and all other entities with which they come into contact. Thought in this way, Nancy’s critique of the fundamental absence of community is the only possibility of community that reconciles the distinction that Tönnies makes between society and community. Nancy therefore leaves room for a reconceptualization of community thought in terms of the ontological fact of existence understood in terms of incessant movement and exposure that Nancy names *being singular plural*; an ontological relation which guarantees our individuality and simultaneously our interconnectedness.

While Bataille and Blanchot claim that the urgency of community is sought, in particular, by those who lack community, Nancy conceives of a community that is always already a fact of exposure, and consequently, of the sharing of singularities.³ He further posits that community is not that which is destroyed by society; rather, it is that which happens to us on the basis of society. Simply stated, if community is to be understood as

that which happens in the wake of society on account of the disappearance of tribes and empires, then this disappearance is of a *something* that we lost, and is what we refer to in our explanation of the construction of society. Nancy argues that this thinking is flawed because the perception that we all share this same experience of a lost community is what founds our commonality – we are here together due only to the perceived absence of community. Ultimately, where Blanchot's thought is inadequate in its failure to reconcile the facticity of time in our relation to the other, Nancy succeeds in acknowledging the primordial temporal dimension of the present and our orientation to the future as that which certifies our primordial ontological relation of being-together.

Next, Nancy's claim that community is inferred from the temporality of the incessant movement among singularities' comings and goings means that the community calls upon each singularity to participate in the movement of differentiation. In his 2014 edition of *La communauté désœuvrée*, Nancy criticizes Blanchot, underscoring the fact that human beings are only "punctuations" who exist according to our sharing. Denying this fundamental fact of "being-with" risks forgetting that the very openness to the world is what allows for all communication to proceed; therefore, Nancy reiterates the need to affirm the community as presence. In *La Communauté désavouée*, Nancy explains the pertinence of his 2014 critique of Maurice Blanchot's 1983 volume *La Communauté inavouable* to our contemporary preoccupation with community:

Il s'agit de la préoccupation de notre temps quant au caractère commun de nos existences: à ce qui fait que nous ne sommes pas d'abord des atomes distincts mais que nous existons selon le rapport, l'ensemble, le partage dont les entités discrètes (individus, personnes) ne sont que des aspects, des ponctuations. Cette très simple et très essentielle condition d'être nous échappe dans la mesure où l'évidence de sa donnée se dérobe avec le dérobement de toutes les fondations et de tous les totems qui avaient pu passer pour les garanties d'un être commun ou bien, tout au moins, pour les garanties d'une existence en commun (11).

[This is the concern of our time with regard to the common nature of our lives: to that fact that we are not first individual atoms, but that we exist according to the relation, the whole, the sharing of which the discrete entities (individuals, people) are only aspects, punctuations. This very simple and very essential condition of being escapes us to the extent that the evidence of its givenness slips away with the unveiling of all foundations and all of the totems that were able to pass for the guarantees of a common being or, at least, for the guarantees an existence in common. (*My translation*)]

Nancy's critical response to Blanchot reiterates the notion of sharing as a condition of being and opposes community as a pre-originary absence. At the same time, the pertinence of his criticism is founded in his desire to sustain the thinking of community as a presence and a sharing of togetherness. In his criticism of Blanchot, Nancy reiterates the point he makes in *La Communauté désœuvrée* in which he warns that denying the fact of the community as sharing risks forgetting the significance of the guarantee of the present as well as its fundamental relationship to the past and the future, for it is fundamentally these facts of existence that prevent against « toutes les fondations et de tous les totems qui avaient pu passer pour les garanties d'un être commun » [against all the icons that have been taken as guarantors of a common being] (11). Thus, if we forget or deny the fact of the incessant working and unworking of the community in the present, Nancy warns that such forgetting fosters the sort of thinking of community that is founded on mechanisms of belonging and exclusion.

Nancy, Derrida, and the Mythic Community

Blanchot affirms the primordial absence of community based on the nothingness that precedes the logic of being, and Derrida's critique of Nancy's community makes a similar ontological distinction. Derrida claims that Nancy fails to escape a sort of ontology that never succeeds in interrupting the circle of self-presence in a drastic way.

He claims that inscribed in Nancy's community is a commonality of origin that implies a certain fraternity in his community; this, Derrida charges, precludes the possibility of even questioning the idea of a fundamental sense of belonging among individuals.

Though Nancy does not criticize fraternity directly, his discussion of the interruption of myth serves the same purpose; thus, the questioning of community relates directly to the questioning of myth as the self-grounding of community and of the interruption of myth as the opening of a being-in-common.

Jean-Luc Nancy first introduced the nostalgia for a lost community in *La Communauté désœuvrée*, in which he defines myth as the narrative that describes an original community of people who recognize themselves as belonging together. Nancy posits that this myth is regarded as an original community that has been lost, and this longing stems from the idea that we once lived in harmonious, cooperative communities.⁴ Modern society, Nancy warns, has given way to a world that has become fragmented into a collective of self-interested individuals, and the composition of such a society leads to feelings of misery and alienation that compel people to yearn for a society whose strength is rooted in the bonds of belonging that join its members together. Considered as such, the myth of the mythical community is the mechanism that presents the community to itself; hence, the myth is that which founds and defines the community. Furthermore, ascribing to the mythic community implies the inclination to erase the boundaries between singularities and the inclination to meld them into a bigger whole. In this sense, the mythical community perpetuates the false belief that we are born into a world in which we are fundamentally isolated from one another and disconnected from our

“original” community; hence, the myth both creates and sustains the perception of alienation.

In order to relate Nancy’s ideal of community to the mythic community, it is necessary to reiterate briefly the distinction Nancy makes in *La Communauté désœuvrée* between beings and singularities. Nancy defines a singularity as a body that is concerned with its limit, and which remains offered or exposed to other singularities at their limits. In this disjuncture, singularities are not considered as separate; therefore, a certain distance is always implied in the contact that exists between them. Hence, singularities exist as plural to themselves, and Nancy’s notion of being singular plural indicates that singularities’ identities can only be found in their relation to other singularities: what exists finds itself in being exposed to or in contact with other singularities in such a way that nothing exists or makes sense on its own. He writes

La communauté est la communauté des *autres*, ce qui ne veut pas dire que plusieurs individus auraient quelque commune nature par-delà leurs différences, mais qu’ils participent seulement à leur altérité... Tous les « soi » sont en rapport à travers leur altérité. Ce qui signifie : ils ne sont pas « en rapport » — en aucune manière déterminable du rapport —, ils sont *ensemble*. L’être-ensemble est l’altérité (258).

[Community is the community of *others*, which does not mean that several individuals possess some common nature in spite of their differences, but rather that they partake only of their otherness... All the selves are related through their otherness, which means that they are not 'related'; in any case, not in any determinable sense of relationship. They are together, but togetherness is otherness] (15).

A singularity for Nancy, then, is always a plurality, and his idea of the limit of a singularity designates two facts of “being-with”. First, the limit implies the fact of the primordial presence of the Other; second, it designates the place in which differences among singularities are realized. Thus, the individual human being is singular, but the fact that one is exposed to other singularities makes one’s existence distinct from others. Therefore, *being* for Nancy is collectivity itself - it is the “*with*” in “being-with”, and this is why he argues that we must regard

the world as comprised of singular beings who are always already in the world and whose existence implies and makes possible the existence of others.

As discussed previously, Nancy's political imperative emerges from his conception of the ontological composition of singularities within society, and involves thinking the possibility of creating a world that sustains the perpetual movements among singularities. Furthermore, his ontology posits that because we exist in an ontological sense as being singular plural, this implies that the political dimension of such a mode of existing marks the space in which encounters take place among singularities. In ontological terms, the reverence for certain racial, cultural, or ethnic identities often involves the denial of a singularity's entanglement with other singularities, and therefore, the nuances of identity(ies) that are determined by such encounters. However, when certain conditions within political or national contexts prevent or limit the movements among singularities, Nancy contends that neglecting to think the space in which "being-with" happens promotes the pursuit of the mythic community. Simply put, if we fail to think the space where the organic movements among singularities occur, we risk aiming towards an "end goal" or the accomplishment of man/society as such, rather than on sustaining the milieu that makes democracy possible, and with it, unpredictability, novelty, creativity, and freedom.

In *La Communauté désœuvrée*, Nancy asserts that because the myth only has meaning through the community, but because the nation has a vested interest in obscuring the distinction between myth and reality for the sake of securing citizen loyalty and obedience to those in power, the myth becomes a real artifact upon which culture is based. As previously discussed, the longing for an original, mythic community is problematic because such a longing is in fact a striving for the community as immanent, which requires a communal

fusion that « n'enferme pas une autre logique que celle du suicide de la communauté qui se règle sur elle » [contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it] (32; 12). If the pursuit of the myth implies that it produces its own essence, then it also implies the negation or denial of the singular nature of those individuals who comprise the collective.

Nancy warns that any political state that has as its goal the formation of a community of immanence inevitably leads to totalitarianism, which will ultimately cause the community in question to close in on itself and render Nancy's community of being singular plural impossible. Since the concept of community contains within it a gesture towards xenophobia in its tendency to label the Other as "foreign", Nancy calls on us to conceive of a new idea of community as that which is characterized by a dynamic of sharing. For Nancy, community *is* exposition and sharing: « Le partage répond à ceci: ce que la communauté me révèle, en me présentant ma naissance et ma mort, c'est mon existence hors de moi » [Sharing answers to this: that what the community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself] (68; 26). This fundamental dynamic of sharing as constitutive of Nancy's community implies a community that is irreducible to the multiple. Thus, if myth is neither a work of death nor of primordial absence, but is rather a real entity that is responsible for our humanity, and for the way in which we relate to and live together with each other, then it is necessary to understand how myth can be useful in understanding the roots of social problems in current national contexts. Nancy suggests that because the myth both founds and provides a narrative of the origins of the community, « Le mythe ne surgit que d'une communauté et pour elle: ils s'engendrent l'un l'autre, infiniment et immédiatement. » [The myth arises only from a community and for it: they engender one infinitely and immediately]

(50; 127). However, Nancy concedes that inherent in the myth itself is its own interrupting tendencies: in its dual yet contradictory roles of origin and of the story of origin, the operative mechanism of myth sustains a permanent aporia between truth and fiction, thus maintaining an incompleteness, or a limit that interrupts mythic narratives. It is in this space where the mythic foundations of a unified community can be challenged.

If we read Nancy against Derrida, we can begin with their distinction between thinking being singular plural by opposing Derrida's "politics of sacrifice" to Nancy's "ontology of offering". While Nancy's idea of "being-with" posits an ontological idea of plurality in which sharing defines the limits and essence of community, Derrida's notion of the community differs in terms of its practical dimension: similar to Blanchot, community is a thinking of the space where the political happens – where we must decide anyway, even though this decision always requires a sacrifice of all the singularities that are neglected in the response to the singular Other. Nancy and Derrida's conception of community forms a dialogue that considers the space in which the political happens and which denotes the political as the impetus for decision-making. While both agree that singularities exist on their limits through an exposure to the outside, and that this exposure of singularities is constitutive of a plurality, Nancy conceives of this exposure as an "offering" of the community of singularities to one another, whereas Derrida considers the relation of singularities to be one of sacrifice. Moreover, Derrida claims that the secret of our origins necessarily creates a space in which the wholly Other meets an other Other, and thus singularities are sacrificed whenever one singularity comes up against another (*Donner la mort* 68). However, Nancy's thinking explains community in

terms of the space in which movements among singularities occur; therefore, his thinking describes the conditions that enable these interactions among singularities to take place.

Although both thinkers want to maintain a certain equality in their understanding of the fundamentally unequal relation of singularities to each other, Nancy differs from Derrida in that he measures the incommensurable Other according to the *with*, or offering of the self to the always already present totality of singularities, while Derrida's measure of the incommensurable Other is implied in the sacrifice of the singular *one* to the totality. Thus, where Derrida desires in his deconstruction of community to make way for the experience of the Other that respects its fundamental singularity, Nancy claims that this kind of thinking of community risks affirming the existence of pure elements and the denial of multiculturalism. Nancy names "offering" as the means by which singularities maintain a certain concern with their limit, for it is on these edges that singularities are turned toward the outside and in which there is a communication of their being-in-common. Such an offering sustains a contiguity with the outside that is incommensurable, and which results in the impossibility of denying the community of pluralities. Thus, for Nancy, the fact of our singular-plural existence reconciles the paradox between desiring to be part of a community and the strife that is caused when being-in-common is threatened by exclusionary forces and political ideologies.

However, Derrida takes issue with Nancy's conception of community, because he posits that it implies a fraternity based on the phallogentric social bond as the origins of community. Moreover, Derrida denies that any community can coherently embrace Nancy's conception of community as an antidote to totalitarianism, because in order to do so, such a community would have to deny its own ratification of the term "community"

that it embraces in its own self-conception. He contends that Nancy's thinking fails to separate the concept of community from genealogical ties, and that such ties can incite the slippage into the sort of exclusionary thinking that leads to totalitarianism.⁵

Derrida's criticism of fraternity and Nancy's theory of the interruption of the myth of community, when read together, constitute a discourse founded in the deconstruction of the concept of community. Furthermore, Derrida's conception of sacrifice as the condition of responsibility is useful in understanding how Nancy's thinking does in fact resolve the problem of the tendency toward the formation of insular fraternal communities.⁶ In order to imagine how a community can actively work to defy the tendency towards fraternization and to understand the practical implications of the interruption of the myth, it is necessary to acknowledge that the inclination towards a certain fraternity is inevitable and unavoidable in all social dynamics. Nancy's idea of the interruption of myth elucidates why myth, regarded as the logic of the foundation of a people, is self-defeating. The traditional idea of community is defined as a totality formed from bonds based in shared familial, historical, or cultural commonalities. However, the idea of community for Nancy is articulated in its interruption and finds its existence only in the suspension of its essence through the interplay of the cultural differences that exist among the community's individuals. Such differences, in turn, lead to the questioning of a community's self-founding mechanisms. It is this questioning that interrupts the myth of communion, and which opens a space that resists the completion of community, or what Nancy thinks of as the basis of totalitarianism.

Nancy recognizes the perpetually future-oriented coming to presence as a fundamental fact of being that always already implies a plurality of singular existences.

This originary plurality means that it is impossible to not use community in our discussion of ontology. However, Derrida takes issue with this, arguing that Nancy does not go far enough to deconstruct the concept of community, and instead posits the term as self-evident (*Voyous* 56). Still, Nancy counters Derrida's charge by claiming that he already thinks beyond community in his ontological understanding of the fundamental relationship between the self and the Other, and argues that the imperative to respond to the Other, as is inscribed in Derrida's ontology, always already incites the process of fraternization and the constitution of a cohesive force.

The significance of both philosophers' notions of community is found in the need for the incessant destabilization of any posited foundation of a community. Because society is fractured into groups that are bound by a certain relationship between its members, it is necessary to consider Derrida's thoughts on the concept of fraternity as that which is both a process and a mechanism of identification that must be considered alongside the deconstruction of community. However, as Nancy concedes, the political realm and its practical workings render it impossible to deny the inclination towards fraternity. Moreover, Nancy's idea of the myth of community prevents us from denying the role that history has had on constructing the interpersonal relationships that naturally occur within communities. He claims that the interruption of myth happens via Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of *ipseity*, or self-referentiality, which is inherent to Nancy's definition of being singular plural. In Sartre's 1943 *L'Être et le Néant* (*Being and Nothingness*), he considers the notion of ipseity as that which denotes selfhood and the self-sameness of the ego. Whereas Sartre conceives of ipseity as a pure sense of selfhood that is personal and which predates the relation to the Other, Nancy affirms that the

singular-plural nature of existence implies that because there is always a plurality of singularities, a singularity is never an isolated purity in and of itself. Singularities are thus not self-referential, and although Nancy concedes in *Être singulier pluriel* that singular differences do indeed characterize notions of identity, no identity is ever pure. As Marie-Eve Morin describes in “Putting Community Under Erasure: Derrida and Nancy on the Plurality of Singularities”, the singular differences that characterize identity, or the “plurality within singularity” only nuances identity, but does not “prevent identification from taking place” (Morin 7). Ipseity, then, should be thought of as a concept which makes it “possible to think of a style, a language, a culture... not as unity, but as a certain identifiable tone that is never contained in any fixed set of features and that, consequently, always remains at the same time unidentifiable, inimitable language” (Morin 7). Ultimately, Nancy argues in *Être singulier pluriel* that the notion of ipseity allows us to think of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic markers as impure and unfixed identities that occur because of the nature of singularities which are always at once plural, multiple, and of constitutive of a plurality (178).

The most important aspect of Blanchot, Derrida, and Nancy’s discussion of the ontological question of community concerns the means by which identities are constructed, which further illuminates how the myth of community sustains nationalism. Most significantly, Derrida and Nancy’s dialectic is useful in understanding the link between such myths and the social oppression of marginalized populations within nations.

Benedict Anderson defines nationalism in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* as that which can be understood as the result of the

“large cultural systems that preceded it”, and that such cultural systems work to assimilate all of one’s inherited or innate identifying characteristics, such as parentage, race, or gender (12). Anderson contends that the idea of nation is represented not as what it truly is – as an entity produced through conflict – but rather as already pre-existing wars, which therefore demands the reconsideration of the concept of property and the historical events that led to the establishment of national frontiers. The total or even partial forgetting of a nation’s history results in the recasting of the nation as “loom[ing] out of an immemorial past”, which obscures the fundamental arbitrariness of its political boundaries (Anderson 11). Inscribed in Anderson’s idea of the nation as an imagined political community is a certain fraternity, which is undergirded by the patriarchal organization of societies that accounts for why individuals become willing to sacrifice their lives in the name of their country. The reliance on violence to sustain myths of belonging secures the profound emotional legitimacy that is afforded the nation on account of its role in providing meaning and kinship to its members and in ensuring the perpetuation of masculine dominance. This explains why political leaders who succeed in exploiting such a nationalistic spirit manage to remain in power long after their ineptitude or tyrannical leadership has been exposed.

The following three chapters that comprise the first section of this dissertation analyze literary representations of the nation in the works of Ernest Gaines, René Depestre, and Carlos Fuentes in an effort to reveal the interdependency of discourses of nation, community, and gender, and how the foundational myths of the political systems that govern nations rely upon the perpetuation of patriarchal values in the pursuit of a conception of a national subject. These chapters will address how the authors portray the

adherence to and the dissolution of the mythic foundation of community in terms of the political and national landscapes of Haiti, Mexico, and the United States South during the mid-twentieth century. In this analysis, the conditions that support the myths that give rise to oppressive regimes will be accompanied by an analysis of how the authors portray the possibility of interrupting myths, which can inevitably foster a society that supports and welcomes cultural, social, and racial diversity.

Notes

1. First published as *Il gusto del Segreto* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli S.p.A, 1997).
2. Originally called the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR), President Manuel Ávila Camacho renamed the PNR the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) in 1946.
3. Nancy names Bataille as the first thinker to consider the contemporary experience of community as the experience of the outside-of-self, rather than as a work to be produced. Bataille describes Being in terms of exposure to the limits of being, and posits that the inappropriability of exteriority means that we always maintain a fundamental relationship with exteriority that is based in an essential difference: « peut-être faudrait-il dire qu'il ne peut *se* rapporter, mais avec lequel il entretient un rapport essentiel et incommensurable » [perhaps we should say that it is *of* this exteriority, that it is of an outside that it cannot relate to *itself*, but with which it entertains an essential and incommensurable relation] (CD 49-50).
4. See Marie-Eve Morin's "Putting Community Under Erasure: Derrida and Nancy on the Plurality of Singularities." *Culture Machine* Vol. 8 (2006), and "A melee without Sacrifice: Nancy's Ontology of Suffering against Derrida's Politics of Sacrifice" in *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 50 (2006): 139-45. In both articles, Morin presents the case for reading Derrida and Nancy's work on community as a dialectic that merges at the point of the "truth of community".
5. See Jacques Derrida, *Voyous: deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), Chapters 4 and 5 for Derrida's complete critique of fraternity on Nancy's community.
6. See Jacques Derrida, *La politique de l'amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994) 374. Derrida reasons that the distinction between friend and enemy is what sustains the political dimension of the world: "The phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever-present possibility of the friend-and-enemy grouping, *regardless of the aspect which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics, and economics.*"

I.1 The Mythical Revolutionary Community in *Los de Abajo* and *Gringo viejo*

The myth of the revolutionary community takes on a powerful presence in Mexican literature. The consequences of the decade-long Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) merit consideration regarding how this myth relates to American imperialism's influence on Mexico, as well as to the Revolution's failure to bring about lasting change for Mexico's agrarian populations at the turn of the nineteenth century. In *La Communauté désœuvrée* and *Être singulier pluriel*, Nancy distinguishes between the idea of the mythical community and how to think of community in terms of being-together. This distinction allows us to make a conceptual break with the traditional idea of community and to consider how the shortcomings of the Revolution's objectives relate to these conflicting myths. The consequences of these different myths can be examined in Carlos Fuentes's *Gringo viejo* [*The Old Gringo*] (1994) and Manuel Azuela's *Los de abajo* [*The Underdogs*] (1915). Both novels depict the plurality of discordant narratives of community that shape and define Mexican society during the revolutionary era. However, the novels also illuminate how the absence of a unifying myth of community engenders perilous consequences for individuals who struggle to reconcile their own individual interests with the objectives of the Revolution. The conclusions of the main characters' journeys in Azuela and Fuentes's novels depict how the primordial fragmentation of the mythical communit(ies) ascribed to by the novels' protagonists renders the Mexican Revolution, in Nancy's terms, an operative community whose shortcomings result from the competing myths of community and revolution. This chapter traces and appropriates Nancy's work on community in order to investigate representations of the Mexican Revolution in Carlos Fuentes's *Gringo viejo* and Mariano

Azuela's *Los de abajo* as both a mythic community and a response to Porfirio Díaz's efforts to turn Mexico into an operative community, in which economic growth was achieved at the expense of the repression of the masses and the institutionalization of a peasant slavery system. Nancy's conception of the mythic community elucidates how the personal objectives of General Tomás Arroyo in *Gringo viejo* and Demetrio Macías in *Los de abajo* are irreconcilable with a revolution whose objectives are substantiated in essentialist tropes of belonging. Upon analyzing the conclusions of the two novels, it becomes apparent that those who succeed in reimagining an alternative to the mythic revolutionary community and whose actions accord with Nancy's conception of being singular plural are more inclined to succeed in achieving their personal objectives.

The Mythic Community

Azuela and Fuentes depict the sufferings experienced by various agrarian groups as modernization and agrarian policies that favored the wealthy led to severe hardships among the lower and peasant classes. In considering Nancy's ontology, one can attribute the phenomenon of socioeconomic suffering to the consequences of a community whose value and identity is determined according to rigidly defined ideas that certain populations are unable to claim or attain. Prior to the Revolution, Díaz's pursuit of a modernized, central government and economy emerged at the expense of the suppression of the multiplicity of Mexico's indigenous groups, most of which were not privy to the fruits of such economic gains. The disjunction between the community of the modern economically robust Mexico that Díaz sought to create and Nancy's ideal community is situated in the distinction between myth and reality. Nancy describes the traditional sense

of community as that which is thought to be not only « [...] la communication intime de ses membres entre eux, mais aussi la communion organique d'elle-même avec sa propre essence » [the intimate communication among its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence] (30; 9). In their plurality, the members of a community claim the same identity as each other in their identification with the people as a whole. However, when the quality of the people's way of life is radically altered, Nancy posits that communities emerge out of this perception of the loss of a former community that has been dissolved in the modern experience of society. The mythic community arises from the consciousness of a lack of a true foundation or an original community; therefore, to speak of myth is to only ever speak of absence. Hence, the mythical revolutionary community that emerged out of the fictional ashes of the "original" Mexican community was a response to the operative community that Díaz shaped via his economic policies, which served to further marginalize as well as homogenize the poor peasant populations.

The revolutionary generals in Azuela and Fuentes's works each contrive a myth that supplies meaning to their unique perception of the lost community and their inevitable foray into the Revolution. In both novels, Generals Tomás Arroyo and Demetrio Macías fight in the Mexican Revolution on behalf of the peasant classes, but join the war on account of personal grievances against violent *caciques*. Macías is a humble peasant who publicly opposes Don Mónico, a local *cacique* from his hometown in the Sierra Mountains. He protests the unfair rural practices that have devastated the livelihoods of the poor peasants, and this public denouncement of his landowner compels

him to desert his family when the *Federales* come seeking his whereabouts and seek refuge in the hillsides.

Gringo viejo takes place early in the Revolution, as word of the legendary Pancho Villa spreads across the northern states of Mexico. In the novel, we meet General Tomás Arroyo, the bastard son of the wealthy Miranda *hacendado* who has returned home as a Revolutionary soldier to find that the Miranda family has fled the estate. We soon discover that the root cause of Arroyo's ire as well as his sense of entitlement stems from the not-so-secret secret that the patriarch of the *hacienda* raped Arroyo's mother, a field worker, on the eve of the Revolution. The only people who remain are his former fellow peasants and Harriet Winslow, the *gringa* governess of the Miranda children. Consumed by vengeance for his former father-master, Arroyo leads his troop of rebels back to the estate, and instructs them to torch the vestiges of the Miranda plantation. However, Arroyo's predominant concern lies foremost in securing the papers hidden within the Miranda homestead that will prove his birthright to his absentee family's land.

In both novels, we witness the reactions of the agrarian classes to the long legacy of authoritarian rule by Aztec, colonial, and republican powers as the masses begin to mobilize and fight against the government. Many peasants and native Indian groups joined the revolution to seek justice and retribution for unfair rural practices and the theft of ancestral lands. Nonetheless, there existed a fundamental disjunction between the loosely formulated ideals of the Mexican Revolution and the core objectives of the various groups who joined the fray. As the oppressed peasants and Indians grew increasingly intolerant of the unfair land practices, they began to ascribe to the general

belief that revolution against the *Federales* would alleviate their suffering and perhaps pave the way for new opportunities and a more prosperous future.

Manuel Azuela and Carlos Fuentes present the fundamental tension between competing myths of community and the mythic dimension of revolution. The disjunction between the ideological incoherence of the Mexican Revolution and the protagonists' personal reasons for joining the rebellion leads Macías and Arroyo to seek ulterior purposes to their interpretation of the mythic narrative that drives the Revolution. Notably, Macías and Arroyo are both heirs to a past of authoritarian rule and submission; however, both characters occupy different strata within the social hierarchy of the Mexican peasantry. By the nature of their group affiliation, Macías and Arroyo join the Revolution for different reasons, and each ascribes to a uniquely different founding myth of communal belonging. However, these unique myths cannot be subsumed under the myth of a singular revolutionary community through their participation in the Revolution. Inevitably, each general's awareness that his own guiding myth cannot be reconciled by the mythic revolutionary community leads Macías and Arroyo to seek alternative paths toward self-affirmation that ultimately conflict with Nancy's ontological understanding of community.

During the Mexican Revolution, the founding myth of the indigenous populations was rooted in the desire to live peacefully among one's own tribe and to be free to occupy and lay claim to their ancestral lands. Similarly, the peasant classes ascribed to the dream of a future in which they could make their own living without depending on the wealthy land owning *hacendados*. Therefore, the relationship between the myth of the revolution is purposeful and constitutive of the rhetoric used in the nation-building

project that followed the Revolution. In Azuela and Fuentes's works, each revolutionary general contrives a myth that supplies meaning to his experience of the lost community and his inevitable foray into the revolution.

The Mexican Revolution as Mythic Community

In *Gringo viejo*, Arroyo's complex relationship with Ambrose Bierce and his return to the *hacienda* as a Revolutionary soldier spawns the seeds of his demise. Bierce, a cynical journalist who crosses into Mexico at the height of the Mexican Revolution, has traveled from the United States in pursuit of a noble death. Upon involving himself in the Revolution after crossing the final and only American frontier he has not yet attempt to conquer with his pen, he inevitably resolves that he is unable to take his own life, and thereafter vexes Arroyo to the point that the rebel general reveals his ulterior motives through his murderous retaliation against the gringo.

The Old Gringo encounters General Arroyo just after the rebel general and his troops have set fire to the Miranda hacienda, which has been razed to the ground at the behest of Arroyo. As Arroyo drives the Old Gringo in his opulent private car to the Miranda estate, the American studies Arroyo and determines that the source of his postured haughtiness can be attributed to the political turn of events that has instantaneously elevated Arroyo from a peon to a respected revolutionary general. Arroyo's history dates back to the origins of his Indian people in Aztlan, the legendary ancestral home of the Aztecs and the mythical foundation upon which his indigenous identity rests. By virtue of his blood relation to Señor Miranda and his ancestral Indian origins, Arroyo believes himself to be the rightful heir to the land. In his defense of the

estate's destruction, Arroyo distinguishes between what it means to be the true owner of the land because you had worked for it, which he contrasts with the ingenuity of the Miranda family's claim to their land, which Arroyo attests has come by way of taking something that was not theirs, "como la familia Miranda tenía estas tierras ganaderas del norte, cercadas por un desierto que ellos quisieron estéril y duro para protegerse" [the way the Miranda family had taken this cattle country in the north surrounded by a desert they wanted sterile and harsh for their own protection] (34; 27). The Old Gringo muses over Arroyo's indignant defense of his rights to the land, and concludes that the source of his pathos derives from Arroyo's understanding that not even the Revolution can truly liberate him from his people's legacy of servility. He imagines the plight of Arroyo's people, attributing the the peasants' unceasing fighting to their long history of subordination under various tyrannical regimes:

...huir de los españoles, huir de los indios, huir de la encomienda, agarrarse a las grandes haciendas ganaderas como el mal menor, preservar como islotes preciosos las escasas comunidades protegidas en su posesión de tierras y aguas por la corona española en la Nueva Vizcaya, evadir el trabajo forzado y unos cuantos: pedir respeto a la propiedad comunal otorgada por el rey, negarse a ser cuatreros o esclavos o rebeldes o tobosos pero al cabo ellos también, los más recios, los más honorables, los más humildes y orgullosos a la vez, vencidos también por el destino del mal: esclavos y cuatreros, nunca hombres libres salvo cuando eran rebeldes (37).

[...flee from the Spanish, flee from the Indians, flee from the servile labor of the encomienda, accept the great cattle ranches as the lesser evil, preserve like precious islands the few communal lands, the rights to land and water guaranteed in Nueva Vizcaya by the Spanish Crown, avoid forced labor and, for a few, seek to preserve the communal property granted by the King, resist being rustlers or slaves or rebels or displaced Indians, but finally, even they, the strongest, the most honorable, the most humble and at the same time the most proud, conquered by a destiny of defeat: slaves and rustlers, never free men, except by being rebels. (29)].

Later, when the Old Gringo challenges Arroyo by sardonically sympathizing with Arroyo's quest for vengeance, Arroyo accuses the Old Gringo of not understanding, and claims that "Nuestros papeles son más viejos que los de ellos" [Our papers are older than theirs] (34; 26). He shows the Old Gringo the precious papers and declares that the Miranda lands have always belonged to his people:

... Estas tierras siempre fueron nuestras, de los escasos labriegos que recibimos protección lo mismo contra la encomienda que contra los asaltos de indios tobosos. Hasta el rey de España lo dijo. Hasta él lo reconoció. Aquí está. Escrito con su puño y letra. Ésta es su firma. Yo guardo los papeles. Los papeles prueban que nadie más tiene derecho a estas tierras (37).

[... a handful of hardworking men granted protection against the *encomienda* system and against the attacks of the Toboso Indians... The King of Spain himself said so... It says so right here. Written in his own hand. This is his signature. I am the keeper of these papers. The papers prove that no one else has a right to these lands] (29).

The Old Gringo realizes that inscribed in the papers is Arroyo's proof of his very identity, and he thereafter exploits Arroyo's desperation by setting fire to the papers as a final gesture to bring about his own death. In a fit of blind rage, Arroyo delivers the *coup de grâce* that the Old Gringo sought in coming to Mexico in the first place. Thus, in this vain act of conflagration, the Old Gringo instigates the general and exposes the irreconcilability of Arroyo's conflicting desires to both perpetuate the myth of land inheritance and simultaneously nullify its genealogical merit for the sake of his personal aspirations.

After the Old Gringo's murder, Arroyo contemplates the psychological torment that accompanies a lifetime of thankless servitude. He acknowledges the pervasive and permanent wounds that slavery inflicts on a man's psyche: "no que no importaba poseer nada sino la tierra, lo demás lo posee a uno y es malo pasarse la vida pensando en lo que

se tiene y temiendo perderlo en vez de portarse como hombre y morir con honor y dignidad” [Nothing was important but to own the land, everything else owns you, and it’s bad to go through life thinking about what you own and being afraid to lose it, instead of living like a man and dying with honor and dignity] (170; 162). Arroyo certifies the paradoxical nature of his situation; however, as the expediency of fate closes upon him, he is forced to reckon with the fact that he will be able to attain neither tangible nor spiritual glory in this life.

Arroyo’s indignant justification of his right to the land, juxtaposed with the Old Gringo’s participation in the war, illuminates the mythical ground upon which the idea of the Revolution as a utopia rests. Whereas Arroyo’s stake in the fight is complicated by his contempt for his past and his dreams for the future, the Old Gringo aligns himself with the Revolution’s objectives in a manner that is absolute and unwavering precisely because the ideals of the Revolution are as utopic as they are unattainable and arbitrary. It is the very fact that the foundation of the revolutionary community is rooted in myth that renders Arroyo’s competing aims irreconcilable, and makes it possible for the Old Gringo to exploit the myth for his own purposes.

Next, Nancy’s theory of community challenges the essentialist ideas of race and nation that traditionally demarcate the standards of communal belonging. In *Los de abajo*, Demetrio Macías’s journey is neither prompted by dreams of revolutionary ideals, nor is his willingness to sacrifice for the Mexican Revolution substantiated in essentialist notions of the nation. Rather, his longing for an original, mythic community emerges from his desire to live freely among fellow villagers of modest means on his humble homestead. Macías joins the revolutionary fight when he can no longer tolerate the

oppressive land practices of Don Mónico, the *cacique* of Moyahua. He tells his band of revolutionary soldiers that although he never entertained revolutionary sentiments, the tyrannical surveillance tactics of the local police force who support and defend Mónico compelled him to join the Revolution as a means of self-preservation. Consequently, Macías and his band of soldiers constitute a community that shares the common desire to seek protection from totalitarian rule, and the impetus to fight against the legacy of tyrannical authoritarian leadership grows stronger the night that they share personal stories about their own mistreatment at the hands of the authorities and landowners. Ultimately, the men's tales collectively shape a mythical history that grounds their desire to reclaim their lost community.

Moreover, Luis Cervantes, an intellectual and a journalist, is held captive by Macías's men after he defects from the *Federales* and arrives at the rebels' camp. Initially, Cervantes is accused of spying for the federalist forces, but in his interrogation by a rebel "priest", he assures the guerilla fighters that he is driven by only the purest of intentions and that he is an emphatic supporter of the Revolutionary cause. Cervantes hails from a middle class urban family, and he charades as a revolutionary ideologue in his efforts to win the trust of the motley group of men. Cervantes perceives Macías to be a humble and impressionable ideologue, and he appeals to Macías's ego in an effort to rally the troops to join forces with the Constitutionalist Army. The idealistic *curro*'s first-hand experience of his hellish war experience and the absence of a unified front on the side of the *Federales* impresses Macías, and compels him to regard Cervantes as a fellow idealist in whom he can confide. Cervantes attempts to inspire the rebels with his own political philosophy, pontificating on the inevitable fate of the revolution, in which he

appeals to the grand objectives of the Revolution in his defense of the sacred rights of the people. He succeeds in charming Macías with his impassioned oration, lamenting the loss of life and the likelihood that the end of the Revolution will inevitably usher in another cache of corrupt state officials. Although Cervantes declares that the Revolution will certainly triumph, he cautions that Macías's return home will render him indirectly complicit in the Revolution's failure to free the underclasses from the tyranny of a dictatorship. Cervantes presents his convoluted reasoning with such gusto that Macías becomes captivated by illusions of glory, failing to notice the speciousness of Cervantes's proposition. Appealing to the ideal of masculine duty, Cervantes bids him to consider the contradictory nature of his personal desires and his political principles:

Usted es desprendido, y dice: "Yo no ambiciono más que volver a mi tierra". Pero ¿es de justicia privar a su mujer y a sus hijos de la fortuna que la Divina Providencia le pone ahora en sus manos? ¿Será justo abandonar a la patria en estos momentos solemnes en que va a necesitar de toda la abnegación de sus hijos los humildes para que la salven, para que no la dejen caer de nuevo en manos de sus eternos detentadores y verdugos, los caciques?... ¡No hay que olvidarse de lo más sagrado que existe en el mundo para el hombre: la familia y la patria!...(43).

[Since you are unselfish, you say: 'I have no ambition other than to return to my land.' But is it just to deprive your wife and children of the fortune that divine providence now lays in your hands? Would it be just to abandon your country now, at these solemn times, precisely when the motherland will need all the selflessness of its most humble children to save her, so she will not fall again into the hands of the caciques, those eternal thieves and murderers? We must not forget the most sacred things a man has in this world: his family and his country!] (42).

However, in a curious turn of logic, Cervantes underscores the imperative that Macías remain strident in his commitment to the Revolution, thus obliquely succeeding in his denouncement of Macías's personal aim to seek a better future for his family. He names Macías an "hombre modesto y sin ambiciones" [modest man, without any ambition], underscoring the imperative that Macías accept his noble mission (43; 42). In joining the

fight, Cervantes affirms that Macías has stood up against the *cacique* system, and he persists in narrating the myth of the fraternal bond that unites them:

Somos elementos de un gran movimiento social que tiene que concluir por el engrandecimiento de nuestra patria. Somos instrumentos del destino para la reivindicación de los sagrados derechos del pueblo. No peleamos por derrocar a un asesino miserable, sino contra la tiranía misma. Eso es lo que se llama luchar por principios, tener ideales. Por ellos luchan Villa, Natera, Carranza; por ellos estamos luchando nosotros (43).

[We are constitutive pieces of a great social movement that will lead to the exaltation of our motherland. We are instruments of destiny for the revindication of the sacred rights of the people. We are not fighting in order to defeat one miserable murderer. We are fighting a fight against tyranny itself. And that is what it means to fight for one's principles, to have ideals. That is what Villa, Natera, and Carranza are fighting for. And that is what we are fighting for] (43; 42).

Effectually, Cervantes condemns Macías's humble ambitions at the same time that he refutes the futility of the Revolution's potential to liberate the people from tyrannical rule. Moreover, the sharp-tongued intellectual realizes that Macías's personal ambitions are intertwined with the success of the Mexican Revolution, and he appeals to Macías's baser instincts, presuming that he can inspire Macías to assume a graver responsibility as rebel leader than the motive that originally compelled him to fight. Cervantes's obsequious speech moves Macías to remain true to the Revolution's ideals as the intensity of Macías's own original myth wanes. Furthermore, his harangue effectively transforms Macías's transparent skepticism of the apparent idealism that carries him through the seemingly interminable fighting. Thus, it is the ascription to the myth of a better future, combined with the appeal to Macías's pride in his role as revolutionary leader, that enables Macías to outlast his fellow comrades in his commitment to the ideals of the Revolutionary cause.

Azuela and Fuentes's novels present the Mexican Revolution as an operative community that aims to accomplish itself as work by presenting its foundational ideals as a concrete and attainable truth. Nancy posits that the problem with the traditional conception of community is that it does not tolerate any myth outside of itself. Rather, the myth communicates a desire for a pure identity and provides a total explanation for everything that exists. Furthermore, such myths operate by yearning for immanence, and this is precisely what Nancy argues sustains the violence that is wielded in the name of nationalism. In both novels, we encounter the early stages of the Mexican Revolution as hordes of discontented peasants and federal army deserters join the side of the Revolution. The influx of new recruits provides a steady supply of malcontents whose disaffection with the war leads more and more men to join the fight. Moreover, the discrepancy between the two generals' motives for joining the Revolution underscores the arbitrariness of its objectives, and reveals how each character's contrasting motives for fighting the *Federales* exposes the absence of a coherent founding myth of community. Thus, while the rebel leaders experience the threat of the loss of community in different ways – Macías in his desire for a vaguely defined 'better' future, and Arroyo in his obsession with his ancestral land - while Macías seeks to rectify this perceived "lost" community by substituting it for the mythical revolutionary community, Arroyo uses the revolution as a guise to conceal his ulterior intentions to occupy the same position of power previously held by his father-master.

General Arroyo embodies the discrepancy between the rebels' objective to reclaim land from wealthy *hacienda* owners and the individual pursuit of personal security through Mexico's legacy of land inheritance. Inevitably, the tension that builds

between General Arroyo and the Old Gringo surfaces when the Old Gringo exposes Arroyo's hypocritical ascription to the inviolability of the Revolution's goals. The conflict between Arroyo and the Old Gringo that subsequently unfolds is representative of the complications that arise in the rupture between the myth of remaining true to the Revolution and the myth of land inheritance ascribed to by the indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, General Arroyo struggles to define his own identity in relation to the Revolution as external forces threaten to distance him from his familial roots. Shortly after the Old Gringo decides to join Arroyo's band of rebels, he and Arroyo ride on horseback to the site where they will set up their next attack against the *Federales*. Arroyo discusses the fate of Porfirio Díaz upon defeating the French Army and likens Díaz to himself: "Cuando tenía mi edad, era un pobre general como yo, un revolucionario y un patriota, ¿a que no lo sabías?" [When he was my age, he was a poor general like me, a revolutionary and a patriot. I bet you didn't know that!] (86; 79) The Old Gringo responds that no, he had not known this, but muses that Arroyo's fate may just as well parallel Díaz's. He asks Arroyo to imagine that his fate will be the same as Díaz's, and challenges him to name any revolution that has escaped the unfortunate fate that follows its end. Arroyo responds in the negative, but implores the Old Gringo to consider if any country has avoided such evils, particularly the United States. He replies, "No, yo hablo de su destino personal, no del destino de ningún país, general Arroyo; usted sólo se salvará de la corrupción si muere joven." [No, I'm talking about your personal destiny, not the destiny of any country, General Arroyo. The only way you will escape corruption is to die young] (89; 81). The Old Gringo's life work as a cynical muckraking reporter has taught him that neither passivity nor self-sacrifice can satisfy the man who seeks

purpose beyond the nation's contest of competing political principles, and his insistence on the inevitable outcome of revolution strikes a chord in Arroyo that the general cannot ignore.

Early in *Gringo viejo*, Arroyo is seemingly unaware of the gringo's semi-veiled scorn for Arroyo's "revolutionary" act of conflagration. As Arroyo observes the smoldering remnants of the Miranda homestead, he addresses the Revolution as an unforgiving father figure for whom he has sacrificed in the name of filial obedience. He names all that he has burned, including "la tienda de raya donde los hijos de nuestros hijos iban a deber hasta la camisa que traían puesta, eso lo quemé, los establos donde los caballos comían mejor que nosotros" [their store where our children's children would still owe the shirt off their backs...the stables where the horses ate better than we did] (135; 127). In his wry nostalgic reflection, Arroyo reveres the myth of land inheritance, promising the peasants who observe from the shadows that if they survive, the dance hall and its ballroom of mirrors will belong to them. Although Arroyo's retribution signifies his contempt for the servitude into which he was born, his decision to preserve the palatial ballroom and his preoccupation with protecting the documents that prove his rights as heir to the estate render his desires mutually exclusive. The sanctity of the mirrors signifies the self-recognition that the revolution has engendered for the poor peasants, and thus Arroyo's veneration for saving the mirrors indicates that the Revolution cannot contend with the individual desire to lay claim to a place to call his own.

In *Los de abajo*, the ground of the mythical revolutionary community is revealed as the rebels revisit former battlegrounds and grow increasingly disillusioned with the

Revolution's promises. The third part of the novel chronicles the progressive degeneration of the Revolution as the rebel fighters increasingly succumb to betrayal, murder, and treachery. The optimism and collective vision that carries Macías's band of guerilla soldiers to multiple victories early in the Revolution fades as the men return to previously trodden battlegrounds. As the men reluctantly march on, the band's ranks swell with disenchanted peasants and ex-*Federales*, and Macías's authority weakens as the rebels' former united front dissolves into a mob of battle-weary unprincipled bandits. Formerly a steadfast purist of the goals of the Revolution, Macías's scrupulousness seems to have declined because he has been influenced by Cervantes's waning idealism. Meanwhile, Cervantes's privileged position in society permits him to shift focus away from the interests of the rebel cause towards securing his own well-being. The process of degeneration of the entire band culminates when Cervantes deserts the group, which occurs once he has acquired sufficient booty to pursue his dreams of individual prosperity.

Towards the end of the novel, Cervantes flees the Revolution and writes Venancio from his new whereabouts in El Paso. He suggests that Venancio become his business partner in opening a Mexican-style restaurant, and alludes to the band's treasury as the potential source of their investment funds. In his written exhortation, Cervantes presents himself as a sage who is endowed with the knowledge and expertise necessary to guarantee their success. His self-regard as a sophisticated cosmopolitan holds weight in his ability to influence Macías and Venancio as the mythical foundation of the Revolution reveals itself as nothing more than a coda of ideals that cannot be substantiated in tangible gains for the rebels.

Perhaps the most virile symbol of the Revolution's promise for a better future for Mexico's poor is embodied in the Revolutionary leader of Pancho Villa. In both novels, the rebels laud Pancho Villa as the unconquerable commander of the Sierra, whose formidable feats against the *Federales* have earned him the reputation as the ruthless Robin Hood-like war hero of the Mexican Revolution. Villa signifies the revolutionary macho male and the ideal model of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, he is the embodiment of the Mexican people liberated from oppressive imperialism and thus represents the mythical revolutionary community. His reputation as a fearless military genius appeals to the poorest sectors of society, who admire his unwavering commitment to the pursuit of revolutionary ideals and who revel in the tall tales of his courageous exploits. However, for General Arroyo and Demetrio Macías, Villa's symbolization as the penultimate revolutionary hero negates the imaginary ground of the mythic community, which complicates both men's idea of their own roles in the war.

Pancho Villa's chief concern during the Mexican Revolution was that the revolutionaries would remain steadfastly loyal to the Revolution's ideals; hence, anyone who compromised its principles was regarded as a threat to the cause. In *Gringo viejo*, a rebel colonel scorns the Old Gringo's display of valor in his battle against the Federal forces because he reminds the rebels that the perpetual fighting signifies the Revolution as a nihilistic project of death: "—Pero ser demasiado valiente y seguir viviendo, ése sí que es un problema, mi general, ése es un problema para los dos ejércitos: el hombre indecentemente valiente. Nos expone a todos. Ridiculiza un poco a los dos bandos" [—But to be too brave and still live, now that is a problem, General, that is a problem for both our armies, he said: the indecently brave man. He shows us all up. He makes all of

us look a little ridiculous] (135; 84). Implicit in the Colonel's insight is the suggestion that bravery is a trait that has no place in the pursuit of a mythical community; this is the tragic flaw in the Old Gringo's death wish.

When Pancho Villa learns of the Old Gringo's murder, his fatal punishment of Arroyo is the necessary consequence of any affront to the operative methods of the Revolution. Villa's arrival at the Miranda estate had been preceded by rumors about the Old Gringo's brave conduct as a rebel soldier. Villa encounters Arroyo and asks him to confirm the tales he has heard about the foreign warrior: "—Un hombre valiente, ¿no es cierto?, un gringo valiente. Ya me contaron sus hazañas. Ejecutado de frente, no por la espalda como un cobarde, pues no lo era, ¿verdad, Tomás Arroyo?" [He was a brave man, wasn't he? A brave gringo? I've heard about all he did. Now he's been shot fairly, from the front, not in the back like a coward, because he wasn't a coward, was he, Tomas Arroyo?] (225; 177) Arroyo replies that no, he was not a coward; rather, he affirms that the gringo was the bravest of them all. Implicit in this exchange is the suggestion that the mythical revolutionary community can subsist as long as its warriors remain committed to the pursuit of the Revolution's objectives. In Nancy's terms, Pancho Villa and the Old Gringo obscure the mythical ground of the revolutionary community, because in refusing to anticipate the end of the Revolution, they reinforce the Revolution as an interminable project.

In contrast to the Old Gringo, General Arroyo's reverence for his original Aztec *Nahuatl* community and his bitterness towards his past prevents him from making a genuine commitment to the revolutionary cause. The irreconcilable nature of the mythic revolutionary community and the myth of land inheritance are encapsulated in Arroyo's

final exchange with his American lover, Harriet Winslow, when he muses that Pancho Villa “detesta a cualquiera que quiera regresarse a su casa. Eso él lo ve casi como traición” [hates anyone who thinks about going back home. It is like treason, almost] (246; 198). Arroyo conceives of returning home as a necessary step towards the liberation of himself and his people from the shackles of the *hacienda*. Nonetheless, Arroyo closes himself off to the community of peasants when he refuses to forsake his own illusions of prosperity. Harriet prods Arroyo to explain his rationale for remaining on the Miranda hacienda against Pancho Villa’s wishes to which Arroyo replies, “Estoy luchando. Ésas son mis órdenes. Pero, Pancho Villa detesta a cualquiera que quiera regresarse a su casa. Eso él lo ve casi como traición. Seguro que me he expuesto al tomar la hacienda de los Miranda y quedarme aquí.” [I am fighting. Those are my orders. But, Pancho Villa hates anyone who thinks about going back home. It is like treason, almost. I have gambled heavily by taking the Miranda hacienda and remaining here] (206; 198). Thus, Arroyo’s refusal to resist the *cacique* system’s patriarchal traditions of inheritance and his shift commitment to the Revolution reveals its aporetic dimension. He despairingly admits to being locked in the destiny of the Revolution, but realizes the impossibility of achieving personal satisfaction in his defense of the mythical revolutionary community. In seeking to preserve the land that he deems rightly his, Arroyo loses sight of his loyalty to the Revolution’s ideals that tie him indefinitely to the Miranda estate.

If we think of community as the differential experience of the Other, then Arroyo’s attempt to appropriate the limits of the community by reclaiming the Miranda land for himself is coextensive with his denial of the mythical ground that validates one’s right to the land. By declaring the custom of ancestral land ownership an immutable truth,

Arroyo masquerades as the benevolent liberator of his people while covertly setting himself up so that he can one day slip into the proprietary role of *hacendado*. However, the myth of customary right is problematic. Although the papers would certify Arroyo's right to become the estate's next *hacendado*, his defense of this myth would necessitate the communal sharing of these lands with his fellow peasants. Thus, the only factor that prevents Arroyo from having to choose between himself and his people is the perpetuation of the war.

Gavin O'Toole explains in *The Reinvention of Mexico: National Ideology in a Neoliberal Era* that during the Revolution, "a consummate redefinition of nationality took place" in which the *mestizo* became the subject of Mexico's national history as well as a symbol that served to legitimize the centralized state and justify the pursuit of a modern economy" (139). Thus, the idea of the *mestizo* reinforced the myth of the Revolutionary community by positing the notion of a unified population of mixed-blood people, but which delegitimized the disparate histories of the indigenous peoples and further pushed them to the margins of society.

Similarly, the potent myth of Pancho Villa in *Los de abajo* works to delay the inevitable interruption of the mythical revolutionary community. In the second part of the novel, Macías's men learn from General Panfilo Natera that they will cross paths with the famed Villa, and Natera's troops are transformed into starry-eyed idolaters as they recount tall tales about Villa's legendary exploits. The stories leave Macías's men awestruck, and our narrator reveals that Villa's embodiment of the revolutionary myth displaces their own post-Revolution objectives with the imperative to not imagine a future beyond the cycle of fighting: "Villa es la reencarnación de la vieja leyenda: el

bandido-providencia, que pasa por el mundo con la antorcha luminosa de un ideal: ¡robar a los ricos para hacer ricos a los pobres! Y los pobres le forjan una leyenda que el tiempo se encargará de embellecer para que viva de generación en generación” [Villa is the reincarnation of the old legend: the providential bandit blazing through the world with the bright torch of an ideal – to steal from the rich and give to the poor! And the poor carve out his legend, which time will be certain to adorn so it may live for generations to come] (67; 64). The men’s verbal veneration of their Mexican Robin Hood effectually demystifies the myth of the Revolution, and they are jolted into considering for the first time the merits of the ceaseless fighting that their hero demands of anyone who dares call himself a revolutionary. Moreover, the troops privately ponder their own capacity to simultaneously emulate their hero and continue to pine for a better future. Storytelling therefore serves as a catalyst for reflection and validates the mythic element of Villa’s persona; however, despite their fascination with Villa’s legendary valor, the weary men contemplate the implications of possessing alternative ideas of the Revolution’s ultimate objective.

Inevitably, it becomes clear that Macías’s men truly are the underdogs of the Mexican Revolution, and that they have paid dearly for their protracted participation in an apparently futile cause. Nonetheless, by the novel’s end, Villa’s mystique is not lost to Macías, even though he has suffered disheartening defeats throughout his two years of battle. Macías succumbs to disillusionment when he returns home and experiences a profound anxiety in his newfound idleness. Despite the warm reception he receives from his wife, who supplicates him to forsake his responsibility as general and return to life as usual, at this point in the narrative it is apparent that the myth of the Revolution has

become constitutive of his very identity. Her entreaties do little to sway Macías, who has already resigned himself to the irresistible compulsion to go on fighting, in spite of the apparent futility of his efforts. In the final scene of our protagonist's epic journey, Macías picks up a stone and throws it toward the bottom of the canyon, likening its trajectory to the inescapability of the Revolution: "—Mira esa piedra cómo ya no se para..." [Look at that rock, how nothin' can stop it now...] (298; 132). In this simple gesture, Macías acknowledges that he is no longer the autonomous, self-actualizing man he was at the beginning of the Revolution. Rather, like Villa, he obscures the abysmal ground of the revolution as myth by offering himself up to the myth, in the futile but irreversible effort to establish the ground and defy its self-effacing truth.

In their conversations with other key characters, Arroyo and Macías inevitably become aware of the impossibility of reclaiming their own lost communities. In due course, the revelation of Pancho Villa's fallibility triggers a definitive shift in the protagonists' attitudes towards the Revolution and in their own capacities to seek solace and personal salvation through the revolutionary cause. Arroyo and Macías's individual justifications for continuing to fight illuminate the fundamental impossibility of achieving a final reality upon the termination of the Revolution. Ultimately, the ambiguous ideology of the Mexican Revolution and the revolutionaries' lack of clear-cut political objectives create a chasm that prevents the sociopolitical ideals of the Mexican Revolution from being realized.

Being Singular Plural and Masculinity

In both novels, the myth of the revolution upholds the concept of a nation worth fighting for, but the paradox of this myth is that the fighting must continue without end if the truth of the myth *as myth* is to remain unexposed and unrealized. Ultimately, both Arroyo and Macías's attempts to achieve their personal objectives make inaccessible the ontological mode of existence that Nancy conceives of as paramount to living according to his conception of a community that resists immanence.

Nancy's conception of being singular plural posits that singularities maintain contact with other singularities, but that their individual identities are derived from their relation to other singularities. The political imperative that arises out of his ontology commands that an environment be created that can foster the incessant movement and interaction of singularities with one another. Nancy argues that because totalitarian regimes depend upon essentialist tropes of culture and identity to demarcate those who do and do not belong to a certain group, such regimes derive their power from the rejection of openness to difference that may compromise or expose the infirmity of such discriminatory practices. Hence, in its striving towards the erasure of difference, the community founded on myth can never reconcile the interests of the masses with those who benefit from its perpetuation. However, a community that is structured according to Nancy's conception of being singular plural necessitates the interruption of myth in order to sustain the perpetual exposure of singularities to each other. Furthermore, Nancy's critique of the community is not solely concerned with the individual's orientation to or role within the community, and his philosophy allows us to re-inscribe an idea of community that embraces openness to difference. Thus, Nancy posits that each

singularity is primordially always among a plurality of Others, and thus existence is of the order of a being-in-common.

The Old Gringo's narration of Arroyo's hypocritical desires is revealed early in the novel, but it is not until his confrontation with Villa that Arroyo suffers the implications of his half-hearted allegiance to the Revolution. Upon returning to the Miranda estate, Arroyo realizes that the prosperous future he covets can never be attained since his "right" to the land is substantiated in a myth that directly contrasts with the myth that drives Villa's actions. Villa's predominant concern upon learning of the Old Gringo's murder is to prevent the United States' intervention in Mexico's revolutionary efforts at any cost. He thus orders that the Old Gringo's body be exhumed and re-executed in order to rectify American reports that claim the journalist's murder was committed in cold blood. Villa's objective in making this demand is to protect and communicate the narrative of liberation via revolution; therefore, any myth or ideology that threatens the revolutionary myth must be eliminated. Nonetheless, Arroyo's private ambitions sustain the operative community, since both myths require him to betray either his fellow revolutionaries or the well-being of his people.

By contrast, Macías's return to Juchipila at the end of the novel reminds him of their victory at Zacatecas one year earlier. Much to their surprise, when they get to Juchipila, they learn that the *Federales* have arrived at the battleground days earlier than Macías has anticipated. As the enemy begins to attack, Macías's newer recruits retreat, leaving behind only Demetrio and his original troop. This retreat symbolizes the absence of a collective, unifying mission shared by all the rebels. Most significantly, however, is the effect that the fair-weathered attitude of the troops has on Macías. The exhausted general does the only thing he knows how to do; he keeps firing "donde pone el ojo pone

la bala” [wherever he sets his eye] (195; 134). In this moment, Macías gives himself over to the Revolution entirely, and in the relinquishment of his own aims, he becomes conciliatory with the Revolution’s trajectory towards immanence.

Moreover, Nancy’s ontology of community allows us to conceive of how being singular plural describes an alternative mode of existence that can transcend the seemingly irreconcilable duality of options between individualism and collective sacrifice. The operative mechanisms of the Revolution are fundamentally antithetical to being singular plural because the demands placed on a true revolutionary requires that he forsake any sentiments or dreams that may run counter to its objectives. If we accept being singular plural as the ontological configuration of community, then we can understand the fate of Arroyo and Macías not in terms of the product of the incompatible differences between their personal aims and the Revolution’s goals, but as the result of their failure (or success) to interrupt the mythic community in such a way that nurtures this ontological dynamic. Arroyo’s failure to take responsibility for the essential bond between himself and the peasants for whom he fights prevents him from finding peace with his past or salvaging his integrity by forgoing his illusions about taking over the Miranda estate. Similarly, despite Macías’s ability to imagine a future beyond the antiquated and oppressive *cacique* system, his steadfast complicity to the demands of incessant battle invariably prevents him from embracing the plurality of community.

Interrupting the Mythic Community

Nancy warns that if myth serves as the identificatory mechanism of a community, then it also engenders a self-enclosed subject as a model to be emulated. The totalizing

effects of such myths are dangerous because they tend to foster societies that are inhospitable to those who differ from the paradigmatic subject who is considered to “belong”. Therefore, the interruption of myth occurs when one acts in ways that defy such archetypal identities. He also posits that the only remedy to the operative community is a society that resists immanence by nurturing the differential play of otherness. Such a community is not realizable in either novel because that which founds the fiction of the revolution necessitates perpetual fighting, but does not posit a viable alternative form of being-together.

Arroyo and Macías inevitably become aware of the impossibility of reclaiming their own lost communities. At the root of Arroyo’s contempt for his past is his shameful knowledge that he is the child of his peasant mother and Señor Miranda, whose rapacious machismo falls accords with a pattern of hegemonic masculinity that was often embodied by the class of wealthy hacienda owners. For instance, Arroyo reflects on the horrific mistreatment towards the peasants wielded by the masters of the *hacienda*:

Se aburrían: los señoritos de la hacienda sólo venían aquí de vez en cuando, de vacaciones. El capataz les administraba las cosas. Ya no eran los tiempos del encomendero siempre presente, al pie de la vaca y contando los quintales. Cuando venían, se aburrían y bebían coñac. También toreaban a las vaquillas. También salían galopando por los campos de labranza humilde para espantar a los peones doblados sobre los humildes cultivos chihuahuenses, de lechuguilla, y el trigo débil, los frijoles, y los más canijos les pegaban con los machetes planos en las espaldas a los hombres y se lazaban a las mujeres y luego se las cogían en los establos de la hacienda, mientras las madres de los jóvenes caballeros fingían no oír los gritos de nuestras madres y los padres de los jóvenes caballeros bebían coñac en la biblioteca y decían son jóvenes, es la edad de la parranda, más vale ahora que después. Ya sentarán cabeza. Nosotros hicimos lo mismo (112).

[They got bored: the masters of the hacienda came here from time to time, only as a vacation. vacation. An overseer administered everything for them. These were no longer the times of the resident landowner who kept a close eye on the cattle and weighed every quintal of grain. When these owners came, they got bored and drank cognac. They fought the young bulls. They also went galloping through the

tilled fields, terrifying the peons bent over their humble Chihuahua crops, beans, wild lettuce, spindly wheat; they beat the backs of the weakest men with the flat of a machete, and they lassoed the weakest women and then raped them in the hacienda stables while the mothers of the young gentlemen pretended not to hear the screams of our mothers and the fathers of the young gentlemen drank cognac in the library and said, They're young, this is the age for sowing their wild oats, better now than later. They'll settle down. We did the same] (61).

Arroyo remains haunted by the memories of the abuses suffered on account of the follies of the landed elite, and this rage prevents him from conquering his own wrathful contempt and imagining how he may better protect his fellow peasants.

Harriet Winslow accuses Arroyo of seeking vengeance as a means of defying his patrimony, and she further charges him with celebrating life over death, and for placing greater value not in “cómo vivió, sino cómo murió” [how he lived, but how he died] (120; 116-117). The lineage of Arroyo's heritage places insurmountable limitations on his ability to access the power strata occupied by his forsaken father; thus, a chasm is created which separates his newly acquired General status and the hegemonic masculine order occupied by the landowning elite. Although he achieves a respectable position in the rebel army, Arroyo is unable to interrupt the revolutionary community fully because he cannot escape his marginalization. He is left with the option to either join the ranks of the other wretched rebels who persist in the unceasing fight as a means of validating their existence, or seek an alternative escape from his destiny via death.

Luis Cervantes and the Old Gringo interrupt the myth of the revolutionary community by defying the hegemonic code of masculine conduct ascribed to by the typical revolutionary soldier. Cervantes and the Old Gringo's privileged positions in society afford them the flexibility and freedom to achieve their personal objectives. The Old Gringo's venture across the Mexican-American border is initially the quest for a

anonymously authentic death, but as his involvement in the Revolution becomes complicated by the affective bonds he forms with Harriet and Arroyo, the Old Gringo realizes that his self is intertwined and henceforth inextricable from others. In confronting his mortality, the Old Gringo yearns for an imagined community grounded in solidarity rather than individualism:

Le murmuró que él había venido aquí a que lo mataran porque él no era capaz de matarse a sí mismo. Se sintió liberado al cruzar la frontera en Juárez, como si de verdad hubiera entrado a otro mundo. Ahora sí sabía que existía una frontera secreta dentro de cada uno y que ésta era la frontera más difícil de cruzar, porque cada uno espera encontrarse allí, solitario dentro de sí, y sólo descubre, más que nunca, que está en compañía de los demás (198).

[He had come here to be killed because he wasn't capable of killing himself. He had felt freed the moment he crossed the border at Juarez, as if he had walked into a different world. Now, he was sure: each of us has a secret frontier to cross because each of us hopes to find himself alone there, but finds only that he is more than ever in the company of others] (161).

Thus, the Old Gringo realizes that even in death, humans are not alone, and it is this realization that finally provides great comfort to him, and ultimately allows him to achieve death, but only after he has entertained a sincere reflection on his flaws, regrets, and unrequited ambitions. His fate suggests that community is achieved through honesty with one's self, and that solidarity with others lies at the heart of the achievement of self: the Old Gringo's quest for truth reveals to him the undeniably relation to Others.

Similar to the Old Gringo, Harriet Winslow has fled to Mexico to hide from her past and to discover herself anew. Whereas the Old Gringo seeks redemption for neglecting his family in the form of a noble death, the young Harriet aims to conceal the pain of her father's abandonment by restarting her life and involving herself entirely in the affairs of another land and people. However, their chance encounters with each other results in a shared affection that not only remedies their individual loneliness, but forces

them to inevitably forsake their false pretexts for coming to Mexico in the first place. The Old Gringo confesses to Harriet that in coming to Mexico to die, he understands that his death wish is anything but noble or altruistic. Rather, upon realizing that his relationships with Harriet and Arroyo have imbued his final days with genuine meaning, he finally “sees” that the sacrifices that he made were in vain. The gratification that the Old Gringo achieves in death has nothing to do with his performance as a soldier; rather, it is the role he plays in leading Arroyo and Harriet towards self-realization that ultimately brings him satisfaction.

Harriet’s affirmation of the Old Gringo’s deepest yearnings allows the Old Gringo to recalibrate his previous ideas of strength and glory. In her own confession of the reasons behind her deceit, she exposes the Old Gringo’s veiled intentions and presents them plainly to the Old Gringo. She swears to him that she will never disclose his identity to anyone upon the discovery of his corpse by promising to forget his real name:

“Olvidaré tu nombre verdadero” (148). Implied in this promise is Harriet’s understanding that the Old Gringo can achieve true glory on his own account so long as he remains anonymous, for it is only in his willingness to be regarded as a constitutive but still partially indistinct agent of the Revolution that enables him to straddle the line between selfishness and martyrdom.

In *Los de abajo*, the fickleness of the Revolution and its grounding principles is revealed through the evolution of Cervantes’s character. After trailing along with the band of rebels for some time, he witnesses the chaos that transpires as one faction of rebels revolts against another, thus obscuring the distinctions among foe and friend. As fellow soldier Alberto Solis and Cervantes stand on top of a hill following a battle

between the *Federales* and their machine gun fire and Macias' men, Cervantes remains stuck in his place and considers upon observing the clouds of smoke and dust whirling up from the demolished town that "Y creyó haber descubierto un símbolo de la revolución en aquellas nubes de humo y en aquellas nubes de polvo que fraternalmente ascendían, se abrazaban, se confundían y se borran en la nada" [He had found a symbol of the revolution in those clouds of smoke and dust rising fraternally, embracing each other, blending together and then dissipating into nothing] (72; 69). The smoke signifies the fleeting accomplishment of the Revolution's ideals, which Cervantes interprets as the futility of its promises and its likeliness to dissipate into nothing.

The perceived pointlessness of the revolution impresses Cervantes profoundly, and his adherence to the cause is replaced by an equally as potent urge to defy the nihilism of battle and escape the Revolution altogether. Ultimately, the interruption of the myth of the revolutionary community enables alternative forms of masculinity to emerge.

Conclusion

The Old Gringo and Cervantes triumph in their individual quests precisely because they remain on the periphery of the insular ideology that founds and propagates the Revolution. The men succeed in challenging the reigning models of masculinity unwaveringly embodied in revolutionary leaders like Pancho Villa by virtue of their low stakes in the outcome of the Revolution, as well as in their ability to manipulate those who are invested in the fate of the war. However, the fates of Demetrio Macías and Tomás Arroyo reflect each man's uniquely conflicted relationship to the mythic dimension of the Mexican Revolution. While the two generals look to their respective

myths to fulfill their individual desires and escape their pasts, neither Macías nor Arroyo is able to conceive of an alternative mode of existence that reconciles the barbarism of his past with the glorious ideals of the Revolution. They remain trapped in a memory of the past that prevents them from thinking outside the mythic community and looking to their respective myths to fulfill their individual desires.

I.2 Fighting Fire with Water: From Négritude to Transcendence in *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien*

Rene Depestre escaped the totalitarianism of the Duvalier regime in 1959 after witnessing François Duvalier use *Vodoun* as a perverted form of black magic and thereafter “plunge the country into a totalitarian surrealism” (UNESCO 45).

Consequently, Depestre moved away from the idea of a socialist revolution espoused by the proponents of the *négritude* movement upon observing first-hand how Duvalier exploited the Haitian people’s belief system into a notion of revolution founded upon a racist ideology. In light of the political context in which *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* was written, we can consider Depestre’s invocation of Haitian spirituality throughout the poem as a response to and critique of the multiple manifestations of Marxist revolutions taking place throughout the world. His disillusionment with Marxism coincided with his renunciation of *négritude*, which was influenced by his concern that similar to Marxist communism, the *négritude* movement would inevitably take on an absolute, mythical nature; only in Haiti’s case, its manifestation would be based in an ideology of racism, rather than political absolutism.

Depestre’s disenchantment with Marxism and *négritude* led him to embrace surrealism, which Depestre termed “the lifeblood of revolt” (UNESCO 44). In surrealism, he found a movement rooted in intellectual foundations that allowed him to inject the supernatural into his vision of the world so as to reimagine a world not based on a spiritual Western-centric rendering of “reality” (UNESCO 44). Furthermore, in his 1997 interview with Jasmina Šopova of UNESCO, Depestre explains that surrealism is inherent to the Caribbean, and like the behavior of *Vodoun* gods, the religious order

produced by Christian-African syncretism in Haiti is an example of religious surrealism. Hence, Depestre's employment of surrealism in his literary works, and particularly in *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien*, allows him to challenge and subvert Western notions of history, law, and realism, which he hopes can ultimately guide world leaders and politicians to "revamp our old ideas about good and evil, [and] to revive a sense of the sacred which is being lost" (UNESCO 46).

Depestre's penning of *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* is consubstantial with the events that were taking place during the period in which the poem was written. The inspiration for the poem came from several significant historical events that took place around the time that it was published in Spanish in 1967, including the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the horrors meted out on the Haitian people under the Duvalier dictatorship, and the threat of the atomic Apocalypse of 1962. In the poem, we find traces of Depestre's response to Castro's anti-racism following the Cuban Revolution, as well as the nihilistic threat of Starfish Prime, a United States-led nuclear test conducted in space off of Johnston Atoll, an unincorporated territory of the United States.²

Although Depestre's political ideology has shifted and evolved throughout his writing career, his reverence for the history of Haitian culture has remained at the heart of his creative works. In *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien*, Depestre challenges the myth of racial superiority perpetuated by the Christian West by jettisoning the torrid legacy of slavery, colonialism, and despotism to the forefront the literary imagination. The poem is imbued with an energy that thrusts the narrator in a proverbial ascent out of the depths of white subordination. This continuous forward momentum is characteristic of Depestre's oeuvre in general; his transition from the non-descript despairing victim

among the oppressed masses to the revolutionary sage who inevitably confronts his own limitations to realize that the power of his singularity lies in his union with the collective.

While his earliest writings extol celebrations of Marxism, Black nationalism, and the revolt against the mulatto hegemony, the work produced during Depestre's exile in Cuba during the 1960s is heavily imbued with anti-United States sentiment. *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* is the product of Depestre's vexation with the United States's attempts to convert who they deemed as the sinful, pagan, polytheistic Haitians to Catholicism during the American Occupation, and the subsequent indirect economic intervention imposed on Haiti in the decades following.

The Myth of Race

Haiti's history teaches us that any society in which race or color constitutes the determining factors of social stratification will inevitably lead to dire consequences. Depestre posits the concept of white superiority as a myth that was created by white Christian colonizers in order to reveal that such a myth can be interrupted by returning to its nexus and chronologically deconstructing its history. In Nancy's terms, it is only when Depestre succeeds in addressing and debunking all aspects of the myth – those that are both integral to the original myth and those which emerge as symptoms of it – that the myth is fully interrupted.

The poem's focus on the forward movement and unification of the human race is contingent upon the poet's completion of each stage of the revolutionary process so that he can eventually reach the final stage of transcendence. His transition from being a solitary revolutionary, to his union with the spiritual world, to the inevitable emergence

of himself as a self-realized black man who invokes the authenticity and power of the black race, is emblematic of Nancy's conception of being singular plural. According to Nancy, the foundation that is re-articulated as community always exists and is in excess of what is programmed or dictated. Thus, if the originary sociality of persons coming together in-common constitutes a plurality, then the *operativity* of such a community implies a community that always lies beyond completion, in that it cannot be constructed as a project of work (Nancy, *CD*, 14). In relating Nancy's ontology of community to the poet's journey through the American South, we can articulate how the poet conceives of the possibility of brotherhood as only feasible in the perpetual un-finishing, or un-working of a unity defined in terms of identity.

Furthermore, Depestre's invocation of the past as a necessary step towards autonomy aligns with Jacques Derrida's notion of democracy. In *Politiques de l'amitié*, Derrida posits the undeniable future anterior as that which opens the space of being and which denotes time as a structure of responsibility (280). Derrida explains that democracy can only be understood in light of a justice *à venir* [to come] – which designates the ontological condition for democracy. Hence, the very possibility of ethics implies a thinking about ethics that is removed from a system of rules and moral norms, so that the ethical can be thought of as a characteristic of existence. Moreover, in *De l'hospitalité*, Derrida describes the categorical imperative as what one must do that is necessary to keep the future open. The perpetual erasure of the future prevents this choice from being based on anything but knowledge of the past and an orientation to the future. Thus, because human experience is bound to the dimension of time, Derrida claims that the political decision is only possible as *impossible*, which means decisions can only be

made in the name of a justice that has yet to arrive. Similarly, Depestre concedes that because history influences the present sociopolitical schematic, the achievement of a culturally syncretic and autonomous Haiti calls for a reconsideration of history in which the marginalized voices of the past are allowed to be heard. Throughout the poem, the poet laments the past political failures that continue to deny Haiti a democratic existence. Depestre envisions that for a future Haiti to be free from tyrannical rule, the Haitian people must embrace a spirit of collective agency in order to reclaim its cultural history and its autonomy from despotism and neo-colonialism. Thus, in order to bring about more solidarity among the Haitian people, Depestre invokes his fellow countrymen to examine Haiti's history in order to understand how it effects the sociopolitical environment of the present day. Depestre's *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* is an example of how history can be reimagined via literature, which can inevitably forge a communal bond strong enough to combat the legacy of white supremacy and domination over black bodies throughout the entire African diaspora.

Depestre traces the origins of black subordination to the historical events responsible for the forced creation of the African diaspora. Beginning with the incipient stages of the Middle Passage, during which Africans were bound, shipped, and sold in the name of capitalism to brokers and plantation owners in the Americas, he sets out to expose how the operative mechanisms of the slave trade lie in direct contradiction with the moralistic bearings of Christianity. In the poem, the Haitian *loas*, or *Vodoun* gods, speak of their collective power and how they are going to teach the white Judeo-Christian world, via militant violence, to listen to their grief and acknowledge the toils they have endured under the evils of slavery. Depestre identifies "the stable" as the space where all

other blacks sit and wait in a collective, unified, but imprisoned mass, where Depestre challenges their white captors to allow them to remain « à la fin des temps » [to the rest of time] where, as slaves, they had « dansaient et fornicuaient » [dancing and fucking] (221; 55).¹ However, he decries that once the centuries-long curse of slavery had ended, it is only now that our poet can self-reflect. When he does so, he sees his naked body, and his eyes come to rest and contemplate his “phallus seditieux” [seditious cock], which he declares is not even his, nor is anything that spawns from wielding it:

« Ce navigateur au long cours n'est pas a moi
N'est pas a moi ce sperme lumineux
Et le petit ange noir qu'il lève en ton ventre »

[This long flowing navigator's not me
This luminous sperm, not me
And the little black angel it raises in your belly] (221; 55).

Thus, the poet concedes that black masculinity, defined by his ability to pleasure women and procreate, is controlled and owned by the white master.

The personal awakening that spurs the poet's venture into the fearsome realm of the white world transitions into a spiritual flight when the poet invokes the Haitian *loas* to join him in his revolt. One by one, the *loas* enter the scene and contextualize the deep South Alabama/Johannesburg setting into which our poet, Depestre himself, has descended. The featured loa are Ogou-Ferraille, Damballah-Wedo, Agoue-Taroyo, Guede-Nibo, Azaka-Mede, Agassou, Baron Samedi, Chango, Ti-Jean Sandor, and Loko, completing this section with the entrance of Cap-tain Zombi.

The poet's quest for redemption is contingent upon his ability to dispute the myths of the white Christian world and the mode of hegemonic masculinity exhibited by the Duvalier regime. Notably, the poet realizes that the Duvalier regime's reverence for

blackness under François Duvalier must be discredited if Haiti is to transcend the myths that attempt to posit certain identities or communities as immanent. Hence, Depestre's concern with *négritude* as a rallying ideology for Haiti emerges as the poet unravels the layers of his former identity in the form of all the myths and half-truths that have long been complicit in his people's subjugation.

It is only after the poet's exhaustive endeavor in which he exposes and untangles the myths that have obscured the truth of his history that he can begin to conceive of an existence that aligns with Nancy's ideal of community. If the culmination of the poet's journey marks the full interruption of the mythic community, then it is upon this climatic union of the poet with his fellow Haitians that a space can open to allow for the possibility of democracy for Haiti.

Interrupting the Myth of Racial, Religious, and Cultural Superiority

While Depestre's incorporation of *Vodoun* elements into his work serves to countermand derisive or dismissive attacks on this spiritual aspect of Haiti's culture, he does not strive to "Africanize" his poetry for the sake of creating that which is non-European in form. Rather, undergirding his poetic tone is a dialectic in which various competing binaries – black and white, Haitian and non-Haitian, Europe and the New World – are juxtaposed and deconstructed. What emerges from the rubble is not the triumph of the finite subjectivity of the Haitian citizen or the black man. Rather, this binary becomes negated in the pursuit of a universal humanism which hinges upon continuous transformation.

The invocation of *Vodoun* in the poem signifies a refusal of the forces of assimilation and an abandonment of European cultural influences. Thus, Depestre wields *Vodoun* as a discursive tactic that conjures up imaginings of a pre-colonized world. Depestre's depiction of *loas*, juxtaposed with his denouncement of Christianity, demonstrates how the spiritual celebration of the destructive institutions and weapons erected by the United States are emblematic of the evils of black magic. For example, the atomic bomb and the giant factories in which they are manufactured directly contrast with the positive and productive forces of *Vodoun*. In *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, Maya Deren explains that *Vodoun* must not be regarded as synonymous with magic; rather, as a religion, its predominant objective is to "direct the cosmic forces toward a collective public good" (59). In contrast to the notion of black magic, the performance of which usually aims to achieve selfish or personal ends upon disordering the cosmos, the fundamental objective of *Vodoun* is to effect some change or to provide support to some entity in the earthly realm through the invocation of cosmic forces. *Vodoun*'s dualistic nature as a force that is both productive and inhibiting steers the poet along his journey as he taps into his own syncretic creative power of the mind and spirit.

The poem is divided into five parts, beginning with the *Prélude*, in which the poet prepares us for his impending metamorphosis. He begins his descent into the South in a state of wrathful turmoil, and he sets out « frapper au visage les faux-dieux » [to drub the face of false gods] (108; 12). The poet foreshadows his transformation in which he will convert his sadness into a cacophonous tempest fueled by rage to wreak havoc on the white world. He names historical events in which blacks in the United States fought to debunk the myth of racial inferiority. For instance, he conjures up images of the Civil

Rights Movement by identifying himself with figures that represent those African-Americans who served on the frontlines of racial revolution in the United States. He embodies the form of « une petite fille/Qui traverse un torrent de fiel/Chaque matin pour se rendre à l'école! » [a little girl/crossing a torrent of hatred/every morning en route to school!] - a figure reminiscent of the black students of the “Little Rock Nine” who were threatened by an angry white mob in the United States in 1957 (108; 12). Furthermore, he compares himself to « le pasteur noir qui remue/Les cendres encore vives de son église » [the black preacher stoking/up some embers of his church] (108; 12). In identifying with the black preacher, the poet summons the iconic figure of Mr. Luther King Jr., the martyred revolutionary minister whose strength as a leader during the Civil Rights Movement required perseverance through violent acts of resistance that threatened to disempower the movement and weaken the collective will of black Americans. The poet then declares that he is « un grand jet d'huile sur le feu » [a great oilspray upon the fire], and appoints himself the trailblazer who will mobilize the revolt against the white dynastic order (112; 13). As he proceeds through each phase of his journey, he reveals his contempt for the oppression suffered by blacks in the American South, and promises to avenge this suffering through revolutionary action.

Following the poet's declaration that he will descend into the South and set fire to its inert institutions (churches, palaces, and banks), his imagination is bombarded with a dystopic vision of the horrors of the Middle Passage. He describes the haunting scene that invades his mind:

Des bateaux négriers sillonnaient en tout sens mon ciel. Quelque part en moi un haut-parleur racontait l'enfance de ma race. Les mots tombaient en flammes. Les mots crépitaient, se cognaient les uns aux autres comme des éperviers aveugles (112).

[In ever sense black slaveships wrinkled my sky. Somewhere in me a spinner of yarns told the childhood story of my race. The words fell in bits of flame. They crackled, fought with each other, like blind hawks] (13-14).

The deafening cries of his ancestors force him to confront his people's past sufferings, and he names the laws and practices that have created and sustained the myth of racial inferiority. Depestre describes how the trans-Atlantic slave trade engendered the myth of an original African homeland as a utopian paradise primed for the return of its stolen brethren, and he indicts the yearning for this homeland as the prime factor responsible for the divisiveness among his fellow Haitians. The problem with the idea of a universal African heritage or a homogenous black culture for Depestre is its concealment of the reality of the cultural autonomy of Haiti. Therefore, with the poet's descent into the South, he seeks to unveil those aspects of history that have hindered Haiti's democratic movements and weakened and denigrated its unique culture.

Depestre rails against the white world and condemns its hypocrisy in emphatic, rhythmic enunciations and affirms that he has begun his transformation. As he approaches the home of the Alabama family, the judge spots the poet, and despite his startled reaction, the poet remains unflappable, declaring, « J'étais un rocher dominant de très haut ce tumulte blanc » [I was a rock dominating this white confusion from a very high place] (112; 14). The poet's looming, steady presence implicates the family in its full participation « à tout ce qui/ Mène l'Amérique à la catastrophe » [taking complete part in all that/leads America to catastrophe], and in providing the three-fold sources of unfounded authority that uphold white dominance: Christianity, racist-terrorist sects, and false totems of freedom (114; 14). Throughout the journey, the family members are ritually possessed and castigated for their complicity in reproducing the mechanisms of

subjugation and control that have historically abused black bodies. Depestre criticizes the simplicity by which each family member has inherited his or her privilege and power in the world:

Le-fils-cadet-de-West-Point
Le-fils-qui-broutait-les-mirages-de-Yale-University
Le-fils-futur-sénateur-républicain-de-l’Alabama
Le-fils-futur-ambassadeur-à-Panama
Le-fils-qui-restera-à-la-maison-pour-surveiller-sur-les-posteleubles-de-l’idiotie-familiale (113-114)

[Kid-West-Point-cadet
Kid-browser-of-Yale-University-delusions
Kid-future-Republican-Alabama-senator
Kid-future-ambassador-to-Panama
Kid-stayawake-at-home-on idiot-family furniture] (14)

He identifies the family members by naming the social categories that have enabled their automatic succession to esteemed positions and institutions. Thus, by exposing the legacy of inheritance that has afforded the family its collective power throughout many generations, Depestre sheds light on the role that skin color plays in determining the value of one’s individual merit as well as his or her standing in the world. In doing so, he illuminates the hypocrisy surrounding the family’s privilege and exposes the absurdity of its fortunate effects on their lives by juxtaposing their hypocrisies with the symbols of false freedom that have vexed black Americans since the nation’s founding:

Une famille appelant à la rescousse
A la fois Jésus et le Ku-Klux-Klan
La Bombe H et la Chaise Electrique
Et la Statue de la Liberté (114)

[A family calling Jesus
the Ku-Klux-Klan
the H-bomb the Electric Chair
and the Statue of Liberty to the rescue!] (15)

The Statue of Liberty represents a false totem to the plight of the black race; although she is supposed to represent the United States's principles of life and liberty, the conditional application of such principles to only a fraction of the population is signified by the torture machines that have destroyed the bodies of all those who dared to challenge the white male hegemonic order.

Next, the poet promises to match the violence delivered to the Alabama family with a brutality that he himself vows to administer. The vitriol with which the poet communicates his plan of vengeance and readies himself for battle causes him to channel his anger into a self-affirming battle cry. The rage that fills his soul supplies him with the momentum needed to invoke memories from his people's history so that he can move forward along his journey. He declares : « Vos chiens je suis venu les empailler/Je suis venu empailler vos lois féroces/Je vais garder dans l'alcool vos prières/Vos ruses vos tabous vos histoires de blancs ! » [I have come to stuff your dogs/and here to stuff your savage laws with straw/I'm going to take your booze your prayers/your tricks your taboos and lilywhite history] (108). The poet's conceptualization of his own potential for change is situated in his ability to channel his self-worth into actions that will be revelatory in their destructiveness. His masculine power allows him the strength to combat protective agents – such as the “laws” of the white world – that to this point have safeguarded the members of the Alabama family and enabled them to perpetuate the hypocritical narratives that have historically validated their undeserved positions of power.

Depestre's concern with divesting Christianity of its false pretexts makes him especially conscientious about portraying *Vodoun* as a legitimate religion, and not a pagan practice of black magic that foils Christianity. Thus, the poet's invocation of

alcohol suggests that his through his transformation, Depestre will cleanse the South of all the impurities that are responsible for its evils:

Hier soir je l'ai [le petit Christ] noyé dans l'alcool
De même j'ai noyé les Tables de la Loi
De même j'ai noyé tous vos saints sacrements
Me voici un nègre tout neuf [...]/
Je me sens enfin moi-même
Dans ma nouvelle géographie solaire
Moi-même dans la grande joie de dire adieu
A vos dix commandements de Dieu
A vos hypocrisies à vos rites sanglants
Aux fermentations de vos scandales! (110)

[Last night I drowned the little Christ
smiling at me in alcohol
and the same for the Tablets of the Law
the same for all your sacred sacraments
Look at the new black me
Finally feeling myself
Decked out in new solar geography
incredibly happy to say goodbye
to your ten commandments of God
to your hypocrisies to your bloody rituals
to the ferment of your scandals!] (13)

In *Vodoun*, alcohol, or “fire-water”, evokes practices germane to rituals conducted during spiritual ceremonies. As Joan Dayan explains in the article “A Rainbow for the Christian West: Towards a Revolutionary Synthesis”, by submerging « le petit Christ » in the fire-water, the poet aims to vanquish the totems of Christianity that have suppressed his culture (50). With this ritualistic act of purification, the poet imagines a reinvented version of himself and declares that he is no longer at the mercy of the Christian West’s oppressive influence.

In *Vodoun*, man is constituted by a plurality of forces emerging from both the mortal and ancestral worlds that invigorate his spirit with strength. The poet compares his former dwelling, the « négrière » or “blackjail”, to a volcano (110; 13). Throughout the

poem, the trope of the volcano signifies the various ways in which the soul manifests throughout one's life. A volcano may exist as a smoldering inert state, it may release plumes of smoke into the atmosphere, or it may present itself in full regalia as it gushes streams of molten lava over its surrounding land. Nonetheless, inscribed in the concept of a volcano is its potential to erupt. The very essence of the volcano conceals the metamorphoses fomenting underneath its surface. Inevitably, a cataclysmic shift between tectonic plates incites an instantaneous swell of magma and its resultant outpouring upon the lands that surround it. Similarly, the metaphorical dichotomy of emotions that are at once concealed and raging in the poem illuminates the urgency of the poet's situation. He braces for the momentous shift on the eve of the revolution, knowing that his boiling anger will not remain fettered much longer.

The poet suggests that the slave-compound, or "blackjail", has remained dormant for centuries, but in truth, it has always been fermenting in the tempers and blood of its oppressed inhabitants. The poet's volcanic explosion signifies that Haitians have long awaited a phenomenal marriage of passions powerful enough to spur the volcanic eruption in the form of violent revolution. However, if certain conditions meet the appropriate degree of pressure, the man, like a volcano, may reach a stage in which his wrathful fury and resentment can be no longer remain dormant. Hence, although our poet has spent his life up to this point in a state of inert complacency, he proudly bursts forth, decrying the passive acceptance of his oppressed reality.

The myth of white superiority is further interrupted in the next phase of the poet's voyage. In « Les Epiphanies des dieux du vaudou », the *loas* orchestrate the poet's full penetration of Southern customs, as well as his voyage through the South, by performing

ceremonial rites that bring him through a series of profound metamorphoses. It is only after the *loas* return to their spiritual homeland in Dahomey that they can commence their venture into the South (Dayan 57). As the poet undergoes a series of possessions by various *loas*, he incorporates the disparate energies of the individual *loas* into a singular power.

Nancy's community is reflected in the ontological constitution of the *loas*'s unification. In *Vodoun* folklore, the epiphany of the *loas* that manifests in "real" physical form occurs when the body of a human being is mounted by a *loa*. However, in « Les Epiphanies », the Haitian *loas* appear independently of their human medium, which evokes the Christian sense of the corporeal manifestation of Jesus Christ. The appearances of the *loas* without their mortal mounting agents challenges the hegemony of the monotheistic Christian world by mirroring its modes of materialization germane to Christianity, while at the same time confronting it with its polytheistic presence. The anger, mockery, and erotic passions that consume the spirits of the *loas* incite a cathartic ecstasy, and propel the collective spiritual force on its mission to revitalize the past. In their wrathful fury, the *loas*'s conduct as a collective force is antithetical to the somber rites of a Christian ceremonial, but is imbued with the spiritual rhythms that accompany birth, death, and resurrection in the *Vodoun* cosmos.

We witness in rapid succession the poet's transition through each *loa*'s subjective experience, in which he becomes spiritually armed and ready for his next phase. Deren explains that throughout this phase, the poet's ego becomes displaced by his successive embodiment of one of the fundamental truths of *Vodoun*: "To understand that the self must leave if the *loa* is to enter, is to understand that one cannot be man and god at once"

(249). As the poet is mounted by each *loa*, he forsakes his own mortal power and acquiesces to their individual demands. Consequently, he cannot be held accountable for any action that he performs during his possessed state.

Nancy's notion of being singular plural is based on Heidegger's conception of the "with", which describes the permeability between the self and others. In *Rethinking Facticity*, François Raffoul quotes Nancy:

The intertwining of the limit and of the continuity between the several *there's* must determine proximity not as pure juxtaposition but as *composition* in a precise sense, which must rest on a rigorous construction of the *com-*. This is nothing other than what is made necessary by Heidegger's insistence on the character of a *with* that cannot be reduced to an exteriority (122-123).

The temporary suspension of control and consciousness is at once violent and sublime, in which the possessed individual's welcome of the spirits into his soul obscures the limits of subjectivity and renders him spiritually contiguous with the otherness of the individual *loa*.

The *loas* garner power from the elemental components of the earth (water, air, and natural disasters) and the mystical energies of the cosmos. Each *loa* performs a unique epiphany, and they obtain their power from the metaphysical realm of the cosmos and channel their energy through the Alabama family members, who are the ritual objects of the impending metamorphoses. In order to understand the interdependent dynamic of the *loas*, we must examine the representation of their synergy not from the perspective of the traditional dualism inherent to Western Christian notions of spirituality, but rather by examining each epiphany as constitutive of a larger orchestration of the spiritual world that transcends finite boundaries and prescribed functions. As Dayan explains, the elements of the *Vodoun* cosmos "are joined together across the boundaries we make to

separate them and are only definable as themselves in terms of other elements that differ from them. The cosmos is seen as a multidimensional series of images” (59). The union of the *loas* interweaves the past, present, and future into one chain of events in which the succession of epiphanies begins with the affirmation of each *loa*’s identity and culminates in their collective mission to supplant the American family’s antebellum home with a Haitian temple.

The procession of the *loas* begins with Atibon-Legba, who is always the first of the Haitian gods to be invoked in *Vodoun* ceremonies. Atibon-Legba’s spiritual transformation is necessary to interrupt the myth of black inferiority drastically and to reverse the process of zombification that has ravaged the black Haitian’s spirit. He occupies the locus between the mortal and spiritual realms, and serves as the messenger between the gods and the mortal world. The Haitian Atibon-Legba is aged and feeble, which contrasts drastically with the fecundative, sexually robust Legba of Dahomey. The wooden cane that is situated between his legs, which aids him as he walks, represents atibon-Legba’s waning phallic prowess. He announces that he arrives exhausted from his travels, which signifies the trials that the Haitians’ ancestors endured in their sojourn across the Atlantic during the Middle Passage (Dayan 122). According to Harold Courlander in *Drum and Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People*, in *Vodoun* cosmography, Mawi and Lisa, the progenitors of all Dahomean deities, charge Atibon-Legba with the task of visiting all the kingdoms ruled by Legba’s brothers so that he may return with an account of what happens in these places (263). Legba sets out to fulfill this cosmic objective upon entering the South, which renders him highly perceptive to all the ways in which Western culture is culpable for the decline of black heritage over time. His

penetration of the inhospitable white world is necessary to subvert the mystical foundation of the dominant white order. Legba scolds the white judge for failing to welcome him properly with a vèvè and the victuals necessary to invoke his powers during *Vodoun* ceremony (peanut oil, rum, mahi). He notes the absence of his culture's accoutrements in the white world:

Mes vieux os arrivent chez vous
O juge et ils ne voient pas
De bagui où poser leurs chagrins
Ils voient des coqs blancs
Ils voient des poules blanches
Juge où sont nos épices
Où est le sel et le piment
Où est l'huile d'arachide
Où est le maïs grillé
Où sont nos étoiles de rhum? (124)

[O judge my old bones are here
among your but they don't see any
sanctum where griefs can come
They see white cocks
They see white hens
O judge where are our spices
the salt and pimento
the oil of arachid
the broiled corn
where [are] our rum stars?] (19)

His lamentation of all that is missing is followed by his condemnation of the meaningless white possessions that surround him. He curses such objects, relegating them to the lowliest of ranks:

Au diable vos plats insipides
Au diable le vin blanc
Au diable la pomme et la poire
Au diable tous vos mensonges (125)

[The hell with your insipid dishes
the hell with your white wine
the hell with the apple and pear

and all your lying] (19)

The bland dishes, white wine, and white fruits represent the bloodless and spiritless objects of the white world, which signify its sterile mediocrity, and which lies in contrast to the vibrancy of his own Haitian culture. Finally, he declares that the whites' betrayals constitute the impetus of his mission to transform his accoutrements into weapons that he will wield to seek vengeance for the blood that the Whites have spilled. Legba then asserts that he requires the « pas virils d'homme » [virilities of man] in order to appropriate the energy necessary to spring fully into action (124; 19). He names several of his various manifestations, and to each he attributes a sword, which replaces one of the accompanying objects pertinent to each of these forms. Each sword corresponds to one of the twelve apostles, which signifies the poet's assimilation of Catholicism into *Vodoun* rituals. He vows « changer en pierre » [to change into sword] his « canne de bambou » [bamboo cane], his « grand chapeau de Guinée » [big Guinea hat], and the « tronc de médecinier » [medicine bag] (126; 20). Furthermore, his metaphorical denuding signifies his essential humanity, which interrupts the myth of racial superiority. Atibon-Legba's stripping away of his garnishments exposes him for what he essentially is – a human being – and for what he is *not* – a *white* human being. Thus, Legba denounces the arbitrariness of racial categories and their role in sustaining the damning myths associated with phenotypical otherness.

Upon affirming his impending voyage, the poet channels the forces of *Vodoun* to call upon the spiritual powers of the *loas* for support and guidance. He invokes the *loa* Agoué-Taroyo, « le grand monstre marin » whose animal manifestations vary according to his location on land or in the sea. The black fish is Agoué's marine incarnation, while

the earthly form that he adopts is a thorn-crowned wandering bear. The plural incarnations of Agoué constitute a cosmic avenue in which land and sea intersect to propel the wandering bear across the sea to the permanent home of the *loa*. As they traverse the sea, the bear and the poet cross over the permanent home of the *loa* by way of the *chemin d'eau*, which facilitates travel between the ancestral and living realms. In *Vodoun*, the cross is the cosmic mirror whose vertical and horizontal dimensions signify the two roads along which the *loas* travel. The vertical dimension represents the « le grand chemin » - the road that joins the path the *loas* take to the mortal world. The base of this vertical axis is anchored in the abysmal waters, the “island below the sea”, also known as Guinea, the legendary home of the *loa* (Courlander 19).

The poet rescues the bear and sails away from the South, pleased to discover « même les bêtes les plus mauvaises de la mer nous ouvraient la route! » and « les merveilles de la mer étaient avec nous! » [And even the wickedest seabests spreading a path!] and [the patience of the sea is with us!] (134; 22). His proclamation signifies the Christ-like bear’s resurrection from the oppressive clutches of white power and the beginning of his odyssey.

Thus, the paradox to this marine-terrestrial creature is that his multiple manifestations render him impenetrable and unconquerable. Furthermore, his Christ-like innocence ultimately allows him to traverse the abyss and announce his intentions to wield its tsunami-force to bring about an apocalyptic termination of the white world. Hence, the poet’s ability to change form and context upon his unification with the spiritual world interrupts the myth of the uni-dimensionality of the world occupied by white oppressors.

Cap'tain Zombi is perhaps the most militant of all the *loas* whose powers are invoked by the poet. He challenges the myth of Christianity's superiority by charging the Anglo-Christian world for the systematic and enduring deprivation of the same freedoms enjoyed by whites. Deren explains that according to Dahomean legend, the zombie is considered a macabre figure whose soulless body is resurrected for the purposes of performing slave labor for the living. The zombie is rendered devoid of "perception, evaluation, and self-control...A zombie is nothing more than a body deprived of its conscious powers of cerebration; for the Haitian, there is no fate more terrible" (83). In the poem, the figure of the zombie is invoked in the *loa* Cap'tain Zombi and signifies the state of being to which blacks have been reduced. Depestre's likening of the zombie figure to the reality of the Middle Passage illustrates how slave ships functioned as metaphorical graveyards in which black bodies were entombed in the innards of the ship until they reached the faraway lands of their future masters. Consequently, the stolen bodies underwent a "zombification" process in which destruction of the individual spirit constituted the objective of the white slavers. However, Cap'tain Zombi contradicts the trope of the spiritless unfeeling zombie by affirming that all of his senses are fully intact, and that he is primed and ready for the impending mission. In a series of hyperbolic statements, he declares:

Je bois par les oreilles
J'entends avec les dix doigts
J'ai une langue qui voit tout
Un odorat-radar qui capte
Les ondes du cœur humain (146)

[I drink with my ears
listen with ten fingers
have a tongue that sees everything
a radar sense-of-smell that attracts
human heart waves] (26)

Senses piqued, Cap'tain Zombi announces that he is prepared to employ his sixth sense, or his « odorat-radar » to detect the millions of buried Africans who have suffered and died as tortured slaves in Haiti. He claims responsibility for his dead brethren, and declares that their blood and bones constitute his very identity, while their memory imbues him with the fervor to seek revenge on behalf of their sufferings. He vicariously experiences the death of his people, which supplies him with the capacity to bridge his current zombified state with his ancestral past. In his own fetid, decaying state, Cap'tain Zombi declares:

Je broute les pâturages
De millions de morts miens
Je suis berger d'épouvante
Je garde un troupeau d'os noirs (146)

[I graze in pastures
with millions of my dead
I am shepherd of terror
watching over flocks of black bones] (26)

As the shepherd of this sea of dead souls, Cap'tain Zombi controls when and how the wrathful stampede across the frontier that separates the living and ancestral realms will take place. The collective voices of the victims of the past will be galvanized into a singular voice that will unleash its fury like a « typhon de bêtes fauves » [typhoon of wild beasts] in the rebellion that will resonate « sur tous les chemins du monde » [on all the world's highways] (146; 27). His allusion to the “world's highways” evokes images of the *Vodoun* crossroads that he must traverse in order to resurrect those who inhabit the

dimension of the living dead. He calls upon Saint Agassou, the powerful warrior spirit of the son of a Dahomean king and a forest leopard. According to Melville J. Herskovits in *Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom*, in Kréyol, Agassou is referred to as “Agassou de bo Miwa” (“Agassou the two-sided mirror”), in which one side faces Haiti, while the other faces the homeland of Voodoo in Guinea (283). As the progeny of a divine mating, Agassou was sent by Ayida Wedo to Haiti to bring the practice of *Vodoun* to her African children in order to alleviate their sufferings. The mirror is an important trope in *Vodoun*, as it signifies the pathway that connects the living and ancestral realms that enables the unification of their energies. Cap’tain Zombi envisions his past with the aid of the mirror, in which he imagines and remembers the plight that black people suffered after being torn from their ancestral origins and dragged across the sea. Now, he must overcome this anguish in order to imagine his people’s potential for revolution by returning to the waters associated with his ancestors’ home.

Cap’tain Zombi regards his brethren’s anguish as the life force that is situated at the core of his very being. Upon returning to his African origins, he hears his ancestors’ revived voices, which compels him to shed his zombie corpse and return to his human state. In contrast to the zombies, the dead souls to whom he calls upon are the ancestors whose spirits carry on in a rhythmic dance with the unceasing throbbing within his « cœur épique » [epic heart] (148). Biological life has ceased, but the life force of the ancestor persists. The sixth-sense that Cap’tain Zombi possesses refers to his newfound ability to communicate with the living dead of the earthly realm and the spiritual energies of the departed ancestors. Thus, the figurative frontier between the African and the white

world has been obscured by Cap'tain Zombi's ability to bridge the three spiritual realms into a solid and fertile ground out of which the next phase of the revolution can emerge.

« Le Bain du petit matin » follows the « Les Epiphanies des dieux du vaudou », and this ceremony cements the vows of revolution declared in the epiphanies into concrete plans of action. In the epilogue to « Les Epiphanies », we witness a meditative gesture of love and ritualistic benevolence depicted by each of the *loas*. Here, the « nègre-tempête » who we first met in the Prélude appears together with the *loas*, and our poet narrates the movements and sentiments of each singular *loa*. They assemble as a collective group in front of a large bathtub that the poet has filled with seawater. This bathtub, our narrator explains, serves several purposes. First, the water that fills it represents the ocean waters that were crossed during the Middle Passage, and is « la même écume que nous avons traversée avec nos fers, il y a trois siècles! La même houle verte où nous avons lancé la dernière rose de l'espérance des Noirs ! » [the same spume we've crossed for three centuries in irons! The same green billow we've cast the last rose of Blacks' hope upon!] (162; 32). Furthermore, the water's cleansing properties signify hope for a future in which the poet's people can be purified of the fears blacks have endured for the years spent toiling and suffering in the oppressive clutches of their white masters. He credits water for its ability to fight « hystéries, vos manies, vos trahisures, vos verroteries morales, vos blanches superstitions, et tout ce cannibalisme réputé incurable qui, en chacun de vous, mâles et femelles du Sud, crie dans le désert sa vieille insatisfaction » [hysterias, manias, treacheries, your moral glassware, your white superstitions and all that reputedly incurable cannibalism which, in each of you men and women of the South, howls in the desert its old dissatisfaction], and he calls upon each

loa to present « la goutte de rosée de sa sagesse haïtienne! » [a dewdrop of Haitian wisdom] into the tub of water (162; 32). Each dewdrop evokes objects and images associated with the *loas*'s unique spiritual powers and their African ancestral heritage. For example, Loko-Carrefour's « sept gouttes de larmes recueillies dans les yeux d'un garçon lynché dans une ville de l'Alabama! » [seven teardrops collected in the eyes of a kid lynched in an Alabama city!] (164; 33). After each *loa* has contributed something to the water, the poet declares the water primed and ready to « vaincra vos délires » [vanquish your deliriums] and imbued with the power to go forward with « tous les charmes de l'espérance ! » [stirs with all the charms of hope!] (164; 33). Once he affirms that the bathwater has been completely purified, the female *loas* enter the scene in the next phase (« Cantate pour sept voix » [Cantata for Seven Voices]) and proceed to exorcise the white deliriums from their lives. The Haitian goddesses gather and sing odes to their male *loa* counterparts, in turn revealing the gods' destination. For the first time throughout the drama, the revolutionary objective of the *loas* is articulated:

Nos *loas* marchent ce soir
 Dans le sang d'un poète (170)

[Our *loas* tonight are flowing
 in the blood of a poet] (36)

The goddesses affirm the objective of their male counterparts' descent into the living realm, and each of the female *loas* reveals her own fears concerning the whereabouts of the men and the mystery surrounding their collective absence. Mama Simbi, also known as « Simbi-en-deux-eaux » [Simbi in two waters] straddles the waters of both the ancestral and abysmal waters where the *loas* reside. The poet informs us that Simbi is

granted the greatest powers of revelation, and she reveals to the other female *loas* that the male *loas* have ventured off to follow a poet, who pursues a rainbow.

Following the cantata, the poet draws upon the memories of past African and Haitian heroes in a series of Odes that conclude the section titled « Sept piliers de innocence » [Seven Pillars of Innocence]. Each of the Odes brings about a spiritual reincarnation of legendary heroes and martyrs through the narration of each named hero's biography and contribution to the black revolution. The female *loas* recall moments in history in which these famed men executed subversive and often violent plots in the fight for black liberation. Finally, the Odes serve as a meditative pause in our poet's revolutionary journey, and they reinvigorate the poet with the desire to follow in the footsteps of his courageous precursors.

The different historical narratives that are presented in the Odes not only tell of the remarkable lengths to which the heroes of the black struggle have gone to defend their race, but considered in their totality, they provide a comprehensive lesson on the ways in which these heroes have subverted the reigning modes of hegemonic masculinity that characterize the eras in which they each lived. In each ode, the featured hero implicates and subsequently defies those responsible for terrorizing, torturing, and enslaving their people. Curiously, the odes are ordered anachronistically, beginning with the Ode to François Mackandal and culminating in the elegy of Malcolm X. Still, the significance of the Odes' order of appearance reflects Depestre's own evolution of character. The traits that are pertinent to each of the lauded heroes parallels the poet's own development, in which he acknowledges his own turbulent journey that led him to his current revolutionary mindset. Beginning with Mackandal, whose wildly bold scheme

set the standard for Haitian revolution, the female *loas* come forth and present their eulogies in celebration of the feats of Péralte Charlemagne, Patrice Lumumba, Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Antonio Maceo, and Malcolm X.

We begin with Ayizan's invocation of the memory of François Mackandal, a legendary Maroon chieftain in Haitian history whose leadership preceded that of Toussaint Louverture. Mackandal is known to have plotted to exterminate the white population in Saint Domingue in efforts to declare black independence on the island of Hispanola. As Ralph Korngold explains in *Citizen Toussaint*, Makandal conceived of a "poison-plot" to combat slavery in Haiti by distributing thousands of packets of poison among all the blacks in Saint Domingue with orders that they poison any food or beverage the whites were likely to ingest on a selected day. Then, when most of the whites had died, he conspired to descend onto the island from the mountains and eliminate any remaining survivors (43-44). Although Makandal's scheme never came to fruition, it is considered the boldest revolutionary plan conceived of by a Haitian prior to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804).

Ayizan declares Makandal the first « A faire un usage marin de ses semences » [to make seaworthy use of his seed], suggesting that Makandal's rallying conviction and rebellious foresight awards him the title of Haiti's first Black Hero (192; 44). Ayizan describes Makandal as « le premier volcan à donner son adhésion/À tout ce qui conspire contre le colon blanc » [first volcano making them adhere/to everything conspiring against the white colonial] which signifies the degree to which he [Makandal] can, without concession, align his own rebellious passions against whites (192; 44). Thus, for revolution to occur, Depestre suggests that a decisive leap takes place in which the enemy

becomes categorically reduced to a singular entity and charged with being uniformly complicit in creating and perpetuating the institutions responsible for the subjugation of black bodies.

In the next ode, Aida Wedo recalls the Haitian Revolution of 1791, which took place in Bois de Cayman and began during a *Vodoun* ceremony on August 14, 1791. The Revolution was led by Toussaint Louverture, who Aida Wedo describes as « l'aïeul de tout ce qui sur cette terre marche vers le printemps » [the grandfather of everything on this earth that travels towards springtime] (194; 44). Toussaint is lauded as Haiti's most esteemed hero, and Aida Wedo invokes fantastical metaphors in which we imagine the hero as the progenitor of revolt:

On le voit jour et nuit grimper
Sur les grands arbres de la douleur nègre
Ou il dépose les œufs frais de la révolte
Tantôt sa marche est une tortue qui porte sur son dos un Rameau d'olivier (194)

[Night and day he is seen climbing
the tall trees of black sorrow
laying fresh eggs of revolt there
Then his way becomes a turtle carrying an olivebranch on its back] (45)

Toussaint is associated with symbols indicating various stages of revolt, from the « les œufs frais » [fresh eggs] of the earliest stages of rebellion to the « Rameau d'olivier » [olivebranch], that is extended in the name of surrender and in the anticipation of peace.

Aida Wedo denotes the fleetingness of slavery's physical sufferings, and she preempts our quivering doubts by reminding us that slavery's victims inevitably learn that « les mains à fouet sont mortelles » [hands with whip are mortal], and that the perpetrators of violence against Black bodies are ultimately no match for « des poumons

géants » [giant lungs] that embolden « la colère nègre » [the black wrath] (196; 45).

Wedo repeats the parting words spoken by Toussaint to his fellow Haitians when he boarded the ship that was destined to carry him to his exile at Fort de Joux near the French-Swiss border:

En me renversant, on n'a abattu à Saint-Domingue que le tronc de l'arbre de la Liberté des Noirs ; il repoussera par les racines, parce qu'elles sont profondes et nombreuses ! (196)

[By defeating me at Santo Domingo they have merely brought down the trunk of the tree of Black Liberty; but it will grow again from the roots for they are profound and numerous!] (45)

Finally, she declares that with Toussaint's exile, the first seeds of Haitian rebellion were planted. Thanks to Toussaint's rebellion, revolutionary actions grew into a force to be reckoned with, as « le fouet perdait ses ailes » [the whip has lost its wings] (196; 45).

Wedo recalls how the spirit of rebellion found its source in the visceral urges and passions of the people, and how it evolved into a regenerative power that would be redeemed thirteen years later, when the nation would become the first black republic in the New World:

Et la liberté pour la première fois
Pour la faim des nègres
Pour la soif des nègres
Pour la joie des nègres
Plantait des arbres fruitiers! (196)

[And for the first time liberty
for black hunger
for black thirst
for black joy
plants its fertile trees!] (45)

The brief anecdotal renderings of Mackandal and Toussaint's pasts prepare us to ally with the poet and accompany him on his quest to emulate his heroes. The memories of

these famed revolutionaries constitute a point of reference from which it is possible to henceforth evaluate the poet's subsequent revolutionary actions in terms of Derrida's conception of responsibility.

The historical leap from the incipient grumblings of revolution concocted by Mackandal in the 1750s to the early twentieth century draws our attention to the spirit of revolt, and underscores the extensive period of time during which Haiti has been at the mercy of external authoritarian regimes. *Vodoun* worship, as it is practiced in Haiti, comes from Benin. *Loas* are most often organized into families, and "Guédé" is the family that embodies the powers of death and fertility. In Haitian folklore, as it is seen in this poem, Guédé Mazaka l'Orage is the form of death that reflects the phonetic characteristics of Haitian *Kréyol*. Guédé Mazaka l'Orage represents Charlemagne Péralte, who was a chief of the "caco" organized armed resistance against the American Occupation. He was assassinated in 1918 when the tension between the American troops and the *caco* resistance fighters intensified to the point that United States marines were sent in to reinforce the Haitian *gendarmie* to combat the rebel fighters.³

The female *loa* who provides Guédé Mazaka l'Orage's ode, tells of the torturous, disheartening effect that the American Occupation had on Haitian culture:

Quand le cœur d'Haïti s'ouvrit en forme de croix
Et qu'il n'y eut plus d'azur dans ses paroles
Quand le sel s'enfuit de son pain en poussant des cris d'enfant blessé (202)

[When the heart of Haiti opened in the form of a cross
and there would no longer be bluesky in his words
when the salt fled from his bread to chase the cries of the wounded child] (47)

In the *Vodoun* practice of zombification, the denial of salt sustains the zombie state of being, as salt is the vital force of nourishment.⁴ Guédé Mazaka l'Orage explains that the

Occupation silenced « le langage créole » so as to dismiss the Haitian people's lamentations of their oppression, hunger, and joblessness. With « le feu qui brillait dans ses yeux » [flame burning in its eyes], Guédé Mazaka l'Orage describes Charlemagne's role in reclaiming the Haitians' language of self-affirmation. Charlemagne transformed the people's voice into weapons of resistance:

Lui seul savait des mots qui respiraient encore
Des mots qui pouvaient encore se tenir debout
Bien droits avec des grenades dans les mains
Des mots qui pouvaient imiter le vent marin
Et emporter nos jours dans leurs courants sonores! (202)

[He who alone knew the words that went on breathing
words that were still able to give meaning a stand
those rights with grenades held in the hand
words that were the mimesis of the sea wind
sweeping our days along in their deeptoned currents!] (48)

Guédé Mazaka speaks of Charlemagne's violent approach to resisting the neo-colonial presence of the Americans, in which he conceived of the need for the unification of the spiritual energies of the gods into « une seule patte/Pour broyer leurs dogmes cruels » [one single paw [of our gods]/To crush their cruel dogmas] in order to transform his fellow Haitians into rage-filled « mangeurs de Yankees » [yankee devourers] (204; 48). She concludes her elegy to Charlemagne by telling of how his leadership permanently transformed the limbs of the Haitians into corporeal weapons, in which they became equipped and psychologically prepared « voler, ramper, feuler » in order to climb « les arbres de la révolte » [fly, crawl, set fire/calmber up the trees of revolt] (204; 48). Thus, Charlemagne's success is credited to his ability to stir up revolutionary fervor by way of reclaiming the power of his own language and renouncing the language imposed on his people by their northern oppressors.

Erzili, the Haitian goddess of love and beauty, introduces Jean-Jacques Dessalines' legacy. A former slave and Touissant's successor, Dessalines ousted the French army from the island and led the nation to independence on January 1, 1804 (Dubois 15). Erzili likens Dessalines' slavery-worn, scarred body to the sea on a stormy day, whose waters' undulations are imbued with justice, and whose waves move in ordinance with the liberty of his fellow slaves. Dessalines provokes his fellow Haitians to « sois un peuple incendiaire » [be an incendiary people] so that they may channel their collective power into one singular, tsunami-like wave to drown the enemy and eradicate it from their island:

Voici le moment d'avoir devant nos pas un seul rendez-vous : le feu
Une seule volonté : celle du feu au bout de la nuit de nos bras ! (198)

[Now's the time for the only rendezvous left: The Flames
The only urge: to flame out at the end of the night of our arms!] (46)

Dessalines succeeded in rallying the people behind the single conviction that Haiti must obtain freedom from its white colonizers. Shortly following the achievement of independence in January 1804, Dessalines called for the execution of all French people on the island, a systematic genocide carried out between February to April 1804 and referred to as the 1804 Haitian massacre (Dubois 404).

As a former slave, Dessalines's revolutionary fervor was fueled by his deep-seated contempt for and distrust of all white French people on the island. Although few generations of mixed-blood Haitians had yet been born and reared on the island, Dessalines' reductive demarcation of genealogical color lines rendered the genocide of the white oppressor a fairly straightforward and uncomplicated endeavor. Thus,

Dessalines's sweeping indictment of all of the country's white inhabitants mirrored the colonizers' similar practice of assigning value and virtue to white skin.

Caridad del Cobre, or La Vierge Caridad, goddess of the sea, travels backwards in time to shed light on Antonio Maceo, the Cuban revolutionary who fought for Cuba's independence from Spain throughout the Ten Years' War (1868-1878). Maceo was exiled to Haiti and then returned to Cuba to take command of the rebel forces when revolt broke out again in 1895. Caridad sings his praises and depicts Maceo as a complex man whose success can be attributed to his mild manner and predilection for peace. As Caridad del Cobre tells it, Maceo advances in his revolutionary fervour accompanied in spirit by other diasporic revolutionaries. Here, Depestre names nineteenth and twentieth century revolutionary leaders of the Americas: Simón Bolívar of Venezuela, Bernardo O'Higgins of Chile, Benito Juárez of Mexico, José de San Martín of Argentina, and Abraham Lincoln, and John Brown of the United States. Upon achieving liberty for Cuba from Spain, Caridad del Cobre asserts that Maceo has returned to Haiti and is « enfin chez lui, dans son élément même » [finally at home, in his own element] content with his achievements, and that whenever he looks toward his homeland, he envisions a Cuba whose people are imbued with the spirit of revolution and who are no longer « plus honte de son sang complice de la mer » [no longer ashamed of his blood's sea-confederacy!] (200; 47). Caridad's return to the past at this stage in the series of odes invokes the collective memory of revolutionary pioneers who fought against the history of colonialization and its detrimental effects on people of color within the African diaspora.

Mama Simbi, who possesses the greatest powers of revelation, presents the Ode to Patrice Lumumba. As wife of Papa Simbi, Mama Simbi shares her husband's powers,

which are associated with the heavenly and abysmal waters. Simbi depicts her subject as a « palmier royal » [royal palm] whose « soif d'Afrique » [thirst for Africa] will be quenched by her nurturing energies, and whose life-giving waters sustains the crusade against Africa's ongoing resistance to its European colonizers (204; 48). Depestre's abrupt shift in focus from Haiti to Africa is significant on multiple levels. First, the previous two odes establish a framework for understanding that Haiti's venerable history in the fight for black independence was homegrown, and that the brave rebel leaders who drove the masses into widespread rebellion possessed an extraordinary resolve to liberate their people. Furthermore, the poet's curious return to the original homeland and his forward leap in history situates Haiti within the tragic diasporic legacy of black oppression, and directs our attention to the modes of resistance employed by other notable revolutionaries.

Mama Simbi's ode to Lumumba alludes to the history of the struggle for the Congo's independence under Patrice Lumumba's leadership. She denounces the political upheaval in the Republic of the Congo that plagued the nation with conflict and unrest in the early 1960s. Lumumba, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the country, achieved independence for Congo as leader of the MNC (Mouvement national congolais) party. However, within three months of gaining independence, Lumumba's government was deposed during a coup during the 1960-1965 Congo Crisis. In *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity*, Kevin C. Dunn explains that the series of civil wars that describe the Congo Crisis started after the Congo achieved independence from Belgium. In the chaos that followed Congo's independence, Lumumba appealed to the

Soviet Union for assistance, which divided the Congolese government and led to a rift between Lumumba and the President, Joseph Kasa-Vubu.

She refers to Patrice Lumumba as a « coq-tempête du Congo » [tempest cock o' the Congo] on whose soul « Tous les malheurs de l'Afrique sont peints...un tatouage fantastique de mensonges et d'atrocités » [All Africa's misfortunes painted...a fantastic tattoo of lies and atrocities] (204; 49). Furthermore, she describes Lumumba as a beautiful martyr who died defending his land from « toutes sortes de rois étrangers » and « l'UNION-MINIERE-DU-HAUT-KATANGA » [the MINERS UNION OF UPPER-ATANGA] and the « loa milliardaire qui se nourrit seulement de métal arrosé de sang 'homme noir' » [millionfold loa living only upon the metal soaked in the blood of the black man] whose exploitative interests in the resources of Africa left Lumumba no choice but to fight to the death against « Le-nègre-écorcheur-et-vendeur-de-nègre » [the black-fleecer-and-black-vender] (206; 46).

Simbi decries African presidents who lack the ethical judgment of leaders like Lumumba. She declares that such tyrants are motivated by selfish interests that are pursued in the name of maintaining relationships with their European imperialist colonizers, and who will inevitably drive the continent into a land of « la négraille d'espèce rampante » [crawling crows of that species] who « vend avec ardeur des actions sur chaque goutte de sang lumumbien » [passionately sellout their shares of every drop of lumumbian blood] (206; 49). Finally, Simbi portrays Lumumba as a heroic champion of freedom whose legacy as a compassionate, forthright leader will be remembered long after his death:

Ainsi l'Afrique le vit passer
Dans la fumée de son combat

Un nègre-phare un nègre-étoile
Un nègre-arbre-fruitier
Qui dépassait d'un feuillage
Les plus hautes vagues de la mer
Et l'invincible tendresse des hommes! (208)

[So Africa passes
on into the smoke of its struggle
a black-beacon a black-star
a black-fruitful-tree
rising above the highest
waves of the foliage of ocean
and man's invincible-----tenderness!] (50)

Despite Lumumba's tragic death, Simbi suggests that his struggle was not in vain, as his admirable heroism exceeds beyond his mortal life. Simbi compares him to a lofty, towering tree, replete with lush foliage and towering above the world in all his glory. His towering presence represents Lumumba's indomitable integrity and unshakeable vision, and thus what persists beyond his mortal life is the memory of his « invincible tendresse » (208).

Simbi distinguishes between Lumumba and black leaders who maintained their power by pandering to European colonizers. Specifically, she compares Lumumba to Moïse Tschombé, the pro-Western leader of the Congo whose reconciliation with Belgium opposed Lumumba's belief in the necessity of severing ties with their European oppressor if Congo hoped to transcend the oppression and exploitation that the Congolese suffered under Belgian rule. Thus, Lumumba's character directly contradicted the forms of hegemonic masculinity embodied by less radical African leaders who failed to contest their nation's paternalistic dependency on European powers. Regrettably, Lumumba came to age during a political era that was unprepared and not ready for his direction. Nonetheless, Simbi's ode attributes Lumumba's mastery of the precious balance of tender

compassion, incorruptibility, and his steadfast will to fight and die in the name of liberty, as defining traits of an ideal revolutionary hero.

The final ode conjures up the memory of Malcolm X, the American black rights activist who signifies the antithesis of the American Southern white family. As the wife of Baron Samedi, the *loa* who presides over the realm of the dead, Grande Brigitte is charged with singing praises to the American black revolutionary. She describes Malcolm X as a teetotaler who « haïssait le mensonge et le vol et les Blancs » [hated lies and theft and Whites], but whose deep sadness and sagacious disposition inevitably led him to transform his hatred towards whites into a deeper understanding of the underlying source of their evils (208; 50). Grande Brigitte tells us that Malcolm X's opinions of whites evolved and inevitably led him to conclude that « ...tous les Blancs / Ne sont pas des loups et des serpents » [...not every White/was a wolf or a serpent]. She then traces the history of racial strife to the timeworn rift between Christianity and Islam and asserts that Malcolm X's tears

...traversent le temps et les pays
Elles coulent avec les fleuves les plus vieux
Elles coulent sur les murs de Jérusalem
Et se mêlent aux légendes les plus vieilles
Elles font le tour de la Bible et du Coran (208)

[...crossing ages and nations
flowing with the oldest streams
flowing to the walls of Jerusalem
mingling with the most ancient myths
walking in The Bible and The Koran
which became islands in the depth of his sorrow] (50)

Grande Brigitte tells us that Malcolm X is murdered for his brazen, sagacious proclamation upon going out into the streets of Harlem and accusing whites of being the progenitors of hatred. The goddess takes liberties in recounting Malcolm X's fate to

honor his martyr status. Similar to the figures who preceded him in the odes, Malcolm X's sweeping allegation calls for a full-fledged revolution to discredit the ill-begotten powers of white colonizers whose justification of the conquering and destruction of non-white civilizations was based on their claim to a divine Christian mandate.

Depestre presents his comprehensive treatise on blackness in « Aphorismes et paraboles du nouveau monde » [Aphorisms and Parables of the New World]. Here, the poet names and subsequently denies the brutal sufferings inflicted on Africans beginning with the slave trade and continuing on to contemporary times in the United States and Haiti. In a curiously counterintuitive rhetorical gesticulation, the poet denies that the slave trade ever happened at all.

La Traite des Noirs n'a pas eu lieu. C'est l'invention d'un historien dément... On n'a jamais eu à grande échelle le souci commercial de les réifier, de les changer en bois-d'ébène, en minerai noir, et d'ouvrir avec eux, dans mille ports, de florissances marchés (210).

[Slavetrade never occurred. It's the invention of a demented historian... There never was that grand-scale commercial anxiety about refining and changing them into ebony and black ore, and inaugurating the flourishing markets... large scale commercial effort to reify them, to change them into ebony-wood, into black ore, to open flourishing markets of a thousand ports with them] (52).

The denial of the history of slavery ironically forces a cognitive supplanting of lies for the truth, which has the effect of temporarily suspending belief. This compels the reader to consider the horrors of slavery from a new perspective. The poet denies the mechanisms employed in the slave trade by avowing that the bodies were never « palpés, pesés et soupesés » [handled, weighed, or rummaged] during their sale on the auction block, and he subsequently repudiates the torturous sufferings that his ancestors endured (210; 52). He exclaims that « on n'a pas versé sur leurs plaies vives de la poudre à canon et du piment pilé » [Gunpowder and crushed pimento have not been poured on their vivid

wounds], and that « La Guerre de Sécession n’a pas eu lieu » [the War of Succession never took place] (210; 52). The poet’s retelling of black history shifts from his denial of the visceral sufferings inflicted on black bodies to his narration of the evolution of psychological abuse suffered by blacks after slavery was outlawed. He disavows the double alienation of the black race « en tant que force de travail et en tant qu’être au pigment coloré » [as a labor-force and as a group with a colored pigment], and compares slaves to bags of coal, which signifies the objectification of their bodies as the nonrenewable resource that fueled the aggrandizement of America’s wealth:

Au siècle dernier
Les Etats-Unis possédaient à eux seuls
Plus de quatre millions de sacs de charbon
Les colonies portugaises deux millions au moins
Les colonies espagnoles plus de six cent mille
Les colonies françaises plus de deux cent cinquante mille (214)

[In the last century
The United States alone took possession
of more than four million coalsacks
the portuguese colonies just under two million
the spanish colonies more than six hundred thousand
the french colonies more than two hundred fifty thousand] (53)

The millions of « sacs de charbon » that were traded and sold during this era underscores the conflation of the singular black body with its commodity value, and therefore the reduction of the individual to the collective totality of slave-laborers disavows its humanity.

La métaphysique donnait aux esclaves noirs une âme égale à celle des chrétiennes-vivants blancs. La douce charité, elle, détestait l’esclavage. La politique moins douce, l’adorait. Charité et politique à bord au même bateau négrier sillonnèrent les mers!... (216-217)

[Metaphysics gives to black slaves a soul equal to that of living white christians. Sweet charity loathed slavery. Politics, less sweet, adored it. Charity and politics in the same slaveship plough the seas!...] (54)

Here, the poet indicts Christianity and its purveyors for establishing the pretext under which white Europeans invaded Africa and stole its people.

Next, the poet declares that black bodies have not been lynched in « /Paris Rome Madrid Lisbonne Bruxelles/Toronto Los Angeles Miami le Cap Sydney » (212; 53). The succession of cities to which the poet will visit signifies his manic impulse to spread the revolutionary word far and wide, unapologetically and without constraint in his mission to expose the white world for all the ways it has wreaked havoc on the black psyche.

Depestre thereafter brings our attention to Omaha, Nebraska in « Pour un nouvel âge du cœur humain » [For a New Age of the Human Heart]. This final section is divided into three sub-sections, the first of which is called « Les Dieux atomiques d’Omaha » [The Atomic Gods of Omaha]. The poet reveals that he has been called upon to band together with the Haitian gods and face the white world’s seemingly impenetrable forces. They find themselves in Omaha, spiritually devoid of the energy and willpower necessary to carry forth on their mission. The poet discloses the daunting situation that he faces in Omaha, and upon assessing the sterile environment of the city, they quickly realize that they have descended upon an inhospitable wasteland that is occupied by « Les grands dieux de l’âge nucléaire/Les fabricants de soleils homicides » [The great gods of the nuclear age/The creators of the homicidal suns]. These “great gods” refer to the nuclear bombs created at the Offutt Air Force Base located at the headquarters of the United States’ Strategic Air Command. However, these manmade monsters intimidate the Haitian *loas*, who cluster around the poet to seek his protection.

The poet declares that he will explain to his gods that the purpose of these barbaric machines is to destroy all aspects of existence, from human beings to the foods

which nourish the human body, to all other forms of life – conceptual and tangible, mundane and monumental – that constitute the world in which humans live. Although the *loas* are braced and ready to invade the white world with a vengeance, the deathly structures that they encounter constitute a labyrinth replete with dead ends, traps, and technological webs that constrain and weaken them. Omaha, the site where « Que l’homme avec ardeur prépare la fin de l’homme/... L’homme a cédé sa place à un peuple de monstres » [the man of fire prepares for the end of man/...man has surrendered his place to a race of monsters] and in which there are « sous nos yeux les merveilleux robots » [under our eyelids the marvelous robots] who have lived for many years under the sea (224; 58).

The juxtaposition between the two opposing conceptions of Omaha is a metaphor for the deeply divisive rift between the founding principles of the United States and the violent militaristic tactics employed to maintain the bulwark that secures the nation’s superpower status. If we consider that Omaha is situated in the heart of America’s breadbasket, then the city can be regarded as the locus of Midwestern American values, whose “fields of grain” have been cultivated by generations of humble, hard-working, salt-of-the-earth farmers. However, the poet reports that *his* Omaha is the site of toxicity and evil, where atomic bombs are manufactured and where the Strategic Air Command is headquartered. He characterizes the West as favoring power, reason, and science over emotions, intuition, and faith, therefore suggesting that the West is the antithesis to Haiti, which he characterizes according to its spirituality and life-giving forces.

The unifying song of love that is presented in « Notre-dame des cendres » symbolizes the loss of the poet’s innocence and his aim to conceive of a new humanism

that unifies rather than divides. At this point, the poet galvanizes the other *loas* and establishes a plan to battle the nihilistic city of mechanistic denigration. The poet directs his attention to his female muse, the mortal goddess and figure of redemption to which he refers as « douce Hélène de la connaissance » [sweet Helen of knowledge] (230).

Initially, the goddess's tranquil demeanor tempers the poet, prompting him to quell his fiery rage and redress his perspective on his personal agency in combatting the forces of mass destruction.

The name "Helen" symbolizes the Christian female figure of the White Virgin. Helen represents a multitude of manifestations of the poet's consciousness, which we discover through her various monikers: « Notre-dame des cendres » [Our Lady of Ashes], « Douce Hélène végétale » [Sweet agrarian Helen], « Douce étoile Venus de nos peines » [sweet venus star of our people] (230; 60). This pluralism signifies how the goddess's transcendence of demographic, national, and ethnic categories contrasts with the singular purpose of the atomic bomb's destructive potential. Whereas the atomic bomb is the product of man's perversion of science and intellectual capabilities, the poet sets out to subvert this perversity through his incarnation of knowledge as woman (Dayan 98-99).

In a curious shift in tone, Depestre likens Helen to an atomic bomb, conflating the tick-tock of the bomb with her beating heart. Accusing her of spawning « Les Méphistos de l'atome » [Mephistos of the atom], he laments how deeply « O douce Hélène de la connaissance » [O sweet Helen of knowledge] has saddened him by allowing herself to be violated by the barbaric gods.⁵ He invokes Helen to deny that she has forsaken her Haitian gods in favor this barren, « fabrique géante de cendres » [giant mill of ashes] in

order to return to her real homeland and once again assume the position of « princesse au bord de la mer » [princess of the sea depths] (230; 60). He promises that he's ready and willing to forgive her for her years of fornicating with the pimps who frequent the « lupanar atomique d'Omaha » [Omaha atomic brothel], and implores her to return to Haiti « régner sur nos phares les plus familiers » [to reign on our most familiar beacons] and ultimately, « lever avec nos plus tendres marées/Un nouvel âge du cœur humain! » [Return and raise our tenderer high tides /A new age of the human heart!] (232; 61).

The poet pleads with Helen that she return to her native land and bid adieu to America, and suggests that if she does not leave, there will forever exist a chasm between her true self and the multitude of fragmented selves that languish aimlessly in this foreign and wretched land. The goddess concedes, and her goodbye to Omaha echoes the poet's own initial declaration in the « Prélude » :

Moi-même dans la grande joie de dire adieu
A vos dix commandements de Dieu
A vos hypocrisies à vos rites sanglants
Aux fermentations de vos scandales! (110)

[incredibly happy to say goodbye
to your ten commandments of God
to your hypocrisies and bloody rites
to the ferment of your scandals!] (13)

The poet affirms « Il n'y a de salut pour l'homme » [there is salvation for man] in the final section called « Romancero d'une petite lampe » [Battle of a Little Lamp]. He declares that although he himself is unremarkable in his own singular existence as a « un brin d'herbe solitaire » [a blade of solitary grass], he is certain that his black brethren will find joy upon taking the leap towards fighting for liberty in spite of his own sufferings and slanderous condemnations which have placed him « au dernier rang des bêtes de

proie » [last in line of beasts of prey] and whom « la médiocrité poursuit/Nuit et jour à pas de sanglier » [I whom mediocrity hounds/ night and day like a wild boar] (234; 61-62). He further vows that he will advance as the « berger de [ses] révoltes » [lover of revolts], and confesses that his faith in the manifestation of his dreams compels him to nurture this faith as if it were a human child. Finally, he implores us to consider his poetic prophecy not as that which has been written in vain and which languishes “Sur la dalle de la douleur” [the slab of sorrow], but as a kind of scripture which shall be regarded instead as a « une petite lampe haïtienne » [little Haitian lamp] that is capable of rising above its troubled history, to achieve liberty « dans la verte innocence/De tous les hommes! » [free in the green innocence/all men!] (236; 61).

The poet’s emphasis on his own singular insignificance and the diminutive size of Haiti is juxtaposed with the enormity of the atomic beasts in Omaha, which suggests that in spite of the stark contrast between the external measures of power communicated to us by their sheer difference in size and physical power, the collective might of those who are inclined towards justice can effect change.

Next, he stresses the urgency of this dire situation by naming the day on which the atomic bombs will be launched, which illuminates the revolutionary demand that immediate direct action to be taken to combat the threatening monsters. The final passages of his poem constitute a prescriptive vision for how Depestre conceives of the nature and consequences of this action. The objective of the poet’s final invocation for cooperation with the United States, his « frère terrible », is to focus on the hope for a love that can transcend all categorical divisions and unify humankind. The fecundate power of taking action in the name of love is analogous to the symbol of the rainbow, which,

according to the Christian fable of Noah's Ark, was God's vow never again to unleash a catastrophic flood onto the world and obliterate humanity. The « plus tendres marées » [most tender floods] signify the spiritual forces of water, which holds the power to cleanse hate and evil and advance humankind through its ever-mobile currents, and build new worlds through the sediment it carries.

In summary, the rainbow signifies the voice of the future, and its earthly parallel is the collective of tender floods which carry with it the unifying love of the heart – the only means by which Depestre conceives of the possibility of creating a new world that may be free of hate and the will to oppress others. Thus, the rainbow anchors the poet to the earthly, mystical, and ancestral realms, and he reveals that he has fully achieved self-realization.

The completion of the rainbow is achieved as each *loa* affirms its specific role or power and subsequently merges into a singular rainbow. The rainbow symbolizes the forging of a sense of unity among the Haitian people and the successfully executed revolt against the neo-colonial forces that have historically endeavored to erase the cultural traditions and trademarks that characterize the Haitian identity. The image of the rainbow represents the sharing of difference that Nancy conceives as akin to a fluid community that is forever “retying” the bonds among singularities that constitute its very existence.

The past energizes the poet throughout his tortuous journey, which culminates in the rediscovery of the self upon the termination of his pilgrimage to the source of Haiti's *Vodoun* origins. After he has denounced all icons of whiteness and the talismans of Christianity that constitute the white family's protective shield, he vows to carry forth his faith and declares that he is ready to once again reunite with the mortal world. Although

he appears to renounce all forms of Christianity with his final words, the poet presents an offering of a cross to the Christian West. In *Vodoun*, the cross is a symbol of Baron La Croix, or Bawon Lakwa in Haitian Creole, the *loa* of the dead and of sexuality. In Yoruba tradition, the cross also represents a crossroads between the living and ancestral realms. Thus, in the poem, Depestre invokes the symbolism of the *Vodoun* cross in celebration of his Haitianness and renunciation of the superiority complex of Christianity:

Occident chrétien mon frère terrible
Mon signe de croix le voici:
Au nom de la révolte
Et de la justice
Et de la tendresse
Ainsi soit-il! (236)

[Christian West, my terrible brother
My sign of the cross is now
In the name of revolt
and justice
and tenderness
Amen!] (61)

Although his offering of the cross further serves as an ambiguous testament to the future of black protest, the poem's ending should not be interpreted as a defeat of the « tempête-nègre ». Thus, the poet's reverence for the Western religion symbolizes his openness to cooperating with the West in the hopes of possibly creating a plan that can bring them together, but on the condition that this relationship is founded upon respect. The defeat of the « tempête-nègre » by the white Alabama judge as signified by the poet's appropriation of the cross-making gesture at first appears to cement the poet's failure to subvert the White tyrannical order. In fact, however, the poet's final words can be interpreted as a rallying cry for the future of black protest as that which is situated in compassion and collective harmony.

Through his solitary journey and consequent transformation, Depestre articulates a new vision that completes the dramatic action of the poem. As a black man, the poet synthesizes his sense of self with his people's universal situation. As an oppressed man who yearns for solidarity with his oppressed fellowmen, he inevitably transmutes into a rainbow who succeeds in fusing himself with the universal, yet these disparate elements of the rainbow remain distinctly glorious in their own right. The unification process that creates the rainbow in *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* reinforces the moral of solidarity, which is possible on the condition of the Haitian's continuous movement forward: « J'avance les pieds nus/Dans l'herbe de ma négritude » [I go forward barefoot/In the grass of my negritude] (112; 13). In the beginning, the poet is initially fueled by his rage and contempt for the effects that white subordination has had on the black psyche. His journey evolves to become a revolution of the black spirit that rails against its white subordinators into a syncretic union of beliefs concerning the peaceful coexistence of the human race. Ultimately, the completion of his journey and the conclusions that he draws are emblematic of Nancy's conception of being singular plural, in which his evocation of a universal humanism requires individuals to be fiercely proud of their own singularity and heritage and simultaneously and perpetually welcoming of the Other.

Notes

1. Except as otherwise indicated, all English translations come from Joan Dayan, "A Rainbow for the Christian West: Towards a Revolutionary Synthesis" in *A Rainbow for the Christian West* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977).
2. James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946-69* (Illinois, 2009). Web. Accessed 19 March 2012.

3. Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti: 1915-1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 82-83
4. Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture* (New York, 1961) 130.
5. "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus" in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Renaissance and Early Seventeenth Century*, 2nd ed. Vol. 2 (Calgary: Broadview Press, 2010) 423. "Mephistos" are demons of Christian mythology that figured in German folklore following the Renaissance period. The name Mephistopheles originally appeared in literature as the demon in *Faust*. The name can also be a combination of three Greek words: "me" as a negation, "phos" meaning light, and "philis" meaning loving, making it mean "not-light-loving", possibly parodying the Latin "Lucifer" or "light-bearer."

I.3 Disrupting the Plantation Order in *A Gathering of Old Men*

**To die in the attempt to humanize America is
preferable to being an American as America is
now constituted.**
Julius Lester

In *A Gathering of Old Men*, Gaines presents the story of a group of elderly black men who have decided to band together in their rejection of the myth of white supremacy, which manifests as an egregious lie affirming each man's complicity in the death of the Beau Bouton, the Cajun farmer who regularly abuses some of the sharecroppers. The story begins when it is discovered that Beau, who leases land from the Marshall family to harvest sugarcane, has been shot and killed out in the black quarters. His body is found on Mathu's property, whose paternal-like relationship to Candy Marshall affords him special privilege with the Marshall family. When Sheriff Mapes arrives at the scene of the crime, he finds Candy Marshall, the young white niece of Jack Marshall and the overseer of the plantation, eighteen black men, and Beau's dead body. Throughout the novel, several of the elderly men, including Chimley, Mat, Cherry, Clatoo, Rufe, Rooster, Coot, and Dirty Red provide individual accounts of the different events that take place throughout the day. However, Mapes is unable to place the blame on Mathu, whom Mapes assumes has killed Beau because of Mathu's reputation for having acted defiantly towards the white Cajuns in the past. Furthermore, Mathu's reputation for being a man whose actions speak louder than his words broods silently on his front stoop as he bears witness to the scene that unfolds before him. We learn that in his younger days, Mathu once stood up to Fix Boutan, the patriarch of the Boutan family, when he demanded that Mathu throw away his garbage for him. However, when Mathu refused, a fight ensued in which Mathu inevitably knocked Fix out, thereafter cementing

Mathu's legacy as "the only one [...] ever stood up to anyone who tried to do him wrong" (179).

After the elderly men show up at Mathu's, one by one, each man steps forward and provides an anecdotal account of his unique motive for killing Beau. The disparate stories reveal the larger historical narrative that describes the sufferings endured by Bayonne's black citizens who have worked for generations since the days of slavery. Although Mapes is confident that Mathu killed Beau, his deferential treatment of Candy Marshall, combined with Candy's audacity in calling up and coercing the gun-toting elderly black men to show up at the scene of the crime, as well as her avowal that she killed Beau, befuddles the Sheriff and sets the stage for the men's subsequent individual "confessions".

The novel's depiction of the racial and social dynamics of the plantation setting of Bayonne, Louisiana that have remained practically unchanged since the time of slavery mirrors the actual history of Southern Louisiana's sugarcane communities. Bayonne is a racially stratified fictional town in which the plot of Ernest Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men* is set. The community of Bayonne is antithetical to Jean-Luc Nancy's ideal of community because the town is organized and governed according to a strict set of rules determined by one's skin color, family name, and relationship to the white plantation owners. Thus, the organization of the community indicates that the town functions according to the etiquette guidelines that are reinforced by the myth of racial superiority. In Bayonne, the myth that race is an acceptable indicator of one's status in society is partly sustained by the collective tacit understanding that the town's racial groupings are determined by a certain perceived sameness inherent to one's racial heritage.

This chapter examines how Gaines's male protagonists achieve mental liberation from the psychological and physical limitations placed upon them by their particular status in the racial hierarchy of the Bayonne community upon inciting the interruption of the mythical, insular community through heroic individual and communal actions. Moreover, this chapter explores how the enduring effects of sharecropping on black and Cajun communities in rural Louisiana can be attributed to the history of racial politics, which often relied upon the use of violence to punish landless farmers who publicly opposed the system. For instance, the killing of a white man by a black man in this part of the country often constituted a crime punishable by retributive death in the eyes of certain members of white society. In Bayonne, although the Jim Crow legal system has ended, the Boutan family and its associates, including Luke Will, remain insistent on perpetuating the old order of Jim Crow justice.

Racism and ethnic discrimination have negatively affected non-white minorities in the United States since the seventeenth century. The detrimental effects of America's legacy of legally-sanctioned racial discrimination, carried out and sustained via racially and ethnically structured institutions, continues to be reflected in socioeconomic inequalities between white and non-white marginalized populations in today's society. The racial stratification that divides and organizes much of American society runs counter to Nancy's conception of community. In *La Communauté désœuvrée*, Jean-Luc Nancy describes existence in terms of "being-in-common", in which the ontological fact of human existence implies that we always already co-appear with others. According to Nancy, community is what happens by virtue of our very being, and it is the community that imparts meaning upon our existence by appropriating every individual to the

common fate of a people. Nancy writes, « La communauté nous est donnée avec l'être et comme l'être, bien en deçà de tous nos projets, volontés, et entreprises. Au fond, il nous est impossible de la perdre » [Community is given at the same time with Being and as Being, beneath all our projects, volitions or enterprises. It is impossible for us to lose it] (87). Furthermore, he posits that this primordial co-existential ontological structure of being implies that the community cannot be defined as such; in other words, community must not be conceived of as a rigid conception of an enclosed space whose members are able to be identified by specific traits shared in common. Efforts to posit a communal identity described in terms of absolute markers of identification tend to lead to violence due to the ontological impossibility of instituting a society capable of defying or denying this primordial exposure to otherness.

Because race is a social construction that contains no intrinsic value independent from or primordial to the affirmative gesture that announces such a difference, Nancy posits that any community that is defined and demarcated according to certain identity markers of inclusion can inevitably lead to the disintegration of society. An inoperative community, therefore, remains perpetually at odds with a system whose functionality depends upon the control, prevention, or denial of authentic interactions with others that occur prior to the affirmation and categorization of difference.

The male protagonists presented in *A Gathering of Old Men* display their specific masculinities in response to the social changes taking place in the American South during the 1970s. The novel is a story of the defiance of the modes of submission that the white plantation class has historically forcefully demanded from black members of society. Derrida argues in *Force de loi* that in order for any legal system to maintain power, it

necessitates the conflation of the justification of law with its origin, which always and ineluctably required violence to affirm the validity of this origin. On the Louisiana sugarcane plantation, the racial caste system remained in tact so long as no one dared to challenge the mythic foundations of the law. Furthermore, the permanence of the land as it relates to the lives of those who depend on it renders the sugarcane fields an extension of the law, since how the means by which those who manage it wield near total power over the weak or disenfranchised. Thus, as is evident from the portrayal of the interrelationships between the sharecroppers, the Cajun working class, and the plantation owner class, the fact that the history of black discrimination remained in effect long after the eradication of the Jim Crow legal system means that the relationship between the mystical foundation of Jim Crow law and the inviolability of land's significance in the American South is blameworthy for creating and sustaining the myth of racial inferiority.

In *Ernest Gaines: Voices from the Quarters*, Mary Ellen Doyle attributes the men's bravery to the moment in which each man is overcome by the "impulse for liberty" that inspires them to stand in opposition to white power (175). The framework provided by Nancy and Derrida's conception of the mythic community is useful in describing how the source of the men's collective defiance precedes their ability to "glimpse a new possible self image" and is situated in the expectations that are inscribed in their communal bond (Doyle 181).

The Inoperative Community

As discussed in previous chapters, the core premise of Nancy's community hinges upon Heidegger's ontological assertion that existence takes place in the rupture between

that which exists (beings) and the state of existence (*Being*) itself. Thus, *Being's* fundamental relational nature to itself as the facticity of its own being renders existence and the state of existing non-absolute. In other words, existence is always already defined in terms of community. The impossibility of absolute immanence means that community must be thought of in terms of a group of individuals whose relationship to their community precedes their individual, singular existence. Nancy uses the term singularity to name the manifestation of being that appears simultaneously with the formation of community. If singularities exist by virtue of their exposure to the outside, then the individual remains perpetually and primordially open to the community.

Nancy's conception of community defined as the perpetual movement and distribution of singularities among each Other means that because singularities are only constituted by this dynamic of movement, community stands in opposition to communion, or immanence: « Ce n'est pas une communion qui fusionne les *moi* en un *Moi* ou en un *Nous* supérieurs. C'est la communauté des *autrui* » [Community does not fuse the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*. It is the community of others] (42; 15).

Therefore, the term "sharing" is a constitutive feature of Nancy's community, since it names the exposure of the individual to the community and vice versa as the dynamic that resists the full determination of community.

The failure to conceive of community as movement and sharing is reflected in the racially divided plantation setting of *A Gathering of Old Men*. The interrelationships among black and white communities that Gaines depicts in his works are unique to Louisiana and other parts of the American South. The relationship between skin color and one's place in the Southern racial caste system is a common trope in many of Gaines's

works. For example, Gaines describes some characters in terms of their “quality”; a code word that indicates both phenotypic and qualitative characteristics that associates light skin with French heritage and a more privileged social status. Despite the better educational, occupational, social and political opportunities that historically have been afforded to lighter skinned people of African descent, the strength of the African-American community in Gaines’s plantation setting derives from the black citizens’ interdependence in their resistance to economic and social oppression. However, the subject of skin color in *A Gathering of Old Men* is quite complicated, which is evident from the men’s attitudes towards race and lineage that are provided by the individual accounts of each of the elderly men. The men’s opinions about racial identity suggests that the social value placed on skin color depends on how the individual men interpret the role that one’s skin color plays in the power dynamics of the community. For instance, Clatoo’s first-person narrative reveals that Mathu takes great pride in his “blue-black Singaleese” heritage, and that this pride makes him scornful of anyone with European bloodlines (51). Mathu’s unique position within the plantation caste system as the surrogate father figure of Candy, the white plantation matriarch, enables him to subvert the traditional racial order by defying the plantation community’s inclination to reinforce a fixed racial hierarchy. Unlike most of the other men, Gaines only provides us access to Mathu’s private thoughts from a third-person point of view, so everything we learn about him is imparted to us by the perceptions of the other characters. Clatoo claims that Mathu’s scornful attitude towards some of the lighter skinned black men reinforces the shared sentiment that Mathu is more impervious to racial slights than the rest of them. For instance, he tells the audience that “Rooster was yellow, with nappy black hair;

Clabber was milk white, with nappy white hair. Mathu just shook his head when he saw either one of them” (51). Of course, this is just one of several anecdotal descriptions of the relational dynamics of the lighter-skinned men, but implicit in Clatoo’s account is the idea that those who occupy an esteemed position in the plantation’s social hierarchy are better able to defy the existing power structure due to their visibility and privileged position within the system. Nonetheless, although Mathu wields his blackness as a tool of defiance against white supremacy, he persists in adopting the same mechanisms of superficial, phenotypic demarcation wielded by white society to elevate themselves above black people.

The racially stratified plantation sustained by the myth of racial inferiority coincides with Nancy’s conception of the operative community. For the black members of the sharecropping community, the land constitutes the locus of their ancestral heritage, as well as a reminder of their past sufferings, their means of survival, and their triumphs. Inscribed in the geographical and social organization of the plantation is a history that is at once constitutive of meaning, but which also transcends meaning.

Although the Cajuns govern the Bayonne plantation and oversee the sharecroppers’ work in the fields, the land belongs to the Marshalls, who occupy the top rung of the social hierarchy of Bayonne. Each of the men who are summoned to Mathu’s front yard draws upon his own personal memories of the sufferings endured throughout his lifetime under various white overseers. Moreover, the men’s defense of Mathu dually serves as a remonstrance against the erasure of their collective history. Cherry recalls the rites surrounding the burial of black people on the plantation and distinguishes between the cohesiveness of the black community reflected in the configuration of the graves,

which are dug and marked haphazardly, in which the individual family members are not distinguished within the family plots. Cherry explains that when he was growing up:

...people didn't even mark the graves. Each family had a little plot, and everybody knowed [*sic*] where that little plot was. If it was a big family, then they had to have a little bit more, sometimes from the plot of a smaller family. But who cared? They had all come from the same place, they had mixed together when they was alive, so what the difference if they mixed together now? That old graveyard had been the burial ground for black folks ever since the time of slavery. I was seventy-four, and I had grandparents in there (44).

Cherry's rumination on the different ways that whites and blacks treat death emphasizes the holiness of the land and its symbolic power as an enduring testament to the racial history of the plantation. Later, when the men pass through the cemetery, the solemnity of the tiny, unmarked tombstones gives them pause, and they stop to reflect upon their own painful histories. The cemetery symbolizes their mortality and reveals to them the futility of inaction in their old age. Furthermore, their sober reflections in the ghostly presence of their ancestors marks the point at which the men make the collective, if yet unspoken, decision to reconstruct their unique history of oppression into a tale of heroism that defies the operative community.

Johnny Paul, perhaps the bravest of the elderly men and the first to claim that he shot Beau, accuses Sheriff Mapes of being unable to "see the church with the people" or "hear the singing and the praying" since Mapes's position in society and his physical distance from the black quarters figuratively obscures his senses. Johnny Paul tells Mapes that he cannot possibly understand the anxiety he and his people have suffered under the oppressive charge of the Cajuns, who threaten to destroy the proof of their history on the land. Johnny Paul declares:

I did it 'cause that tractor is getting closer and closer to that graveyard, and I was scared if I didn't do it, one day that tractor was go'n come in there and plow up

them graves, getting rid of all proof that we ever was. Like now they trying to get rid of all proof that black people ever farmed this land with plows and mules (92).

His “confession” signifies the dangers that “progressive” forms of advanced technology and shifts in the white power structure poses to the livelihoods of the black community. Moreover, his comment is not intended to condone or dismiss the subordinated positions occupied by the members of the black community on the plantation; rather, Johnny Paul sheds light on the fact that the proof of his people’s suffering is inscribed in the land, and thus it is necessary to protect the visibility of the graveyard. Tucker, another one of the elderly men who responds to Candy’s call to arms, sympathizes with Johnny Paul and explains that his “decision to kill Beau” was informed by his desire to preserve the memory of their history on the plantation as an affirmation of their continued right to live and work the land free from the tyrannical abuses of the Boutan clan. To Johnny Paul, Tucker, and all the other black men who have tirelessly toiled in the fields, Beau symbolizes the threat of the eradication of their livelihoods through the Cajuns’ appropriation of the arable land.

Although the men seem to imply that life was better before the Cajuns began leasing the plantation from the Marshalls, their stand against the Boutans should not be considered a qualitative evaluation that affirms the better of two evils. Rather, the men’s willingness to come together and stand against the Cajuns signifies their collective awakening to the fact that unless they take action, they cannot hope to prevent against the ushering in of a new form of white authoritarian rule. The men’s realization that the same people who want to erase their history are those who threaten Mathu’s life constitutes a call to action that begins with their collective claim of proprietorship over how they are to be treated by the town’s authority figures.

The permanence of the land fosters relationships among Bayonne's citizens that transcend racial demarcations and barriers. Beau's death disrupts the symbiotic relationship among the landowning Marshall family and the black sharecroppers because it forces everyone involved to confront the changes that have been threatening the status quo leading up to Beau's murder. Bea Marshall declares that it is "about time [Candy] shot one of them Cajuns, messing up the land with those tractors. Yes, that gal's got spunk in her" (23). Bea's cold-hearted gesticulation suggests that in the eyes of the old white landowners, the lives of those who work the land are only as valuable as their contribution to the well-oiled cane-cultivating machine. Furthermore, her dismissive attitude towards the fact that Candy has been implicated in Beau's death reveals the conditional means in which justice is administered in the community.

If, according to Nancy's conception of subjectivity, one's relation to his community is partially constitutive of individual subjectivity, then the men's individual histories form a narrative that illuminates their long history of oppression. Nancy's insistence that humans are never alone implies that the aggregate of individual stories constitutes a community's shared history. The individual men's experiences with the institutionalized violence of Jim Crow on the plantation attune each man to the joint history and destiny of his people. Just as the men share a common story of abuse and subordination, the separate manifestations of mistreatment that each has experienced throughout his life enables them to appreciate their unique stories as entangled with, but not emblematic of, their narrative of oppression.

Chimley and Mat decide to come to Mathu's aid without knowing the facts involved in the case that led to his accusation. Candy commands that the two men

immediately head to Mathu's with shotguns in tow, but the question of whether or not Mathu "did it" appears to be essentially beside the point. Rather, knowing that Mathu has been accused of killing a white man is enough information for Mat and Chimley to understand the potential implications of the accusation. Mat communicates this when he tells Chimley, "If he did it, you know we ought to be there" (30). Although at this point they have not yet conspired with the other sixteen elderly men, their resolve to obey Candy's instructions suggests that they possess an innate understanding that this is their last, if not their only opportunity to rebel against the rigid racial caste system guaranteed by Jim Crow law.

After all the men have assembled in Mathu's yard, Clatoo assumes leadership of the group and represents their collective voice. When he asks if anybody has anything to say before they head to Mathu's, the rest of the men say nothing, and Clatoo leads the decrepit band of hobbled and half-blind bodies forward. He announces that they are to go in "like soldiers, not like tramps", which opens up the floor for the men to evade responsibility, but more importantly, certifies their collective mission to proceed as a strong and united force (49).

The delicate order of authority is disturbed when the men's fundamentally altered self-perception induces role reversals in others. Sheriff Mapes becomes frustrated and resorts to violence when the men begin confessing to having killed Beau. At this point, Mapes still regards the group as a singular entity and is initially unwilling to deviate from his tried and true tactics towards black delinquents. As he proceeds to beat the men one by one in an attempt to extract any information whatsoever about the crime, they do not falter in their persistent avowals of guilt. After Mapes batters Uncle Billy, he commands

that his deputy bring him “another one”, to which Candy protests scornfully: “You’re going to beat them all, Mapes?” (68). Although Mapes reduces the group to an aggregate of anonymous and interchangeable bodies, Candy’s speech reveals that she also views herself as their superior. Mapes commands Lou Dimes, Candy’s boyfriend, to “get her out of here”, to which Candy replies, “Like hell he will. This is my land, in case you forget” (68). Despite protesting Mapes’s abuse of the sharecroppers, Candy refers to them in a collective sense as *Other*, and thus, as apparently unworthy of individuation. However, her public criticism of Mapes’s actions draws attention to the link between race and the means by which law is enforced, which gives the Sheriff pause and inevitably compels him to stand back and reluctantly permit the day’s events to play out without his intervention.

In their unified defiance, the old men take on a new identity and find solidarity in their willful disobedience and collective dishonesty. The men’s confessions are the manifestations of a tacit, telepathic contract that psychologically disarms Mapes and renders him incapacitated in his role as enforcer. However, it is the bombastic pretense of their collective confession that creates a space for unabashed and straightforward storytelling. Moreover, Mathu’s unique relationship to both the white landowners and the black sharecroppers provides the group of men defending him with the leverage needed to enter into a non-verbal negotiation with Mapes. Past experience has taught the sharecroppers that due to his respect for Mathu, the Sheriff will first adhere to legal proceedings before making moves to arrest him. Thus, because Mathu is the only one of the men that Mapes regards as an equal, the sharecroppers understand that Mathu will not be taken into the courthouse until he confesses to killing Beau. Also, while Mathu says

nothing to either affirm or deny his guilt, the other men provide narrative accounts of Mathu's history and his relationships with some of the whites on the plantation. For example, Rufe, one of the first of the old men to arrive at Mathu's, explains that although Mapes respected Mathu, "he didn't think much of the rest of us, and he didn't respect us."

Rufe elaborates further:

Mapes liked Mathu. They had hunted together. Wildcats, alligators, deers. They had fished together. And Mapes had had a few drinks with Mathu at Mathu's house. He liked Mathu. Even when Mathu got into trouble and he had to arrest Mathu, he knowed it wasn't Mathu's doing. But he knowed Mathu had never backed down from anybody, either. Maybe that's why he like him. To him Mathu was a real man. The rest of us wasn't (84).

Rufe's rumination on the conditions of Mapes's respect for Mathu suggests that Mathu's courageous refusal to grovel before whites in order to avoid trouble is the sort of subversive attitude that the rest of the men must adopt in order to defy the law.

Ultimately, Mathu's front yard-turned-confessional fosters the men's gradual realization that their individual voices yield a commanding presence that stuns their white audience into submission.

The Mystical Foundation of Law

Although the novel takes place a decade after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the members of the black community during this period continue to bear witness to the lasting effects of institutionalized economic and political discrimination. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex in public accommodations, employment, and federally funded programs. For those living in the quarters on the Marshall land, the policy changes made at the federal

level have little to no effect on the practical workings of the legitimate legal system that governs the town's citizens a decade following the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Therefore, the chasm that separates the legitimacy of law and its manifestation fails to mitigate the black citizens' fears of white retaliation when the police and the Boutan clan learn that Beau's death took place in the Quarters. The men's shared attitude towards Mathu's indictment is complicated by the fact that this is the first time any of them have witnessed the killing of a white man by one of their own. The magnitude of this event forces the old men to triumph over cowardice and defy the illegitimacy of the myth that sustains their subordination by realizing the futile complicity of remaining silence.

In *Force de loi* [Force of Law] (1994), Derrida claims that because the foundation of law is self-referential, it is also groundless; thus, it lays itself open to deconstructive criticism and the exposure of the flaws in the system. To succeed in revealing the self-referential truth of the system of law therefore implies that we endeavor to reach a certain form of justice that transcends legality. Justice, like freedom, cannot be measured because it describes that which, in its true form, *exceeds* the proper law. Furthermore, Derrida defines "justice" as that which is owed to every singularity as part and parcel of a plurality. He discusses the problem of justice in an interview with Maurizio Ferraris in *A*

Taste for the Secret:

[La justice] est une relation à l'inconditionnel qui, une fois toutes les données conditionnelles ont été prises en compte, témoigne de ce qui ne sera pas se permettre d'être enfermé dans un contexte...Il est celui qui tente, néanmoins, pour produire un nouveau droit. Et pour ce faire, il faut d'abord prendre en compte le contexte et ensuite, à un moment donné, le transformer radicalement (*My translation*).

[Justice is a] relation to the unconditional that, once all the conditional givens have been taken into account, bears witness to that which will not allow itself to be enclosed within a context...It is that which attempts, nonetheless, to produce a new right. And to do so it is necessary, first, to take the context into account and

then, at a given moment, to transform it radically (17).¹

Hence, justice is achieved when the established credential for determining what is just in each circumstance is deconstructed and rethought anew. Long before the day's events take place in *A Gathering of Old Men*, Jack Marshall, the absentee inheritor of the Marshall land, had relinquished his responsibilities as the plantation's resident patriarch. Consequently, Jack's lack of involvement with the plantation's operations creates a space in which an uncustomary standard for law and order can be established. While Jack spends his days drinking, he cares so little about the goings on in the sugarcane field and in the sharecropping quarters that the news of Beau's death fails to perturb him. His indifference removes one of the pillars of law that governs the plantation, which constitutes the root condition that provides the men with the courage to rise up against the Boutans. The reader learns about Jack's indifference from Tee Jack, the local bartender whose bar Jack frequents daily. He explains that although his parents left him to care for the estate, Jack never wanted anything to do with the business of the plantation. Due to Jack's failure to assume responsibility for the plantation, he indirectly relinquished control to the Cajuns, whose use of force to sustain the existing order reveals the arbitrary foundations of Jim Crow law. Tee Jack attributes Jack's excessive drinking to the emotional burden of his unwanted responsibility for the Marshall plantation:

He want it to go to hell. To hell with it. He go by the name 'cause they gived him that name, he live on the land 'cause they left it there, but he don't give a damn for it"...I reckon for people like him they have always been complicated – protecting name and land. It's just too much for most people. Feeling guilty about this, guilty about that... (154).

Next, throughout the scene in which the confessions take place, Mathu adopts a detached, observant position atop his front porch, while Candy coordinates the assemblage of armed men in the yard before him. At first, the tales that other characters

tell about Mathu's reputation lead us to believe that Mathu's detached stance in the entire matter has to do with the fact that he has always been the only person to ever stand up against the Boutan clan. For example, when Mapes discusses the crime with his deputy sheriff Lou, he reasons that Mathu "killed him, all right. The only one with nuts enough to do it" (72). While it is not clear if the sharecroppers also share Mapes's presumption, they understand that Beau's lower-class status and Mathu's close relationship with Candy makes it possible to take a stand against the arbitrary system of plantation law. Their internalization and subsequent collective resolve to stand against Mapes signifies the first step in transforming the existing order. The stalling that occurs in the interim between the news of Beau's death, the gathering of the old men, and the arrival of the Cajuns at Mathu's house is indicative of the first of several small victories achieved by the men over the normal "legal" procedures that have historically denied black men lawful justice.

During the hot, still hours in which the men remain assembled in sweaty solidarity on Mathu's property, Reverend Jameson tries repeatedly to convince the men to go home. It quickly becomes clear that Jameson's dissenting voice isolates him from the group that knowingly awaits retribution from the Boutans. As Reverend Jameson attempts to shame the men, Clatoo silences him, commanding him to "get a gun if you want to talk."

Jameson refuses, and so Clatoo tells him that he better "shut up", because "people with guns speak first here today" (103). In « Ex Nihilo Summum » (De la souveraineté) Nancy affirms that the phenomena of violence wielded by authorities automatically appears to:

« définitivement privé de légitimité, installer ouvertement son illégitimité sous l'apparence du pouvoir » [definitively deprived of legitimacy, openly installing its illegitimacy in the guise of power] so that the illegitimate self-foundation of law is

revealed by the event of violence (150). Thus, violence is the condition of the possibility to make changes to the existing power structure, and the men's unconscious understanding of this reality is symbolized in their equation of firearms with power. The shotguns awkwardly wielded by each of the elderly men symbolizes the implicit understanding that the Cajuns' impending retribution can only be matched with the threat of violence equal to or greater in degree of force. Moreover, the guns represent the grave resolve of the men to be taken seriously by Sheriff Mapes and the other onlookers, and the absoluteness of their killing power juxtaposed with the cane stalks and fists used by the Cajuns to maintain order on the plantation illuminates the aporetic origins of Jim Crow justice.

The gathering of men begins as a rally around Candy to protect Mathu, but inevitably becomes dissociated from Candy as the sharecroppers realize that her leadership prevents them from fully asserting themselves against the seemingly indomitable white order. In *Force de loi*, Derrida contends that the « la fondation d'un État réussie produira *après coup* ce qu'elle était d'*avance* destinée à produire » [the successful foundation of a State will produce *après coup* what it was destined in advance to produce] (13). Because the state inscribes its desired structure into the existing legal structure, therefore, the moment of the foundation of a state is a *coup de force* that at once and simultaneously creates and justifies the law. Derrida emphasizes that this inscription is inherently violent, but that such violence legitimates the new force of power, which will remain in effect until an even more violent coup is conducted to wage war against the existing institution.

Although Candy Marshall initially seems allied with the sharecroppers and genuinely concerned about their interests, it soon becomes apparent that she is simply an extension of the white ruling order. Candy appropriates Jack's unwanted duty by birthright and assumes the role of plantation patriarch. She functions as the elderly men's caretaker and protector when she involves herself in the investigation, but only on the condition that the people obey her. Mathu's dilemma situates him in the center of the manipulative stand-off that takes place between his peers, Candy, and the law, but because Candy and Mathu's relationship necessitates his acquiescence to her demands. Hence, their bond is based on conditional love. According to Nancy's idea of the operative community, whenever the relations between or among singularities in a community are conditional, this effectively closes off the community to the future. Although Candy's desire to protect Mathu is based on a loyalty to him as a surrogate father, her authoritarian way of dealing with Mapes and the means by which she imposes her rules onto the group of elderly men threatens to thwart them from achieving self-realization on their own terms. Candy is immune from the punishment that any of the men would suffer in the event of a solitary confession of murder, and thus her desire to protect "her" people keeps her blinded to the emasculating, silencing effect that she has on the group by speaking for them. Thus, when Mathu excludes her from the men's conversation, he affirms that the sharecroppers' lifelong social and political impotence on the plantation has persisted because of the fixed responsibilities and expectations placed upon them by virtue of their race. Moreover, Mathu's decision to bar Candy from the group's conference signifies his refusal to subject both himself and the sharecroppers to further arbitrary legal decisions made at their expense.

Mathu's declaration that he will accompany the men relays the unspoken message that he will likewise no longer look to Candy for protection. When Candy involves herself in the discussion among the sharecroppers, Clatoo tells her she is not wanted, and she reacts by telling them to "go'on and listen to Clatoo if y'all want. But remember this – Clatoo got a little piece of land to go back to. Y'all don't have nothing but this. You listen to him now, and you wont even have this" (174). Her thinly veiled scorn for the everyone except Mathu reveals her conditional affection and concern for the fates of the sharecroppers. Her protesting affirms that she will only lead the men to safety as long as she is permitted to continue occupying the position of patriarch. Candy's conditionally offered olive branch implies that if her wishes are not met, she will just as well step aside and allow the Cajuns, with their bloodthirsty quest for retributive justice, to act in accordance with Jim Crow protocol.

Mapes witnesses the dethroning of Candy's patriarchal rank, and in spite of himself and his own culpability in condoning racist legal practices, he publicly narrates Candy's hypocrisy. He laughs scornfully and says, "Listen to the savior now. Do what she wants or you're out in the cold. Did y'all hear that?" Candy accuses Mapes of trying to create factions among the group, but he retorts, "And you want to keep them slaves the rest of their lives" (174). Of course, Candy has never allowed herself to consider her role in sustaining the systemic oppression of the black citizens; rather, her shortsightedness has only ever enabled her to see herself in the role as protector. At this moment in the novel, Mapes reaches the climax of his character arc by simultaneously commiserating with the aberrant men and crediting them for their own agency in resisting the operative mechanisms of the order. He finally demands of Candy: "At least let your people talk.

That's why they put that church up there. Now you're trying to take that away from them" (174).

Gil Boutan is the only white character in the novel that, prior to the events of the day of Beau's death, has already undergone a transformation in his attitude towards the myth of racial inferiority. Due to the lessons in social justice that he has learned while away at college, combined with his dissociation from his family, the Louisiana State University football player scolds his family for their reputation in using vigilante justice to maintain black subordination. Sully, one of the black men on the plantation, provides the reader with anecdotal information about Gil's character: "Gil loved all the people back here, and they all loved him, white and black. He would shake a black man's hand as soon as he would a white man's, and the blacks would beam with pride when he did" (132). Thus, Gil's reputation for fairness and non-discriminative treatment towards the black people in Bayonne, as well as his kindness to his own community members.

Gil's father, Fix Boutan, calls upon his son to seek revenge for the murder of his brother. Gil arrives at his father's house to find that the entire extended Boutan family has assembled to wait for the elder Boutan's blessing to avenge Beau's death. Fix tells Gil that he will never achieve the title of All-American if he is involved in something against the law", and that "even if [their] name was involved, the Yankee press would destroy me" (138). When it comes to family responsibility and defending one's honor, Gil has realized that he and his family no longer view race in the same way. Thus, when Gil refuses to join Luke Will's lynch mob in defense of Beau's honor, he declares:

All my life, I have heard what my family has done to others. I hear it today – from the blacks, from the whites. I hear it from the opponents even when we play in another town. Don't tackle me too hard, because they would have to answer to the

rest of the Boutans. It hurts me to hear that, Papa. It hurts me in here,' he said, hitting his chest. "It hurts me because I know it's not true (137).

Relating their present dilemma to the broader American landscape that extends far beyond the slowly evolving Bayonne, Gil declares that he will no longer remain complicit in reinforcing the myth of black inferiority. Russ, a peripheral associate of the Boutan clan who is more liberal in his views on race relations, tells Gil that if he wants to do something for his dead brother, he should do his job and return to LSU to play in the next football game:

Whether you win against Ole Miss or not, you'll beat Luke Will. Because if you don't, he'll win tomorrow, and if he does, he may just keep on winning. That's not much of a future for Tee Beau is it?...Sometimes you got to hurt something to help something. Sometimes you have to plow under one thing in order for something else to grow. You can help Tee Beau tomorrow. You can help this country tomorrow. You can help yourself (151).

Although Gil's oppositional position against his family does not deter them from running down to the quarters in pursuit of revenge, his bold stance against the Jim Crow order signifies the start of an era that can hopefully give rise to a new, social justice-minded generation.

By the novel's end, the sharecroppers are accompanied by some unlikely allies and successfully expose the mystical foundation of the law by forcing a reconciliation between both the informal and formal arms of the law. The dialogue exchanged among Sheriff Mapes and Candy, as well as between Gil and his family, reveals how white dominance over black bodies is the product of abusive law-enforcing tactics that are able to be carried out within legal boundaries because the foundation of the law is itself both self-referential and groundless.

Ultimately, Mathu realizes that it was not until the other men on the plantation arrived on his property to defend his innocence that he understood how closed off he had always been to the others:

Hating them out there on that river, hating y'all here in the quarters. Put myself above all – proud to be African. You know why proud to be African? 'Cause they won't let me be a citizen here in this country. Hate them 'cause they won't let me be a citizen, hated y'all cause you never tried. Just a mean-hearted old man. All I ever been, till this hour (182).

Mathu's newfound perception of himself as an individual enmeshed in a dynamic and plural community joins him to the community of sharecroppers. Although Mathu once had no reason to take a vocal role in the drama on the porch or to interfere with Candy's attempts to direct it, when the other black men step in to direct the action, he finally realizes how his own contempt for others has been debilitating on his psyche. Despite the fact that there is much at stake as the sharecroppers prepare for battle against the Cajuns, Mathu's blessing signifies the role reversal that has transpired between himself and Candy in which Mathu supplants Candy's role as protectorate, and becomes the humbled patriarch whose own self-judgment enables him to subsequently exonerate the men of their past so that they can charge forward. Ultimately, his announcement that the men have nothing left to prove constitutes the final step in bridging the gap between himself and the rest of the men, and this affirmation certifies that their power is inscribed in their unity (181).

Conclusion

The novel concludes with a trial in which the men are treated as equals before the legitimate court of law, and this trial signifies the men's opportunity to demonstrate

publicly their newfound power and collective pride. The elderly men in *A Gathering of Old Men* effect positive change and achieve selfhood through exacting support from their fellow community members, and also by reevaluating the pre-existing conditions that have historically prevented the black community from rising up in protest or resistance to oppression. If we consider Nancy's preoccupation with community as that which exists as the interruption, fragmentation, or suspension of the inclination towards a community as work, then the men's successful counterattack on the lynch mob can be attributed to their ability to envision a revised mode of being and fundamentally to alter how they see themselves and their white oppressors. Each confession signifies the singular claim to agency and power that has been denied them all their lives, and ultimately, the men are able to renegotiate their own terms for selfhood and situate these terms among the collective objectives of the other black men.

Notes

1. In *Force de loi*, Derrida writes « La violence même de la fondation ou de la position du Droit doit envelopper la violence de la conservation du droit et ne peut pas rompre avec elle. Il appartient à la structure de la violence fondatrice qu'elle appelle la répétition de soi et fonde ce qui doit être conservé, conservable, promis à l'héritage et à la tradition au partage » (93).

Chapter 2. RETHINKING JUSTICE

II. Responsibility, Hospitality, and a Democracy *to come*

The reasons that led to René Depestre's disassociation with communism in the 1950s are echoed in his concern with the turn that religious fundamentalism has taken in today's modern society. In his 1994 interview with the UNESCO Courier, Depestre explains that inscribed in both communism and religious fundamentalism is the tendency towards immanency that contains "the spark of totalitarianism". As a consequence of the global capitalist order that has changed the dynamics of national and international politics, Depestre believes that "all kinds of ethno-nationalist savagery, supposedly under the banner of a campaign to renew faithless societies, are building monuments to obscurantism, terrorism and new banditry by the state" (46). Without implicitly indicting Western society in this debacle, Depestre calls upon the progenitors of globalization, namely, Western civil societies, to focus their energies on bestowing upon the global market "certain ethical features, such as meaning, laws of citizenship and an art of living together based on mutual respect and sympathy between the world's peoples and societies" (46). In Nancy's terms, what Depestre hopes for the future is a world community whose dynamics would be such that any fundamentalist or utopian ideology would be ontologically barred from taking root. In order to understand how such a world community could be shaped, it is necessary to reimagine and redefine certain concepts that describe human civil societies so that we can rethink how society may apply these revised definitions to political decision-making in the name of keeping the future oriented towards a democracy *to come*.

In their works, René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines underscore the need to treat the re-inscription of communities that are threatened by violence, xenophobia, and totalitarianism by reimagining the individual's relationship to community. Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida's differing conceptions of the relationship between community and the political shapes a theoretical framework which allows us to identify conditions that foster the cultivation of communities that are open to difference and which are concerned with progressing towards a more inclusive political state. In this next section, Nancy and Derrida's framework will be used to investigate how the protagonists in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines rearticulate their responsibility to the community by ordering their actions according to Derrida's conception of democracy.

Derrida and Nancy's philosophical notions of responsibility have their roots in Martin Heidegger's thinking of the ontological origins of human existence, which he describes in *Being and Time* (237). In *The Origins of Responsibility* (2010), François Raffoul explains that the concept of the "thrown"/thrownness describes the "projection" of Dasein into existence as "a matter of care, a keeping-vigil-for, a solicitude for death that constitutes the relation to the self of that which, in existence, relates to oneself" (16). Although our existence is self-evident, "thrownness" describes the impossibility of grasping the entirety of its sense, despite our attempt to exert mastery over its origin and its meaning. Hence, Heidegger argues that moral responsibility is based on our primordial ontological responsibility, and the idea of "thrownness" posits that existence is always already a conundrum for us since it is the only fact that we as humans cannot communicate. In *Donner la mort* [*The Gift of Death*], Derrida regards our primordial

responsibility to care for our existence as another way of thinking freedom (17). This freedom, which is constitutive of our very being, undergirds both Nancy and Derrida's philosophy of the subject's openness to the Other and grounds their theories of the political in our primordial ontological responsibility. The point at which their conceptions of ontological responsibility diverge concerns how pre-original openness relates to subjectivity. Derrida and Nancy's disagreement on the question of subjectivity illuminates the standards by which individual decisions can be evaluated according to reimagined definitions of freedom and responsibility.

Derrida and Nancy agree that singularities exist on their limits through an exposure to the outside, and that this exposure of singularities is constitutive of a plurality. However, while Nancy conceives of this exposure as an "offering" of the community of singularities to one another, Derrida considers the relation of singularities as one of sacrifice. He explains that the secret of our origins necessarily creates a space where the wholly Other meets an *other* Other, and thus he claims that singularities are sacrificed whenever one singularity comes into contact with another (*Donner la mort* 68). While Nancy's idea of the primordial exposure, or *being-with*, describes an ontological idea of plurality which *demand*s us to think of the space where the political takes place, Derrida's notion of the community differs in terms of its practical dimension: community is a thinking of the space where the political *happens* – where we must decide anyway, even though this decision always requires a sacrifice of all other Others. The significance of this difference enables us to determine how and to what degree certain communities are disallowed from expressing this ontological freedom. Furthermore, their thinking

frames our analysis of how individuals, in defying the political forces that seek to suppress freedom, foster the creation of a more democratic society.

Nancy considers the forgetting of the existential unease that we experience due to our “thrownness” to be at once anxiety-inducing as well as the condition of our freedom. In Nancy’s essay, titled *L’expérience de la liberté* [*The Experience of Freedom*] (1988), he confronts the idea of freedom as a question, and not as a given. His underlying premise of this investigation begins with his assertion that because existence is not deduced from any principle, we can think of freedom as the absolvment from any contact with what is other and therefore find reason for existence within ourselves. Thus, for Nancy, freedom is the name of the movement in which the self breaks free from the non-self so that it becomes both free and open towards the Other. Freedom therefore means that there is no underlying determining principle by which a subject is defined; rather, because freedom is given from the outside, it can only be limited by the freedom of the Other. Nancy describes the community’s sharing as the measure of freedom, in which the degree of freedom enjoyed by a community is determined by the degree to which individuals are able to do what they please with the ontological burden of their “thrownness”. However, in order to arrive at the significance of freedom’s relation to the structure of community, we must turn to Derrida to further investigate how freedom constitutes the condition of Derrida’s conception of responsibility, hospitality, and democracy.

In *Spectres de Marx* (1993) Derrida deconstructs Marxist thinking and posits that it remains relevant to the contemporary global political situation, but that we must understand the political implications of “democracy” in some way other than through a

negative idea of the political as the groundlessness of law and justice. He writes

C'est pourquoi nous proposons toujours de parler de démocratie *à venir*, non pas de démocratie *future*, au présent futur, non pas même d'une idée régulatrice, au sens kantien, ou d'une utopie – dans la mesure du moins où leur inaccessibilité garderait encore la forme temporelle d'un *présent futur*, d'une modalité future du *présent vivant* (110).

[That is why we always propose to speak of democracy *to come*, not of a future democracy in future present not even of a regulating idea, in the Kantian sense, or of a utopia – at least to the extent that their inaccessibility would still retain the temporal form of a future present, a future modality of the living present (*Translation mine*)].

Derrida's idea of a democracy to come is an avowal that commands the arrival of something that will never present itself in its full form. This conception aligns with Nancy's vision of a community whose configuration implies the incessant engagement and entanglement of singularities. Whereas Nancy's thought considers what is at stake for a society in the absence of such a community, Derrida's idea of the link between dissension and politics renders his concern for the political a concern of a more practical dimension. In his early 1967 collection of essays *L'écriture et la différence* [*Writing and Difference*], Derrida notes that spacing, or the fact that that which we know is only known in retrospect, means that the essential fact of human nature is a pre-originary violence that stems from having to exist in an already irreducible alterity. He further insists that the Other is necessary for the constitution of the self with regards to a primordial opening to the Other. Regardless of whether this opening is received peacefully or violently, it is this ontological fact that makes every relationship possible. Thus, Derrida's conception of sacrifice reveals the immediate and imperative command to act, while Nancy's idea of primordial responsibility is useful in evaluating restrictive or oppressive political contexts.

If the achievement of full self-realization is the measure of freedom, then it is possible to assess how an individual is limited by the socioeconomic and political conditions of his society. Derrida and Nancy's dialectic of the political frames the literary analyses presented in the second section of this project, which is concerned with how the protagonists in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines respond to socioeconomic and political conditions that limit freedom, influence responsible decision-making, and align their actions with Derrida's conception of a democracy *to come*. Therefore, using reconceived notions of responsibility and hospitality as standards of measurement of freedom, the degree to which the authors' protagonists achieve self-realization can be evaluated according to how their individual actions align with Derrida's notion of democracy.

De la grammatologie [*Of Grammatology*] (1967) is the foundational text of Derridean deconstructive criticism, and is the first place where Derrida introduces the notion of the trace, which is an essential construct of his idea of a democracy *à venir*. Derrida's conception of democracy posits human experience as bound to the dimension of time, and the present as an event that is always already informed by its past and oriented towards the future. The defining feature of the experience of the present is that this experience contains a "trace", or that which in the presence of the present does not present itself. The trace is characterized by both its repeatability and the non-presence that it harkens to in its fragmented, incomplete state. The trace also describes the perpetual partial erasure of the present, which sustains the infinite deferring of time and thus renders resolute decision-making only possible as *im-possible*. It is Derrida's notion of the trace that provides us with a thematic basis for comprehending how humans are

exposed to the awareness of our mortality. Furthermore, in *De la grammatologie*, Derrida names the future anterior as the fact of an unrepresentable past that marks temporization as a structure of responsibility, and is that which opens the space of being. He writes:

L'avenir ne peut s'anticiper que dans la forme du danger absolu. Il est ce qui rompt absolument avec la normalisé constituée et ne peut donc s'annoncer, se *présenter*, que sous l'espèce de la monstruosité. Pour ce monde à venir et pour ce qui en lui aura fait trembler les valeurs de signe, de parole et d'écriture, pour ce qui conduit ici notre futur antérieur, il n'est pas encore d'exergue (14).

[The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity. For that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the values of sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no inscription (5)].

The absence of any “proof” of a future reality that can inform the present leads Derrida to situate responsibility in the experience of the aporia of decision-making, in which all decisions that are made in the present are made according to a leap of faith that one will know one’s self upon the reception *of* the Other. In order to be “most responsible”, Derrida explains that we must be able to experience the limit of the undecidable in order to keep the future open and allocate a maximum amount of space within which one can navigate specific situations and make decisions in response to specific circumstances.

Next, in *De l'hospitalité*, Derrida describes his philosophy of the categorical imperative as what is necessary to do in order to keep the future open. However, the perpetual erasure of the future prevents this choice from being based on anything but one’s knowledge of the past and his orientation to the future. Thus, Derrida posits that the aporia of responsibility denotes the condition that prevents any institution from founding itself, since all political decisions must be of the order of a democracy to come. Because politics is happening *now* at each and every moment, the ontological structure of

democracy allows itself to be perpetually improved upon.

Responsibility and Sacrifice in Depestre's Haiti

René Depestre considers Haiti's specificity in relation to and apart from Caribbean identity. While the apostles of *négritude* posit that the diffused spatiality of African peoples throughout the diaspora are unified by their black identity, Depestre's early regard for *négritude*'s capacity to inspire revolutionary racial consciousness changed upon witnessing the hypocrisies of communism. Inscribed in both ideologies, Depestre came to realize, was the inclination to crowd out difference in the pursuit of an undivided identity. Despite Depestre's problems with *négritude*, he did perceive in it the power to inspire the Haitian people to condemn Western domination and undermine the denigrating myths that served to justify their subordination by foreign powers. However, in his interview with the UNESCO Courier in 1997, Depestre claims to have always possessed a latent distrust of the idea of *négritude*, which he believed to be of the order, but still the exact opposite of the same ideology that devalued black people based on their skin color. He explains, "You can't just transfer to a Black context what is said and done in terms of Whites" (44). His break with *négritude* coincided with his departure from Marxism, upon which he focused his energies on embracing a new literary aesthetic steeped in surrealism that avoided falling into the trap of the "anti-racist racism" Depestre claimed to be inherent to the *négritude* movement.¹

Haiti during the era of Duvalierism is a prime example of a nation that sought to create a pure and undivided social identity in an attempt to resist external forces and sustain the ruling class's hegemonic power. Depestre's refusal to adhere to *négritude* was

inspired by Duvalier's manipulation of racial politics and his exploitation of *Vodoun* symbols. Furthermore, the despot's creation of a new Haitian flag is just one of many ways in which, under the pretense of the reverence for *négritude*, Duvalier sought to weaken the stronghold of the Mulatto social class in the pursuit of total control over Haiti's society.

The Duvalier dictatorship was the embodiment of the immanent community that Nancy warns sometimes arises in the absence of the conditions that keep the future open. Depestre's disenchantment with *négritude*, the idea of a Marxist utopia, and his denouncement of Duvalierism all came to a head upon realizing that not only had he become consumed by the ideals of revolution, but also that what was meant by "socialist revolution" was simply another form of the same ideal that can only be realized, in Nancy's terms, as an immanent project of death. In an essay on *négritude* titled "Jean Price-Mars et le mythe de l'Orphée noir ou les aventures de la négritude", Depestre denounces Duvalierism, and explains that Duvalier's ability to perpetuate his reign was due to the isolation of the issue of race from the economic and social development of Haiti. He explains that in assigning an absolute, mythical character to Haiti's struggle to succeed as an independent nation, the truth of the catastrophic effects of colonialism are discounted, and in turn, prevent the Haitian citizen from escaping a defeatist mentality:

En séparant la question raciale du développement économique et social de Haïti, en lui assignant un caractère absolu, mythique, ils ont ravale notre histoire à une succession chaotique de conflits seulement "raciaux" entre les mulâtres et les noirs qui, des les lendemains de notre première Indépendance, ont formé l'oligarchie dominante du pays (177).

[By separating the racial question from the economic and social development of Haiti, by assigning it an absolute, mythical character, [those totalitarian leaders who assign an imaginary value to class] reduce our history to a chaotic series of "racial" conflicts between mulattoes and blacks, and in the aftermath of our first

Independence, these are the figures who have formed the ruling oligarchy of the country.” (*My translation*)]

Depestre’s novel *Le Mât de cocagne* is a parody of Haiti’s suffering under the totalitarian Duvalier regime, and the novel portrays the catastrophic consequences that result when the President’s manipulative, fundamentally undemocratic means of ruling inevitably creates and sustains an operative community. The events in *Le Mât de cocagne* center around Henri Postel’s entrance into the annual festival of the greasy pole, which signifies a grave defiance of the totalitarian regime led by the dictator president “Zoocrates Zachary”. Although President Zachary promotes the festival as a test of masculinity and the validation of the democratic foundations of the regime, in reality, the contest serves as a phallogentric symbolization of the unfettered, obscene, and systematic violence with which the regime silences its opposition. However, his participation in the contest also functions as a critique of Duvalier’s total subjugation of the Haitian people, which he has achieved by denouncing any forms of individualism, since the objective of Duvalier’s regime was to thwart potential rebellion via violently quashing any alleged rumblings of revolutionary behavior. Henri Postel’s zombification, therefore, is emblematic of the social and spiritual torture to which Duvalier’s suspected enemies were subjected.

Henri’s decision to compete in the contest challenges the racially-based mythic character of the nation by exposing the means by which its pervasive power is sustained by force and fear-mongering. According to Derrida’s philosophy of responsibility, because there are innumerable Others, each one who is absolutely other than every (other) Other, Henri’s decision to emerge out of his oppressed state signifies a taking of responsibility for his “thrownness” in which he distinguishes himself from the rest of his fellow Haitians. In deciding to join the contest, Henri understands that his public defiance

of the regime will cause him to be a spectacle in the contest. Thus, in choosing to compete, he sacrifices his fellow citizens, as he subjects them to Zachary's unpredictable wrath. Nonetheless, in the long-run, this sacrifice engenders hope for the community when Henri forces Zachary's hand and incites him to reveal his tyrannical means of domination.

Furthermore, Derrida's idea of responsibility posits that because the wholly other Other is at once mysterious, inaccessible, and perpetually gestures towards the future, we must respect the secret unknowability of the Other by being just without being noticed for doing so. Therefore, the following chapter will examine how Henri's actions expose the fundamental undemocratic mode in which the Zoocracy governs by compelling President Zachary to inevitably undermine his mythical omnipotency in order to defeat Henri. Ultimately, upon describing the limitations of Henri's capacity for responsible decision-making, it becomes possible to see why his willingness to sacrifice himself should not be interpreted as foolish or nihilistic, but as the first step toward collective redemption and rebirth.

Hospitality and Co-existence in Fuentes's Mexico

Hospitality, as discussed by Jacques Derrida in *De l'hospitalité* (2000), challenges us to consider our relation to each other in reference to a limit, and how such limits and the conditions they impose on citizenship and belonging can be transgressed in order to cultivate more a more inclusive society. Derrida explains that the self's primordial welcoming of the Other as the condition of its subjectivity likewise results in the subject's assumption of multiple roles – host, guest, and hostage – and is the condition

for determining all ethical and juridical practices. He also posits that in order to transcend categories of membership in the nation-state, we must think according to the aporia of hospitality, or hospitality as unconditional and inoperative.

Nancy's discussion of the inoperative community in *La Communauté désœuvrée* posits that the limit reveals the hypocrisies inherent to notions of globalization and universality, and he suggests that we should consider hospitality not in binary terms, but as that which is a reflection of the "with", or our shared experiences "in-common" that are also the inevitable outcome of our originary sociality. Nancy contends that the "with" always already exceeds staid notions of nation and belonging because of the pre-originary fact of the singular-plural configuration of the operative community. Thus, Nancy's idea of the inoperative community urges us to explore how our primordial openness to the Other occurs in the interactions between singularities, and how such experiences in common are constitutive of responsibility. Meanwhile, Derrida's notion of the ever-evasive limit of the welcome compels us to think of our relation to the Other as that which must perpetually strive to defy rules of engagement and inclusion.

Carlos Fuentes presents multiple competing myths that are constitutive of Mexico's identity as a nation. He also directs a critical gaze on the debilitating prejudices of capitalism and modernity, and consistently emphasizes that the realization of the Mexican Revolution's ideals are only possible if the multivariate pasts of Mexico are perpetually incorporated into the present. Fuentes is concerned with articulating a modern description of Mexico that should not be defined by either the myth of a lost history, nor by the desire for a modern Mexico whose success shall be determined according to Western ideals of wealth and prosperity. Instead, Fuentes wants to think post-

Revolutionary Mexico as a nation that conceives of its past as a variety of unfinished projects which respects the unceasing nature of time, and which also remains oriented towards and open to the infinite process of metamorphosis.

The chapter titled “Hospitality and Coexistence in *La región más transparente del aire* and *Gringo viejo*” will examine how both of Fuentes’s novels depict the relationship between home, nation, and national identity, and how the protagonists grapple with such categories of membership through their shared experiences with others in their journeys toward self-realization.

In *Gringo viejo*, Ambrose Bierce, the “Old Gringo”, and General Tomás Arroyo confronts the “Other” as they undergo individual transformations in which both men negotiate and redefine categories of national identity and belonging in their attempts to make peace with their own complicated ideas of personal and patriotic responsibility. In a similar vein, in Fuentes’s seminal novel *La región mas transparente*, he investigates Mexico’s relationship to an increasingly globalized world as it continues to grapple with the aftermath of the Revolution and the reality of the nation’s cultural, racial, and economic diversity. Fuentes’s criticism of Mexico’s capitalist fervor in the post-Revolutionary period is portrayed through the dialogues between characters whose political and economical ideologies can be characterized according to their opposing views on inclusion and cultural multiplicity. Ultimately, the degree to which the protagonists transcend conditions of inclusion and make responsible decisions is integral to their capacity to form relationships with others and orient themselves towards a more communal and harmonious existence.

Fraternity, Friendship, and Law in Gaines's Louisiana

If we recognize that the definition of what it means to be part of a community is arbitrary, unnatural, and thus inauthentic, we must acknowledge that it nonetheless implies a certain cohesive force. This cohesive force that is characteristic of the traditional idea of community is defined as a totality formed from bonds based in shared familial, historical, or cultural commonalities. As previously discussed, Nancy and Derrida both agree on the need for the incessant destabilization of any posited foundation of a community in order to interrupt the myth of the immanent community and guard against the tendency toward totalitarianism.

The fact that society is divided into groups implies that these groups are bound by a certain relationship between its members. Derrida names this bond “fraternity”, in which the fraternal bond is both a process and a mechanism of identification that must be considered alongside the deconstruction of community. The political realm and its practical workings render it impossible to deny the inclination towards fraternity. Nancy’s idea of the myth of community prevents us from denying the role that history has had on shaping communities according to categories race and ethnicity.

In order to consider a revised notion of fraternity and community, we must first delineate Derrida’s distinction between friendship and fraternity, in which friendship designates the primordial relationship of being-with, while fraternity describes the process of identification that generalizes and excludes. In Gaines’s two novels, Derrida’s critique of fraternity, which he claims occurs when we forget the sacrificial dimension of the relation to the Other, allows us to conceive of how the political can be structured in such a way as to counteract fraternal forces which aim to fix identities that found

immanent communities. Derrida conceives of the future of the political as that which is situated in the shift away from a certain fraternity, and which instead is of the order of friendship, but a radically new sort of friendship that reflects the ontological makings of Derrida's democracy. Thus, his democracy *to come* is a democracy without fraternity, and is organized not through the process of fraternization, but through the interruption of the mythic community that occurs when individuals act most responsibly and hospitably.

In Ernest Gaines's neo-colonial plantation setting in *A Lesson Before Dying*, Grant Wiggins is called upon to follow through with a duty that he is reluctant to do, and the mythical community within which he navigates severely limits his ability to instigate direct change. Due to his exclusion from the community that has predicted and determined Jefferson's fate, Grant must rely on his community as a source of strength in his efforts to make Jefferson realize and affirm his manhood. The process of fraternization which determines how one is treated before the law is inscribed in the town's racist legal system, in which one's identity precludes responsible decision-making from taking place.

The chapter titled "Fraternity, Friendship, and Law in *A Lesson Before Dying*", demonstrates how Jefferson's unexpected transformation affects both communities in the town of Bayonne, and calls upon the totality of its members to consider the humanity of Jefferson. In Derridean terms, this recognition opens up the future to give way to the sort of inclusivity that transcends racial lines and exposes the mythical foundations of the inoperative community.

Notes

1. In his preface, titled "Orphée Noir" [Black Orpheus] to the 1948 anthology of black poetry written by Léopold Senghor, Jean-Paul Sartre used this phrase to describe *negritude*. See Léopold Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache; précédée par Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1948).

II.1 Responsibility and Sacrifice in *Le Mât de cocagne*

Despite Haiti's tragic history of political turmoil, the success of its 1791 slave revolt continues to resound in Haitian society. The original revolution set a precedent for the insistence on equality and political sovereignty that has long since characterized the political spirit of the Haitian people. Nonetheless, the autonomy of the Haitian citizens has been perennially compromised by a long legacy of corrupt colonial and neo-colonial foreign powers and tyrannical national leaders. Consequently, the revolution's promises to erect a democratic, sovereign state have become undermined by both internal and external forces, and have therefore remained unfulfilled. Much of René Depestre's work is reflective of how political oppression affects the individual psyche, and how the individual is limited in his ability to transform Haitian society. However, Depestre tempers his skepticism of the individual's agency to effect significant change by providing his protagonists with meaningful, yet limited abilities to inspire and provoke the Haitian people to collectively denounce totalitarian rule. In *Le Mât de cocagne* in particular, Depestre portrays Henri Postel as a heroic visionary who syncretically re-inscribes elements of Haiti's cultural heritage into his sacrificial display of heroism. While the fate of Henri reflects Depestre's appeal for the collective and his distrust of individual grandeur, his characterization of the ex-Senator also resonates with Derrida's conception of the ontological limitations of individual subjectivity and responsibility.

The sinister doctrine of Duvalierism served the interests of François Duvalier and his legion of cronies throughout his presidency. Duvalier's power depended on the exploitation of race, his cult of personality, and the cultural appropriation of African animism, *Vodoun*, and Haitian history in order to maintain his specter of oppression.

Furthermore, he oversaw a regime of totalitarian control that relied upon terror to ensure the psychological colonization of the Haitian people. In Derridean terms, terror can be understood as the eradication of difference in others, in which the worst violence takes place when one appropriates another. In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, written shortly after the World Trade attack on September 11th, 2001, Giovanna Borradori interviews Derrida alongside fellow philosopher Jürgen Habermas on the phenomenization of terror in our modern society. Derrida explains that “the worst [terror] can simultaneously appear insubstantial, fleeting, light, and so seem to be denied, repressed, indeed forgotten, relegated to being just one event among others, *one* of the “major events”... in a long chain of past and future events]” (99). In the 2001 interview, Derrida distinguishes between radical evil and absolute evil in his discussion of contemporary acts of terrorism. He first discusses the difference between his idea of a “worst violence” and Kant’s conception of a “radical evil”. Whereas Kant defines radical evil in (German) *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* as that which stems from the innate propensity of human beings to subordinate moral law to self-interest, Derrida defines *le pire* [the worst] violence in terms of his objection to the violence inscribed in Lévinas’s reductive ontological concept of the relation to the infinitely Other. Derrida explains in his two-part 1964 essay « Violence et métaphysique » [“Violence and Metaphysics”], that the worst violence occurs when the Other is completely appropriated to or within one’s self, which results in a sweeping exclusion of the *most*; i.e., when the violence wreaked is limitless. In other words, the sacrifice of all Others that occurs when the address towards the singular Other reaches its proper destination does the most, or *worst* violence in this total exclusion of the rest. In terms of terrorism, the potency of terror inscribed in a particular

act derives from the level of control that is reached when all other Others are reduced to a collective totality. Thus, Duvalier's total, brutal, and systematic repression of political agitators constitutes real-world manifestation of the connection Derrida makes between total exclusion and the worst violence.

In Depestre's novel, Henri Postel is a middle-aged, overweight Mulatto who joins the competition along with seven other men to climb the greasy pole in the Square of Heroes; an enormous spectacle for the citizens of Port-au-Roi (a deliberate allusion to Port-au-Prince). Furthermore, the novel parodies the Duvalier regime's effective utilization of terror to nullify resistance through the "zombification", or total spiritual and political incapacitation, of the former political agitator. *Le Mât de cocagne* can be conceived of as divided into five parts, and opens with the debate between President Zachary and his crony, Barbotog, in which the two men discuss the desired specifics of Henri's zombification. In this exchange, we first learn that Henri Postel is a political enemy of President Zachary, that his family has been slaughtered, and that he has been "zombified" in order to prevent the ex-senator from exerting influence over the people of « Grand Pays Zacharian » [Zacharyland]. Since President Zachary's rise to power, Henri has been condemned by NOFES to sell groceries and toil through life alone and utterly powerless. Zachary refers to Henri as his last living enemy, and vows to construct a pseudo-prison in which Henri is made perpetually aware of his wretched state of existence by being sentenced to dwindle as the life of a grocer. President Zachary believes that the greatest punishment that Henri can suffer is to toil alone as the living dead, where death is would be a reprieve from his wretched existence. To make matters worse for the despairing ex-Senator, his former political supporters take pity on Henri to

the point that they have stopped patronizing the store because they are fearful of being associated with the political dissident and archenemy of their dictator. Consequently, the National Office for the Electrification of Souls (NOFES) agents are the only people who frequent his shop, and they do so in order to ensure that he continues to languish in the most meager of existences.

Depestre's initial characterization of Henri as a man who possesses a fickle and irresolute disposition invokes in the reader a sense of resigned compassion for the vulnerable and mistreated man. Henri recounts the sufferings he formerly underwent, in which he was forced to bear witness to the torture of his wife and daughter, and the murders of his other children as well as his supporters:

Certains furent enfermés vivants dans des sacs sisal, avec de grosses pierres, et jetés dans le golfe du haut d'un hélicoptère. Et cinq ans après ces horreurs, qu'est-ce que je fais de mieux contre la zoocratie ? Rien de mieux que grimper sur un fils de putain de mat de cocagne !...J'emmerde les coups de feu que je n'ai pas tirés, et que personne a ma place n'a tirés. Merde pour nous tous. Nous sommes tous là : couchés sur des blocs de glace, les bras en croix, les mains vides, l'esprit ramolli par le tafia de la résignation (64).

[Some of them were put into gunny sacks alive, with some large rocks, and dropped into the gulf from a helicopter. Five years after these horrors, what's the best I can do against the Zoocracy? Nothing better than climbing up a motherfucking greasy pole! ...To hell with the shots I didn't fire and that nobody fired in my place. Shit on all of us. We're all here, laid out on blocks of ice, arms crossed, hands empty, our minds softened by the rum of resignation] (47-48).

Henri's speech is imbued with the regret that he, like his fellow Haitians, passively accepted his fate after Zachary took power and transformed his subjects into docile, fearful victims of Zachary's violence. The agony that our hero has undergone, combined with his feelings of helpless regret, portrays the Zachary regime the obvious enemy of the people when Henri is attacked for representing "Mulatto Pseudoliberalism". Zachary identifies Henri's Mulatto social class with « insincérité, l'hypocrisie, le racisme et le

libéralisme » [insincerity, hypocrisy, racism, liberalism], and the president's accusation resonates as a ridiculous and tired tactic utilized by the dictator to keep opposition at bay (63; 47).

In *Le Métier à métisser*, Depestre explains that the mass killings, terrorism, and systematic depletion of the nation's resources that plagued Haiti during the nineteenth century does not compare to the horrors that were endured by Haitians in the century that followed. He explains

Jusqu'a l'expérience de la démocratie que notre patrie d'origine, grâce a une incertaine tutelle internationale, est en train de vivre sous l'autorité du premier personnel démocrate de toute notre histoire, le 'pouvoir noir ou mulâtre a l'haïtienne' s'est révèle absolument incapable de se constituer en société civile et en Etat moderne, démocratique et souverain (201).

[Until the democratic experience that our original homeland, thanks to an uncertain international trusteeship, is living under the authority of the first Democratic leadership, the 'power of the black or mulatto Haitian' has revealed absolutely incapable of forming a civil society and a modern, democratic and sovereign state. (*My translation*)]

Depestre decries the unsustainability of any regime that exploits racial difference to garner ill-begotten support from its most marginalized populations in an attempt to divide and conquer.

Moreover, in *Bonjour et adieu à la négritude*, Depestre cites Aimé Césaire, who explains that the history behind Haiti's racial hierarchy stems from the institutionalization of racial relations between Europeans and Africans who were enslaved and deported during the era of colonialism. Upon ascending to the presidency in 1957, Duvalier sought to deconstruct Haiti's racial hierarchy, in which value was arbitrarily attributed to skin color as a means to justify the brutalities of slavery and colonialism. Césaire reminds us that white Europeann colonialism is responsible for establishing *black* and *white* as social

signs, despite the fact that these racial color signs possess no meaning in and of themselves (146). Similarly, *Le Mât de cocagne* exposes the arbitrary relationship between race and class by portraying Henri Postel's mulattoism as equally as contemptible as his ex-Senatorial position in the eyes of Zacharyland's rulers.

During the colonial period in Haiti, the French imposed a three-tiered social structure in which the *grand blancs* [white elites] occupied the top of the hierarchy, the *noirs* [black slaves] were situated at the bottom, and situated between the two groups in the middle tier were the *affranchis* [freedman], most of whom were Mulatto, or mixed-race descendants of slave owners and slaves. Still, the racial codes of the time reinforced a social and political sub-hierarchy based on race alone, in which poor whites considered themselves socially and politically superior to Mulattoes, even if the latter were technically economically superior to them. However, the Haitian Revolution of 1791 supplanted a new social structure in the place of the former three-tiered system. With the revolution came the collapse of the former plantation system and hence the eradication of the white colonial ruling class. For a brief period thereafter, the new black and Mulatto leaders tried to reinstitute a revamped version of the former plantation system via strict military control, but this system did not last long. This was largely due to the consequences of the Haitian Revolution, which divided plantations into smaller tracts of land that were distributed among former black slaves. These structural changes resulted in the leeching of power from the Haitian upper class, which hoped to supplant the economic positions of the former colonial powers. Thereafter, the newly instituted Mulatto Haitian upper class turned away from agriculture and towards government,

business, and urban-based activities, where they endeavored to maintain their superior economic and social positions by occupying positions of power.

The nineteenth-century Haitian ruling class consisted of the educated, French-speaking, and mostly Mulatto, urban elite, as well as military leaders, which were mostly black Haitians. Although the alliance between the military and urban elite was precarious, their political dynamic ensured that the peasant majority remained closed off to national political matters. Furthermore, the urban elite promoted elements of French culture in order to keep themselves ideologically and culturally distinct from the low class peasantry, and as a result, French social mannerisms, Catholicism, as well as light-skinned phenotypical markings, continued to be deemed criteria of high social position, in contrast to the peasants and manual laborers, who tended to be darker skinned and who occupied low social positions.¹ Finally, in the twentieth century, a small but not insignificant number of black Haitians ascended to the middle class; among those was François Duvalier. Duvalier's contempt for the urban elite stemmed from his belief that the separation between black and Mulatto groups was the reason for Haiti's legacy of black oppression by light-skinned elites. Although left-leaning thinkers distinguished between race and class and argued that the topic of color served to conceal the more difficult to swallow truth that governing elites of all skin colors had oppressed the masses over the course of Haitian history, Duvalier exploited the notion that class and color were interchangeable (Dubois 318). He further sought to interrupt the pattern of light-skin empowerment that he claimed was attributable to the widespread oppression of the marginalized black populations by creating an echelon of new black leaders.

In the novel, Zachary's condemnation of Henri and what he represents parallels Duvalier's antipathy toward the established mulatto elite. Depestre uses surrealism in his writing to challenge the arbitrary binary of racial color signs by beginning the novel with an introduction to Henri's backstory. We learn that our protagonist possesses an unflappable moral code, and that in his former life he was loved and respected by the people of Zacharyland.

Furthermore, Depestre incorporates elements of *Vodoun* into Henri's world, and his use of intertextual surrealism allows him to obscure reality and its representation on both a fictional and historical plane. He utilizes the style of surrealism to open the field in which a revolutionary praxis, through the interplay of different story elements situated in both the natural and the supernatural, at once celebrates the Haitian people and their shared history while denouncing oppressive forces of power.

Derrida's ontology of responsibility frames a discussion of the process by which Henri breaks from his zombified status and becomes revived, which begins when he reveals the fundamental irresponsibility of the Zachary regime. Henri achieves this by compelling President Zachary to use public displays of terror to thwart Henri's ascension up the greasy pole. Thus, Depestre's use of surrealism and his invocation of *Vodoun* illuminate how Henri's de-zombification process requires him to reengage his identity with the collective conscience of the Haitian people. Furthermore, Henri's internal revolution and his ultimate fate is the result of subversive actions that are made in the name of decisions that can be deemed the "most responsible" in Derridean terms.

The Fundamental Irresponsibility of Zacharyland

Duvalier's regime embodies Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of the means by which inoperative communities are formed when a society is plagued by authoritarian rule, violence, and the impossibility of peaceful cohabitation. In several of his works, Depestre explores the theme of zombification, which signifies the submergence of a conscious being into a state of mental and physical degradation. The zombie in Depestre's Haiti serves as the archetype of utter failure, because to be rendered zombified in the fictionalized city of Port-au-Roi is to suffer a fate worse than death. Depestre's figure of the zombie is featured in Haiti's cultural history, in which the zombie is the body of the living dead – a person who has been robbed of his vital power and has consequently been deprived of light and hope so that he is rendered a body degraded to a bestial mode. Depestre explains in *Hadriana des tous mes rêves* (1988) that in the zombified state, the body functions as

...un bestial humain taillable et corvéable à merci. C'est un sous-nègre, personnalité en pièces détachées sans souvenir ni vision du future, sans racine pour porter des fruits [...] objet errant du royaume des ombres, loin du sel et des épices de la liberté (140).

[...a human workbeast subject to and at the mercy of the master's bidding. He is a sub-black, a personality of detached parts, without memory nor a vision of the future, without root to bear seeds [...], an object wandering from the realm of shadows, far from the salt and spices of liberty. (*My translation*)]

The zombie shares some physical attributes with the living, and this sentiment of familiarity serves as a visible, constant reminder of the implied danger of individual resistance. Upon meeting Henri, the reader is introduced to the pervasive threat of total human degradation imposed by Zoocrates Zachary's "Zoocracy", which has subjected the collective psyche of the people to one of perpetual paranoia. In his quest for total power,

Zoocrates Zachary strives to degrade his zombie-sentenced subjects' spirits by alienating and humiliating his victims until they accept that survival is only possible on the condition that they passively and interminably accept their dehumanized state.

Zoocrates Zachary discusses the electrification of souls with Clovis, the Minister of the NOFES, and foresees a life for Henri in which Henri will suffer a living death that will

[...] montera de son inconscient comme une névrose qui le trompera a chaque instant. Il prendra pour un sursis le chemin qui le conduit tout droit sur la terre. L'électrification des âmes accède à une nouvelle dimension métaphysique: la mort qui ressemble plus à la vie qu'à tout autre chose (12-13).

[...] rise from his unconscious like a neurosis, misleading him at every moment. He will think the road leading straight to the grave is a reprieve. Electrification of souls attains a new metaphysical dimension: a death resembling life more than anything else (6).

Derrida's idea of the trace reveals how Henri's relegation to a zombified state is the product of an operative community whose power is derived from the nullification of its citizens' decision-making capabilities. He further posits that the present is perpetually under erasure because it is not determined by a transcendental signified (God, for example) that precedes being; therefore, any political absolutism should be deemed suspect due to the degree of violence that is required to maintain this illusion of absolute power. Furthermore, Derrida describes the « indécidable » ("undecidable") as the condition that invokes political consequence and which makes it possible to break from the narrative flow of history. In *Donner la mort*, Derrida describes the creation of history as what happens when decisions are made that differ from the status quo. He writes

S'il est vrai que le concept de responsabilité a, tout au long d'une histoire qui est aussi cohérente qu'elle est continue, toujours implicite implication dans l'action, en faisant, une praxis, une décision qui dépasse la conscience simple, ou la compréhension théorique simple, il est également vrai que le même concept nécessite une décision ou une action responsable de répondre pour lui-même consciemment, qui est, avec la connaissance d'une thématiques de ce qui se fait,

de ce que l'action signifie, ses causes, se termine, etc....En conséquence, l'activation de la responsabilité (décision, acte, praxis) devra toujours s'étendre derrière et au-delà toute détermination théorique ou thématique (19).

[If it is true that the concept of responsibility has, throughout a history that is as consistent as it is continuous, always implied involvement in action, doing, a *praxis*, a *decision* that exceeds simple conscience or simple theoretical understanding, it is also true that the same concept requires a decision or a responsible action to answer for itself *consciously*, that is, with knowledge of a thematics of what is done, of what action signifies, its causes, ends, etc....As a result, the activating of responsibility (decision, act, *praxis*) will always have to extend behind and beyond any theoretical or thematic determination] (27).

Thus, if decisions that break from the normal course of history radically interrupt the present and eventually become constitutive of the historical timeline, then according to Derrida, these decisions are inherently *responsible* decisions because they exceed prescriptive knowledge regarding precisely how and in what way such decisions accord with pre-established rules. Related to the idea of the undecidable is Derrida's notion of the "secret", which signifies the unknowable fact of the wholly Other, in which the political happens in the moment of decision in which the obligation to decide in spite of the daunting and persistent inevitability of the sacrifice keeps the moral and political fields open. Furthermore, the secret of the Other and the primordial obligation to decide situates the necessity to act in a context in which one is rendered infinitely responsible for the Other. Although Derrida claims that responsibility belongs to the subject (me) alone, the limit of this responsibility designates the point at which one commits the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the Other. Thus, « la donner la mort » [the gift of death] signifies this limit, or the point at which we forsake our ultimate singularity, or our irreplaceability, by sacrificing for the Other.

According to Derrida's philosophy of responsibility, the process of zombification is proof of the fundamental irresponsibility of Duvalier regime. Derrida claims that if the

future is that which can never be known or predicted, then it follows that no form of governance can ever justify the use of violence to maintain its power, since the ascent to power must always be accomplished through the creation and execution of a preconceived plan. Since Henri is unable to directly modify his immediate situation as a zombified grocer who wastes away in the confines of his empty store, he must alter his perception of his own agency by launching an attack on the very foundations of Zachary's power.

Depestre constructs a world in *Le Mât de cocagne* that contains elements of the supernatural that allude to the Duvalier regime. Despite his belief in the power of *Vodoun*, Depestre portrays the incapacitating effects that dictatorial violence has on the community's ability to harness spiritual power and combat political terrorism. President Zoocrates Zachary's name ironically refers to Socrates, though the dictator is neither wise nor concerned with governing his people in the name of reason and democracy. Rather, Zachary rules by propagating racist dogma and winning consecutive elections via fraud and terror. Zachary's ruthless deputy, Clovis Barbatog, oversees the political terror at NOFES, in which "electrification" signifies the use of zombification and metaphorically represents political terrorism and the spiritual death of the Haitian people.

Barbatog represents Duvalier's real-life long-time friend Clément Barbot, who recruited and administered the fearsome street police known as the *tonton macoutes* until 1960, when Duvalier arrested him on suspicion that Barbot was scheming to usurp him.² The introductory debate between Zachary and Barbatog is followed by a lengthier discussion in which Henri and Master Horace discuss whether Henri should go into exile

or remain in Haiti and participate in the festival.

Perhaps the most significant event in the novel that relates to Nancy's idea of sharing as the fact of community occurs early in the text, when Henri laments his situation as a political enemy who has been relegated to the margins of society from his former position as Senator. Horace Vermont, Henri's most trusted friend, runs a shoemaking shop next to Henri's grocery store. Henri confides in Horace that he can no longer stand to « barbotte dans la graisse et le tafia » [wallow around in grease and tafia] and that he plans to go into exile (16; 9). He decries the futility of his two years as senator: « Qu'ai-je fait durant ces deux années-la? Des prédications pour le vent. Pendant ce temps, Zacharias, lui, électrifiait, zombifiait, massacrait à tour de bras. Qui suis-je à cette heure? » [What did I do during those two years? Preached into the wind. During that time, Zachary, for his part, electrified, zombified, murdered at every turn. Who am I now?] (16; 9). However, Master Horace implores him not to flee, and instructs Henri to instead enter the contest of the greasy pole, appealing to his former role as Senator and defender of the people by reminding him that the people still hold him in high esteem.

Although Master Horace pressures Henri to consider his obligation to the people of Zacharyland and challenges his selfish desires to flee, it is ultimately Habib Moutamada's duplicity that spurns Henri into action. Moutamada, an associate of Barbotog, supplies Henri's store and is hated by the people of Port-au-Roi because of his past reputation for financing the coup that led to Zachary's rule. The reasons for Henri's contempt of Moutamad are numerous, but all relate to the fact that Moutamad signifies the endemic corruption that plagues Haitian politics (28; 19). For example, Henri declares that he wants to kill Moutamad for a multitude of reasons; among them, giving \$100,000

to Zachary's campaign, connecting Zachary with the Mafia that traffics in guns, serving on the Board of Directors of ZAAMCO (the bank that exports human blood), and finally, for admitting that he is going to take money from the country for himself. Thus, when the ruffian encourages Henri to go into exile and enumerates the multitude of advantages to which Henri would be privy upon leaving the country, Henri's deep-rooted hatred for Moutamad, coupled with his unwavering moral integrity as a former benevolent politician, compels him to defy Moutamad and announce his participation in the festival of the greasy pole. The ex-Senator's announcement aligns with Derrida's notion of the threshold of responsibility, in which the unknowability of the thematization of the responsible person or act; simply stated – the essentially inadequate thematization of responsibility - is the condition for responsibility. Derrida posits that one's ability to be responsible first depends on the experience of his irreplaceability, which he only ever knows through the Other. Thus, because Henri's existence prior to entering the festival was one of obscurity and futility in his zombified state, his decision to join the competition signals a drastic break from his own history of imprisonment.

The Irresponsibility of Responsible Decision-Making

Henri defies his spiritual death sentence when he decides to enter the contest. We are privy to the private thoughts that run through his mind after he resolves to join the competition, in which he tells himself « je veux simplement donner à voir à cette moitié d'île qu'elle n'a plus comme chemin qu'une dure montée » [I simply want to make this half of the island see that there is no road left but a hard climb] (35; 25). Here, we witness the proverbial revolutionary gears turning about in Henri's mind, and we catch a glimpse

of the sheer desperation with which Henri regards his current state of existence. He remains preoccupied with the plight of his people, and it becomes apparent that his yearning to bring justice and liberty to the impoverished and oppressed citizens of Port-au-Roi is motivated not by his desire to win the contest, but by the knowledge that his people need to witness faith embodied in the decrepit but dogged figure of the ex-Senator.

Next, David Ritson's denunciation of Henri is indicative of the larger theme of the limitations of individual agency that are found throughout many of Depestre's works. Ritson, an untrustworthy associate of Henri, has much to gain if Henri flees the country. He blames Henri's decision to compete as inspired by folly and ego, and tells him « aucun spectacle n'a jamais libéré des esclaves » [no burlesque performance ever freed any slaves] (35; 24). However, since the stakes of winning the contest would require the champion to choose a criminal life, whether or not we can deem Henri's decision an ontologically responsible one depends on how we interpret his permanent state of persecution. On one hand, Henri is aware that he has entered a contest in which he stands little chance of defeating an enemy who has not only invalidated his conscience, but who has publicly pronounced the inevitability of his failure in the contest. If Derrida considers responsible decisions as those which do as little harm as possible to all the Others who are sacrificed in the moment of the decision, Henri's abysmal chances of winning initially seems to suggest that his entrance into the contest does not appear to pose a high risk to his fellow Haitians.

As Henri reflects on the passivity with which he has accepted his horrible fate, he considers how « Sa pensée pue tout ce qu'il a fui comme la peste depuis la fin de son

adolescence » [his mind reeks of everything he has avoided like the plague since his adolescence] and resolves « intégrer sa vie à la pâte de son action » [to knead his life into the dough of his action] (38; 27). He cycles through an internal dialogue steeped in self-doubt, which strengthens as his resolve to join the competition continues to grow. Henri conflates the pole with his own phallic masculinity, and censures himself for daring to attribute his own self-importance with forces represented by the phallic power of the pole that are beyond his influence. He reminds himself that the pole is neither « le nombril du monde ou le moyeu de son destin » [the navel of the world [n]or the axle of his destiny].

He continues:

Ton mâât n'est pas l'un des points chauds de leur guerre froide. Il n'est pas non plus tu ne sais quel pont fameux où un homme seul devait contenir toute une armée ennemie. Pas un défilé où une poignée de nègres essayent d'arrêter l'avance des Perses du siècle ! Rien qu'une putain de mat ensorcelé ! (39)

[It is not one of the “hot points” of their cold war. It's not that well-known bridge where one man alone was able to hold back an enemy army. Not a parade in which a handful of blacks try to stop the advance of this country's Persians. Nothing but a magic fucking pole!] (27)

Henri's inclination toward egoism is tempered by his self-debasing private thoughts, which allows him to maintain grounded in his moral trajectory. Still, Henri's self-awareness leads him to reflect on the multiple conflicting influences that drive him to compete, which enables him to hone in on the most compelling force that steers him toward the public limelight. Specifically, he tells himself that he must climb, but also that he must relinquish control and allow his fellow Haitians to interpret his crude display of valor on their own accord:

Si ce que tu vas faire a plus d'un sens, l'imagination de la ville sera bien à même de le déchiffrer. Ton rôle est seulement de grimper. Tu n'es pas chargé de tracer quelque allégorie dans le ciel de ta ville ni de jouer à un nouveau Postel pour des

milliers de spectateurs. Pas un spectacle ta chienne de vie. Tu n'es pas un acquéreur de mérites solitaires ni un de ces intellectuels qui, impuissants à se situer dans la foule, barbotent sans fin dans les symboles et les fables de la conscience morale. Tu vas travailler pour tes nègres, avec eux (39-40).

[If what you're going to do has more than one meaning, the city's imagination will be able to decipher it. Your role is simply to climb. You haven't been given an allegory in the sky over the city nor to play a new Postel for thousands of spectators. Your bitch of a life is no spectacle. You're neither a collector of solitary virtues nor one of those impotent intellectuals lost in a crowd and endlessly dabbling in symbols and fables of the moral conscience. You're going to work for your people, and with them] (27-28).

Thus, Henri acknowledges that the futility of his life has rendered him unable to pontificate and inspire the masses as he did formerly as Senator. Hence, in his zombified state, Henri understands, even if only implicitly, that he bears little chance of escaping some sort of miserable fate. Although he does not entertain illusions that the competition will mobilize the masses to overthrow Zachary, he leaves it up to chance that his performance may serve as a potential catalyst that can engender a collective awakening. It is at this point in the novel that Henri realizes the purpose of his entrance into the contest is to welcome the obscuration of his singularity and with it, to forsake illusions of a sunny destiny.

After Henri leaves Ritson, he registers his name in the competition and is immediately met with incredulous opposition from the NOFESian agents. They demand to know why Henri wants to join the contest, and although Henri does not articulate his intentions for competing initially, when he is harassed at gunpoint and forced to explain why he has formerly been imprisoned, he concedes that it was because he was « un sénateur du peuple » [the people's senator] (32; 44). Afterwards, when the agents demand that Henri identify the person who told him to register for the contest, Henri declares that it was his conscience, to which Dr Parfait Merdoie (Perfect Gooseturd) replies:

Qui vous a dit que vous avez une conscience ? Dans ce pays un seul homme peut faire état de sa CONSCIENCE, parce qu'il l'a au majuscule : c'est notre vénère Chef-Spirituel-à-Vie, l'Honorable Dr Zoocrates Zacharias (33).

[Who told you that you have a conscience? In this country, only one man can lay claim to his CONSCIENCE, because he has it with a capital letter: that's our venerable Spiritual-Chief-for-Life, the Honorable Zoocrates Zachary] (46).

At the end of the interrogation, Barbotog's deputy, Dr. Perfect Gooseturd, concludes that Henri has chosen the most physically demanding sport of all because he has a pathological obstinancy and « Cet excès d'orgueil qui hier lui faisait accroire qu'il était un champion méconnu de la démocratie » [a grandiose illusion which made him believe his was the unrecognized champion of democracy], the level of responsibility inherent to Henri's motives becomes obscured (52; 38).

We witness how the evolution of Henri's thought process accords with Derrida and Nancy's notions of community, responsibility, and democracy. Derrida's conception of the undecidable is signified by Henri's decision to enter the festival of the greasy pole and risk everything for the sake of penetrating and publicly denouncing the autocratic Zoocracy. Furthermore, Henri's realization that his singular existence is intertwined with the community allows him to see that he is absolutely not alone in his climb, and that the implications of his participation weigh as heavily on his conscience as they may potentially on those of his community members. We can deduce from his internal dialogue that Henri's motivations to enter the contest are dual in nature. In one sense, he yearns to prove to the people that the only way to rise above the oppression is through risking one's life in battle. However, in another way, Henri is impelled to seek redemption for having never incorporated direct conflict and confrontation with authority into his repertoire of political dissension.

Merdoie's declaration that President Zachary stands as the supreme ruler and conscience of the country signifies Nancy's idea of the mythical community that produces a self-enclosed subject in the form of a totalized, static body politic who is totally immobilized and denied the ability to suspend or interrupt the steady flow of unidirectional power. Henri returns to his home to meet with Master Horace and announces « Je n'ai pas le droit de manquer mon coup » [I haven't got the right to fail] in which he affirms the secret of responsibility by vowing that he can neither make a decision which avoids the sacrifice of others, nor one that is premised on a predictable outcome (53; 39). Henri concedes that his decision to join the competition is his way of responding to the will of his people, who indirectly present him with one final opportunity to do something meaningful with his life. If he fails, the Zachary regime will ensure that Henri returns to an even more destitute means of existence. Thus, in accepting the challenge, he regards winning as the only privilege which he is owed; not because he deserves to win, but because the consequences of losing would transcend his own suffering and be proof of the Zachary regime's inexorable dominance.

Henri enters the capital city and sets his eyes on the « vieux, reptilien, lépreux, la capitale onedo-zacharienne » [old, reptilian, leprous Zacaharian capital'], and considers the futility in recalling fond memories from his former life:

Si l'envie vous en prenait, vous pouviez vous enrouler tendrement dans les draps frais de votre enfance... Le plus dénué des citadins avait la faculté d'ouvrir sa ville et de se pencher sur sa nuit utérine ou l'on découvrait d'humbles trésors que la méchanceté et la dégradation n'avaient pas encore saccages (58-59).

[If the mood struck you, you could roll up tenderly in the fresh sheets of your childhood.... The most deprived of city dwellers could open the city and examine its uterine night, where there were humble treasures that spitefulness and degradation had not yet pillaged] (42-43).

He is subsequently overcome with rage upon viewing the destitute state of his former home:

Maintenant tu vois ce que le génie de l'ONEDA a fait de ta cite, un circuit ferme d'injustices, grouillant d'abus et de prévarications, rongé de hontes et d'impôts, un petit monde clos d'électrificateurs d'âmes. Tu as sous les yeux sa face nocturne aussi ravagée que son visage du jour. Ta nostalgie lentement se change en épée...(58).

[Now you see what the genius of has done with your city, a closed circuit of justice, groveling in abuse and prevarication, gnawed by shame and taxes, a closed little world for the electrification of souls. Before your eyes you witness its nighttime face, as devastated as during the day. Your nostalgia slowly changes into a sword... (42).

The combined effect of the sorrowful state of Port-au-Roi and Henri's epiphany that he may stand a chance at being resurrected subdues his earlier apprehension and reinvigorates him. At this point, it becomes clear that his decision to enter the contest is a fully responsible one, since Henri realizes that even if his participation does incite turmoil in Port-au-Roi, it cannot possibly worsen the population's living conditions.

Martin Munro suggests in *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Danticat* that one of the motivating forces of Depestre's use of surrealism in the novel is to "add color, some exotic spice, which acts as compensation for the sense of lack and emptiness that (negative) deterritorialization inevitably creates" (133). The carnivalesque portrayal of the contest provides the languishing and oppressed people with a lively distraction from their otherwise dismal existence. Depestre's use of surrealism in his illustration of the bizarre and magical events that take place during the contest yields two major effects. First, Henri re-engages with his community by appealing to the popular surrealism of *Vodoun* and impressing upon his fellow citizens that he remains invested in their religious traditions and belief system. Henri's fruitful

invocation of *loas* proves to his fellow citizens that those who rule over the living realm are not impervious to the mystical forces of the spiritual realm. In his public display of valor, the fallen hero reminds the people of Zachary's mortality and his weaknesses, as well as his brutality. Secondly, Depestre uses surrealism to portray Henri's personal reawakening, which he achieves through the fantastical escape of his zombified reality.

On the first day of the competition, the competitors gather at the Square of Heroes and Barbotog enumerates the altered rules of the competition that have changed since the administration has learned of Henri's participation. He launches a personal invective against Henri's motivations for competing, implicating his megalomaniacal sensibilities as a « sempiternel aspirant au martyre, qui comptait fébrilement sur une très hypothétique victoire pour nous acculer enfin à l'écrouer comme malfaiteur » [perpetual candidate for martyrdom who was feverishly counting on his hypothetical victory to drive us to the point of imprisoning him as a criminal] (74; 56). Barbotog declares that moving forward, if Henri is to win, then he will be condemned to either wear the uniform of NOFES or « se tire une rafale dans le tête » [to riddle his own head with bullets] (74; 56). Henri's decision to proceed with the contest despite the rule change signifies the irreconcilability of individual triumph in the face of totalitarian rule. In the first option posed by Barbotog, being forced to don the evil Master's attire would drive the final nail into the coffin of Henri's total zombification, rendering him a completely incapacitated slave to the system; in other words, a fully formed zombie. Thus, the only possible outcome that could possibly liberate Henri from such a fate would be to pursue death unequivocally. Barbotog concludes that Henri's win would be in vain, since it would prove the individual man's efforts to combat the dictatorial machine futile, since it has

already prescribed its subjects' fate. Barbatog's resigned outlook parallels Depestre's own philosophy of the limitations of the singular man's potential to invoke real, lasting change against systemic and institutionalized tyranny. However, we must evaluate Henri's choice to participate not by measure of the fruits yielded, but rather, in terms of how his sacrifice exposes the mystical foundations of Zachary's power.

Depestre inserts the character of the white European "outsider" who serves as both a meta-narrator and the normative voice of reason to ensure that his audience does not get lost in the surreal spiritual gymnastics that ensue during the contest. Claude-Marc Nidang, a Parisian journalist who is in Port-au-Roi to report on the games, describes Henri's former senatorial cause as an effort « arracher au 'fascisme du sous-développement' les croyances et les forces les plus élémentaires du peuple » [to liberate the most elementary beliefs and strengths of his people from the 'fascism of underdevelopment'] (83; 63). Nidang, whose writing is saturated with colonial rhetoric, depicts Haiti as a failed state and describes its citizens in reductive terms that ignore the singular integrity of each person who makes up the oppressed masses. He claims that Henri's solitary sacrifice is « le souci évident d'offrir à son peuple...un exemple apte à le réveiller de sa condition animale de zombie » [an obvious desire to offer to his people...an example capable of awakening them from their bestial condition of zombies] (83; 64). Ultimately, Nidang forecasts that Henri's triumph will either liberate the people, which would in turn « libérant la fusée-rébellion-du-pays-réel » [free the social-creative faculty of the people], or that it will signal to the tyrants the beginning of the end to rulers who have expanded « Le terrain hallucinatoire de l'imposture et de l'injustice » [the hallucinatory terrain of imposture and injustice] (84; 65). The journalist's predictions of

the possible outcomes that will occur if Henri wins the contest illuminate the perpetually unresolved tension inscribed in Depestre's own political philosophy with regards to the obstacles that those who possess magnanimous ideals meet in the confrontation with endemic oppression. Moreover, Nidang foretells of the inevitable consequence that Henri's participation will have on reinvigorating the community with the spirit of revolution.

The third part of the novel consists of the first day of the festival. The contest itself depicts a caricature of political power that symbolizes Zachary's dependence on violence to sustain his power. During Duvalier's reign, the dictator exploited Haitian mythology by soliciting the allegiance of *houngans*, or *Vodoun* priests, and cultivated an aura of mystical terror that he wielded to suppress political opposition. Furthermore, the dictator styled his speech and appearance on Baron Samedi, the *loa* of the dead, which fed rumors that Duvalier possessed supernatural powers and attributed his ascendancy to the support and blessings of *Vodoun* spirits.

Le Mât de cocagne presents three instances in which *Vodoun* rites are utilized in the competition. First, Espingel Nildevert invokes Baron Samedi by donning Baron Samedi's hat, high collar, false white beard, and skull rattle with the intention to render the greasy pole the reposoir of the *loa* of death. Nildevert is a *bokor*, or a *Vodoun* sorcerer who dabbles in both good and evil by invoking *bakas*, or evil spirits to assist him in doing his bidding. Because Zachary favors Nildevert, he permits this invocation, which incites a series of subsequent invocations from Henri and his co-conspirators. Nildevert's possession by Baron Samedi stymies his ability to climb the pole, which upsets the audience, and in turn, enrages citizens who have made bets in his favor. Not only does

Nildevert's fall reinforce the unpredictable and often undesirable consequences that transpire when the powers of *Vodoun* are exploited or manipulated to achieve personal ends, but it also speaks to the singular-plural nature of the living and spiritual realms and the need to heed the independent and untamable workings of *Vodoun*.

Sor Cisa realizes that Nildevert has begun the rite against Henri by changing the pole into the residence of Baron Samedi, which verifies that the crux of the competition is situated between Henri and the residence of Baron Samedi, or death itself (69-70). The second *Vodoun* rite takes place during the evening following the first day of the games. At this point, Sor Cisa, Henri's masseuse and spiritual guide, summons Loko Roi Nago, otherwise known as Papa Loko, the *loa* of healing, to forge a connection between the living and the ancestral realms in order to counteract Nildevert's invocation of Baron Samedi.

Sor Cisa takes charge of the spiritual combat, draws a *vèvé* on Henri's floor, and performs a counter-rite to summon Papa Loko to retaliate against the invocation of Baron Samedi. In Haitian folklore, a *vèvé* represents the figures of the astral forces, which oblige the *loas* to descend upon the earth. Since President Zachary has used both sorcery and the exploitation of racial divisiosn to sully the bridge that connects the ancestral and the natural world in attempts to further his own power, Sor Cisa invokes the healing powers of Papa Loko and reminds Henri and Horace that trees connect the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Although Master Horace protests that the use of *Vodoun* be used as a weapon against Henri's opponents, Henri explains to Horace that Sor Cisa represents the general population, who share her belief that all unfortunate events are linked to evil forces. Therefore, she reminds the men that although her perspective differs from theirs,

they must accept the spiritual assistance and embrace solidarity with the mystical realm.

Henri's conciliation with Sor Cisa signifies Derrida's conception of the nexus of secrecy, or the moment of absolute unconsciousness that precedes responsible decision-making and punctuates the moment of decision with the unknown. In Henri's decision to permit the use of *Vodoun* to proceed in the competition, he frees himself by plunging into unpredictable terrain, thus relinquishing his control over his fate and welcoming the forces, which are part and parcel of his cultural world and the people with whom his fate is intertwined.

The fourth part of the novel features the climactic part of the second day of the games and centers on Henri's counterattack on Zachary's entourage. Papa Loko is called upon to reverse the effects of zombification that have wreaked havoc on the overweight senator's body, and to expel the cluster of dead men from Henri's unhealthy physical form and break the spell that holds him down (110; 86). Although Papa Loko grants Henri the agility and skill needed to execute his ascent up the greasy pole, he does not guarantee that Henri will win; rather, he simply levels the playing field so that Henri's physical capacities equals those of the other competitors. Thus, Papa Loko respects the conditions that enable responsible decision-making to take place. He keeps the future open by respecting the absolute unknowability of responsibility, and leaves it in Henri's hands to find the courage within himself to ascend the pole.

In order to be revived, Henri seeks to extract life from death-giving objects. He must defy the murderous weapons thrust upon him by Zachary and his cronies by subverting their meaning while simultaneously heeding the potency of their power. Henri declares that he has « points chauds » [hot points] inside of him, which affirms his

renewed willpower. However, Henri's restored vivacity is subsequently countered by the third and final *Vodoun* rite, in which Gloomy-Simon-Seven Days is called upon to further curse Henri's ascent up the pole. Gloomy, Zachary's *houngon*, or local priest, advises the dictator to inject the pole with his breath, to which Zachary concedes that « Ce mat suiffe, c'est mon Etat, c'est moi ! » [The greasy pole is my State, it is myself!] (135; 106).

Gloomy-Simon-Seven-Days signifies Zachary Delva, the powerful *houngon* from Gonaïves, Haiti, who became the leader of the *tonton macoutes* during Duvalier's reign. President Zachary is commanded to undress, and swastikas are drawn on his forehead, chin, chest, and erect penis, signifying his unequivocal power and his parity with the xenophobia of Haiti's former white colonizers. Zachary is lifted and carried by his associates and finally ordered to simulate copulation with the pole, which invokes the antics of Baron Samedi, who is frequently found in the company of obscenely gesturing subordinates.

At the completion of this rite, Zachary and Barbotog are confident that the pole, now referred to as [king-general Siegfried von Phalbus], will not be defeated by Henri. They name the pole the *poteau mitan* [central pillar] of the [Spiritual-Chief-for-Life]; however, they do not anticipate the vital power of the *loas* Papa Loko and Papa Legba, who have imbued Henri's body with youthful energy that will enable him to mount the pole. Ultimately, Henri ascends the pole and seizes the machine gun that rests on the top of the mast. In a final display of courage, he fires a round at the president's dignitaries, and is felled by a sniper who has been placed in position for the very purpose of offing the victor.

Henri's fate can be interpreted as the manifestation of the antithesis of Derrida's

conception of the impossibility of absolute responsibility. If responsibility is contingent upon the unknown to challenge an impending responsible decision, then the gun that awaits Henri at the top of the pole signifies his preordained doomed destiny. The very presence of the gun in Henri's hands necessitates that the death of Henri for their own protection, yet his ascension of the pole already affirmed his destiny prior to his discovery of the gun. Thus, the Zachary regime's scheme is tailored to prevent any responsible decision from occurring. Due to the fact that the consequence of winning the competition had previously been articulated, Henri's decision to pick up the gun or not pick up the gun culminated in the same inevitable fate, thus showcasing the absolute irresponsibility of the Zachary regime.

The fifth and final part of the story is the epilogue, which details the aftermath of Henri's death at the top of the greasy pole. We learn that with the death of Zoocrates Zachary has ushered in the leadership of his daughter, Angel, and that the « lutte fratricide » [fratricidal war] has begun all over again (177). The evidence of Postel's legacy is confirmed by Elisa's affirmation at Henri's wake that his death « soutiendra la lumière, l'espoir et la beauté des tiens, parce que de ton vivant tu as su élargir leur droit de lutter et de rêver... Ta mort nourrira les actions et les rêves de ton peuple comme ta vie a fécondé ma vie... » [will support the light, the hope, and the beauty of your people because, when you lived, you were able to enlarge their right to fight and to dream... Your death will nourish the actions and dreams of your people as your life fertilized your own] (177; 139). Hence, Henri achieves masculine selfhood and martyrdom by appealing to a sort of fraternity in the community of spectators to interpret his sacrificial actions as symbolic of the hope for future modes of collective resistance

that have the potential to prevent the duplication of the same mechanisms of control employed by the dictatorship. The epilogue communicates that the fundamental responsibility of Henri's decision to fight is verified by the display of valor that was witnessed by the members of Port-au-Roi, who were given the opportunity by way of Henri's performance to observe the fissures inscribe Zachary's power. Had Henri chosen the path of exile, he would have remained spiritually stunted and been rendered useless to the Haitian citizens. Nonetheless, his tragic but inevitable fate signifies the overall impotency of any singular individual to effect change on a grand scale. However, although the general populace has tacitly accepted Zoocrates Zachary's dehumanizing regime, Henri's heroic actions force a recalibration of the limits of revolutionary resistance.

Then novel suggests that for the individual who must exist within the confines of a totalitarian government, even the bravest of men who dare to singlehandedly and publicly resist the tyrannical forces will always fail to achieve any objective that is articulated as the antithesis to the mythical community. Henri, for instance, cannot win the contest *and* continue to go on living because of the prescribed guarantee that any public display of opposition will always result in death. However, in his death, Henri communicates to the spectators that fissures indeed exist in the foundation that supports Zachary's dictatorship. Furthermore, in his discussion with Horace regarding the use of *Vodoun* used to assist him in the contest, Henri presents an alternative way for the community to think about their agency. He implores Horace to consider how it may be better to accept Haiti for what it is instead of condemning the oppressed citizens for relying on mythical assistance from the *Vodoun* gods. He also suggests that they should

channel the violent energy that is « gaspille en trances et en crises de possession » [wasted on trances and fits of supernatural possession] into a collective of self-reliant men who « voir que leur sort dépend d’eux-mêmes et non de la solidarité entre les hommes et le règne végétal » [see that their fate depends on themselves and not on solidarity between humans and the vegetable kingdom] (51; 69). Henri’s invocation to foster a movement of self-reliance among the people of Zacharyland thus offers a criticism of the dependency of blind spiritualism, which is embodied in the drastic and ludicrous manipulations of *Vodoun* power that Zachary ordains in his final murderous gesture.

Conclusion

Le Mât de cocagne depicts a system of values embodied in the Henri Postel who is led by an ethic of individual affirmation that is fulfilled in his struggle to incite a grand revolt. Henri’s gradual transformation from a zombie to a liberated man who suffers a tragic fate embodies Depestre’s political vision that one person can do little to effect widespread change without the support of a collectively conscious community. Furthermore, Henri’s decision to enter the contest signifies not only a decision to break with his fate and challenge the tyrannical power of the Zachary regime, but it also represents Henri’s engagement with the community as sharing. His defiance of the regime compels him to reclaim his own identity, and to enter into the fundamental communal relationship and share his singularity with that of all of the spectators and people of Zacharyland. Thus, his final charge to the top of the pole, coupled with his attempt to shoot and kill his enemies, enables him to channel the support of his spectators

to incite a collective awakening to the despotism of the Zacharian regime.

In summary, Depestre's depiction of the universally devastating effects of the Duvalier regime on the lives of Haitian citizens demonstrates how the exploitation of political ideals for the purpose of political power engenders a society whose reverence for utopian ideas strives to maintain in its clutches the means of its totalitarian power.

Notes

1. Glenn R. Smucker, "Social Structure", *A Country Study: Haiti* (Richard A. Haggerty, editor). Library of Congress Federal Research Division (December 1989).
2. Georges Fouron, "'I, Too, Want to Be a Big Man': The Making of a Haitian 'Boat People'" in *The New African Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 78. In Haitian Creole mythology, *Tonton macoutes* was a figure of terror who was fabled to kidnap children in the night and keep them in his gunny sack. According to the legend, those who were kidnapped were never seen again. Similarly, in Duvalier's regime, the name *tonton macoutes* referred to those dissenters to Duvalier's presidency who went missing in the night and disappeared forever.

II.2 Hospitality and Coexistence in *La región más transparente del aire*

In *La región más transparente del aire*, Carlos Fuentes invites the reader to consider the dangers of the immanent political community by continually drawing attention to the lessons learned from the Mexican Revolution. His works teach us how Mexico's post-colonial history provides a check against unfettered power, which he underscores through his frequent portrayal of the hero-to-tyrant trope. Nevertheless, he avoids using vacuous rhetoric that relies upon mythic and reductive interpretations of nation and revolutionary ideals. Although the idea of revolution typically refers to the drastic shift in a nation's political and socioeconomic landscape, Fuentes explores how in Mexico, to speak about revolution is to acknowledge the cyclicity of time and history. Fuentes's seminal novel *La región más transparente del aire* explores the tension between the call for increased democracy and the manifest and potential dangers of the country's foray into globalization and a new capitalist era. He situates this tension in the ongoing dialogue between the real estate magnate Frederico Robles and his son, the poet and intellectual Manuel Zamacona. The plot of *La región más transparente del aire* revolves around their complicated relationship, which is torn along the ideological lines of social responsibility and opposing interpretations of Revolutionary ideals. Also, their opposing perspectives of Mexico's future presents the complexity of Fuentes's own concern for articulating a modern Mexico that is neither defined by the myth of a lost history, nor by the desire to shape the nation according to first-world ideals of wealth and success. Specifically, Fuentes's wariness of globalization's propensity to favor economic growth at the expense of independence and sovereignty and his skepticism of globalization is portrayed in *La región más transparente del aire* through Manuel

Zamacona's celebration of universalism and his criticism of the sacrifices and hypocrisies that have led to Robles's economic prosperity.

The fact that neither Robles nor Manuel Zamacona are aware of their filial relation signifies a great deal, since both men have polarized political ideologies, which are largely informed by their distinctly opposite upbringings. The implication of the fundamental discrepancy between the political ideologies of father and son is situated in their regard for the welcome of the Other. Robles's inability to live according to Derrida's conception of unconditional hospitality leads him to project any sentiment of human affection onto the economic success he reaps in his business transactions. He confesses to Ixca Cienfuegos, the ubiquitous character who serves as the unifying moral conscience of the disparate characters, that his entire sense of self-worth is tied up in his economic success:

De aquí a diez o quince años, ya me habré cansado de trabajar, y no me quedará más satisfacción que corroborar el resultado de mis esfuerzos en el progreso del país. Ése será mi hijo, pues (322).

[In ten or fifteen years I'll be tired of working and there will be no pleasure left for me except to see the results of my efforts measured in the progress of the country. That will be my son] (213).

The growth of Mexico's economy is the measure of Robles' filial love. In lacking a true filial relationship and unknowingly shirking his paternal responsibility, Robles invests his filial energies into his work and becomes increasingly closed off to human relationships as he ages. On the other hand, Zamacona seeks intense connections with everyone he encounters, as if in a constant, manic attempt to fill a paternal-filial void. In spite of Robles's claims to the progressive social benefits of globalization, Zamacona does not believe that Mexico's modern capitalist system is capable of integrating the interests of

the nation's multitude of diverse peoples without leaving the marginalized populations utterly underserved. Derrida's conceptualization of the undecideability of hospitality illuminates the conditions that determine who is considered welcome, or at home, in contemporary Mexico. Whereas Robles refuses to think the threshold of the welcome in his political dealings and personal relationships, Zamacona remains trapped in redundancy and fails to offer a counter-solution to capitalism that weds the ontological dynamic of Nancy's community with the practical implications of Derrida's political imperative. Consequently, although Zamacona succeeds to some degree where his father fails in terms of creating meaningful human relationships, the irreconcilability between his ideals and his lived reality induces an inescapable anxiety that mirrors Mexico's own struggle with modernity.

In his essay titled "El Camino Federalista" which was published in 1995, Fuentes presents his analysis of the world as it undergoes a universal metamorphosis characterized in terms of economic interdependence, technological advancements, and the instantaneity of communication. Fuentes foretells of the consequences that globalization will have on countries vying for a competitive stronghold in the world market:

La paradoja es esta: si la racionalidad económica nos dice que el próximo siglo será la edad de la integración global de las economías nacionales, la 'irracionalidad' cultural se hace presente para informarnos que también será el siglo de las demandas étnicas y los nacionalismos renacidos (1).

[This is the paradox: if economic reason tells us that the coming century will be that of the global integration of national economies, cultural irrationality informs us that it will also be the century of ethnic demands and resurrected nationalisms. (*My translation*)]

Here, Fuentes warns of the socioeconomic ills that unchecked capitalism will bode for independent nations caught up in the tide of homogenization, especially those nations comprised of diverse ethnic groups that are already plagued by racial, indigenous, or socioeconomic tensions.

Maarten van Delden argues that the ideological disjunction between the reality of Mexico's multiple competing histories and globalization's unitary aim to make manifest the established tradition of Anglo-American modernization constitutes the crux of the politico-philosophical conflict Fuentes grapples with in this novel. Furthermore, Fuentes contends with paradoxical ideas, such as individualism and community, universalism and diversity, and realism and myth in order to frame his own thesis on the dilemma of the modern Mexican state.

La región más transparente del aire alternates between multiple, predominantly masculine perspectives on the nature of the individual's relationship to history and to his community. Furthermore, the novel consists largely of dialogues that take place between alternating configurations of pairs of male characters in simultaneously occurring situations that are presented in a disjointed linear order. According to van Delden in *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*, Fuentes's depiction of the struggles faced by Robles and Zamacona supports Fuentes's philosophy that subjectivity is neither achievable through free individual choice nor through a return to Mexico's cultural origins. Instead, he explains that Fuentes posits an approach to the problem of subjectivity through a vision of simultaneity that promises freedom and possibility and values the perpetual process of metamorphosis, but does not dispense with the potency of the past's capacity to shape the present (31). In order to understand the significance of

van Delden's argument and the particular socioeconomic conditions navigated by Robles and Zamacona, as well as how their actions support or conflict with Fuentes's political vision, it is first necessary to discuss the means by which the political landscape of Mexico during and after the Mexican Revolution influences each individual man's perception of his own social status.

First, although Frederico Robles was born a peasant, we learn that he overcame the obstacles of his birth after fighting in the Revolution, and that he later achieved economic success by dint of ambition and ruthless business transactions. Furthermore, he marries the beauty Norma Larragoiti, whose superficiality and vacuous ideals match her husband's own political values. Robles commits himself unabashedly to an Anglo-American idea of progress that has necessitated self-sacrifice at every stage of his life and career, but accompanying such sacrifice has required Robles to denounce the sanctity of Mexico's revolutionary ideals. By denying his own connivance of the history of Mexico's self-affirming political systems that have perpetuated a long cycle of tumult and despair, we learn that Robles's history is responsible for his betrayal of the revolutionary ideals for which he once fought. Furthermore, as Fuentes unfolds the layers of Robles's personal life, it becomes clear that that which Robles cannot appropriate unto himself he must destroy, which includes his business partners, his loved ones, and his religion. Despite the relationships he has with his wife, Norma, and his mistress, Hortensia, Robles's voracious pursuit of power leaves him emotionally isolated and incapable of escaping the spiritual imprisonment by his own ego until the very end of the novel, when he renounces success and fame for love after he goes bankrupt.

In an altogether different vein, Zamacona foils Robles in terms of his spiritual and political disposition. Although both men are egoistical and isolate themselves by way of their own obsessive adherence to their political ideologies, Zamacona's depth of character far exceeds Robles's apparently narrow view of what constitutes a meaningful life. Zamacona is a poet and an intellectual who presents himself as the voice of moral reason and the antithesis to capitalist ideology and the first world notions of progress to which Robles ascribes. He is also the product of a society that appears to be distancing itself at an alarming rate from the social ideals that were hard won by Mexico's forefathers who fought in the Revolution. Although Fuentes presents criticisms of the Mexican government predominantly through Zamacona's perspective, the poet's random, tragic fate intimates the futility of elevating utopian ideas of creation and art above real-world problems facing Mexico, such as poverty and its autocratic government, given the fleeting and arbitrary nature of existence.

We can conceive of a remedy for the philosophical disjunction between the two men's political principles by the novel's end, when it becomes apparent that the ideal configuration of a society in which an individual can flourish in an increasingly modernizing world requires the constant recognition that the Revolution calls forth the need to maintain alive all of time by acknowledging the cultural pluralism of Mexico's history.

Frederico Robles and Derrida's Unconditional Hospitality

In 1996, Derrida gave two lectures in Paris on the subject of hospitality, which comprise the two parts of *De l'hospitalité*. The sections « Question étranger » [Foreigner

Question] and « Pas de hospitalité » [Step of Hospitality] present Derrida's consideration of hospitality in terms of the political and the ethical. *De l'hospitalité* consists of two texts on interfacing pages: Anne Dufourmantelle's "Invitation" clarifies Derrida's two lectures and takes on the form of a response to the philosopher's discussion of how we are to understand the interaction between foreigners, which Derrida also refers to as strangers. In « Pas de hospitalité », Derrida acknowledges that the notion of hospitality beholds an antimony that is aporetic and impossible to solve. The paradoxical notion of the dilemma between unconditional hospitality – the "law" of hospitality (conditional hospitality), versus the laws themselves – means that the law of pure hospitality is fundamentally opposed to the structured multiplicity of *laws* that regulate hospitality in practice. While the laws that govern hospitality are conditional and thus fundamentally antithetical to true openness and hospitality, they are nonetheless guided by unconditional hospitality.

Derrida contends that if conditional hospitality and pure hospitality are at once indissociable, in that « L'une appelle, implique ou prescrit l'autre » [one calls forth, involves, or prescribes the other] then pure hospitality would not be possible without pre-established laws delineating the boundaries between one's home and the public sphere (129-131). Hence, to invite someone into one's home presupposes that one claims a sort of sovereignty over his home, which fundamentally contradicts the definition of pure hospitality. Nonetheless, this notion of pure hospitality describes the maximum amount of "space" within which one can navigate various situations and make decisions according to the circumstances that arise in each situation in order to keep the future open.

If we are to understand pure hospitality as the effacement of the question that interrogates the Other and impels him to disclose his identity, then the law of pure hospitality posits that hospitality is *rendered*, or granted to the Other before he is ever identified. This puts the Other at risk of being harmed by the always invited-guest, which is why in practical terms, society can only function according to the notion of conditional hospitality if it wants to regulate interactions between foreigners and *les hôtes* [hosts]. Robles is wont to welcome people whose political ideas favor notions of progress that attribute Mexico's future prosperity to any system other than capitalism. Furthermore, as a result of the degree to which his own identity is determined by his prosperity, Robles remains closed off to all relationships that threaten to challenge his integrity and remind him of his peasant beginnings.

Moreover, Robles refuses to attribute the unrealized ideals of the Mexican Revolution to his personal prosperity. Rather, he claims that Mexico's foray into capitalism can be ascribed to the policies spearheaded under the presidencies of Plutarco Elías Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas, which created a large market and the conditions that led to the establishment of a stable middle class.¹ Robles expounds the successes of these two leaders in a heated exchange with Ixca Cienfuegos regarding the effects that their political decisions had on ending Mexican feudalism. He argues that while Calles laid the foundation for capitalism, Cárdenas

Aumentó los salarios, dio toda clase de garantías a la clase obrera haciendo que se sintiera protegida y sin necesidad de armar borlotes, instaló definitivamente la política de gasto gubernamental en las obras públicas, aumentó los créditos, repartió las tierras y, en todos los ámbitos, logró desatar una vasta circulación de riqueza estancada (146).

[raised wages, gave labor every conceivable guarantee, protected workers so there was nothing for them to agitate about; he established once and for all the policy of Federal investment in public works; he broadened credit, broke up land holdings and on all levels tried to stimulate a vast circulation of stagnant wealth] (89).

Consequently, Robles refuses to acknowledge that prior to Mexico's economic transition, the nation was anything other than a gigantic "país latifundista regido por una inútil plutocracia agraria" [kingdom of great absentee landlord estates ruled by a perfectly useless agrarian plutocracy] (146; 89). Although he concedes that Mexico has indeed turned into a plutocracy, he concludes that it is thanks to the power inherent to this plutocracy, as well as to the pre-Revolutionary existence of large private fortunes that Mexican society is able to flourish in the modern era. Thus, Robles rejects the failures of the past and is unwelcoming toward any lessons that can be learned from the revolutionaries by turning his attention towards the future and ascribing only to the belief that progress is the result of continuous building. His philosophy on capitalism posits that with progress comes sacrifice, and implicit in his declaration that "capital hay que pagarlo con vidas, como la de los niños que murieron en las salas de tinte de Río Blanco, y después hacer leyes del trabajo" [capital is bought with lives, like those of the children who died breathing lint dust at Río Blanco] is his avowal to refuse to respect the pure socialist foundations of the Revolution (127; 76). Moreover, Robles recounts the events that led up to his own participation in the Revolution, which reveals his impoverished upbringing and his thinly veiled contempt for the helplessness he experienced as a youth. He admits to being abandoned by his parents to be cared for by a Catholic priest, and coolly tells of the tragic fate suffered by his family members by the *Federales* ruthless tactics during the Revolution. Robles explains to Ixca Cienfuegos that his brother's

kidnapping did not incite his family to seek vengeance, and he confesses that he too would not have sought retribution, since he understood nothing about the Revolution at such a young age.

Y aunque lo hubiera entendido, no hubiera ido por ese motive a la revolución. La revolución llegó como llegan el sol o la luna, como llueve o hace hambre. Hay que levantarse, o acostarse. O cubrirse del agua, o comer. Así. Yo nunca supe de donde surgió, pero una vez que estuvo allí, había que entrarle al toro. Después algunos, como yo, encontramos la justificaciones (128).

[Even if I had understood, that alone wouldn't have sent me to the Revolution. A revolution comes ... like sun or moon, rain or hunger. You stand or you lie down. You get out of the rain, or you get wet. That I never knew where it came from, but once I was in it, I had to take the bull by the horns. Afterward, a few of us found reasons] (76-77).

Whether we accept or forgive Robles' reluctance to assign blame to the events that led to his participation in the war, what emerges from the tales of his past is that the indecisive and powerless young Robles stands in stark contrast to his current self. Robles recalls once believing that his inevitable involvement in the war inevitably led him to ascribe retrospectively a viable motive for his participation in the war. He concludes that he once believed in the imperative to feel purposeful, regardless of any underlying political intent. He confesses:

Eso nomas me acicateo. Tenia que colocarme donde me tuvieran que respetar pese a mi facha y mi ignorancia. Y tenia que trabajar duro, para server al pais. Si no, ¿para que habiamos hecho la revolucion? No para sentarnos a contemplar el triunfo de nuestros ideales, sino para trabajar, cada quien en lo suyo. Los sentimientos de los que habiamos entrado con Carranza y Obregon a Mexico eran contradictorios (137).

[I had to move ahead to a point where people would respect me in spite of my ignorance and my clothes. And I had to work hard to serve my country, because that was why we had made the Revolution. Not to sit and dream about the victory of our ideals, but to work, every man in his own way. Our emotions when we marched into Mexico City with Carranza and Obregón were contradictory. But we all felt that the time had come to attempt everything, any goal, no matter how high] (83-84).

Robles relates his success to his ability to maintain complete control over every facet of his life, even though the ability to claim total mastery over one's domain is theoretically impossible according to Derrida's idea of pure hospitality.

Later, the antimony between pure and practical – or unconditional versus conditional - hospitality is evident in an argument that is shared between Robles and Zamacona, in which Zamacona derides the Revolution's failures. Zamacona claims that in fact, its only effect was to give rise to a new privileged class, which paved the way for economic domination by the United States, and paralyzed “de toda vida política interna” [all internal political life] (333; 221). Robles feverishly denies this accusation, and states that the great estates of Mexico have been dissolved, because “eso que usted llama casta privilegiada lo es en función de su trabajo y del impulso que da al país” [what you call the privileged class is based on their hard work and the boost it gives to the country] (334; 221). Although Robles credits his wealth to his unflappable determination and tireless work ethic, he refuses to acknowledge that his partnerships with American investors have been forged at the expense of the development of Mexico's infrastructure. He further argues that the growth in Mexico's industry, despite its lack of capital, is a justification of his own dealings with American investors. Thus, his perspective illuminates how Robles operates according to Derrida's idea of conditional hospitality in his willingness to dismiss the value of encouraging Mexico's economic development for the sake of making the most profitable investment that will benefit him.

At the heart of the philosophy of hospitality is the question of what constitutes *home*, and who is permitted to claim such a place. One condition of citizenship is to have a place to call one's own - a place where a person sense that he belongs and feels

obligated to protect. Robles assumes total occupation of the role of host, but rejects what Derrida claims is the self's primordial welcoming of the other, which designates the condition of subjectivity and at once places the self in multiple roles – host, guest, and hostage. Robles's selfish obsession with maximizing the profitability on his investments leads to his denial of this ontological fact, and situates him in the permanent position of host - the same social strata occupied by Mexico's earlier oligarchs and aristocrats whose State-sanctioned policies the Revolutionaries once fought to destabilize.

Robles's sense of self fragments as he ages and settles into his life as a powerful businessman. The tension between his relationship to his family and his struggle to achieve self-mastery in spite of occupying the top rung of Mexico's rigid social hierarchy persists when Robles fails to sacrifice, or welcome the Other, which compromises his familial relationships. Anastasia Tataryn explains in her article "Revisiting Hospitality: Opening doors beyond Derrida towards Nancy's Inoperativity" that Derrida's idea of hospitality is inherently gendered, since "home" is traditionally associated with gendered notions of care, femininity, and motherhood (187-188). Thus, the moment of the welcome is feminine, as feminine alterity constitutes the condition of hospitality. Fuentes's works are generally reflective of a rigid patriarchal structure germane to Mexico in the twentieth century, and Frederico Robles's fraught sexual and familial relationships in the novel is a testament to his struggle to find satisfaction in relationships because of his reluctance to open himself to any experience – emotional or otherwise – that fall outside of his realm of control. In his romantic relationships, he holds steadfast in refusing to welcome the Other from any position other than host. Echoing the gendered nature of the welcome in *Totalité et Infini: Essai Sur L'exteriorité*, Emmanuel Lévinas

understands hospitality as intrinsically feminine in structure and nature, and claims that hospitality occurs in a pre-ethical zone that can be occupied by a member of either gender at the dwelling place called home (166). Lévinas describes woman as

...l'Autre dont la présence est discrètement une absence et à partir de laquelle s'accomplit l'accueil hospitalier par excellence qui décrit le champ de l'intimité, est la Femme. La femme est la condition du recueillement, de l'intériorité de la Maison et de l'habitation (166-167).

[...the other whose presence is directly an absence, with which is accomplished the hospitable welcome par excellence which describes the field of intimacy. The Woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the home, and inhabitation] (155).

The narrator reveals to the audience that Robles's relationship with his wife, Norma, remains at a level of benign respect, adoration perhaps, but does not transcend into the sort of all-consuming love that requires one to be vulnerable to the unpredictable deluges of emotion that often accompany romantic love. The married couple refrains from verbally affirming their love for one another, and so their union remains oppressed by the limitations imposed by Robles in his obsession with preventing against the unexpected:

...“te quiero” porque quererte es quererse y bajar todas las defensas hasta rendir el pudor y la vanidad y el poder en la entraña de quien nos conoce y nos domina y nos abre de par en par porque ya no somos yo, sin ella y ella no es ella, sino yo. Esto jamás lo podrían hacer él y Norma. Norma no lo haría con él, como él no lo haría con los hombres que constituían los valladares entre su persona y las metas de su ambición. Pero así la quería; así la había pensado y buscado: contrapartida de su vida pública, continuación o avanzada de sus resortes de éxito, nueva soldadera de la verdadera Revolución (195).

[...“I love you” may not be spoken because to love you is to love someone else and to drop all defenses, surrender all rottenness and vanity and power into the guts of her who knows us and dominates us and parts us, pair by pair. Nor could he and Norma ever do that. He would not build with her, as he would not build with men who put obstacles before his ambition. But he loved her as such a person: she was what he had wanted and searched for: the counterpart to his public being, the continuation and spreading of the streams of his triumph, a fellow comrade in the true revolution] (125).

Again, the reader is invited to witness the past life events that have led to Robles's prideful coldness. His inability to relinquish control, admit failure, or unconditionally welcome the other is signified by the pride he extorts in his mastery over others.

However, there exists one romantic relationship in which Robles expresses love in a full and unabated manner. His lover, Hortensia, nurtures Robles' journey towards selfhood by inflating his ego and expecting little from him in return for her affection. Whereas Robles admits to fearing the loss of his own autonomy if he allows himself to love Norma beyond a certain threshold of vulnerability, Hortensia's patience, silence, and unassuming manner supplies Robles with the power to feel as if he is in control in their relationship. In terms of hospitality, Hortensia is unconditional, as she gives Robles the permission not to be accountable for her.

Frederico Robles and Jean-Luc Nancy's Mythic Community

The chasm that separates Manuel Zamacona from reconciling with his lack of an authentic paternal bond can be attributed to the difference between how Zamacona and Robles view the ontological responsibility to the community in which they live. If *La región más transparente del aire* depicts Robles's inability to strive towards unconditional hospitality and the consequences that this failure poses for his interpersonal relationships, then Zamacona's ability to think according to the aporia, or the limits of hospitality, allows him to both expose the immanent community that his father seeks to uphold, as well as to welcome instances of hospitality that defy its limiting conditions. Consequently, Zamacona recognizes that the endurance of Mexico's unique identity depends upon welcoming all of its diverse peoples of disparate histories in order to

appeal to a democratic future that is built upon incessant creation rather than the destructive forces inherent to capitalism.

The recurring problems of class inequality and political corruption which emerge in Fuentes's works are linked to the hypocritical motives of the members of the ruling oligarchy who insist on propounding the myth of the necessity to create and sustain a stable, bourgeois middle class. Nancy uses the concept being singular plural to characterize the world as always already present, and from this point of departure it is possible to develop the idea of a Mexico that accords with Nancy's vision of community. An ongoing dialogue between Robles and Zamacona reveals two opposing perspectives regarding how to consider the ontological relationship of the political and economic operations of Mexico as it enters a new phase of modernization. Perhaps one of the most poignant exchanges that best exemplifies Nancy's imperative to think the world as comprised of singular beings who are always already in the world takes place between Robles and Zamacona when they discuss Mexico's past, for which Robles refuses to avow. He declares "México es otra cosa después de la Revolución" [Mexico is not the same country since the Revolution] (325; 215). However, Zamacona denounces this claim, and he condemns Robles for failing to carry out the ideals of the Revolution, which he blames on Robles's refusal to recognize that there is a past that must be dealt with, despite Robles's inclination to forget it altogether. Zamacona denounces Robles's painfully nihilistic understanding of Mexico, which he declares is precisely the condition that allows for the justification of the horrors that took place in Nazi-occupied Europe in the concentration camps in Dachau or Buchenwald: "Toda nuestra historia pesa sobre nuestros espíritus, en su integridad sangrienta, sin que sean nunca plenamente pasado

ninguno de sus hechos o sus hombres” [All our history hangs heavy upon our spirit, in bloody integrity without which none of its facts or its men is ever really past] (327; 217). The basis of Zamacona’s fury lies in Robles’ affirmation of the absence of history and the consequential denial of all the self-affirming political systems that have perpetuated the cycle of destruction and despair.

Later, Zamacona scathingly claims “No puedo pensar que el único resultado concreto de la Revolución Mexicana haya sido la formación de una nueva casta privilegiada, la hegemonía económica de los Estados Unidos y la paralización de toda vida política interna” [The only concrete result of the Revolution had to be the rise of a new privileged class, economic domination by the United States, and the paralyzing of all internal political life] (333; 221). His assertion that those with means are justifiably wealthy contradicts his claim that the security of Mexico’s future depends upon the endurance of a stable middle class, precisely because Robles’s financial success has only been possible due to his ability to remain wholly external to this “necessary” social stratum. However, by declaring that Mexico’s progress needs such “estabilidad burguesa” [bourgeois stability], while engaging in shady dealings with foreign investors, Robles is able to avoid being indicted for his hypocrisy (146; 89).

Later, Ixca describes the plight of the middle class as being worse off than that of the masses and claims that the valorization of the middle class reiterates the nihilistic nature of capitalism as a utopian ideal. He takes issue with Robles’s belief in the sanctity of a robust middle class:

La clase media está más amolada que el pueblo, mi estimado, porque tiene ilusiones, y más que ilusiones, tiene que mantener las apariencias.... Vivimos en una sociedad de libre empresa, señor, y las gentes que viven de eso se van para arriba, pero la clase media se queda en donde está... (222).

[The middle class not only has dreams, it has to keep up appearances... We live in a free enterprise society, Señor, and a man has to go up; but the middle classes can't go up. They just stay where they are...] (144).

In his reply to both Ixca and his Zamacona, Robles appears to acknowledge the immoral duplicity that characterizes his financial operations:

Lo que sí es muy fácil es proclamar ideales revolucionarios: reparto de tierras, protección a los obreros, lo que usted guste. Ahí nos tocó entrarle al torito y darnos cuenta de la única verdad política, el compromiso. Aquello fue el momento de crisis de la Revolución. El momento de decidirse a construir, incluso machacándonos las conciencias (142).

[To proclaim revolutionary ideals is easy: land reform, labor laws, whatever you please. But we had to face reality and accept the only political truth, compromise. That was the moment of crisis for the Revolution. The moment of decision to build even if it meant staining conscience] (87).

Robles's argument conveys his categorical dismissal of the importance of remaining true to the Revolution's ideals, even when the nation's prosperity began to grow. Although Robles's justification for his unethical business transactions seems to align with Nancy's criticism of any utopian political structure that presents itself as immanent, the means by which Robles functions is inherently antithetical to Nancy's community. First, because Robles identifies the unachievable myth of the Revolution as that which necessitates compromise, his solution is nonetheless inscribed in and dependent upon the endurance of the myth itself. Second, Robles's appeal for the establishment of a strong middle class takes the shape of an alternative myth that imitates a reconciliation between an ideal and what is practical; however, it still falls into the realm of Nancy's description of a community that presents itself as a work of death. In Nancy's community, a community that functions properly in its being singular plural configuration would not have to declare itself or name its constitutive parts, nor preconceive of the delineation of its

disparate components. Rather, the properly functioning political community would not possess finite limits between groups and classes.

Ixca and Zamacona attempt to impress upon Robles that he must maintain a critical eye on capitalism's tendency to present itself as immanent by continually returning to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. They remain critical of Robles's insistence that the ability of Mexico to thrive in an increasingly globalized world requires a prescriptive blueprint of society's social structures, such as a thriving middle class. Moreover, in their dialogue, they allude to Nancy's idea that the citizens' common experiences are capable of determining the long-term success of Mexico's dealings in this new capitalist era. Thus, Ixca and Zamacona interpret Robles's claim that capitalism's sustainability is guaranteed so long as a robust middle class exists as a poor disguise for the fact that he will continue to ignore the needs of the majority of the country's citizens so long as the upper echelon of society continues to profit off of their dealings.

Frederico Robles and Jean-Luc Nancy's Inoperative Hospitality

Nancy's discussion of the inoperative community in *La Communauté désœuvrée* challenges Derrida's seemingly limited conception of the oppositional binary manifestations of hospitality by interrogating the foundations that give rise to categories of inclusion and identity. Nancy's conception of the inoperative community posits the pre-originary foundation of community as always exceeding any determinable conception of the community as completed or finished (71). Nancy's operative community designates the status of a community as perpetually incomplete – or that whose very existence is premised on its unceasing un-working and re-working of itself through the

infinite creation and breaking of ties, or interactions, among singularities. If we identify the conditions that render hospitality *operative* according to Nancy's philosophy, we can extend Derrida's explication of hospitality beyond a binary understanding of the ontological and practical meaning of welcoming the other.

Although Derrida recognizes that unconditional hospitality, or the welcome of the wholly other Other, might actually be dangerous, he nonetheless implores us to consider if "hospitality without risk, a hospitality backed by certain assurances, a hospitality protected by an immune system against the wholly other, [can] be true hospitality?" (*Philosophy in a Time of Terror* 129). Investigating the concept of hospitality through Nancy's idea of the inoperative community expands upon Derrida's binary of hospitality and invites us to implore what constitutes the conditions of unconditional hospitality. Derrida posits that hospitality is contingent upon claiming access to a place, or a home, from which one can offer hospitality to another. Hostility, then, arises when one enters a home without first being welcomed. Still, Derrida and Nancy both concede that true hospitality, or unconditional hospitality, can only be such when the welcome is unlimited and dares to expose its threshold for hostility in the form of an invasion of boundaries.

The sharing of singular beings that constitutes the inoperative community requires each individual to confront the threshold, or aporia, which designates the difference between hostility and unconditional hospitality. According to Nancy, incessant sharing means that hospitality can be understood as the condition of our being with others. In the novel, Frederico Robles refuses to consider this aporia and instead functions according to a rigid conception of conditional hospitality. For example, Robles and his son argue about Catholicism's influence in modern Mexico, and their reference to the significance

that Jesus's sacrifice had on mankind thereafter symbolizes their differing ideas of the impact that the effects of the Revolution had on Mexico in the mid-twentieth century. Robles scornfully postulates that the reason why Jesus is revered is because of his willingness to commit the ultimate sacrifice, and in so doing he chooses not to be like his father. Zamacona argues against this, declaring that because Jesus's sacrifice made it possible for man to be saved regardless of his identity "de hombre, de ladrón, de santo, de adúltero" [man, thief, saint, adulterer] the foundation of his universal admiration lies in the fact that his sacrifice allowed him to offer unconditional hospitality to his followers in being willing to die for their sins (439; 296).

Pero cuando se renuncia sin tener nada, no cabe más que la posibilidad de asumir el dolor y la culpa, ya no de los iguales, sino de los semejantes . Es ésta la única riqueza que queda entre nuestra renuncia y nuestra perdición. Desnudos de todo lo nuestro, sólo podemos vivir con los demás, para los demás (440-441).

[But when you give up everything and have nothing, nothing more is ended than the possibility of assuming the guilt and pain not, now, of your equals, but of all your fellow beings. That is the only richness which remains between renunciation and perdition. Naked of all that is ours, we may live only with others and for others] (297).

Zamacona further reasons that the greatest criminal is indeed the resurrected man, because in being unable to renounce anything to save himself, such a person is ontologically imprisoned, since he is not obliged to make a decision in the name of unconditional hospitality. Thus, Zamacona regards the savior's subsequent resurrection as the single fact that denies him the potential for universal selflessness, and in so doing, emphasizes the true unconditional love implicit in his original sacrifice.

Manuel Zamacona and Nancy's Inoperative hospitality

Nancy alludes to hospitality, but does not identify it as such in his corpus of work on the community. Whereas Derrida explores the implications of thinking the aporetic dimension of hospitality, Nancy considers the intersection between our originary sociality and the interactions of singularities – a social dynamic that is always already occurring at the limit of hospitality. Nancy's community is created in the primordial exposure of singularities to the plurality of singularities, and the incessant exposure of singularities at their limits guards against the formation of a fixed social bond. If our originary sociality prevents us from thinking of community as that which can be completed, then Derrida's binary notion of hospitality constitutes a limited framework for understanding the political implications of hospitality.

First, if we can identify those factors that support the inoperative community by discrediting the inclination to assign rules of citizenship, it is possible to understand how individual behaviors that accord with the functioning of the inoperative community likewise tend to support a more democratic society.

Derrida and Nancy are both concerned with how to think the limit of hospitality, or openness to the other, in the ever-changing dynamic of the social connections that constitute the community. Whereas Derrida considers the aporia of hospitality as that which renders hospitality only possible in its impossibility and to act in spite of this irreconcilable limit between conditional and unconditional hospitality, Nancy conceives of the inoperability of the community as that which demands us to consider the absence of hospitality's threshold and to evaluate political decisions and actions which sustain this exposure at the limits.

Manuel Zamacona's perspective on the individual's place and responsibility in modern Mexico concerns how our originary sociality exceeds notions of belonging. He implores his interlocutors to consider how the individual who embraces the entirety of Mexico's diverse peoples and multivariate histories can lead to the reintegration of Mexican society into a sacred order that has the potential to guard against the self-estrangement that the individual suffers in the modern world. Fuentes's criticism of the Mexican government is portrayed through Zamacona's perspective, in which the young poet believes that his country's transition into a modern capitalistic world risks devaluing what the Mexican Revolution has taught the Mexican people about the dangers of teetering too close to either rogue individualism or universal sacrifice. He argues that the Revolution provided Mexico a list of objectives to be achieved at the conclusion of the struggle, and that these objectives were posited in the name of openness and the cultivation of a social milieu that could nurture and guarantee the livelihoods of Mexicans occupying all strata of society. He articulates this in the debate with Robles:

—Y expresamente, la Revolución, al recoger todos los hilos de la experiencia histórica de México, nos propuso metas muy claras: reforma agraria, organización del trabajo, educación popular y, por sobre todas las cosas, superando el fracaso humano del liberalismo económico, anticipando el de los totalitarismos de derecha e izquierda, la necesidad de conciliar la libertad de la persona con la justicia social. La Revolución Mexicana fue el primer gran movimiento popular de nuestro siglo que supo distinguir este problema básico: cómo asegurar la plena protección y desarrollo de lo comunitario sin herir la dignidad de la persona. El liberalismo económico sacrificó, en aras del individuo, a la sociedad y al Estado (333).

[Specifically and expressly, on recovering the threads of our historic experience, the Revolution gave us very clear objectives: land reform, unionization, public education, and above all, to get rid of the human collapse of economic liberalism, anticipating the collapse of totalitarianism of right or left, the need to reconcile personal freedom with social justice. The Mexican Revolution was the first great popular movement of this century to face the basic problem: how to insure the

community protection and growth without sacrificing personal dignity. Economic liberalism sacrificed society and the state on altars of individualism] (221).

Furthermore, Zamacona's cautionary attitude toward the dangers of capitalism remains a constant theme throughout the novel. He describes capitalism as a "hinchazón ficticia" [fictitious vanity], and he believes that power is unproductive when it comes to human values (331, 220). The inherent will to power that capitalism's success hinges upon is, according to Zamacona, the antithesis of creation. Incessant creation through blood mixing, the freedom to define one's own terms of success and happiness, and to create meaning independently of economic limitations, according to Zamacona, is necessary to prevent against the immanent community:

La cultura ha tomado un cariz de decorado, esta formada por bienes fungibles. ¡Hay que hacerla, de nuevo, insustituible, sagrada! ¡Hay que lograr que todos los hombres se sientan Leonardos! Esta es la misión del poeta: la misión de la comunicación profunda y sagrada, que es la del amor (44).

[Culture has become decorative, with interchangeable parts. We have to make it over from the beginning, tirelessly, with reverence! We have to labor until all men feel themselves Leonardos! And that's the poet's mission, profound and sacred communication. And another word for it is love] (17).

He reasons that it is only through love that the world can be shaped by creative forces that will likewise help to avoid the triumph of "la borrachera de poder, del materialismo, del crecimiento excesivo, y la derrota de los valores humanos" [brute force, excessive growth, and the downfall of human values] that defines the United States' capitalist system (87-88; 47). In spite of Mexico's upheaval during the Revolution, Zamacona identifies the good that came from the country's losses:

La derrota de México nos conduce, por el contrario, a la verdad, al valor, a la limitación propia del hombre de cultura y buena voluntad. Lo que tiene éxito no siempre es lo valioso, sino todo lo contrario. Y en consecuencia, lo que tiene éxito no es lo bueno, ni lo que fracasa lo malo. No es posible identificar el éxito con el bien y el fracaso con el mal, pues entonces los Estados Unidos serían buenos y

México malo. Como sabemos que esto no es cierto, nos sentimos en la verdad cuando pensamos que no interesa ser bueno o malo, sino importar humanamente... (87-88).

[Mexico's defeat, on the other hand, led us to truth, to honor, the correct limits of a man of culture and good will. What wins is not valor but the contrary. Consequently, what wins is not always good, and what loses is not always evil. Good may not be identified with victory, nor evil with defeat. For otherwise the United States would be good and Mexico evil. What is of importance is the intensity of feeling, not any practical result...] (47).

Zamacona's celebration of the intensity of feeling over concrete political or socioeconomic outcomes reflects Nancy's conception of the individual's relationship to his community, in which the autonomy of the self is limited by his originary sociality. Thus, Zamacona underscores that to a certain degree, the self is culturally determined and hence intertwined with his heritage. Therefore, Zamacona's insistence on the sanctity of feeling over practical reason accords with the imperative to consider the threshold of hospitality. If the past of Mexico is always present, then welcoming this history is necessary to being able to continually think according to the aporia of hospitality. Manuel Zamacona affirms the need for Mexico to confront its violent past and ultimately transcend it, which underscores his persistent resistance to reductive interpretations of revolutionary ideals that fail to take into account Mexico's modern reality.

Conclusion

The appeal for a certain nationalism that is bound to patriarchal traditions of inheritance persists throughout the novel, and this adherence to the legacy of inheritance is presented as necessary to resist the total encroachment of either revolutionary or capitalistic nihilism. Derrida's philosophy of hospitality and Nancy's thinking of the inoperative community beckon us to consider the conditions that affect the experience of

the encounter with the Other. The marginalization of those who are considered “unwelcome”, or marginalized, in Mexican society, as the nation transitions to a modern capitalist society is presented by the polarized perspectives of Robles and Zamacona in *La región más transparente del aire*. Through the dialogues shared between them, Fuentes addresses the question of how Mexico should treat the idea of the nation in such a way that welcomes the inevitability of modernism while simultaneously respecting the plurality of Mexican society and the rights of its indigenous populations. In the novel, Fuentes represents his concern with finding a balance between heritage, history, nationalism, and modernity, and Zamacona’s opposing views, which are peppered throughout the narrative, reiterate how such a balance is essential to defending against the social ills that stem from the pursuit of individual interests. Ultimately, Fuentes’s defense of Mexico’s unique national culture guards against the amnesic tendency to forget the destructive consequences that colonialism and Western culture’s influence has had on Mexican society.

Notes

1. Lázaro Cárdenas’s (1875-1970) presidency lasted from 1934-1940; Plutarco Elías Calles’s (1877-1940) presidency lasted from 1924-1928.

II.3 Fraternity, Friendship, and Law in *A Lesson Before Dying*

In Ernest Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying*, Grant Wiggins and Jefferson live in Bayonne, Louisiana, and the conflict of the narrative revolves around the unlikely pairing of the college-educated teacher Grant Wiggins and Jefferson, a black adolescent who has been convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of a white man. Grant Wiggins is a black man in his mid-twenties who formerly left his rural southern Louisiana hometown to attend university. For reasons not explicitly mentioned, Grant comes home sometime after obtaining his degree and ends up teaching the children of sharecroppers at the local plantation school. Grant's return to his hometown after attempting to make a successful life on his own terms has left him bitter and resentful towards his community. Thus, when his aunt (Tante Lou) and Jefferson's godmother, Miss Emma, supplicate Grant to visit Jefferson at the jailhouse in the hopes that Grant can help Jefferson believe in his self-worth before he is executed, Grant's own insecurities and contempt for people like Jefferson, who Grant perceives to be beyond salvation, leads him initially to rebuke the older women's request.

The myth of white supremacy sustains the racial hierarchy in the fictional town of Bayonne, which is based on the actual city of New Roads in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. The myth of white supremacy functions to exclude Grant Wiggins from gaining access to circles occupied by the white townspeople who are responsible for the legal decisions that have led to Jefferson's death sentence. The narrative portrays the means by which this myth hinders Grant from gaining physical and emotional access to Jefferson. Ultimately, Grant must rely on the black members of Bayonne to assist him in teaching Jefferson a life-affirming lesson before the accused dies in the electric chair.

The particular socioeconomic caste to which Jefferson belongs in *A Lesson Before Dying* differs from the one with which Grant identifies, but Grant must reconcile with this misconception before he can establish an emotional connection with Jefferson. According to Nancy, the idea of community is a troubled concept because any member who defines himself in terms of who he wants to be or what he wants the community to be risks pushing the community to adopt mechanisms of exclusion in defining itself. Nancy and Derrida both agree on the need for the incessant destabilization of any posited foundation of a community. However, Derrida takes issue with the fraternal element that is implied in Nancy's community, which he claims allows Nancy to avoid a proper deconstruction of the term itself.

In *L'Expérience de la liberté*, Nancy insists on naming "fraternity" to denote freedom. He invokes Sigmund Freud to describe fraternity in genealogical terms, in which he conceives of the murder of the Father as that which brings people together in a fraternal bond due to their collective contempt for him and which constitutes their communal sharing of this identical substance (in the totemic meal). Nancy explains that fraternity names the unifying element of or the unification of a common family, but the relation « eux dont le Père, ou la substance commune, a disparu » [of those whose Parent, or common substance, has disappeared], so that the fraternal bond, and thus their freedom and equality, is provided to them on account of this common experience of loss (97; 168).

However, Derrida questions why Nancy insists on retaining the word "fraternity" to refer to the incommensurable. He explains in *Politiques de l'amitié* :

un lien généalogique ne sera jamais purement réel ; sa réalité supposée ne se livre jamais à aucune intuition, elle est toujours posée, construite, induite, elle implique

toujours un effet symbolique de discours, une "fiction légale" [...] au sujet de la paternité (13).

[...a genealogical tie will never be simply real; its supposed reality never gives itself in any intuition, it is always posed, constructed, induced, it always implies a symbolic effect of discourse, a "legal fiction" [...] on the subject of paternity] (92-93).

In *Voyous: Deux Essais sur la raison* [*Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*] (2003), Derrida expounds on this further, claiming that fraternity does not designate the common family relation, but rather privileges the figure of the brother as masculine authority and as nation (89; 59). As such, Nancy's line of thought runs counter to Derrida's conception of pure ethics, in which, if there is any, « commence à la dignité respectable de l'autre comme l'absolu *dissemblable*, reconnu come non-reconnaissable, voire comme méconnaissable » [begins with the respectable dignity of the other as the absolute *unlike*, recognized and non-recognizable, indeed as unrecognizable] (90; 60). Thus, such an ethic challenges Nancy's idea of fraternity as that which prioritizes the familiar.

While Nancy remains far from settled on the meaning of "fraternity", Nancy and Derrida's ontology of community illuminates the similarities and differences between their notions of ontological freedom, which informs their conceptions of responsibility and community. The intersection of Derrida and Nancy's conception of the fraternal element of community marks the point at which we can formulate a revised conception of community that may be helpful in understanding the political implications of thinking togetherness as neither based wholly on fraternal relations nor on utopian notions of friendship. The fraternal bond that binds members of groups within communities together is both a process and a mechanism of identification that must be considered alongside Derrida's idea of the Other as wholly *Other*. In order to imagine how a community can

defy the tendency towards fraternization, we must read Nancy and Derrida's thinking of community as a dialectic that addresses the practical workings of community so that we may identify the conditions that push humans towards insular, exclusionary thinking, or away from the acceptance of the fundamental fact of sharing. The dialectic formed between the two thinkers concerning the role that fraternity plays in the constitution of community allows us to understand the function and implications of the fraternal bond in an ontological and practical sense.

In *Politiques de l'amitié*, Derrida conceives of the future of the political as that which is situated in the shift away from a certain fraternity, and which instead is of the order of friendship, but of a radically new idea of friendship considered in terms of an interpersonal relation that reflects the ontological framework of democracy. His notion of a democracy *to come* implies a democracy without fraternity, which manifests in the interruption of community that occurs when individuals act *most responsibly*. Derrida posits that the fundamental condition of friendship is not of the order of one's claim to friends or enemies as such; rather, his approach aims to maintain an open space that respects the immeasurable fact of being-together. Friendship, then, is the consequence of a given social space that we already subscribe to, before the event of consensus or dissent. Therefore, friendship is not, for Derrida, related to fraternity, nor is it assumed based on the fact of a familial bond. He explains

Nous ne serions pas ensemble dans une sorte de communauté minimale – mais aussi incommensurable à toute autre – parlant la même langue ou priant pour la traduction dans l'horizon d'une même langue, fût-ce pour y manifester un désaccord, si *une sorte* d'amitié n'avait pas été scellée, avant tout autre contrat, si elle n'avait pas été avouée, avouée comme l'impossible qui résiste même à l'aveu, mais avouée encore, avouée comme l'inavouable de la "communauté inavouable" : une amitié d'avant les amitiés, une amitié ineffaçable, fondamentale et sans fond, celle qui respire dans le partage de la langue (passée ou à venir) et

dans l'être-ensemble que suppose toute allocution jusque dans la déclaration de guerre (264).

[We would not be together in a sort of minimal community - but also incommensurable to all others - speaking the same language or praying for translation against the horizon of a same language, if only to manifest disagreement, *if a sort of friendship* had not already been sealed, before all contracts; if it had not been avowed as the impossible that resists even avowal, but avowed still, avowed as the unavowable, of the 'unavowable community': a friendship prior to friendships, an ineffaceable friendship, fundamental and groundless, one that breathes in a shared language (past or to come) and in the being-together that all allocution supposes, up to and including the declaration of war] (236-237).

Derrida and Nancy's conception of the ontological relationship between community and responsibility reinforces the need to consider how the friendship/fraternity dichotomy that distinguishes each philosopher's notion of the nature of being-together manifests in the interpersonal relations that form in communities. The interdependency of Grant and Jefferson's journeys towards selfhood reveal the need to recognize the merits, but also be critical of, the dual nature of the communal bond. While Nancy's notion of the fraternal element of community is useful in understanding how the members of the black community in *A Lesson Before Dying* are bound to each other according to the externally-imposed categorization that creates the fraternal bond among different groups of people based on skin color, Derrida's critique of fraternity helps to illustrate how the singularizing gesture of the ontological sacrifice can transcend the universalizing impulse inscribed in fraternity in order to achieve a more authentic bond among individuals. Ultimately, each man's journey towards selfhood is made possible when they renounce their unique means of self-protection and become vulnerable to more authentic modes of bonding with each other and with the members of their community.

Freedom and Community

As previously discussed, freedom founds both philosophers' conceptions of community and responsibility. Nancy explains that being is itself a freedom. If existence has its essence in the existence that it is, it is therefore what it is by being outside of itself (« *elle est hors de soi ce qu'elle est* ») (*L'Expérience de la liberté* 95). Thus, freedom is given in the self's exposure to the outside, and is measured by the capacity for which a singularity can share its being with others. While Nancy's idea of the primordial exposure, or being-with, calls upon us to think of the space where the political takes place, Derrida posits that community is a thinking of the space where the political happens – where upon encountering the Other we must decide anyway. The fact of the undecidable constitutes the condition for decision, in which each time a decision is made, it is made without rules to follow, to apply or to conform to, and so each time the decision constitutes an event (Raffoul 296). In “Dire l'évènement, est-ce possible?” (2001) [Is Saying the Event Possible?], Derrida states:

On dit facilement « je décide » ou bien « je prends la responsabilité », « je suis responsable ». Ces phrases me paraissent aussi irrecevables les unes que les autres. Dire « je décide », dire « vous savez que je décide, je sais que je décide », cela veut dire que je suis capable et maître de ma décision, et que j'ai un critère qui me permet de dire que c'est moi qui décide (102).

[Just as we say “I give” and “I forgive” too easily, we also easily say, “I decide” or “I take responsibility” or “I’m responsible.” These statements are all equally inadmissible. To say “I decide,” to say “you know that I decide, I know that I decide,” means that I am capable of deciding and am master of my decision, that I have a criterion that allows me to say that I’m the one who decides. (*My translation*)]

Derrida's ontological dynamic of community differs from Nancy's in terms of its practical dimension since the decision, which is always the decision of the Other, designates the Other's welcome as the condition of responsibility, and hence of politics.

Nancy and Derrida's differing notions of the relationship between community and the political shapes a theoretical framework which allows us to determine how and to what degree certain groups and individuals are permitted full access to their ontological freedom given the socioeconomic and historical conditions that may limit it. Furthermore, their thinking frames an analysis of how individuals, in defying the political forces that seek to suppress freedom, foster the creation of a more democratic society. Nancy's idea of primordial responsibility is useful in evaluating restrictive or oppressive political contexts, while Derrida's conception of sacrifice reveals the immediate and imperative command to act. More specifically, Nancy's ideal of community invites us to examine how the environment in which one lives places rules and restrictions upon one's means of existence, including where one can freely go and with whom one can freely interact. With regards to Grant Wiggins and Jefferson, their intractable relation to their community and its members intimates that the conditions that limit their individual freedoms can be attributed to large-scale institutional forces that originate in a power structure that is carefully organized to benefit only a select few.

In the opening pages of the novel, the audience learns that Jefferson has been accused of committing a robbery at Mr. Gropé's store with two of his black friends, both of whom perish after an unplanned exchange of gunfire with Mr. Gropé, the white Cajun storeowner, who also dies in the firefight. During the trial, Jefferson is accused of being an accomplice to the murder, and is sentenced to die in the electric chair. In Jefferson's defense, his attorney attempts to appeal to the jury by declaring that a person as uneducated as Jefferson cannot possibly possess the shrewdness or requisite level of intelligence that one would need to plan and enact such a crime. Upon being labeled a

“hog” by his defense attorney, Jefferson adopts a defeatist and nihilistic attitude towards his fate and the remaining days of his life in a perverted defiance of his attorney’s public defamation.

Jefferson protects himself in his tacit acceptance of the opinion of the court when his defense attorney declares that he is not worthy of being deemed a human being. This public defamation and denouncement of his humanity causes Jefferson to withdraw emotionally, and he spends his prison days languishing in nihilistic contempt for his own existence, in which his willful silence functions as a self-fabricated shield that he dons to prevent against being obliged to confront the penultimate existential dilemma of his impending death.

Nancy claims in his chapter on the interruption of the mythic community in *La Communauté désœuvrée* that the problem with the mythical community is that it is founded on the exclusionary effect that stems from the allegiance to a certain community based on specific identifying traits. He explains that the sharing implied in community, as Nancy’s term « partage » suggests, happens at a point of separation in which true sharing consists in sharing only a lack of identity (xxviii). In his trial, Jefferson is refused the mercy of the white ruling class that controls all aspects of a justice system whose origins are rooted in its legacy of white domination. Thus, Jefferson’s identity as a black man implies that at every step of his “legal” trial, his guilt has already been determined by an inherently racist system that preemptively erases his humanity in labeling him a “hog” before he even steps foot in the courtroom. This same system prosecutes him according to an automatic presumption of guilt that is based on his possible involvement in the death of a white man.

Meanwhile, Aunt Emma and Tante Lou succeed in persuading Grant Wiggins to visit Jefferson. It has become apparent to Aunt Emma that Jefferson's initial anger and shame in being labeled a hog has transformed into a self-denigrating identity that Jefferson accepts as truth. Grant reluctantly heeds her supplication to help Jefferson reclaim his humanity; however, Grant initially acts contemptuously towards the condemned youth, his aunt, and the bereaved Aunt Emma. Although Grant is deeply disturbed by the defense team's perverted use of base rhetoric to argue that Jefferson is an animal incapable of murder, he nonetheless wants no part in mentoring a man whose actions are antithetical to the character that Grant has spent his entire life constructing. Grant's life has forever defied the stereotype held by the jurors and members of the legal system whose judicial decisions reinforce a myth that black men are unworthy of equality before the law, and that it is the court system's prerogative to treat them accordingly. However, Grant's own journey towards self-realization has been marred by doubt, and his disdain for his fellow community members, who he deems unsophisticated and essentially incapable of helping themselves rise out of their impoverished state, is rooted in his own insecurities, which have been created and affirmed by the very system that will execute Jefferson.

In *L'Expérience de la liberté*, Nancy seeks a non-subjective freedom that considers the existential ground from which freedom emerges. Grant's identity is determined first and foremost by his blackness, which restricts his freedom by prohibiting him from sharing the same spaces and experiences with the white members of the Bayonne population. Moreover, upon returning to Bayonne, Grant is reminded of his lack of freedom, and we get the impression that he enjoyed many more liberties while away

during his studies at the university. His teaching job at the local plantation school serves as a stark reminder of the limited opportunities that are available for a black man in his town in this period, despite the fact that his college education makes him a minority among both the black and the white populations of Bayonne. Grant views his responsibility as a teacher to make his students into “responsible young men and young ladies” (39). However, Grant himself is not a model teacher to be emulated by his students; rather, he is mean and impatient, and he uses severe forms of corporal punishment to take out his frustration for his pitiful regard of the next generation’s lack of promise.

Moreover, although Grant’s reaction to the defense’s claim that Jefferson is an animal incapable of planning a murder deeply disturbs him, he doubts his ability to transform Jefferson’s perspective of himself. He has spent his entire life striving to be extraordinary, and thus he does not wish to help a man with whom he does not identify. The rhetorical questions that Grant poses to Tante Lou regarding his own ineptitude reveal his deep-rooted insecurities. For instance, when Tante Lou begs him to go and see her former employer, Henri Pichot, and request to speak to Jefferson at the jail, Grant decries her wishes. He says to her, “What do I say to him? Do I know what a man is? Do I know how a man is supposed to die? I’m trying to find out how a man should live. Am I supposed to tell someone how to die who has never lived?” (31). Grant eventually concedes when his aunt gives him an ultimatum: find a new place to stay or meet with Jefferson. Reluctantly, Grant obeys, and when he arrives at Henri Pichot’s home, Sheriff Guidry and several other esteemed white men are also there. The white men treat Grant with subtle but apparent disrespect, reminding Grant that his decision to meddle with the

affairs of the courts is an intolerable affront to their entrenched power. After two hours of waiting, he is finally permitted to see them, and Grant remains self-consciously aware of the impression that he makes on the men. Nonetheless, he opts to forgo posturing as a groveling imbecile in a feeble attempt to maintain his pride and dignity:

I tried to decide just how I should respond to them. Whether I should act like the teacher that I was, or like the nigger that I was supposed to be. I decided to wait and see how the conversation went. To show too much intelligence would have been an insult to them. To show a lack of intelligence would have been a greater insult to me (47).

The white men's omnipotence is revealed in the actions that they take to remind Grant of his "place" in society. Later, Grant recounts the interaction to his aunt:

Everything you sent me to school for, you're stripping me of it... The humiliation I had to go through, going into that man's kitchen. The hours I had to wait while they ate and drank and socialized before they would even see me. Now going up to that jail. To watch them put their hands on that food. To search my body each time as if I'm some kind of common criminal (79).

At this point in the novel, Grant realizes but has not yet accepted that his education and pedigree have not earned him access to the white order of power. In longing for their acceptance, he acts in complicity with the myth of white supremacy.

Responsibility and Community

Derrida's notion of sacrifice allows us to consider and evaluate the specific actions and decision of individuals according to the degree to which they refrain from obstructing the freedom of any individual or group. Implied in the sacrifice of the infinite Other that occurs in the relation to the singular is the immediacy of the decision. Furthermore, according to Derrida, inscribed in the decision is the trace, or the perpetual partial erasure of the present. The trace, which denotes the infinite deferral of time and which renders resolute decision-making only possible as *im*-possible, nonetheless informs

the sacrificial decision. Derrida's thinking of the impossible possibility of the responsible decision intimates that decisions may be judged according to whether or to what degree they foster interpersonal communication.

Grant's attitude towards his duty as a teacher is duly inspired by Matthew Antoine, Grant's former teacher, and his opinion of Bayonne's black citizens, as well as Grant's overall doubt in education's ability to expand his students' horizons. He recalls a time after college when he visited Antoine, and he describes how Mr. Antoine, who is of mixed racial origins, never had anything "but hatred for himself as well as contempt for us. He hated himself for the mixture of his blood and the cowardice of his being, and he hated us for daily reminding him of it" (62). Grant relates to Mr. Antoine's hopelessness for the children's futures and his bitter regard for the limitations afforded him by his blackness. Grant's doubt in his ability to make a difference in his students' lives increases when Antoine tells Grant that his college experience has failed to teach him the "real" lessons in the reality of a black man. Grant recalls how Antoine had long ago predicted that he and his fellow classmates

...would die violently, and those who did not would be brought down to the level of beasts. Told us that there was no other choice but to run and run. That he was living testimony of someone who should have run...He hated himself for the mixture of his blood and the cowardice of his being, and he hated us for daily reminding him of it...He could teach any of us only one thing, and that one thing was flight...When we told our people how we felt, they told us to go back and learn all we could. There were those who did go back to learn. Others who only went back. And having no place to run, they went into the fields; others went into the small towns and cities, seeking work, and did even worse (62-63).

Grant adopts Antoine's outlook, and he believes that his work as a teacher will inevitably fail to remedy how society has already failed his students. The students must still chop wood for the impoverished schoolhouse and perform other arduous or menial tasks, and

Grant doubts that their futures will be any different. However, the interaction between the two teachers reveals the truth of Grant's immediate situation: Grant *does* have a choice, as well as an opportunity to make a difference. He realizes that Jefferson's hopelessness parallels the powerlessness he himself feels in his stagnant existence in Bayonne. In *Papier Machine* (2001), Derrida posits that in order to be "most responsible", we must be able to experience the limit of the *undecidable* in order to keep the future open and allocate a maximum amount of space within which one can navigate specific situations and make decisions in response to specific circumstances. He explains that in the absence of rules, the ethical decision must face the undecidable: « Il n'y a de décision ni de responsabilité sans l'épreuve de l'aporie ou de l'indécidabilité » [There is no decision or responsibility without the trial of the aporia or undecidability] (358; 128). Thus, the decision must be made without rules to follow and without knowing how to choose, which is why the decision is always of the order of the impossible. Therefore, the interaction between the former and the current teacher inspires Grant to make decisions that will inevitably engage the entire community in taking a leap of faith on behalf of their hope in Jefferson's ability to stand.

Over the course of several months of jail visits, Grant guides Jefferson along a tumultuous road towards self-discovery. He endeavors to convince Jefferson that he is a man of worth and dignity who must fight to his death against those who have reduced him to the status of an animal. Still, the racist defense team's disparaging charge continues to hinder Grant's attempts to establish a bond with Jefferson. Consequently, Grant is left with no option other than to expose himself directly to the white

community's prejudice in his efforts to gain special privileges for Jefferson and recreate a context that reflects his true humanity.

The process of fraternization which is inscribed in the community determines how one is treated before the law, which itself is inherently racist throughout the Deep South. The laws that govern the bodies of Bayonne's citizens function to ensure that one's racial identity is the condition that determines whether or not responsible decision-making can take place. Grant closes himself off to those who most lack agency in their own lives – namely, his students and Jefferson – because these are the people with whom he does not want to be associated. He avoids most of the people in his town and chooses to occupy his time by drinking at the local bar. At this point in the narrative, he begins to relate to the members of his community and is afforded the space to reflect on how his upbringing in the sleepy plantation town of Bayonne renders him inextricably connected to his community. One night, he sits at the bar and listens to a group of old men reflect on the days of Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis, which makes Grant think of his own literary education and a time in which he read James Joyce's "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," a story in which the author discovers the universality of the need for heroes. Grant considers the effect that Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis's athletic triumphs had on the psyche of the black community in Bayonne, and he recalls that after Joe Louis knocked out Schmeling, "there was nothing but chaos...Everybody patted everybody else on the back. For days after that fight, for weeks, we held our heads higher than any people on earth had ever done for any reason" (89). Grant relates the "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" story to his own people's celebration of Louis's knockout. He thinks: "I had never really listened to what was being said. Then I began to listen, to listen closely to

how they talked about their heroes, how they talked about the dead and about how great the dead had once been” (90). Grant understands that the old men’s impulse to romanticize those individuals who embody hope and progress use nostalgia to distance themselves from their stagnant or present realities. Similarly, the sense of hope that resonates in their reminiscent tales appeals to Grant’s affinity for his fellow community members.

Derrida argues in *Voyous* that the problem with fraternity is that it requires the grouping and measuring of men that tends toward mastery and exclusion. He explains that democratic exclusion is guaranteed where « la fraternité des frères fait la loi, là où s’impose une dictature politique de la fraternocratie » [the fraternity of brothers dictates the law, where a political dictatorship of fraternocracy comes to be imposed] (76; 50). Moreover, Derrida claims that although there will always be brothers, democracy is in danger where the nature of the bond of the fraternity of brothers determines what is legal and what is not. In *Politiques de l’amitié*, Derrida asks, « D’ailleurs comment pourrais-je être votre ami, vous déclarer mon amitié (et celle-ci consiste plutôt à aimer qu’à être aimé) si l’amitié ne restant pas à venir, à désirer, à promettre » [How could I be your friend, and declare my friendship for you (and the latter consists more in loving than being loved), if friendship did not remain something yet to come, to be desire, to be promised?] (262; 367-368). Hence, friendship, in contrast to fraternity, describes the set of interactions and decisions that are made which exceed expectations, categorization, and rules.

Once Grant becomes fully invested in the mission to change Jefferson’s attitude towards his fate, his empathy renders him more sensitive to the subsequent horrors that

threaten to erase his progress. In particular, the details surrounding Jefferson's impending execution are almost too much for Grant to bear. Grant's anger towards the ambiguity and arbitrariness of the decision to execute Jefferson and the means by which it has been decided intensifies his motivation for getting through to Jefferson. When Grant learns that the date on which the execution will take place falls on Good Friday, Grant asks himself, "How do people come up with a date and a time to take life from another man? Who made them God?" (159). In the novel's narrative structure, the protagonist interweaves his self-reflective comments with the Sheriff's remarks to Henri Pichot on the second time he visits the plantation owner. For example, when the Sheriff relays to Pichot that he must deliver the news to "the old woman" (Aunt Emma), Grant considers the injustice of the jury's decision and thinks to himself:

Twelve white men say a black man must die, and another white man sets the date and time without consulting one black person. Justice? They sentence you to death because you were at the wrong place at the wrong time, with no proof that you had anything to do with the crime other than being there when it happened. Yet six months later they come and unlock your cage and tell you, We, us, white folks all, have decided it's time for you to die, because this is the convenient date and time. ...And on Friday too. Always on Friday. Same time as He died, between twelve and three. But they can't take this one's life too soon after the recognition of His death, because it might upset the sensitive few. It can happen less than two weeks later, though, because even the sensitive few will have forgotten about their Savior's death by then (157-158).

Grant interprets the scheduling of Jefferson's execution with the biblical holiday to be a blatant affront to the black community, as the Sheriff's disregard for the sanctity of the religious event symbolizes the fraternal and exclusionary nature of the white community.

Fraternity, Friendship, and Autoimmunity

Grant's complicated relationship with religion creates a chasm that separates him from his family and his fellow community members. Unlike most of the people in Bayonne, Grant does not lead a devout life, but his own core belief system is weak and guided by a general selfish contempt for his life's circumstances. Gaines portrays Reverend Ambrose and the church as potential agents for change. He characterizes the antagonistic relationship between Reverend Ambrose and Grant as a necessary obstacle to overcome if Grant is to reconcile the role of religion and the beliefs of his community with his own value system. Initially, Grant refuses to work with Ambrose to figure out a solution regarding how to best help Jefferson because he perceives the Reverend's approach as that which is based in lies and deceit. Incidentally, by resisting Reverend Ambrose, Grant begins to take a genuine interest in the time that he spends with Jefferson, which appears to be inspired by stubborn vanity. Reverend Ambrose denounces Grant's refusal to appeal to a higher divinity for the sake of comforting Jefferson, and he asks Grant, "What did you learn about your own people? What did you learn about her? ... No, you not educated, boy...You learned your reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, but you don't know nothing. You don't even know yourself" (215). The "her" to whom Reverend Ambrose refers is Tante Lou, and he enumerates the sacrifices she has made to provide to Grant the opportunities for obtaining the education the community now calls upon him to use. Grant avows that he will never lie to Jefferson, to which Reverend Ambrose responds:

That's why you look down on me, because you know I lie ... I lie... to relieve pain. 'Cause reading, writing, and 'rithmetic is not enough...They sent you to school to relieve pain...and if you have to lie to do it, then you lie...And that's the difference...that make me the educated one, and you the gump. I know my

people...I know they done cheated themself, lied to themself-hoping that one they all love and trust can come back and help relieve the pain (218).

Reverend Ambrose alludes to the idea that Grant's responsibility to his community is based in a sense of indebtedness to his heritage, which can provide him with the humility that is necessary to humble himself before the downtrodden Jefferson. Grant's failure to ascribe to the same belief system as the Reverend leads him to evaluate his own moral belief system. Grant says, "I want him in heaven as much as you do, Reverend", to which the Reverend replies, "A place you can't believe in?" Grant contradicts himself and says, "No, I don't believe in it, Reverend." When the Reverend asks him, "And suppose he ask you if it's there, then what? Suppose he write on that tablet you give him, is it there? Then what?" and Grant replies, "I'll tell him I don't know" (220). Although the Reverend believes that it is permissible to lie to relieve another's pain, Grant's unwillingness to be dishonest constitutes the very condition that enables him to forge an authentic connection with Jefferson independent from an ulterior divine motive, and ultimately, he becomes capable of revealing the problematic mythical constructs of blind faith. Grant chooses instead to be frank with Jefferson so that he may develop the tools that can foster self-reliance as he confronts his terrifying fate. Thus, Grant understands that relying on religion risks engendering further lies and facilitating an escapist mindset, and which leads him to affirm his own autonomy by admitting his ignorance of the unknown. It is this affirmation that establishes the groundwork for the beginning of a friendship that is based in trust, vulnerability, and courage.

Later, Reverend Ambrose implores Grant to tell Jefferson to "fall down on his knees 'fore he walk to that chair. Tell him to fall down on his knees 'fore her. You the only one he'll listen to. He won't listen to me." Grant responds in the negative, telling

him that we refuses to do so. He asserts, “I’ll tell him to listen to you – but I wont tell him to kneel. I will try to help him stand” (219). In this exchange, Grant again vocalizes his uncertainty about the afterlife and heaven. Finally, Grant humbly admits of his own ignorance as to what happens after death, and he significantly relinquishes full control in his teachings, thus facilitating the conditons that may enable Jefferson to take responsibility for his own decision to stand.

Next, the distinction that Derrida makes between friendship and fraternity reinforces Derrida’s problem with Nancy’s community. We can consider the implications of this distinction in order to determine whether and to what degree Grant’s actions align with Derrida’s formulation of responsibility. Marie-Eve Morin explains in “Putting Community Under Erasure: Derrida and Nancy on the Plurality of Singularities” that Nancy conceives of community as defined according to a dynamic in which a certain fraternity is inscribed in his notion of “being-with”. However, Derrida condemns Nancy’s idea of the fraternal element of community, since it can be wielded as a mechanism of exclusion. He claims that Nancy’s community does not serve as a useful concept for thinking “being-with”, as it oversimplifies notions of politics, ethics, and responsibility. The fundamental problem that arises from the ease with which friendship and fraternity can be conflated is that the concept of fraternity too easily lends itself to the idea of a universal friendship or fraternity. In other words, if fraternity insinuates the idea of a universal, exemplar fraternity, it therefore gives the impression of inclusion, but in doing so, presumes the exclusion of an entire group or population. In *Politiques de l’amitié*, Derrida draws our attention to the difference between the two concepts, in which the comfort that is offered by the friend as brother is undermined by his difference from us.

This confronts us with a dilemma in the political realm, in which we must regard the friend as brother and the potential of the brother as enemy in the process of fraternization in order to engage: « par privilège à la fois des frères amis et des frères ennemis dans le même processus de fraternisation » [in privileged fashion both brother friends and brother enemies in the same process of fraternization] (129; 106). Thus, true friendship requires that one honors the potential enemy *in* the friend and is willing to tolerate his difference. The difference between “me” and the friend poses a potential for conflict, but Derrida concedes that the political, democratic decision is situated in the leap of faith that is taken when we respond genuinely to the Other as friend, despite our difference. Doing so demands that we acknowledge our separation from the Other and respect our vulnerability before him in the forging of a bond in which a fundamental distance that functions as a necessary and perpetual tension must be continually addressed and worked out via each party’s honesty, sensitivity, and generosity.

Derrida cites Nietzsche’s discussion of the impossibility of female friendships in his philosophical novel *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* *Zarathoustra* [*Also Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*] (1883) in support of his argument that honoring the potential enemy that our friend can become is an indicator of freedom. In *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Nietzsche begins with the premise that women’s lack of power renders them incapable of forging noble friendships among women. For Nietzsche, women are only capable of love, but the power structure inherent to love makes love a relation of inferiority and superiority. Thus, women are both tyrant and slave, but are not free and equal enough to be friends (*Politiques de l’amitié* 314). Derrida quotes Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, who also denies that men are capable of loving

their enemies as brothers, and draws our attention to the “not yet” of either gender’s capacity for friendship. In other words, *friendship*, which is based in equality and freedom, falls outside of our capacity to define it as such, since to do so would be to name it according to a preconceived notion of rules set in governance of the relation. He explains that we must not confuse friendship with comradeship, since « au fond, ce dont l’homme aura été capable, jusqu’ici, jusqu’ici du moins, ce n’est certes pas l’amitié parfaite, mais seulement la camaraderie » [fundamentally, that which will have been capable – at least up to now – is certainly not perfect friendship, only comradeship] (316; 284). Thus, true friendship is rooted in a fundamental *instability*. As Derrida explains, « l’amitié à venir continue de signifier, pour Zarathoustra : liberté, égalité, fraternité. La devise fragile, instable, et récent on l’a vu... d’une république » [friendship to come continues to mean, for Zarathoustra: freedom, equality and fraternity. The fragile, unstable and recent motto...of a republic] (316; 284). In sum, inscribed in the notion of friendship is a certain fraternity that, as also concerns freedom and equality, is the condition of democracy.

In Grant’s first successful visit with Jefferson, he is able to convince the sheriff that the group that consists of himself, Jefferson, the Reverend, and Miss Emma should move out of the cramped quarters of Jefferson’s cell into the larger day room. The sheriff eventually concedes, and the new space that is offered to the motley group constitutes the necessary condition that enables Grant to make his first breakthrough with Jefferson. Perhaps this can be attributed to the amount of space and subsequent privacy that is afforded Grant and Jefferson, especially considering that Miss Emma’s presence intensifies the dichotomy of emotions Jefferson experiences in wavering between his

instinct to resist any human contact and his conscience which tells him to act in a way that eases Miss Emma's pain. When Grant coaxes Jefferson to eat something, Jefferson watches him closely and demands, "What you want?" to which Grant replies nonchalantly, "Just want you to eat something, that's all" (188). In this scene, Jefferson reveals his distrust for Grant, clearly sensing his unwillingness for being there. Jefferson repeats himself: "What you want?" Grant responds that he wants "Us to talk", and Jefferson inquires further, "'Bout what?" Grant defers back to Jefferson, and says, "I don't know. Anything you want to talk about. What do you want to talk about?" Jefferson replies, "That chair." Despite Jefferson's mistrust of Grant, he reveals that he is desperate for a friend with whom he can discuss his pressing existential questions. Unlike his Aunt Emma, Jefferson does not need to protect Grant. However, he takes a risk in this confession, but Grant's willingness to broach the subject in light of not knowing how Jefferson will respond accords with Derrida's conception of democracy. The fact of the unknown is the condition for a democracy to come, and like friendship, democracy must always remain « indéfiniment perfectible, donc toujours insuffisante et future mais, appartenant au temps de la promesse, elle restera toujours, en chacun de ses temps futurs, à venir: même quand il y a la démocratie, celle-ci n'existe jamais, elle n'est jamais présente, elle reste le thème d'un concept non présentable » [indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, It remains the theme of a non-presentable concept] (339; 306).

The reality of Jefferson's impending execution becomes an obsessive, nagging thought, and he struggles to deal with the magnitude of his fated death sentence alone. He needs Grant to help him come to terms with it, and this begins with understanding how the actual death machine work, and all the happenings that are occurring in his community as they relate to his own reality. Grant, however, does not jump immediately into a dialogue about "that chair," and instead diverts their attention to his school's Christmas program. Jefferson relates himself indirectly to Jesus, and uses the word "Christmas" as a segue to ask, "that's when He was born, or that's when He died?" Grant answers, "Born", and Jefferson replies, "That's right. Easter when they nailed Him to the cross. And He never said a mumbling word" (139). The parallel that Jefferson draws between himself and Jesus prompts Grant to begin a meaningful dialogue – he has Jefferson's full attention, which is evident by Jefferson's ability to relate his own plight to that of the crucified martyred Christ. Grant asks Jefferson if he knows the definition of the words "moral" and "obligation", but Jefferson refuses to answer. Grant takes his silence as a cue to continue, and he carries on with his lesson. He tells Jefferson, "No matter how bad off we are, we still owe something. You owe something, Jefferson. Not to me. Surely not to that sheriff out there. But to your godmother. You must show her some understanding, some kind of love" (139). Grant takes the opportunity to expand upon Jefferson's imaginative conflation of himself with Christ to teach him that Christ's visceral sufferings pale in comparison to the importance of the teachings that he imparted to others during his life. Grant takes a vested interest in alleviating Jefferson's pain, and in doing so, he makes the first genuine gesture of friendship towards the condemned man. The symbol of Jesus Christ becomes likened to Jefferson's sufferings, and it is this

common ground shared by both men that makes Grant view Jefferson as an equal.

In *Totalité et Infini* [*Totality and Infinity*] (1961), Emmanuel Lévinas discusses the feminine Other in his explanation of how femininity constitutes the pre-ethical place of home that serves as the condition for the welcome of the Other. « La femme est la condition du recueillement, de l'intériorité de la Maison et de l'habitation » [The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the home, and inhabitation] (155; 166). However, Derrida takes issue with the onto-theological roots of fraternity, since the concept excludes the feminine in its appeal to the sanctity of the familial bond that stems from paternal lineage. In *Politiques de l'amitié*, Derrida criticizes the traditional notion of masculine inheritance as that which is based on the idea of man as the archetype of humanity and which excludes woman in its fraternal bond. If we fail to think beyond the fraternal community, we risk condoning the « *double exclusion* du féminin » [double exclusion of the feminine] that transpires in the movement to politicize the friendship model, which is at work in all the discourses that reserve the political space to man (312; 281). In order to remedy this, Derrida claims that we should rather think about the future of democracy in terms of friendship and the essential bond that is forged among all members of a community in order to circumvent the historical impulse to exclude and compartmentalize according to the oppositional logic of gender.

The women in Grant's life subvert the traditional concept of the historicity of friendship that Derrida analyzes in *Politiques de l'amitié*, since they play a significant role in the political fabric of Bayonne. Their unique relationships with men in both the white and colored populations situate them at the center of the political maneuverings and negotiations that surround Jefferson's trial and sentence. In his review on *A Lesson*

Before Dying, David E. Vancil explains that Gaines characterizes women as possessing the capacity to impart faith onto their communities through their “sustaining resilience”. Vancil writes, "Without the hope that these women provide through their belief in redemption in the future, life would be intolerable” (489-491). Tante Lou, Aunt Emma, and Grant’s paramour Vivian serve as catalytic encounters that inspire the heroism displayed by both Grant and Jefferson. Moreover, the women hold both men accountable to varying degrees of remaining open to their community. For example, in prison, Jefferson concedes to Grant and appeases his aunt by allowing himself to eat a little bit of the gumbo that she brings for him, which signifies his acknowledgement of his responsibility to her well-being, which is premised on their filial bond. In other example, at the Rainbow Club where Grant drinks, Thelma loans Grant money out of good faith so that he can purchase a radio for Jefferson, despite the fact that she earns little more as a waitress than Grant does as a teacher.

It is due to the insistence of the women in his life that Grant inevitably accepts his responsibility to Jefferson. In their early interactions, Grant repeats this message of moral obligation to Jefferson: "No matter how bad off we are ... we still owe something"; yet Grant interprets this obligation as that which can be achieved through direct, interpersonal action (139). He has yet to see that “owing” something to others can be provided in one’s shared presence with another. It is up to the women in his life to show him that Mr. Antoine’s pessimistic outlook is not only wrong, but also reinforces the myth of white supremacy.

The first authentic relationship that Grant forms with anyone in his community is with Vivian. Since Vivian must adhere to the terms of her divorce and remain within

visiting distance of her ex-husband, Grant decides to stay in Bayonne despite his dream of moving to California. Grant's discussion with Vivian reveals that Grant is aware of his special role in the community. He explains that the reasons why his aunt needs him to help Jefferson are more complex than they seem:

What she wants is for him, Jefferson, and me to change everything that had been going on for three hundred years. She wants it to happen so in case she ever gets out of her bed again, she can go to that little church there in the quarter and say proudly, 'You see, I told you – I told you he was a man.'...And for Irene and the others there in the quarter, it's the same. They look at their fathers, their grandfathers, their uncles, their brothers – all broken. They see reading, writing, and arithmetic. I can give them something that neither a husband, a father, nor a grandfather ever did so they want to hold on as long as they can. Not realizing that their holding on will break me too. That in order for me to be what they think I am, what they want me to be, I must run as the others have done in the past (167).

As Grant speaks, the thoughts that he has repressed spill out of him, and he realizes that integral to the women's expectations of him is a seemingly irreconcilable paradox.

Namely, he believes that to be a successful man in the eyes of his community is to be indomitable, stable, and present. However, he intimates that like so many men from his community who came before him, shouldering such weighty expectations would surely break him. However, in revealing his own vulnerability to Vivian, he transgresses a threshold that cannot be uncrossed. Thus, in affirming his deepest fears, Grant allows himself to be humbled before Vivian, and he is left with no other choice but to venture forward and fulfill his aunt's wishes.

In a subsequent visit to the jail, Grant appeals to Jefferson's empathy by asking him to do his aunt a favor, which further suggests that Grant now views Jefferson as a peer, rather than just a pitiable project. As Jefferson, Grant, Reverend Ambrose, and Miss Emma sit around the table eating in the dayroom, Grant leads Jefferson away from the table and tells him that he wants the two of them to be friends. He appeals to this request

for friendship by asking that Jefferson treat Miss Emma the same way – as a peer, like a man would treat a friend or fellow man. He communicates his request to Jefferson:

I want you to be more than a godson to her. A godson obeys, but a friend – well, a friend would do anything to please a friend. A friend does a lot of little things. It would mean so much to her if you would eat some of the gumbo.... Look at me, Jefferson, please.... Will you be her friend? Will you eat some of the gumbo? Just a little bit? One spoonful? (194)

Jefferson's willingness to let down his guard and offer his grandmother this single concession encourages Grant to ask even more of Jefferson. He relates the idea of friendship to the grander conception of a hero. Grant asks:

Do you know what a hero is, Jefferson? A hero is someone who does something for other people. He does something that other men don't and can't do. He is different from other men. He is above other men. No matter who those other men are, the hero, no matter who he is, is above them. I could never be a hero I teach, but I don't like teaching. I teach because it is the only thing that an educated black man can do in the South today. I don't like it; I hate it. I don't even like living here. I want to run away. I want to live for myself and for my woman and for nobody else (191).

Thus, Grant allows himself to confess to Jefferson his own weakness of mind. He continues to describe that which defines a hero, and denies any association with the term:

A hero does for others. He would do anything for people he loves, because he knows it would make their lives better. I am not the kind of person, but I want you to be. You could give something to her, to me, to those children in the quarter. You could give them something that I never could. They expect it from me, but not from you. The white people out there are saying that you don't have it – that you're a hog, not a man. But I know they are wrong. You have the potential. We all have, no matter who we are. Those out there are no better than we are, Jefferson. They are worse. That's why they are always looking for a scapegoat, someone else to blame. I want you to show them the difference between what they think you are and what you can be. To them you're nothing but another nigger – no dignity, no heart, no love for your people. You can prove them wrong. You can do more than I can ever do. I have always done what they wanted me to do (191).

Grant's emphatic speech reveals the depth of his affinity for Jefferson. As he speaks, he is reminded that although they have both suffered from the myth of white supremacy,

Jefferson's narrative differs from his. He tells Jefferson:

A myth is an old lie that people believe in. White people believe that they're better than anyone else on earth – and that's a myth. The last thing they ever want is to see a black man stand, and think, and show that common humanity that is in us all. It would destroy their myth. They would no longer have justification for having made us slaves and keeping us in the condition we are in...I want you to chip away at that myth by standing. I want you – yes, you – to call them liars. I want you to show them that you are as much a man - more a man than they can ever be. That jury? You call them men? That judge? Is he a man? The governor is no better. They play by the rules their forefathers created hundreds of years ago. Their forefathers said that we're only three-fifths human – and they believe it to this day (192).

Finally, Grant vocalizes his appeal to Jefferson, and speaks to him as a friend in need of guidance. Implicit in Grant's definition of a hero is his realization that heroic action implies social connection and a sense of one's duty to his community. Grant delivers his final plea to Jefferson:

I need you. I need you much more than you could ever need me. I need to know what to do with my life. I want to run away, but go where and do what? ...I'm no hero; I can just give something small. That's all I have to offer. It is the only way that we can chip away at that myth. You – you can be bigger than anyone you have ever met. ...You have the chance of being bigger than anyone who has ever lived on that plantation or come from this little town. You can do it if you try...We need you to be and want you to be. Me, your godmother, the children, and all the rest of them in the quarter (193).

The heroic act that Grant requests of Jefferson is of the order of friendship, due to its potential to expose the exclusionary mechanisms of the mythic community that rely upon the myth of black inferiority. Grant makes Jefferson understand his responsibility to not only him, but to his entire community; it is therefore necessary to debunk the myth of white dominance whose weight is derived from its inclination to measure, categorize, and exclude. After delivering this speech, Grant breaks down and cries, and attempts to justify, or at the very least explain, the reason for his tears. He tells Jefferson, "I cry, not from reaching any conclusion by reasoning, but because, lowly as I am, I am still part of

the whole” (194). In this naked moment, Grant is compelled to conceal his contempt for knowing that he cannot escape the operative workings of the myth of white supremacy.

Perhaps the most important tool that Grant provides for Jefferson is the journal that compels Jefferson to discover his own internal conflicts. Thus, Grant helps Jefferson assert his worth through the act of writing. Education for Grant represents a mode of radical resistance and the potential to appropriate conventionally white tools once used to reinforce master narratives and wield control over blacks; therefore, he considers the journal that he gives to Jefferson as a necessary device to be used in Jefferson’s self-affirmation process. In his solitude, Jefferson learns that he is free to articulate his opinion of the injustices that he has suffered.

Furthermore, Grant’s gift-giving gesture falls under the order of friendship rather than of fraternity because it exceeds the expectations of what is required in a relationship between student and pupil, as it denotes a sort of risk that is characterized in terms of trust, vulnerability, and risk. The process of friendship implies the primordial movement towards identifying with the Other in the first place, and Grant’s ability to impart his own knowledge and experience onto Jefferson constitutes the condition upon which a more meaningful friendship can be formed. Upon reading the final words in his journal, the reader understands that Jefferson has fully affirmed his subjectivity through the articulation of his own unique experience as a black man.

Jefferson certifies his friendship with Grant through his writing and the confessions that he records in his journal. Jefferson admits to “knowing” each of the white men, and thus the journal becomes a medium used to achieve vengeance through the communication of truth. Jefferson writes:

paul trying to be [hard] when he ain't like he don't want get too close to me no [more] [and] all the time he is the only one [around] [here] [know] how to talk like a [human] to people I [know] you paul [and] I [know] old clark [and] I [know] you too [Sheriff Guidry] and you [Mr. Pichot] and [Mr. Morgan] and all the rest of yall I [just] never say [none] of this [before] but I know yall [every] [last] one of yall (230).

Jefferson's pronouncement that he "sees" through the actions of the white men inverses the victim narrative and places power in the silent voice that will inevitably reflect his enemies' own hypocrisies back to the community. Furthermore, the crudely-penned entry serves as proof of Jefferson's limited education and alludes to the social constructs that have denied Jefferson access to a better life, notwithstanding the cruel men who have deemed him a monster without ever having actually known him.

Although it is apparent that Jefferson has never before discussed the meaning of friendship, on the eve of his execution, he certifies his newfound friendships in a final avowal of his trust in those people who he knows will read his journal after he is gone: "i just feel like tellin you i like you but i dont kno how to say this cause i aint never say it to nobody before an nobody aint never say it to me i aint done this much thinkin and this much writin in all my life befor" (228-229). Jefferson affirms his friendship with Grant and Paul when he records his wishes for them to be the benefactors of his worldly possessions upon his execution. He also uses his journal to express the wish that the other prisoners receive access to his radio, that Grant inherits his journal, and that Sheriff Paul receives his pocketknife and gold chain (245). This avowal differentiates the two men in their unique and separate relationships with Jefferson. In the last entry that Jefferson makes in his journal, he offers a final proclamation of life and love, and certifies that he "sees" the beauty of life and shares this knowledge with Grant. He observes his last mortal observation of the beauty of the world, and writes 'sky blu blue mr wigin' (237).

Future of the Political and Democracy

The friendship formed between Grant and Jefferson signifies the future of the political. As Grant's interest in Jefferson blossoms into a genuine affinity for the young man, his obligation to Aunt Emma and Tante Lou transforms into a genuine relationship. In *Voyous*, Derrida presents his idea of "autoimmunity", which builds upon some of the other concepts he focuses on in his work, such as *aporia* and *différance*. He thus makes a case for thinking about democracy as directed by an autoimmune logic. We can consider Derrida's idea of autoimmunity to understand how the nuanced complexity of the two men's relationship evolves from that characterized by its fraternal bond to a relation defined as true friendship. In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, Derrida employs the term autoimmunity to name a concept that denotes the suicide of the defense mechanism that is supposed to protect the living body from hostile external forces. Derrida discusses the notion of autoimmunity in biological terms, in which he explains that autoimmune diseases occur when the immunity of the self becomes so strong that it threatens the life of the self by attacking its own immune system in order to stay alive (150). At this point, Derrida asserts, the self can only remain itself by destroying what protects it from invasion by foreign elements and remaining radically open to the non-self that threatens to destroy it. While inspired by the biological notion of the term, Derrida discusses *l'auto-immunisation* to describe the actions made in the self-preservation of something that inevitably leads to the thing's destruction. He explains that by its internal ordering logic, democracy is threatened; in other words, *democracy* as such cannot be achieved; rather, the fact that inscribed in democracy is the threat of its own rupture is precisely what Derrida claims is necessary for a democracy *à venir* to be possible. The idea of the

delay of democracy means that time makes the process democratic : « un libre jeu de son indétermination » [a free play of its indetermination] (61; 58).

Derrida's conception of autoimmunity constitutes the ontological explanation for Grant's initial inability to begin his journey towards self-realization. The degree to which Grant and Jefferson achieve selfhood is tied to the conditions that create their autoimmunity. Grant's pride, which constitutes his mode of self-protection, proves too weak a shield to remain impenetrable. Inevitably, Grant's stubbornness conceals a deep-seated insecurity, and serves as the catalyst for his emotional unraveling and failed early attempts to bond with Jefferson. Hence, Grant's immunity initially works against him by attacking him, as host, and threatening to weaken his other forms of resilience. He can only succeed by opening himself up to the non-self – his community, his family, and Jefferson – that he once perceived as agents which threaten to destroy the self with whom he identifies. Grant must inevitably allow himself to welcome and be affected by the people whom he initially rejects.

Grant's autoimmunity is rendered ineffectual when he acknowledges the singularity in Jefferson and in turn develops a meaningful friendship. Similarly, Jefferson's universalizing embrace of his entire community allows him to become integrated into his community and forge a fraternal bond that becomes the condition for his salvation. Thus, Grant and Jefferson's triumph over those autoimmune forces that obstruct them from achieving selfhood ultimately lead them to affirm their unique authentic identities and transform their community's collective consciousness.

Grant acts according to a revised notion of responsibility that is situated in friendship when he begins to seek Jefferson's company not out of duty, but out of love.

His decision to continue to visit Jefferson falls outside of the realm of the political because he persists in seeking and acknowledging the wholly unique difference in Jefferson that makes his relation one of friendship, rather than of fraternity. In a different vein, Jefferson achieves mental liberation from the Southern code of *de facto* racism by embracing the acceptance and support of his fellow community members. It is only after Jefferson accepts the significance that his death will have on his people's own collective sense of self-worth and agency that he affirms his humanity and welcomes the fraternal gestures of kindness and acceptance extended to him from people spanning across all of Bayonne's social classes.

Finally, Grant is only able to fully teach Jefferson his "lesson" after he accepts that an integral component of his identity is derived from the trials he has endured in a world ruled by white laws and values. Thus, when Grant realizes that he can find peace within himself by connecting with his fellow community members, he is able to challenge the myth of white supremacy by revealing to the community that it is the white legal system which has created the lie of Jefferson's barbarism. Only when Grant ceases to doubt his capacity to transform Jefferson's self-perception does he fully regard Jefferson as a peer and an equal, and form a genuine friendship that is based on respect and empathy.

Through the development of the friendship that Grant gradually forms with Jefferson, he becomes fully actualized upon asserting his right to die according to his own terms, which in turn teaches his community that daring to die with dignity constitutes an affront to the racist constructs of power that have sealed his fate.

Ultimately, Jefferson's death sentence has been handed down by the white order of society who sustains its power via the process of fraternization, but Grant's refusal to bear witness to Jefferson's execution signifies his desire to protect his friend's newfound dignity. In turn, Grant provides Jefferson the freedom to stand on his own if he so chooses. Although Grant criticizes himself for his own cowardice, his doubt keeps the future open and allows Jefferson to make a decision outside of the realm of what Grant expects of him. He asks himself, "Why wasn't I there? Why wasn't I standing beside him? Why wasn't my arm around him? Why? Why wasn't I back there with the children? Why wasn't I down on my knees? Why?" (250). However, in permitting Jefferson the freedom to die alone, Grant relinquishes all control, thus suggesting that he regards Jefferson as an equal and as a friend. Furthermore, the significance of Grant's solitude illuminates how his journey toward self-realization is dependent on his isolation from all duties – he has acted, and now he must wait. He must join the rest of the community of mourners, and allow Jefferson the peace and dignity of experiencing the rawness of martyrdom that he has earned. In the final moments before Jefferson's death, Grant concedes that the Reverend is braver than he, and he sends a silent message to Jefferson:

I am not with you at this moment because – because I would not have been able to stand. I would not have been able to walk with you those last few steps. I would have embarrassed you. But the old man will not...He will be strong. He is going to use their God to give him strength...He is brave, braver than I, braver than any of them – except you, I hope. My faith is in you, Jefferson (249).

Grant's silent confession reveals that he has entered into a new phase of understanding in which he has fully shed his prideful façade through this final gesture of friendship, thereafter nullifying his spiritual autoimmunity through this final blessing to Jefferson.

Conclusion

Jefferson's unexpected transformation affects all facets of Bayonne society, and calls upon the totality of its members to recognize Jefferson's humanity. This recognition opens up the future to give way to the sort of inclusivity that obscures racial identifications and exposes the mythical foundations of the operative community.

At the end of the novel, Gaines offers a haunting description of the townspeople's reaction to the arrival of the electric chair. The Bayonne citizens' inescapable proximity to Jefferson's killing machine announces its presence with its ominous and unrelenting hum. Thus, the entire town is forced to bear psychological witness to Jefferson's impending death, which forces them to internalize (to varying degrees) the visceral manifestations of law that orders their society. Consequently, the unfortunate circumstances of the looming execution draws the people of Bayonne together in a collective, albeit silent, reflection upon the implications of "justice" as it is meted out to the black members of society.

In conclusion, Grant's struggle to reassess his place in the scheme of racial inequality allows him to re-articulate the basis for collective bonding as man's inherent right to self-dignity. In an attempt to help Jefferson understand that he is a victim in the white supremacist narrative that defines black history, Grant guides Jefferson towards transcending this narrative. Through Grant's underhanded, but still glaringly apparent opposition to the racism in his town and his refusal to comply with a rigid conception of blackness and its accompanying limitations, he compels Jefferson to believe that his own salvation depends upon Jefferson's ability to subvert the white-supremacist narrative that subordinates them both. Jefferson ultimately becomes his own muse - the lessons

Jefferson learns about himself through his writing inevitably reveals to him his self-worth. Thus, Jefferson is the key factor in Grant's own journey towards self-discovery. Similarly, the collective sympathy that the community has for Jefferson also reminds the black community of its own worth. Grant's personal growth is demonstrated in his interactions with the otherness in Jefferson, and is not due to any change that takes place within the society in which he lives. Ultimately, Grant's salvation is contingent upon his ability to lead Jefferson to pursue his own meaningful subjectivity, and Grant's moral journey culminates in Jefferson's martyrdom, upon which the community teaches Grant that morality, courage, and humanity are universal truths that oppose the operative myth of racial superiority.

Chapter 3. REDEFINING MASCULINITY

III. Reconstructing Masculinity

The final section of this project examines representations of masculinities in the literary works of René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines in efforts to identify and determine how the actions of marginalized men exhibited by particular individuals and groups within the authors' novels of study challenge oppressive forms of hegemonic masculinities. In particular, the relationship between the effects of globalization on the formation of gender identity will be investigated, specifically in terms of how economic and political dynamics affect the constitution of the male self in minority populations. The effects of globalization play a major role in reinforcing the established patriarchy in each of these three societies, which shapes constructions of gender and sustains hegemonic forms of male dominance. Drawing from Raewyn Connell's formulation of the gender hierarchy that characterizes most contemporary societies, the homogenizing forces of globalization contribute to the oppression and disempowerment of subordinated and marginalized men who are unable to portray certain hegemonic forms of masculine behaviors. The final section of this project seeks to discover how the traditional, insular male/female binary formulation of hegemonic masculinity accounts for the ways in which non-hegemonic, marginalized masculinities appropriate new behaviors and value systems as alternatives to hegemonic forms in efforts to resist oppression and achieve a sense of agency despite their socioeconomic contexts.

Numerous studies conducted by gender theorists since the 1970s have posited that certain patterns of masculinities exist that are more closely associated with social authority and dominance than others. In *Studying Men and Masculinities* (2013) David

Buchbinder considers the notion of anxiety as a starting point for his examination of the masculine in the contemporary Western social and cultural context. The text begins with Buchbinder's assessment of whether the idea of a "crisis" in masculinity is historically unique, culturally and historically conditioned, or always already inscribed in the concept of the masculine. Buchbinder cites psychotherapist Roger Horrocks and Christopher E. Forth, a professor of cultural history of gender, in his discussion of two differing conceptions of the relationship between crisis and masculinity. In *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies, and Realities* (1994), Horrocks asserts, "the masculine gender is a precarious and dangerous achievement and is highly damaging to men" (1). Thus, the very concept of masculinity is a crisis in today's world. More specifically, the notion of the "ideal" man exists within most cultures, in which he is described by a limited set of positive masculine characteristics sanctioned by the patriarchal order (Buchbinder 90). However, Horrocks believes that such an ideal is inherently problematic, since ideals by their very definition signify archetypes to be desired but not necessarily obtained. By contrast, Forth argues in *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body* (2008) that the term "crisis" is inadequate if we accept that "there is no stable or non-critical period to be found prior to the disturbance in question" (Forth 3). The question of the matter of a crisis in masculinity posed by Horrocks and Forth concerns whether such a crisis can be considered a reaction to cultural change, or whether it is always already inscribed in the idea of the masculine. In a slightly different approach, the question that this final section explores is situated in the language surrounding the debate itself. Specifically, determining whether such a crisis in masculinity is historically unique, culturally and historically conditioned, or already structured into the masculine is

not the primary focus of this project. Rather, that such a crisis exists at all invites us to explore the causes and implications of masculinity as a troubled concept.

This third section first demonstrates that certain attributes of masculinity and femininity are culturally and historically conditioned, but that masculinity and femininity are not staid properties germane to male and female bodies. Despite the changes that the categories of masculinity and femininity have undergone since the 1960s, when late capitalism created dramatic shifts in society across the globe, these concepts continue to structure society as well as human behavior. This project aligns with constructivist gender theorists in adopting the stance that gender is the product of the way a society develops. As Buchbinder explains, “There are social and cultural influences that operate in and around such material factors as the body” (31). Therefore, we learn how to accommodate ourselves to such influences in order to insert ourselves into the structures created by these influences. Second, this final section examines how non-compliance to certain conceptions of masculinity bodes particularly problematic for men of various demographics and societies. Specifically, the struggle to achieve male dominance in Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States has historically been guaranteed to men based largely on their skin color or ethnic identity. Finally, the following chapters analyze how Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines portray revised models of masculinity that empower, rather than denigrate, those men who do not exhibit the same masculine traits as those embodied by members of the hegemonic patriarchal order.

We must revisit Derrida and Nancy’s ideas of the ontological origins of responsibility in order to understand how time is an integral factor in our understanding of the relationship between masculine responsibility, history, and the mythic community.

Specifically, situating each author's notions of masculinity and community in this ontological framework accentuates the need to redefine masculine responsibility on an individual and societal level. The framework that is shaped by these thinkers' conceptions of ontology, responsibility, and the community will allow us to comprehend how marginalized men can display behaviors that contend with reigning forms of hegemonic masculinities, and to imagine a new milieu that can open the way for a reconceptualized definition of masculinity.

First, Nancy's idea of being-with is also intimately linked to time; however, he diverges from Derrida's conception of the self and the Other to argue that the fact of time is precisely what requires us to think being-together as definitive of the mode of being in the world. His conception of the mythic community posits that myth functions to found a community by bringing together its singular members who are, in an ontological sense, falsely perceived as isolated from one another and who consequently pine to return to a bygone era in which humans were primordially connected to each other through their membership to the same community. As discussed in the two previous sections, the myth of community is the impetus that drives people and political regimes to violence in the quest to establish and defend national identity. However, Nancy's conception of the ontological nature of community posits that the relation to the Other must be thought of in terms of time, not as an absolute rupture with the present, but rather as a disjuncture that nonetheless maintains a constancy of movement and interactions among singularities. In this sense, we can conceive of any identity – gender, ethnicity, race, etc. – not as a staid category, but as perpetually in process. If singularities are at once separate but primordially exposed to other singularities, then the formulation of patterns of

masculinity within particular groups of men is the result of a dynamic process that changes according to global and social forces. Thus, by their very nature, patterns of hegemonic masculinity change and evolve over time. Consequently, changes in the hegemonic order likewise affect the value systems and power structures in all levels of society subordinate to the hegemonic order.

Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines present male characters that face dilemmas within their particular historical and cultural contexts that ultimately challenge the patriarchy and specific hegemonic masculinities germane to their nation. The authors' depictions of these male protagonists compel us to consider a new masculinity that is, as Buchbinder puts it, "capable of continual shifts and alterations, [which] adapt parts of more traditional masculinities" that may be blended into new forms of masculinities so that "new constellations of what may count as hegemonic masculinities may be given the chance to come into being" (180).

Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler has sought to challenge our preconceived notions about gender to make the argument that gendered behaviors, as well as sex itself, are learned. This project adopts Butler's definition of gender, which she presents in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) and later expands upon in *Undoing Gender* (2004). She defines gender as a highly coded set of behaviors which announces sex:

Sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. Thus, "sex" is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices (1-2).

Hence, we are compelled to assert or exhibit masculine or feminine behaviors in order to be identified as male or female. The question therein lies in the concern for what happens to people who cannot meet gender norms. Those who do not meet certain gender norms become in some way marginalized. As Buchbinder explains, Butler subverts assumptions about the relationship between sex and gender and demonstrates how such categories obtain meaning through discourse, “understood as reaching from language to cultural phenomena, attitudes, and behaviors” (56). Beginning from the premise of Butler’s idea that gender is constructed through discursive practices that assert one’s sex, it is then possible to interrogate the conditions that affect the formation of gender. In order to do so, it is first necessary to define and analyze how the notion of *patriarchy* shapes constructions of gender. Buchbinder defines “patriarchy” as a “nebulous set of discursive strands that constitute for people in the culture an order and way of thinking of themselves as subjects within a sexed and gendered economy” (68). Gender theorist and professor bell hooks provides a more nuanced conception of the idea of patriarchy in her work on the formation of black hegemonic masculinity in the United States. Specifically, she argues in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* that the values associated with what she terms “imperialist white-supremacist patriarchy”, or the particular type of patriarchy that structures society in the United States, can be defined as “the embrace of capitalism, the support of patriarchal violence, the conservative approach to gender roles, and the call to liberal individualism” (151). More attention will be given to hooks’s conceptualization of the nuanced formulation of patriarchy that describes gender and social relations in the United States in the final chapter. Moreover, because Buchbinder’s definition of patriarchy posits that the discursive formation of patriarchy is not only

influential in our lives, but also “change[s] and adapt[s] to changing sociohistorical contexts”, it will be necessary to describe the particular shape that the patriarchy takes in the social and cultural contexts portrayed in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines (68).

Factors such as sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, or social class play a crucial role in the nature of a man’s access to power. Buchbinder distinguishes between formal and symbolic patriarchies to explain how different societies are structured around different manifestations of the patriarchal order, which are largely determined by the dynamics of power that characterizes a political environment and governing authority of a particular place. In formal patriarchies, the power is held and wielded by a male individual over the community, and his power usually derives from his political position as the either literal or symbolic sire of his people (66). On the other hand, in a symbolic patriarchy, the power is dispersed among the male subjects. Power in symbolic patriarchies is “held out as promised to men, and as always only provisionally held by individual males” (67). Thus, men in symbolic patriarchies “remain implicated in an overarching system of power that remains finally beyond their own control” (67).

In *Le Mât de cocagne*, Depestre’s portrayal of the Zoocrates Zachary dictatorship, which mirrors the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti from 1957-1971, functions as a formal patriarchy, whereas symbolic patriarchies characterize the societies portrayed in Fuentes’s *Gringo viejo* and Gaines’s *A Gathering of Old Men*. According to Buchbinder, symbolic patriarchies should be viewed as a “discursive formation by means of which sex, sexuality, and gender become intelligible and legible within a particular economy of power” (67). In symbolic patriarchies, when social and cultural changes threaten the

status quo, the more powerful men in that society are more likely to react to threats to their power by acting in ways to ensure the hierarchal order. Hence, those characters who govern the patriarchal order, namely Candy Marshall and the Boutan clan in *A Gathering of Old Men* and General Tomás Arroyo in *Gringo viejo*, take extremes measures when their status is threatened by lower ranking members of the patriarchal order.

Men's extrication from the patriarchal order yields severe consequences for such men. In order to more deeply understand the nature and effects of such consequences, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the economy and the patriarchal order to conceive of how flows of power within society benefit certain groups of society at the expense of others. Then, it becomes possible to apply gender theorist Raewyn Connell's gender hierarchy to the manifest forms of masculinity portrayed in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines.

Buchbinder explains that the relationship between the patriarchal order and the patriarchal economy describes how the power inherent to interrelated institutional systems governs may be harnessed to give meaning to sex difference, gender, and sexuality (67). If the economy is a system that regulates the flows of power among people, then these flows constitute the sources of power and "produce the various cultural discourses that characterize a society at a specific historical moment" (67). These discourses are inscribed in the patriarchal order, which Buchbinder defines as a "social structure that advantages men, as a class, over women, as a class; and that privileges men who possess or demonstrate certain characteristics over those who do not" (69). Therefore, those who benefit from the patriarchal economy tend to be men who likewise occupy the top rungs of the patriarchal order, while those who do not benefit tend to

become disadvantaged and in turn, marginalized. We must consider how a crisis in masculinity particular relates to marginalized populations who are not privy to hegemonic forms of male dominance.

Next, we turn to Raewyn Connell's gender hierarchy model to categorize and describe various forms of masculinities. Most people possess a preconceived set of characteristics that they would use to describe the traits that are generally associated with masculinity. For instance, one might argue that physical strength, emotional stoicism, bravery, and virility are common positive traits that may be expected to be exhibited by a man. While that which is considered masculine may include a wide range of descriptive ways of being a man, Buchbinder postulates that "within most cultures, there exists a limited set of positive masculine characteristics sanctioned by the patriarchal order that describe the ideal man" (Buchbinder 90). Similarly, Connell's conception of hegemonic masculinity posits that because gender is constructed within the patriarchal order, the dominance of certain hegemonic masculinities becomes naturalized in such a way that people tacitly and often subconsciously ascribe to it, and thus become complicit with it.

Social philosopher Antonio Gramsci's analysis of social power dynamics and his distinction between hegemony and dominance inform Connell's hierarchy of gender. In *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci recorded his conceptions of a variety of political concepts, one of them being the notion of hegemony, which he defines as a hierarchical relationship among people who remain complicit to the existing power structure, and which also describes the systematic forces which lead to the stabilization of class relations. The term hegemony later informed Connell's formulation of the concept "hegemonic masculinity". Connell introduces her formulation of a gender hierarchy in

her 1987 text *Gender and Power*, in which she identifies the different and relational masculinities that function in a society and which are shaped by power dynamics. The four types of masculinities that Connell identifies are hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalized. In *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, Donald P. Levy defines and describes these four types of masculinities. He explains that the hegemonic position of the hierarchy is the “currently accepted male ideal within a particular culture at a particular time”, whereas the complicit male encompasses most men, who “accept and participate in the system of hegemonic masculinity so as to “(1) enjoy the material, physical and symbolic benefits of the subordination of women, (2) through fantasy experience a sense of hegemony and learn to take pleasure in it, (3) avoid subordination” (253-254). In the gender hierarchy proposed by Connell, these two positions take a hierarchically superior position to subordinated and marginalized masculinities. The difference between these hierarchically inferior types of masculinities is that as opposed to men in a marginalized position, a man in a subordinated position can appear to possess the “physical attributes necessary to aspire to hegemony”, while marginalized men usually cannot aspire to hegemony, and are “most often men of color and men with disabilities” (Levy 254).

Although hegemonic patterns of masculinities are embedded in specific social environments, an increasingly globalized world reshapes the context in which national and local masculinities are expressed. The processes of globalization influence traditional gender dynamics and reinforce existing forms of masculinities or shape them into new forms. Marginalized men who are unable to exhibit hegemonic masculinities due to their inferior position in the patriarchal economy are likewise denied access to the power and

agency needed to resist dominant or authoritarian regimes. However, when men are economically disempowered, suffer from unemployment, tyrannical rule, poverty, or racism, some are more likely to exert power over women and other groups of men economically, socially, and physically as a means to maintain some semblance of power and honor. Thus, the nuances of gender dynamics in Haiti, Mexico, and the American South reveal how men in certain populations adhere to, resist, or retaliate against the reigning hegemonic form on account of their exclusion from the superior categories.

If we accept Derrida's conception of the origins of responsibility as informed by time and inherently tied to others, we can connect the praxis of responsibility to one's geopolitical and socioeconomic reality. The complex racial and socioeconomic dynamics that characterize the marginalized populations of Haiti, Mexico, and the American South are of particular interest because these populations exhibit patterns of masculinity that have historically been constructed both in response and resistance to hegemonic masculinities.

Moreover, it is possible to more confidently assess the influence that the dominant social and political forces have on the constructed nature of masculinity by analyzing the history of the social background against which different types of masculinities emerge. In this way, we can closely the male protagonists in René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines's works to consider how these characters negotiate with the existing configuration of hegemonic masculinity in their respective literary-geographic locale.

The third chapter of this project first defines the characteristics of the patriarchy that structures the society in Depestre's Haiti, Fuentes's Mexico, and Gaines's Louisiana. We will examine how the patriarchy in each place shapes conceptions of gender, and how

it has begun to take on a different form as a consequence of major socioeconomic changes affecting each society during the actual sociohistorical time period in which the stories are set. Most of the male characters that will be studied in Depestre's *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* and *Le mât de cocagne*, Fuentes's *Gringo viejo*, and Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men* fall into the marginalized category of Connell's gender hierarchy.

In order to conceive of a definition of masculinity for the purposes of the final section of this project, it is necessary to describe the value system inscribed in the reigning form of hegemonic masculinity to which the marginalized masculinities depicted in the writings of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines will be compared. The value system that describes hegemonic masculinity in Haiti, Mexico, and the United State can generally be characterized in terms of positive masculine behaviors, including self-reliance, stoicism, individualism, virility, fatherhood, and socioeconomic dominance over others. By contrast, marginalized masculinities can be described as the ways of being a man that are deemed inferior to those ways exhibited by more privileged men. Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines encourage us to abandon the idea that men must conform to a certain model of the masculine and to recognize that "masculinity is simply the totality of how all men might choose to enact socially the fact of their maleness" (Buchbinder 180).

Finally, this project will explore how resistance to patriarchy is possible upon analyzing causes for shifts in the patriarchal order, and how these shifts affect and trouble existing notions of gender in Haiti, Mexico, and Louisiana. Specifically, we will examine how the authors portray emergent, alternative masculinities that may be viable in contrast with hegemonic masculinity. Such an analysis may allow us to formulate new

masculinities that can adapt to sociocultural shifts, in which these new emergent masculinities have adopted certain aspects of traditional masculinities and forsaken other aspects that are no longer viable means of functioning as a self-respecting man. The benefits of formulating new masculinities may, as Buchbinder reasons, enable us to “feel free enough to abandon the idea that men *must* conform to a certain model of the masculine if they are to be counted as men, and come to recognize that “masculinity” is simply the totality of how *all* men might choose to enact socially the fact of their maleness” (Buchbinder 180).

The concomitant critiques of hegemonic masculinities illuminate how marginalized men assert their masculine identities in relation *and* resistance to narrowly-scripted racial and gender roles. In appropriating masculine behaviors that are alternative to the hegemonic masculine model of a certain place, it possible to evaluate how the characters in the works of Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines make choices that accord with Nancy’s conception of being singular plural based on the degree to which these behaviors and actions challenge oppressive forms of hegemony. Specifically, Depestre, Fuentes, and allude to the conditions that allow individuals to resist and overcome oppression by portraying masculine traits that challenge hegemonic masculinities that have been shaped certain myths.

In *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* and *Le Mât de cocagne*, the marginalized masculinities that are embodied by his protagonists contrast with the hegemonic ideal, which can be characterized in terms of phallocentric representations of power, a fearsome American-Christian religious order, and the violent means by which Haiti’s leaders and oppressors have thwarted political opposition. Depestre demonizes the

internal and external forces that have oppressed and terrorized the Haitian people throughout the twentieth century. In the *Le Mât de cocagne*, for example, the greasy pole signifies the yoke of political violence that terrorizes the Haitian people. This *mât-phallus* is a sort of monster that President Zachary erects in the town square to challenge the protagonist and city's moral conscience, Henri Postel.

Depestre reimagines new patterns of masculinity and critiques the existing patterns of hegemonic masculinity exhibited both in the context of Haiti's relationship to its powerful northern neighbor, and throughout the era in which the Duvalier regime held power. François Duvalier, whose reign can be characterized in terms of totalitarian power over his people, aggressiveness, and violence towards opposition, embodies hegemonic masculinity. New institutions of power often rely upon negative behaviors to obtain and sustain domination, but these institutions inevitably tend to engender social ills as a result of such grave power differentials. Depestre's portrayal of the Haitian male subject's nomadic sense of place, his triumph over spiritual and bodily degradation, and his transcendence in the erotic allows him to formulate emergent versions of masculinity that defy hegemonic masculinities reinforced by totalitarian or imperialist forces.

The formulation of hegemonic masculinity in Mexico adopts similar patterns during the Revolutionary period and in the era of modernization that follows. Professor of Anthropology Andrew Gutmann observes in *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (1996) that masculinities are in a process of transformation in contemporary Mexico, but that certain dynamics exist which make it difficult for marginalized masculinities to contend with dominant hegemonic forms. Specifically, Gutmann acknowledges that although "machismo" describes the current hegemonic form of

masculine Mexican identity, the concept has nonetheless has evolved alongside the development of Mexican nationalism, and that the reality of life for Mexican men is much more nuanced.

Omnipresent in many of Carlos Fuentes's works is the archetype of the power-hungry political figureheads and revolutionary leaders such as Porfirio Diaz and Pancho Villa. These men's attitudes and behaviors fall in line with conventional ideas of machismo. However, the pre-capitalist setting of *La región más transparente del aire*, which is set several decades following the end of the Mexican Revolution, showcases a shift in hegemonic patterns of masculinity, as embodied in the stoic and unflappable real estate magnate of Frederic Robles. Although the subject matter of Fuentes's works span nearly a century of Mexican history, he repeatedly situates his protagonists' triumphs and failures in the context of the extent to which they are willing and able to shun machismo-like behaviors in favor of alternative forms of self-assertiveness.

Depestre's portrayal of "zombification", eroticism, and his use of marvelous realism allows him to construct a reimagined masculinity that aligns with Nancy's conception of the unworking and reworking of community. In Fuentes's works, hegemonic masculinity is synonymous with the ability to articulate one's desire and subsequently to achieve it; however, this achievement usually comes at a cost. Similarly, Fuentes's reverence for the multiplicity of Mexico's historical narratives are embodied in the multiple male characters who struggle to imagine the possibility of a future Mexico that can enable the individual to claim agency and assert his right to a permanent identity. Fuentes's appeal to the need to maintain an ambiguous interpretation of the Mexican Revolution's ideals emerges in his portrayal of the renouncement of the father and of his

treatment of sacrifice and death. Finally, Gaines presents reimagined conceptions of American Southern black masculinity that can be considered in its own right, separate from the impulse to relate such alternative notions of manhood directly to the myth of white supremacy. Consequently, he leads his male protagonists to mental liberation and destabilizes the mythical, insular community through his portrayal of masculinities that defy the hegemonic order.

Contemporary African American narratives raise issues concerning racialized masculinity in American society. However, Ernest Gaines defies the tendency to define black masculinity in comparison with, or in contrast to, what bell hooks describes as “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy”. Gaines redefines masculine subjectivity by challenging conventional American-centric notions of hegemonic masculinity that have been founded upon notions of inclusion, freedom, and democracy that have largely excluded black males from obtaining the same opportunities provided to white men as a consequence of these patterns masculinity throughout American history. He accomplishes this by examining the black male psyche from emotional and psychological perspectives. Gaines’s characters assert their intolerance for the existing white paternal social order by challenging the political foundations that allow for such oppression to continue. In the American South plantation system, white male superiority makes it so that black men reach a crisis when racial segregation becomes outlawed and racial equality is theoretically legally sanctioned, but despite these changes, the actual circumstances of life for black people, especially black sharecroppers, remains unchanged. The end of the Civil Rights Movement culminated in the passage of federal laws banning discrimination in voting, employment, housing and other sectors of

American society. Consequently, the traditional exercise of power enjoyed by whites became threatened, and as Sally Robinson explains in *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*, “the symbolic vulnerability of the white male body made visible and material became the motive for a claim of victimhood” (21).

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Grant Wiggins attempts to use white masculinity as a touchstone for his efforts towards self-realization. However, Grant only succeeds when he reconfigures his own subjectivity through re-integrating himself into the black community in Bayonne. Ultimately, Grant comes to accept that although the legacy of black subjectivity in the South has been fraught with hardship and suffering, he can triumph over this history of oppression by reasserting a type of black male leadership that differs from that embodied by his predecessors. Ultimately, he is inspired to turn away from his inclination towards individualism and fight to deconstruct the myth of salvation through isolated self-reliance.

Nevertheless, Gaines’s penultimate critique of masculinity is presented through Jefferson, the embodiment of its least likely incarnation. The context within which Jefferson has grown up has severely limited his potential to survive, much less thrive in the Jim Crow-era South in which he lives. Gaines critiques hegemonic masculinity in the black community by illustrating the realism of crisis-like situations with which black men have been forced to grapple. He offers an alternative conception of operative hegemonic masculinity as that which may come to be defined in terms of openness and honesty, rather than individualism and power. Thus, Jefferson’s impending death marks the occasion in which he is offered a final opportunity to live a meaningful, albeit tragically short, life, but which requires him to be vulnerable but strong in his public exposure.

In conclusion, this final section investigates how the masculine behaviors exhibited by these literary protagonists counter dominant fictions of normative, hegemonic masculinity that defines the social Haitian, American Southern, and Mexican landscapes in which Depestre, Fuentes, and Gaines cast their characters.

III.1 Renewal and Mobility: Depestre's Reimagined Masculinity

René Depestre's emigration to France in the latter part of his life and the impact that his career with UNESCO has had on his social and political ideologies is reflected in his interviews and in his prose. In his UNESCO interview, Jasmina Sopova discusses Depestre's participation in the historical 1956 *Primer Congreso* organized by *Présence Africaine*, a literary magazine that was influential in the Pan-Africanist and *négritude* movements, as well as in the former French colonies' struggle for decolonization. Sopova asks Depestre what his participation meant for him in terms of the then colonial statuses of most Caribbean nations. In his response, Depestre debunks the myth that the Caribbean journey towards independence was inspired by a coherent and unified objective. Rather, he explains that to understand the diversity of the black experience as it relates to the Caribbean's legacy of slavery and colonization, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that the various historical journeys of Africa and its Diaspora did not always coincide. He explains, "In my case, I had a particular experience. Dictatorships in Haiti made it such that "my adversary" wasn't a white man, he was a Haitian, like me."¹ Depestre concedes that in Haiti, although the oppressive forces that subjugated the Haitian people came from both within and outside of the island nation, the particular individuals who suffered did not belong to one particular ethnic or racial group.

Thus, it is necessary to investigate and identify the nuanced history of the political hegemony that has ruled Haiti throughout the twentieth century in order to determine how such forces have shaped hegemonic and marginalized masculinities. In doing so, we may better understand why the social ills that continue to plague Haiti today, such as extreme poverty, the lack of equity in income distribution, and the existence of power

structures that preserve socioeconomic inequalities are a huge detriment to its struggle for autonomy and prosperity in a region in which other nations share, at least to some degree, Haiti's legacy of slavery and colonization, but which have tended to manage better in their contemporary situation.

The Afro-Trinidadian social theorist Cyril Lionel Robert James, best known as C.L.R. James, succinctly names the sugar plantation and slavery as the two major factors that historically have governed the islands of the West Indies in *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938). Haiti in particular has long suffered from the effects of these institutions. James posits that Caribbean history has long been tied to the broader narrative of European modernity. He claims, “the West Indian masses are the most highly experienced in the ways of Western civilization and most receptive to its requirements in the twentieth century” (410). Thus, as resistance against imperialism merged into a greater revolutionary movement in the early twentieth century, black intellectuals like Depestre understood that the vanguard of anti-colonialism depended upon a unified front comprised of the collective support of Caribbean nations as well as of the broader African diasporic nations. Consequently, while Haiti certainly constitutes the main locus of Depestre's literature, his literature appeals to his imaginings of a better future for the diverse multitude of Caribbean peoples. Dating back to his speech given at the 1956 *Primer Congreso*, Depestre describes his overarching aim “to determine how we should carry out common actions for the whole decolonization of the diverse cultures of the Third World.” In his speech titled “L'intellectuel révolutionnaire et ses responsabilités envers le tiers-monde”, Depestre indicts the Duvalier regime in his appeal for a wide-scale revolution, which he

posits is the only means by which decolonization can be achieved. He describes the regime as « le cauchemar totalitaire imposé au peuple haïtien par *Ton-Ton Macoute* Duvalier » [the totalitarian nightmare imposed on the Haitian people by *Ton-Ton Macoute* Duvalier], and stresses that it is only through the collective fight against neo-colonialism the peoples of the Caribbean can inevitably formulate their own unique national identities. He states: « Il n'y a pas de développement de la culture nationale possible sans une rupture radicale, violente, désaliénant, avec le passé colonial » [there can be no possible development of the national culture without a radical, violent, disalienating rupture with the colonial past] (38-42). Thus, he regards the social revolutions of the mid-twentieth century, which were largely led by the disparate peoples of the Caribbean and of Latin America, nonetheless shared similar histories and experiences of suffering under their particular neo-colonial autocratic regimes. Although the various revolutions that Depestre cites differ in terms of the national spirit that carried each revolution to fruition, the common thread that unites them centers around how these revolutions began as social movements which were led by the masses and founded upon common ideas of equality and freedom from colonial rule. In his speech, Depestre states:

Au Vietnam comme à Cuba la décolonisation est une création sociale ininterrompue, un organisme extraordinairement vivant qui ne cesse d'engendrer de puissants anticorps qui le rendent capable de résister avec succès à l'épidémie néo-coloniale... Les révolutions cubaines et vietnamiennes, tout en s'acculturant nécessairement aux apports de la civilisation industrielle, sont en train d'affirmer, avec une immense vitalité, leur particularisme culturel et leur potentielle universalité (40).

[In Vietnam as in Cuba decolonization is a continuous social creation, an extraordinarily living organism which continues to produce powerful antibodies that make it able to successfully resist the neocolonial epidemic... The Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions, while necessarily adapting themselves to the contributions of the industrial civilization, are still asserting with immense vitality, their cultural peculiarity and their potential universality (*Translation mine*)].

Depestre's deep understanding of the intertwined nature of the particular and the universal as it relates to national identity and the legacy of colonialism informs formulations of masculine identity. The overarching conceptions of universal, hegemonic masculine behaviors that are embodied by colonial powers can generally be applied to many populations throughout the Caribbean. It is possible to assess the influence that the dominant social and political forces in Haiti had on the construction of masculinity by analyzing the history of the social background against which different types of masculinities emerged. In his writing, Depestre critiques the forms of hegemonic masculinity that are exhibited by François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, as well as by the arbiters of United States "security" forces and the direct and implicit injuries the Marine occupiers inflicted on the black republic.

During the Occupation of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic, President Woodrow Wilson appropriated large tracts of land for the purposes of expanding the sugar industry and ultimately increasing America's influence in the region. However, in order to recruit enough workers for the sugar plantations, thousands of Haitians were brought into the Dominican Republic to perform migrant work, which created major tensions between the populations of the two countries and incidentally cultivated stigmas against Haitians among Dominicans. After the United States left the Dominican Republic in 1924, the country's weakened economy made it easy for the ruthless dictator Rafael

Trujillo (1930-1961), who had been trained by the United States army, to rig elections and secure his position as dictator of the ailing country. As Raymond H. Pulley explains in “The United States and the Trujillo Dictatorship, 1933-1940: The High Price of Caribbean Stability”, upon Trujillo won the election in 1930, President Hoover congratulated Trujillo and extended his support for the “happiness of the people of the Republic” (22-23). During his dictatorship, Trujillo continued to propagate such anti-Haitian sentiments, and eventually issued an order to exterminate all Haitians in the northwest part of the country in 1937.² At the same time, after becoming President in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt implemented the “Good Neighbor” policy in the region, which effectively provided a significant degree of economic and military aid to both the Trujillo and Duvalier dictatorships, but especially to the Trujillo regime. Given the vast amount of military weaponry provided by the United States, the Dominican Republic had the firepower needed to carry out mass killings of its Haitian occupants under Trujillo’s orders, who feared that the racially inferior Haitians would taint the purity of the Dominican population. Nonetheless, it was in the United States’s best interests to maintain close ties with Trujillo under Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor” policy; therefore, despite scathing criticisms from powerful First World countries regarding the Trujillo regime’s brutality, the United States launched a huge public relations initiative to extol Trujillo’s character as virtuous and conciliatory with First World democratic values. Consequently, in both the Dominican Republic and in Haiti, the United States established its own economic dominance in both countries and created strong central governments with ruthless national military and police forces that had been trained by the United States army.

During the course of the Occupation, the United States bolstered the Haitian military, and in 1957, François Duvalier established himself as the leader of a military dictatorship which lasted until his son, Jean-Claude, came to power in 1971, and followed in his father's dictatorial footsteps until 1986. Duvalier, Haiti's most despotic ruler of the twentieth century, commanded his militia, the "tonton macoutes", who ruled the Haitian people through a regime based on terror and corruption. Furthermore, he turned all of the scholars and teachers who dared to challenge his authority out of the country, therefore depleting Haiti its doctors, writers, and educators. Haiti's legacy of foreign military occupation and the oppression it suffered under the dictatorial regime severely hindered the people's potential for self-advancement. As a result of Haiti's weakened economy and its military state, the stage was set for a tyrannical leader to take control of the country.

Next, because patriarchal systems determine how people think of themselves as subjects within a sexed and gendered society, marginalized men find it exceedingly difficult to decouple themselves from the dominant forces that subordinate them. Also, because one's behavior is always reactionary to the particular forces at work that determine, limit, or prevent one from exhibiting hegemonic behaviors that can afford him the same privileges as those who dominate him, we must consider how a crisis in masculinity affects marginalized men who are not privy to hegemonic forms of male dominance. For many decades, the majority of the Haitian population has been at the mercy of corrupt leaders, dictators, American occupiers, and colonialist powers. Thus, the typical Haitian man has long been unable to exhibit hegemonic masculinities due to his inferior position in the patriarchy. Consequently, the Haitian majority historically has

been denied access to the power and agency needed to resist these authoritarian figures and regimes.

Depestre's protagonists navigate desperate circumstances that have been shaped by both a host global and local forces and a long-standing history of oppression in the quest for their own masculine subjectivity. The inability to adhere to the traditional ideals of hegemonic masculinity explains why some men adopt non-hegemonic masculine behaviors as alternatives to the existing formulations of hegemonic masculinity. Depestre imagines a revised formulation of the Haitian masculine model that challenges the hegemonic forces that maintain their power using displays of aggression, dominance, and violence.

In *Le Mât de cocagne*, Depestre's portrayal of the Zoocrates Zachary dictatorship, which mirrors the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti from 1957-1971, functions as a formal patriarchy in which hegemonic masculinity is characterized in terms of virility, phallogentric power, and a reverence for black racial purity. In the novel, Zoocrates Zachary inflicts terror on Zacharyland's downtrodden subjects. Depestre portrays revised models of masculinity in the decisions made by Henri Postel, spiritual zombification and political disposition renders him incapable in several ways of exhibiting hegemonic masculinities that can compete with Zoocrates Zachary.

Derrida and Nancy's conceptions of ontology, responsibility, and the community, allows us to analyze the decisions that Zoocrates Zachary makes as Henri becomes a force to be reckoned with in the competition. Zachary's actions reveal how the patriarchal gender structure is maintained when those who occupy the hegemonic order become preoccupied with imposing their power over others in order to keep ruling. According to

Derrida and Nancy, such decisions are fundamentally irresponsible and therefore reinforce the operative community. In his appropriation of masculine behaviors that are alternative to the hegemonic masculine model, it possible to evaluate how and to what degree Henri's choices accord with Nancy's conception of being singular plural based on the degree to which these behaviors and actions challenge oppressive forms of hegemony. For instance, although machismo exhibitions of retaliatory power against the despotism of the Duvalier regime is signified by the festival's main event, the masculine behavior that Henri displays can be described in terms of the triumph of spirit over physical limitations of strength and the power of the feminine-masculine bond, which is rooted in tenderness, patience, and trust. In *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien*, hegemonic masculinity is embodied in the form of the Christian West, while marginalized masculinity is embodied by our poet, the protagonist of the epic poem who navigates the Christian American South in the efforts to adopt new patterns of masculine behavior that allows him to proceed along his mission at each stage of his journey. The poet battles the American-Christian religious order of the United States, whose influence on the social and religious dynamics in Haiti during the American Occupation produced specific cultural discourses that denigrated Haiti's unique spiritual and cultural belief systems and practices which inevitably left the country vulnerable and worse of than it was prior to the Occupation, and reinforced the tradition of maintaining power through force. In the poem, the poet's masculinity is marked by his nomadic spirit and appeal to the collective and spiritual bond that is necessary to propel him on his literal Southward and figurative downward journey in his efforts to reinvent the black moral conscience through his bold indictment of white oppression. Thus, upon providing a thorough

analysis of the means by which Depestre's protagonists combat hegemonic masculinities, it is possible to map such behaviors onto a new definition of masculinity that contends with the hegemonic forms.

The Feminine Other – Woman as Home and Moral Conscience

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler presents her conception of the performativity of gender and posits that there is not an essential relationship between masculinity and the male body. Rather, the idea of such a relationship is required to maintain the existing gender system and patriarchal order. Buchbinder summarizes Butler's formulation of this logic: "In order for the masculine to define itself as proper to only the heterosexual male and his body, any possibility or trace of the feminine or the homosexual must be abjected, expelled to produce *other* subjects, and *other* kinds of body" (101). Thus, because patriarchy and masculinity require the abjection of the feminine and the male-homosexual, the masculine is constituted by such abjection.

In *Le Mât de cocagne*, President Zachary embodies a locally hegemonic version of masculinity that relies upon rhetorical manipulation and violence to ensure the abjection of any form of political resistance. In a different vein, the white Alabama family in *Un arc-en-ciel* collectively exhibits white imperialistic hegemonic masculinity that is characteristic of the colonial powers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The poet denounces the abject nature of each member of the Alabama family, characterized in terms of weakness, fickleness, and unmerited ranking, to appeal to the fixed and enduring nature of the Haitian. Still, in both works, the singular force that possesses the capacity to challenge the dominance of brute power is the mollifying presence of strong female figures. Thus, Depestre's inversion of the construction of the masculine by abjection of

the feminine suggests that marginalized masculinities should seek to integrate the feminine into its construction of the masculine in attempts to counter hegemonic dominance.

Depestre depicts women as claiming sovereignty over the private realm of the home to which men must be granted access. Upon accessing the feminine realm, men are thereafter afforded the possibility of attaining self-actualization within a haven that is safeguarded by women-keepers and ruled by sensuality, love, and patience. Depestre portrays Henri Postel as a soft-bodied, aging man whose revolutionary inclinations have long been suppressed under the thumb of the dictatorial regime led by Zoocrates Zachary. We can consider how Henri's subversion of Zacharyland's hegemonic norms illuminates the socioeconomic factors that shape the country's hegemonic ideal, and which renders him abjectly other and worthy of ridicule. First, Henri's weakened, decrepit body foils the hyperbolic masculine strength of Zoocrates Zachary. Moreover, the greasy pole serves as a literal symbol of the constructed model of hegemonic masculinity, which evokes notions of the phallogentric power that is wholly concentrated in the omnipotence of President Zachary. The obscenities that classify Zachary's behavior, along with his zealot cronies, are represented by the vile substances, which have been smeared onto pole. Thus, the crudeness of the pole directly foils the noble sexuality that ultimately provides Henri with the psychic and virile strength needed to ascend the mast.

During the festival, Depestre bestows to a brutal and obscene dictatorial regime a literary and satirical rendition of itself that it deserves. The homoeroticism that the greasy mast invokes symbolizes Zachary's metaphorical double, which he must wield to exact his power and triumph over all the other masculine displays of insolence. Whereas the

pole signifies the hegemonic order of masculinity that characterizes the obscene, powerful, and male-dominated regime in which masculinity is put on display for public scrutiny before it is categorically crushed, the covert setting where Henri locates his inner strength is antithetical to the public square upon which the phallic representation of masculinity has been erected. In Sor Cisa's dwelling, Henri is massaged, loved, and restored with his former virility. Her healing power draws its potency from the private serenity of her quarters, where Henri is afforded the gentle patience that is necessary for his spiritual and physical rejuvenation. Henri wins the competition when he wholeheartedly welcomes the intercession of the force of the *Vodoun loa* in conjunction with his embrace of the erotic. Furthermore, when Sor Cisa beckons the *loa* Erzulie Freda to mount her cousin, Elisa Valery, the feminine power that is garnered is thereafter transferred to Henri so that his spirit may be imbued with the youth and beauty of Elisa, « le soleil qui est venu de l'obscurité de la beauté et rajeuni » [the sun of which came from the dark of the beauty and rejuvenated] (129; 122). Sor Cisa uses Elisa for the purpose of performing the erotic counter rites, which will enable Henri to resist Zachary's mounting spiritual power. Elisa rejuvenates Henri with a « bain d'hormones fraîches » [bath of fresh hormones], and the poet attributes the potency of her healing powers with her blackness, which sends electricity surging through Henri's body: « son soleil est de la partie noire de sa beauté » [her sun came from the blackest part of her beauty] (87; 80).

Aside from the spiritual element of eroticism that pertains to *Vodoun*, Henri's zombified status has robbed him of his sexuality. The ritual he undergoes with Elisa reawakens his repressed sexuality and connects him with another human in a way that reasserts both his humanness and his manhood. In the essay, "Fuel for Fantasy: The

Ideological Construction of Male Lust”, Michael Kimmel asserts that the relationship between sex and selfhood by reiterating that for men, the goal of a sexual encounter is rarely about sexual pleasure, rather, it tends to have to do with “[men’s] sense of [themselves] as men” (85). Hence, Henri resists the Zachary dictatorship by harnessing creative sources of strength through *Vodoun* and the power of Elisa Valery’s erotic love, both of which are antithetical to the means by which the Zachary regime wields its power.

Sor Cisa commands the evil forces that have been cast upon Henri to exit his body as Elisa massages Henri. She recognizes the need to invigorate Henri with both masculine and feminine forms of strength and power, and her invocation of the spirits begins when she holds a rooster between Henri’s legs during the rite. She invokes the transcendental power of Elisa’s erotic love to contend with the spell that Zachary’s crony Nildevert has cast upon him, declaring that the strength and beauty of the earth alone shall be channeled to work in Henri’s favor. His ability to physically achieve an erection is rendered coextensive with his newfound physical strength that will make him capable of mounting the greasy pole. Elisa’s feminine life-giving force awakens the dormant virility within him, and the emotional and sexual bond that is formed between Elisa and Henri signifies the opposition to Zachary’s brutality and political oppression. Henri’s ultimate triumph is not defined by his conquest of mast, but by the moral victory of the couple formed by Henri and Elisa, for it is in the moment of their union that Henri becomes rejuvenated and clear-sighted. However, after Henri is executed, Elisa becomes the solitary survivor who is able to carry forth the revolutionary struggle for which he sacrificed.

In *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien*, women signify the universal hope for a better tomorrow. The reader is called upon to heed the universal conception of woman as a figure and a force who always exceeds the final identification in terms of race or culture, and whose universality serves as a healing force in an otherwise often destructive patriarchal world.

Erzulie-Freda, the Haitian *loa* of love, is considered to have seven faces, and several of her forms appear throughout the poem. Harold Courlander explains that although Erzulie is the Rada Goddess of Love and the epitome of the feminine principles and is

concerned with love, beauty, flowers, jewelry, femininities and coqueteries, liking to dance and to be dressed in fine clothes...the figure of Erzulie-Ge Rouge, on the Petro side, is awesome in her poignancy. When she possesses a person, her entire body contracts into the terrible paralysis of frustration; every muscle is tense, the knees are drawn up, the fists are clenched so tightly that the fingernails draw blood from the palms. The neck is rigid and the tears stream from the tightly shut eyes, while through the locked jaw and the grinding teeth there issues a sound that is half grown, half scream, the inarticulate song of in-turned cosmic rage (*The Drum and the Hoe* 27).

Erzulie-Freda undergoes a metamorphosis upon coming into contact with the West, and dons the façade of Erzulie-Ge Rouge, an evil version of the original Erzulie-Freda. The Omaha Helen, Erzulie-Ge Rouge, functions as an accessory to destruction. As Maya Deren explains in *Divine Horseman* that in Haiti, “Erzulie-Ge Rouge was born out of rage, the rage against the vile fate that the African suffered, the cruelty of his displacement and his enslavement” (143). Thus, she was formerly the victim of the West’s cruelties, and now she is the instigator of the worst atrocities to humankind imaginable.

The quest for power is signified by African Hélène and Erzulie-Freda's transitions to Omaha, in which Erzulie-Freda comes forth after being reborn as the Black Venus figure who is both a representation of sorrow and purity. She is simultaneously the embodiment of carnal eroticism and divine spirituality. Her existence spans the entire spectrum of emotions, and the fact that Depestre does not attribute a final and definite identity reinforces the universality of woman. In refusing to reduce her to any number of common female figures – mother, temptress, Madonna, or lover – the poet reinforces her transcendent power to charm men into submission.

The universal goddess, the “Lady of the Ashes”, speaks of the potential for the world to be reborn. Depestre addresses her as a former lover and begs of her to renounce her relationship with the atomic gods of Omaha (« Les Dieux atomiques d'Omaha »):

Autrefois tu me as donné un baiser immortel
Sans voler mon âme et ma force humaine
O douce Helen des connaissances
Quelle tristesse de vous voir maintenant
Avec tous ces dieux barbares gaspillant
Votre bouche, vos seins et votre sexe ébloui
Que faites-vous à Omaha (231)

[Once upon your deathless kiss
which never rifled my soul or my human power
O sweet Helen of consciousness
how sad seeing you now
all these crude gods profuse
at mouth, breasts, and dazzled sex
What are you doing in Omaha?] (60).

This allusion to the violation of his former lover reflects the distortion of the true essence of what she represents. Her violation has killed her spirit, but because she is partially responsible for current situation, Depestre suggests that she retains the power and position to serve as a companion to both races. However, the fact that she remains

trapped in Omaha insinuates that Helen represents the permanent, protracted distortion and stunted growth of one who grows complacent and fails to continue on the pursuit of the all-inclusive rainbow of universal love. Thus, Depestre cautions against the idealization of femininity and reinforces the importance of refraining from the ascription to fixed models of gender in order to remain critical of totalitarian tendencies.

Furthermore, in *Un arc-en-ciel*, women play several important roles in assisting the poet along his journey. Depestre does not portray the feminine as a domain of power, and the violent tone that he adopts in his portrayal of the white women suggests that the poet's inability to assert dominance in his former life manifests in his treatment of sexuality and of the feminine as a domain where he must assert dominance. The female *loas* who are featured in the poem occupy subordinate positions in the spiritual realm, and although it appears as if Depestre assigns little agency to feminine power, upon deciphering his coded language, we can see that each major decision that the poet makes as he descends deeper into the American South is pushed forth by the very presence of the women and female *loas* he encounters along the way. In fact, it becomes apparent that without their presence, the poet's journey would be directionless; therefore, Depestre's coded regard for the importance of women in a Haitian's man spiritual journey intimates that the openness to feminine wisdom and energy is essential for masculine self-realization.

Depestre uses positively coded language in his depiction of black femininity in both a literal and a figurative sense. In the final section of the « Prélude », Depestre concedes that although he initially begins his journey in solitude and is driven by the pressures of limited time, these two conditions inevitably force him to act. He refers to

Haiti's history as "woman-time", and states that « C'était une négresse ravissante la solitude! » [Solitude was an enchanting Negress]. With regards to this beautiful woman, the poet affirms that « le temps n'est pas arrivé jusqu'à la peau-noire » [time hasn't yet come for black skin] in Haiti (121; 16). He further suggests that Haitians have failed to revere the proud legacy of their past and to « couvrir son corps de baisers et comme un dieu entrer en elle pour la changer en Venus de la mer ? » [cover her body with kisses and enter her to change her into Venus of the sea?] (121; 16). This failure to both mourn the centuries of tortuous hardships and to memorialize the accomplishments made in the name of black liberation drive the poet to seek redemption for Haitian history. He calls upon the people to acknowledge their nation's history as the basis upon which Haitians must begin to rebuild their national pride, and in turn, reclaim their sense of self-worth. Depestre's positive depiction of the feminine aspects of Haitian history with regards to both to its current and ancient motherland suggests that one condition for masculine self-determination is one's capacity to embrace the enduring presence and fecundative power of Haiti's history and its maternal connection to Africa.

The third section of the poem, « Cantate pour sept voix » [Cantata for Seven Voices], which follows « Les Epiphanies des dieux du vaudou » [The Epiphanies of the Voodoo Gods], features the female *loas* who appear on the scene, including Ayizan, Aida Wedo, Erzili, Guede Mazaka L'Orage, and the Virgin de la Caridad del Cobre. The female *loas* discuss how their male counterparts have traversed en masse to the realm of the living to join the poet in his descent into the Christian South. The significance of water in the cantata plays a key role in the female *loas*'s conclusion that a rainbow must be formed to bridge the spiritual and ancestral worlds if the poet's journey is to be

successful. The element of water is especially important to Haitian female *loas*, as it not only provides the medium by which spirits travel and maneuver between the living and ancestral realms, but it also invokes their ancestors' sufferings in the horrific slave ships that brought them to the New World during the Middle Passage. Aida Wedo, the wife of the male *loa* Damballah and goddess of the rainbow, declares that the creation of a rainbow requires the sanctioning of the birth of such a rainbow from Aida Wedo herself, to which the other goddesses take issue and contend that Aida Wedo's powers are limited. Whereas Aida Wedo, who is known for her affair with Agoué and who is reputed to create a rainbow that touches the sea each time they make love, is scorned by the other goddesses, who denounce her ego and the self-proclaimed fecundative powers of her beauty. The quarrel that transpires between Aida Wedo and the other female *loa*, who believe that Simbi is more knowledgeable and intimately familiar with matters of the sea, compels Simbi to foretell of the fate of the male *loas*'s journey across the sea. The disjunction between Aida Wedo and Simbi signifies Depestre's criticism of the healing power of the singular individual, therefore reinforcing the necessity of the power of the collective, as well as the importance that time plays in effecting a genuine transformation. In short, Simbi reminds the *loa* that the poet can only complete the arduous voyage upon invoking the entirety of the transformational powers of the spiritual realm.

Furthermore, the duality of water's powers relate to its capacity to both douse and destroy, as well as to purify and expose. Damballah-Wèdo, the *loa* of fertility, is thought to be a great serpent that rises from the underworld to drink of fresh water after a rain.

Damballah's serpentine figure invokes a phallic power that will permeate the water in which he resides and which will be used as a weapon against the white Christian world.

He likens himself to a rainbow, and threatens to violate the judge's daughter:

Je suis vau-dou-l'arc'en-ciel
Et la fille ainée d'un Juge de l'Alabama
Va perdre son bonnet blanc sur mes rivages! (130)

[I am voodoo rainbow
and the eldest daughter of an Alabama judge
is losing her white bonnet on my beaches!] (34)

In *Vodoun*, all revelation is instigated under the double form of serpents Damballah-Wèdo and the female equivalent, Ayidaze. Thus, we must read beyond the rape implications that are suggested by Damballah's threat, and consider how the threat of sexual violation of a black man against a white woman feeds into the cardinal fear of the white world:

J'asperge vos pales hystéries
J'arrose la terreur qui se love en vos yeux
J'arrose les points cardinaux de vos vices (130)

[sprinkle your pale hysterias
wet the terror coiling in your eyes
moisten the cardinal points of your vices] (33).

Damballah implies that this "watering" can cultivate a new territory within the corrupted white land where his fellow *loas* may be welcomed. Thus, the fertilization of the land, similar to the allusion of the raping of the white women, may be considered a veritable "homemaking" in which the tainted earth can be revitalized with the energies of the Haitian *loas* to counteract the murderous prejudices of the whites. Using the charade of the white women's violation, Damballah garners strength from the exposure of the hypocrisies of the white world. Ultimately, implanting "his seed" into this white land is

the condition for the rest of the *loas* to join him, which evokes the idea of the collective power of the spiritual world.

Depestre's contempt for the white family fuels a rage that translates into a fantastical sexual vengeance to be played out on the bodies of the white women. His description of their rape is couched in hyperbolic language, and thus his fantastical imagining of committing this violation seemingly serves as a perverted expression of his powerlessness. In *Will to Change*, bell hooks argues that men's inability to assert dominance in real life can be then "asserted in the realm of sexual fantasy", which suggests that the fantasy aspect of this poem says more about the limitations of masculine dominance (73). Furthermore, in his essay "Feast of Blood: 'Race', Religion, and Human Sacrifice in the Postbellum South", Orlando Patterson discusses how historically, the sexualized torture of the black body was the manifestation of the simultaneous white hatred of black bodies and of white desires for the consumption of black bodies. He discusses how the rhetoric of the public imagination reinforced the myth of black man as sexual predator while denying him agency as sexual being in his own right:

The idea of Afro-American men resisting and fighting against the outrages heaped upon them was as much an anathema as was the fantasy of Afro-American men lusting after Euro-American women. Thus the distorting emphasis on the charge of rape and attempted rape accomplished two goals of "racial" oppression in one fell swoop. It promoted the image of the Afro-American male as a sexual fiend, and at the same time it denied all manhood to him (225).

However, the poet extends the Southern distortion of the black male predator by appropriating the trope of rape to reclaim black masculine sexuality. By dramatizing the imaginings of the violation of the white daughter, the poet reveals his the true meaning of "rape" through Damballah, whose speech reveals that his intentions are not to rape the judge's daughter, but rather that the water from which he garners his spiritual energies

will renew the girl with life renewing elements when combined with Ayidaze's.

Damballah transmits his energies via a medium of seven colors to the daughter, so that she too transforms into a rainbow. Thus, the violation of the white woman takes on a different connotation at the end of the epiphany, in which the dual-gender nature of this serpent signifies the sexual unity that characterizes the cosmos. This duality also suggests that rather than sexually conquering the judge's daughter, Damballah intends to erase the discrepancy between gender altogether upon merging to form the rainbow. Ultimately, the symbolism of the rainbow constitutes part of his conception of how marginalized masculinities can be understood not in terms of domination, but in the balance between feminine and masculine strength.

Masculine Spiritual and Bodily Rejuvenation

Henri's entrance into the contest triggers a reactive chain of events at the highest levels of government, compelling the Zachary regime to redouble its efforts and assert its masculine, phallic authority publicly against the rogue force of Henri's incorruptible spirit. Master Horace tells Henri that the regime has hung banners all around the town that say « Le mulâtrisme de Tête-Bœuf ne passera pas » [The Mulattoism of Tête-Boeuf Shall Not Win] (61; 45). Sam Daumac, the white editorial writer for the *Zacharien Courier*, describes the pole's power as the

Force de l'Homme noir, du Marron aux yeux rouges, noir et luisant comme l'ébène, astique par trois siècles d'esclavage, hirsute, lippu, brutal, laid, suiffe et sensuel, sauvage et phallique, jailli des profondeurs affreuses de la fournaise de l'iniquité sociale (62).

[Force of the Black Man, of the Maroon with his red eyes, black and shining like ebony, polished by three centuries of slavery – hairy, thick-lipped, brutal, ugly, greasy and sensual, savage and phallic – sprung from the frightful depths of the furnace of social inequity] (46).

Duamac's attribution of the pole's power to the blackness that it represents parallels the race war that took place during the Duvalier dictatorship, in which Duvalier appropriated the tenets of *négritude* into his own political philosophy. As Martin Munro explains in *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier*, "there is also a clear drive to appropriate Haitian history into this racial discourse, and to project all of this onto the meaning of the competition itself" (120). Hence, the appropriation of Haiti's history and culture into totalitarian discourse means that for the Zachary regime, the competition serves as a symbol of Haitian history, masculinity, and blackness. Most significantly, the contest symbolizes Derrida's notion of the mystical foundation of law, in which the supreme authority of Zacharian law implies that entering the contest constitutes a brazen public denouncement of the government. As Munro explains, "the regime's appropriation of the founding myths of Haitianity might seem irresistible or impossible to overturn; indeed, if Postel were to challenge them on their own terms, they would be" (121). Thus, the doomed fate that Zachary promises to serve to the victor of the contest indicates Zachary's preoccupation with maintaining full control of the national imagination by reinforcing that the greasy pole competition signifies the total power of his regime, which is an extension of an appropriated Haitian history.

In Depestre's description of the ailing Henri, we can consider how the unfettered use of brute force has rendered the population feeble and directionless. The widespread fear that permeated Haiti during the Duvalier regime is reflected in Zacharyland's new black intelligentsia's lack of support for Henri, who deems his revolutionary inclinations

too dangerous. The events in the novel mirror our author's own life to some degree, in which Depestre's disfavor with Duvalier led to his exile. Nonetheless, Henri's endeavor to avoid the press allows him to leave the meaning of his participation open for interpretation. He remains a willing participant in the contest and does not seek to overturn the conditions of the game; thus, his refusal to inject the pole with any tangible meaning enables him to leave the future open and allow the people to inscribe their own conclusions into his revolutionary actions.

If we take into account the role that eroticism plays in his revolutionary struggle against the phallus, then Henri's newly reclaimed masculinity can be understood as a necessary condition for his ability to reclaim his humanity and un-zombify himself. In particular, Sor Cisa's invocation of the *loas*, Henri's romantic encounter with Elisa, and his temporary physical transformation affords him the strength of mind and body that he needs to mount the pole. In doing so, he exposes the limitations of unfettered brute force as well as the consequences of individualism.

Prior to the competition, Henri's aging body and haggardness is the product of his zombified, isolated state of existence. However, following his entry into the competition, Henri becomes increasingly energized and appears to regress in age, and his newfound youthful vivaciousness is the product of the erotic lovemaking session that he shares with Elisa. Not only does Depestre depict romantic love as an essential element of masculine vitality, but he alludes to the notion that the absence of both sexual and familial love can render one spiritually and physical devoid of the life forces that are necessary imbue a man with a purpose that exceeds his own personal motivations.

Eroticism in its excess manifests as violence in *Le Mât de cocagne*, and Henri's

physical rejuvenation with Elisa is juxtaposed with the vulgar sexuality exuded by the Zachary regime. As President Zachary's autocratic domination becomes increasingly threatened the more that Henri gains in strength and popularity, Zachary invokes *loas* to do his evil bidding. Although Henri retaliates by invoking their positive powers for his own performance, his ultimate ascent up the mast is not intended to evoke the notion that in his triumph, Henri has now embodies a fully-realized masculinity. Rather, Henri's individual victory enables him to achieve masculine selfhood, but his immediate assassination by Zachary's snipers reflects Depestre's own ideology of the limitations of heroic individualism. Henri's death demonstrates that masculinity premised on the strength of the individual ultimately engenders little immediate and direct good. His ascent and subsequent death culminates in the increased threat of death for his supporters and chaos for the community of spectators.

Finally, the greasy mast becomes the gallows upon which the solitary revolutionary hero meets his fate. Although Henri's destiny is pre-determined from the moment he enters the contest, his shining moment begins with his connection with Elisa, and comes to an abrupt and tragic, yet still predictable end when he exits her protective womb to pursue a solitary martyr status.

If *Le Mât de cocagne* is a cautionary warning against rogue individualism as a constituent component of Depestre's revised definition of masculinity, then the epiphanies experienced by Changó in « Les Epiphanies des dieux du vaudou » in *Un arc-en-ciel* reinforce the power of the collective. In *Un arc-en-ciel*, Depestre also depicts the limited power of the solitary individual, as well as the significance of *Vodoun's* power to provide the mortal body with the physical and spiritual strength needed to overcome

adversity. In embracing his mission to venture out of Haiti and enter the American South, the poet must overcome his own individual bitterness towards his doomed fate in this inhospitable world that is controlled by the machinery of white power. In his invocation of the Haitian *loas*, he calls upon Changó to shake up the white world through the manipulation of their greatest fear by perpetuating the narrative of black men's sexual avarice. Changó, a warrior and an ironworker, is a member of the Ogou family and is identified with the element of fire and is notorious for his overt displays of masculine sexuality. He employs both of these attributes to destroy the white Alabama devils and to seduce the white women. Similar to Henri Postel, Changó must channel his energies into a display of bodily strength in order to defeat his enemies. First, he seeks to enfeeble the menfolk of the Christian family by denouncing Christianity and its ill-begotten powers. He then directs his attention towards the judge's daughters, whose bodies become objectified and utilized for the next phase of his epiphany. Changó anoints their bodies with castor oil derived from Haiti, which is imbued with the power to prepare the wombs of the white women to welcome new life, in which they will become the mothers and hosts of a new being whose mixed blood will possess the transformative powers to denounce the staid racial dynamics and the oppression of the Black world. The women are held captive against their will, but Changó does not actually penetrate the women. This omission of the sexual penetrative act itself suggests that neither control nor violence of the women is the objective; rather, the aim is to beget a new generation whose hybridity exposes the arbitrariness of racial demarcations.

Similarly, Damballah's fertilization of the judge's daughter incites the symbolic rebirth of the white race and also revivifies the gods, who can only proceed in their

mission if they are provided a place of their own in the inhospitable white world. His exploitation of the whites' fear of sexual relations between whites and blacks lends him the necessary power to attract the attention of the whites so that he may be taken seriously.

The Haitian male subject's nomadic sense of place

Martin Munro explains in his article "Something and Nothing: Place and Displacement in Aimé Césaire and René Depestre" that in his works, the constitution of the subject hinges upon his relationship to Caribbean place (143). He conceives of Depestre's exile and the rupture that it caused in his own subjective identity as that which is responsible for his depiction of Haiti itself as dislocated, nomadic, and consequently detached from staid categorizations of race and identity. Munro posits that Depestre does not dwell on the negative brutality that is often associated with its colonization by Europe; rather, he focuses upon the primordially unbreakable bond that exists between his protagonists and the *pays natal*. Furthermore, Munro explains that Depestre's friendships with major literary figures in Cuba, Chile, Brazil, and the United States demonstrates that he is perpetually looking to situate his writing and ruminations on social justice, exile, and the effects of globalization in a fertile location where cross-cultural contact can lead to the exchange and revision of ideas. Due to Depestre's long exile, which afforded him ample time and exposed him to multivariate contexts that influenced and enabled his perception of the meaning of "Caribbeanness" as it affects his own life, Mary Gallagher in *Ici-là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French* claims that the consequences of his exile led Depestre to imagine the universal

plight of oppressed people's in a general sense. He writes, "Exile relocates, or more accurately, dislocates the Caribbean, and ruptures the traditional bond between subjective identity and physical location. In this sense, the literature of the Caribbean, in particular of Haiti, itself becomes nomadic, on the move, impossible to classify" (154).

In both works, Depestre presents different variations of a male subject who has been shaped by his nomadic sense of place and his relationship to Haiti. Henri Postel's anti-government political views are influenced by his deep-seated belief in universal conceptions of justice, and his political ideology situates him in a broader global context that exceeds the borders of his tiny island nation. Although Henri's life as a Senator has been spent fighting for the rights of the people of the Great Zacharian Nation, his moral compass is directed towards the grander mission to achieve social equality and dethrone tyrannical leaders through the steadfast pursuit of an objective definition of justice. For instance, we learn that Henri has been denied participatory status in the anti-government group because of the tunnel vision that his moral individualism engenders. Henri's ideal of masculinity – namely, that being personally wounded by injustice is the condition for real heroic action – is indicative of his own influential power and self-affirmed moral rectitude that he perceives as necessary to instigate the rebellious tempers among his supporters, provided that he can gain access to such a public platform. Given Henri's reputation as an esteemed citizen, his decision to enter the competition is regarded as brazen by those politicians who most fear him, and thus their violent and reactionary efforts to mitigate his influential potential subjects his fellow Haitians to the dangerous whimsy of the Zacharian regime. Here again, Depestre hints at the consequences of individual, heroic efforts towards social change. Henri's decisions may be inspired by his

morally benevolent disposition, but his shortsighted thinking predisposes him to failure, inevitably robbing his people of a progressive leader.

The symbol of the tree trunk that the competitors endeavor to mount signifies feminine stability, which serves as a direct foil to the nomadic male subject. The ascent up the greasy pole not only requires a masculine display that is nothing if not grotesque, but it also requires the public displacement of participants from their normal social positions. The pole functions as a social class equalizer, and the men who choose to participate come from all walks of life to pursue a common objective. Meanwhile, the wooden mast that has been corrupted by such vile substances is nonetheless pure in its essence and constitution. Sor Cisa claims that beneath the lard is the « vrai bois de la vie » [true wood of life], while Horace says that the tree, « a été abattu, privé de ses racines, barbouillé de lard [has been chopped down, deprived of its roots, smeared with lard] (57; 49). Still, Sor Cisa insists that a tree is always a *pied bois* – given its persistent and enduring existence, in which it can continue to survive even when its roots and branches become severed. She further declares that the tree which grows straight may serve as an altar of repose for other living things that need tenderness and peace. Thus, the tree validates the pure origins of Zacharyland Haiti, and the fact that no matter what happens on its soil, it will always be the land of the people.

Both Sor Cisa and Horace acknowledge the purity of the tree's original life force, which similarly represents Zacharyland's corruption and tyrannical contamination. Whereas Sor Cisa believes in the endurance of the integrity of the tree, despite its use, Master Horace declares that those who compete are complicit in the perpetuation of the operative mechanisms of the Zachary regime. Thus, any attempt to overcome this tyranny

not only requires the public, humiliating display of presumably futile physical exertion, but also the risk that is entailed in disassociating oneself from his status quo in an overt act of defiance against the dictatorship. The debate between Horace and Sor Cisa raises the question of whether or not the endurance of Henri's character remains, despite the change that affected his identity while he was in exile, or, if his participation in the festival renders a a pawn in the NOFES.

Nomadism is depicted in *Un arc-en-ciel* in two distinct ways. In the most explicit sense, perhaps the most significant effect of the poet's journey into the white world is evident when the reversal of power roles takes place, in which the whites defer to the newly dominant Haitian loas. The gods attribute their new positions of power to the successful culmination of their cross-ocean voyage, in which they have now arrived in the white world and have captured everyone's attention. One of the Alabama women implores Agoué-Taroyo to « pardon pour nos erreurs pardon pour nos péchés » [forgive us our trespasses forgive us our sins], to which Agoué-Taroyo replies,

Non je lui dis je suis un nègre sans pardon
Mon dernier pardon n'a plus des yeux de nègre (132)

[No I tell them, I am black sans pardon
My last pardon no longer had black eyes] (22).

Agoué-Taroyo speaks for the entire black race upon declaring that he will no longer be submissive; the veil has been lifted and he can now clearly see all the injustices that must no longer be tolerated. In denouncing this request, he asserts that forgiveness cannot precede action, and he sets the stage for the final transformation of the poet.

The idea of mobility and nomadism is also expressed the invocation of Abraham, which not only undermines the notion of Anglo-Christian supremacy and redefines those

patriarchal structures that uphold white domination, but also alludes to the American President and emancipator, Abraham Lincoln. In the « Prélude », Depestre utters a final affirmation when he declares that « Abraham ce soir c'est moi! » [Abraham tonight is me!] (117; 15). The significance of this exclamation lies in his ability to implicate the barbaric weapons used by the whites against black bodies, such as the KKK, the H-bomb, and the electric chair. In his identification with Abraham, he postures as someone who identifies with their Christian beliefs, but simultaneously, he brings forth the notion of ultimate sacrifice. We are left contemplating whom the poet wishes to sacrifice in this pivotal moment, and we must listen closely to his tirade to identify the victim. He announces, « Abraham c'est la merveille de désintégrer l'atome de la famille ! » [Abraham is the miracle of splitting the family atom!], which conveys a double meaning (117; 15). On the one hand, his identification as Abraham invokes the idea of Abraham's ultimate sacrifice of his son to God, and thus the « désintégrer » refers to the disruption of the family dynamic of paternal possession over progeny in the name of a higher good – pure love and obedience to God. Thus, Depestre's proclaimed willingness to model his future actions after Abraham suggests that he also acknowledges the need to shake things up and break the rules of traditional conceptions of the nuclear family, both in terms of the black relationship to whites and the black family's relationship to itself as an insular and unassuming underbelly of society. However, this breaking of rules is necessary for the reformation, or retying, of alternative definitions of family bonds and relations that will ultimately pave the way for a “miracle” to be ushered in in the form of turning the white dominant structure topsy-turvy and exposing it for its hypocritically weak foundations.

Second, the invocation of Abraham suggests that he will not only be willing to sacrifice, but that he assumes responsibility for the totality of his people in invoking such a sacrifice. The poet impersonates Abraham Lincoln and postures as a sardonic revolutionary emancipator, taking on the same name of the man whose emancipatory actions yielded incomplete, if not unsatisfactory results for former black slaves. Thus, Depestre's incarnation of Lincoln undermines Lincoln's reputation:

Abraham c'est la joie d'étaler sous vos yeux le faux trésor de vos délires !
Abraham c'est la merveille de désintégrer l'atome de la famille !
Abraham ce soir c'est l'ivresse de bruler des stères de respectabilité blanche !
Sa hache de bucheron c'est mon bras d'homme noir !
Tremblez dans vos fruits et dans vos branches
Famille blanche de l'Alabama ! (117)

[Abraham is the joy of unfolding before your eyes the false treasure of your delirium!
Abraham is the miracle of splitting the family atom!
Tonight Abraham is the intoxication of burning the cordwood of white respectability!
His woodcutter-axe is my black-man-arm!
Tremble in your fruits and in your branches
White family of Alabama!] (15).

The new Abraham dons appendages and props as symbols of blackness and strength (his « bras d'homme noir »), and states that this new Abraham's objective is to sever « l'atome de la famille » using this new black-man-arm, while « respectabilité blanche » will be subjected to an act of conflagration that will intoxicate the new Abraham and encourage him along his mission.

Finally, the realization of manhood by both works' protagonists is contingent upon their ultimate regard for "home". In the texts, the protagonists' wills to embark on perilous missions bring about short-term discomfort that is inevitably remedied, to various degrees, by the very decision to act. Our poet seems to suggest that nomadic

tendencies must be tempered by a persistent consideration of one's own relationship to a world context that extends beyond one's known boundaries, and that with this consciousness comes the unceasing call to garner support from one's community in order to temper the allure to heroic individualism.

Conclusion

Depestre's literary representations of masculinity reinforce the importance of understanding the historical conditions that have shaped patterns of political and racial hegemony. The formal patriarchy that dictated the lives of Haitians during the era in which Depestre wrote also influences how people think of their gendered subjectivity as it is affected by society. The narrator in *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* and Henri Postel in *Le Mât de cocagne* are both marginalized Haitian men who decide to battle the forces which oppress them. Neither the narrator nor Henri can overcome the hegemonic forces that condemn them to the margins of society - the institutionalized racism of the United States in the narrator's case and the totalitarian dictatorship of President Zachary in Henri's - and thus we follow these characters along their respective journeys to witness how they each reimagine a workable masculinity that can contend with the hegemonic forms to ultimately enable them to assert agency and break from the shackles of insubordination.

Throughout his lifetime, Depestre has been an erudite witness to and participant in social revolutions through the world, and the driving forces that propel his protagonists along their mission are influenced by, and in many ways mirror the same revolutionary philosophies that Depestre advocates for in his personal life. Depestre offers a

reformulation of Haitian masculinity that is still “Caribbean” in shape and form in *Un arc-en-ciel pour l’Occident chrétien*, in which the narrator reclaims his Haitian identity while advocating for a universal Caribbean masculinity. Moreover, Henri Postel’s rejuvenation and escape from his “zombified” state enables him to illuminate the flawed foundations of law and power that uphold neo-colonial forces and contemporary dictators. Ultimately, both works present a re-conceptualized version of masculinity that accord with Nancy’s conception of a community whose celebration of feminine cooperation, erotic love, and racial harmony can work to keep the community open.

Notes

1. Jasmina Sopova, “Between utopia and reality: An interview with René Depestre.” *The UNESCO Courier*, 1997.
2. See *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* Vol. 1 (2006): 266.

III.2 Fuentes, Hospitality, and the Father[land]

The struggle to achieve male dominance in Mexico has historically been guaranteed to people based largely on their ethnic identity. Eve Walsh Stoddard and Grant H. Cornwell observe in “Cosmopolitan or mongrel? *Créolité*, hybridity and ‘Douglarisation’ in Trinidad” that the word *creole* is inherited from the Spanish *criollo*, “meaning born locally though ancestrally from elsewhere”, in which *criollo* as a verb derives from *criar* (to breed) and from the Latin *creare* (to create) (336). As David Buchbinder explains:

Creole belongs *racially* or *ethnically* to one group (the Spanish, say) whose ethnic identity is dictated by the colonial metropolitan center (Madrid or, more generally, Spain, in this case). However, such a subject, having been born outside that center itself, feels a certain pressure to ally her/himself *culturally* with the group into which s/he has been born (Central or South American, or Caribbean, for instance) (*Studying Men and Masculinities* 179).

Since having been conquered by Spain in the sixteenth century, Mexico has grappled with the question of blood heritage and social class, particularly concerning tensions between creoles and indigenous people. Carlos Fuentes considers the question of race and ethnicity throughout his works, and attributes many of Mexico’s economic problems to its identity crisis. Mexico’s Spanish, black, and indigenous heritages have each been denounced during different periods after Mexico achieved independence in 1821 in the name of masking certain identities for the sake of venerating others. Nonetheless, Fuentes regards the oligarchy of the PRI, Mexico’s official revolutionary party, as responsible for reproducing the negative characteristics embodied by the succession of oligarchical regimes that have long ruled Mexico, including those of the colonial creole aristocracy, such as General Santa Anna (1794-1976), the American-born Spaniard (creole) who

fought for Mexican independence, and President Porfirio Díaz. The social and agrarian reforms promised by the Revolution were slow to come to fruition, and were only truly implemented on a large scale in the 1940s by Lázaro Cárdenas. According to Nora Hamilton in *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, later presidents who succeeded Díaz, such as López Mateos and Ávila Camacho, created a neo-capitalist society founded on the same economical ideology as the North American system, which was arguably subjected to its control (279). Moreover, Fuentes's criticism of the modern state of Mexico centers on the consequences of the one-party system which was implemented after World War II, in which political power was concentrated in the PRI, and which established an economic system that opened the door for economic domination by the United States. The incomplete actualization of the Mexican Revolution's ideals throughout the past century has reinforced certain patterns of hegemonic masculine behaviors that continue to favor masculine behaviors exhibited by landowning oligarchs, authoritarian leaders, and wealthy businessmen.

The idea of a formulation of hegemonic masculinity that serves its country allows us to understand how gender in Mexico consists of a constant process of configuration supported by hegemonic forces that are also contested by other marginal groups. Certain attributes of masculinity are culturally and historically conditioned that continue to structure Mexican society and individual behavior. Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt's article "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" (2005) reconsiders the definition of hegemonic masculinity that Connell first defined two decades prior. Connell and Messerschmitt provide a more nuanced definition of masculinity which refers to those gender normative behaviors that determine a kind of

masculinity that fits into a certain set of behavioral and ideological constructs (832). The key idea of this definition is the notion of *performance*, in which “being a man” implies the successful exhibition of particular masculine behaviors. However, the effort to prove one's own masculinity is often accompanied by negative consequences, such as heightened levels of stress, tension, and anxiety, regardless of whether one's masculinity is classified as hegemonic or non-hegemonic according to Connell's model of gender hierarchy. In *What it Means to be a Man: Reflections on Puerto Rican Masculinity*, Rafael Rodríguez's discussion of how society assigns “gender specific attributes, characteristics and expectations” to the way in which people are perceived within their particular social group encourages an examination into the cultural constructs of the *macho* and *machismo* that characterize masculinity within Mexican society at particular historical moments (11).

The nature of masculinity in Mexico has been constructed throughout a long history of patriarchal lineage that begins well before the Mexican Revolution. Robert McKee Irwin's 2003 publication of *Mexican Masculinities* describes the history of masculine constructions in Mexico beginning in 1810, and traces the formulation of masculinity forward in time to the mid-1960s. Irwin analyzes literary constructions of masculinity presented in the works of literary greats such as Octavio Paz and Juan Rufo, and begins with the premise that constructions of Mexican identity emerge from foundational notions of masculinity and male sexuality. Irwin's objective centers upon an examination of Paz's characterization of masculinity in his 1950 novel *El laberinto de la soledad*. In this novel, Paz describes Mexican men as a mixed-race progeny born of the rape of indigenous women by the Spanish who sought to triumph over their subordinate,

liminal status by means of becoming hyper-masculine *chingones*, or one whose performance of masculinity is predicated upon penetrative virility. Irwin outlines the paradox of the performative aspect of masculinity as that which is paired with the male phallus, so that “being a man” constitutes an inherent trait that can be denied to someone based on another’s social performance. The importance of Irwin’s theory as it relates to the argument presented in this chapter is his notion that Mexican masculinity has long been the product of the performance of masculinity based on the exchange between two or more men concerning the body or the idea of a woman. Hence, the performative aspect of masculinity as that which is predicated on the exhibition of behaviors and physical traits which are absolutely non-feminine characterizes the traditional idea of Mexican *machismo* that has been evolving in contemporary Mexico, an argument articulated by Andrew Gutmann, a scholar of modern ethnography of masculinity in Mexico. In *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*, Gutmann claims that although machismo is rapidly becoming a limited, if not antiquated notion used to describe manhood, the term has evolved as a result of changes in the social and cultural environment in which the reality of life for Mexican men is much more complicated than commonly held conceptions of behaviors and responsibilities associated with the traditional male/female gender binary that upholds notions of masculine *machismo* and feminine subordination (21). As James Messerschmidt explains in his analysis of Gutmann’s argument, it is imperative to “tease out different categories of masculinity—for example, the macho and the *mandilón*, while recognizing, and showing in detail, that these are not monadic identities but always are relational and constantly are crosscut by other divisions and projects” (Connell and Messerschmidt 837).

In pre-revolutionary Mexico, masculinity is embodied by President Porfirio Díaz, who maintained power due largely in part to his steady repression of opposition. Although the three decades of Díaz's rule led to tyranny and the administration of venal justice to repress opposition, he lacked the resources to impose a total police state in Mexico. Instead, he chose his battles discriminately; he took to task only those powers that might potentially pose a threat to his rule. Thus, by maintaining close ties with the powerful landowning families while only intermittently and inconsistently quashing instances of resistance using his *rurales* police force, Díaz displayed his apparent pervasive power, embodied in the rural taskforce who arbitrarily and ruthlessly enforced the dictator's will. The *rurales* were armed and mounted terrorists of the countryside, and carried out Díaz's omnipotent control by liberally wielding the *ley fuga* [law of flight], in which everyone deemed to resist the law was shot dead in their attempt to flee the hand of justice (McClynn 10). The thousands of people who were killed as a result of the *ley fuega* is a testimony to the low number of revolts that took place throughout Díaz's thirty-four year dictatorship, given that the people were generally terrified of the consequences that might result in the event of such wide-scale resistance. Furthermore, the torturous mechanisms by which the *rurales* punished defectors or rebels are numerous, and the arbitrary applications of force and the naming of "criminals" translated into a pattern of forceful hegemonic masculine behavior defined according to ruthless control and the punitive surveillance and merciless retribution for perceived wrongs or governmental opposition.

The need for complimentary or alternative concepts to hegemonic masculinity calls upon us to examine social inequalities and the complexities of masculine power.

Moreover, because an increasingly globalized world reshapes the context in which national and local masculinities are expressed, it is imperative to look for emergent alternatives to hegemonic masculinities in order to understand how patterns of masculine behavior exhibited by marginalized men can serve as a gauge to detect and determine the impetus of other shifts in the societal status quo. In response to such shifts, men may appropriate new behaviors as alternatives to the existing hegemonic behavioral patterns in efforts to resist domination and achieve agency in their own right.

The history of hegemonic and non-hegemonic parameters in Mexico reveals how those in power promote or discredit traits in men that would either serve or disrupt the modernization of the country. In considering the historical setting of *Gringo viejo* and *La región más transparente del aire*, we must identify the parameters that define the protagonists' masculinities as they are structured by socioeconomic and historical factors. The philosophical framework on responsibility and the community shaped by the deconstructive thinking of such concepts in Derrida's *De la grammatologie* and *Donner la mort*, along with Nancy's discussion of the conditions of the unworked community as presented in *La Communauté désœuvrée*, allows us to envision how marginalized men can exhibit non-hegemonic masculinities that contend with hegemonic masculinities that empower men of all socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, in *Politiques de l'amitié*, Derrida's notion of our primordial responsibility for the Other, which is bound to the fact of the chronology of time, allows us to understand the social and economic conditions which impact constructions of masculinities make it possible to determine how the behaviors exhibited by Carlos Fuentes's protagonists diverge from traditional notions of masculinity that characterize the periods of Mexico's history in

which *Gringo viejo* and *La región más transparente del aire* are set. If we trace the evolution of hegemonic masculinity in Mexico during the twentieth century, it is possible to explain how such non-hegemonic, marginalized masculinities can empower men to challenge American hegemony, capitalistic idealism, and the legacy of patriarchal inheritance.

Mexico has long functioned as a symbolic patriarchy, in which gender is fluid and contests boundaries of authority. Furthermore, the symbolic patriarchy refers to a male-dominated society and system of government, as well as intra-familial power relations which posit the father or oldest male the “symbolic father” or “father figure” (Buchbinder 67). According to Connell, because gender is constructed within the patriarchal order, the dominance of certain hegemonic masculinities within symbolic patriarchies becomes naturalized in such a way that people subconsciously ascribe to it. Derrida’s philosophy of hospitality is useful in situating and mapping the behaviors of the Old Gringo and Tomás Arroyo in *Gringo viejo* in terms of how their individual motives for fighting in the Mexican Revolution are influenced by an inclination to resist the patriarchal order of the United States and Mexico. As has been discussed in previous chapters, Derrida’s notion of the aporetic is constitutive of his philosophy of the limit. In *Donner la mort*, Derrida explains:

... les notions de responsabilité, de la décision ou du devoir sont condamnées a priori au paradoxe, scandale et aporie. Paradoxe, scandale, et aporie sont eux-mêmes rien d'autre que le sacrifice, la révélation de la pensée conceptuelle à sa limite, à sa mort et la finitude (68).

[...the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty are condemned a priori to paradox, scandal, and aporia. Paradox, scandal, and aporia are themselves nothing other than sacrifice, the revelation of conceptual thinking at its limit, at its death and finitude] (68).

The ontological fact of sacrifice means that the limit can never be transcended or overcome, and so the notion of the aporia affirms that everything is only possible in its impossibility. Therefore, the *possible* refers to that which happens outside of a subject's foreseeable horizons. While Derrida's idea of unconditional hospitality can only occur in reality as *im*-possible, hospitality is not structured according to the construct of power or to the subjective will of another. In *De l'hospitalité*, Derrida explains that because one would need to offer more than he actually has to offer to break from any horizon of possibility and disrupt the expected dynamic of hospitality, hospitality is only possible in the event of the arrival of the Other, which happens outside of the subject, in that the subject is always unprepared to provide hospitality for the wholly foreign visitor. This analysis does not lead to a refusal of hospitality, but rather a call to be even more open to welcome the arriving Other regardless of the conditions: « Disons, oui, à l'arrivant avant toute détermination, avant toute anticipation, avant toute identification (...) que l'arrivant soit un être humain, animal ou divin, un vivant ou un mort, masculin ou féminin » [Let us say yes to *who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification* (...) whether the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female (73; 77).

In *Gringo viejo*, Ambrose Bierce enters Mexico driven by his own past experience as an American reporter whose work has always allowed him to position himself outside of the constructs of law. Thus, he crosses the border without paying much attention to the implications that his presence will have on the Mexicans whom he will encounter. He justifies his arrival on the basis of his neutrality in the Mexican Revolution, and on his status as a white man who hails from an economically superior

nation. Crossing the frontier, he pays little mind to how he will be perceived by the Mexicans, and carries forth on his mission to fulfill his death wish in that “last” foreign land sharing a border with the United States that he has yet to discover. In order to achieve a noble death, the Old Gringo seeks to assimilate himself among the local peasants in the hopes that he shall embark upon a “truth” that has forever escaped him. He therefore denounces the United States’s patriarchal order in the hopes that he will be welcomed by the Mexicans and treated as an equal. In doing so, however, he defies the patriarchal order that structures the rural society of Mexico, since his presence forces the Mexicans on both sides of the war to make sense of his presence and orient their actions accordingly.

Thus, the condition of his disinterest is a testament not only to how little he has to lose in traipsing into Mexico, but also to the fact that he has a great deal to gain. The Old Gringo is not the guest of Mexico, but, in Derridean terms, he is actually the ever unconditionally welcoming host, as well as the guest, and can shift allegiances as the situation suits his needs. In other words, if unconditional hospitality means that the host must always be prepared to allow himself to be overtaken, while also being ready and able to welcome and shelter the Other, the Old Gringo exemplifies this dynamic on the basis that he is void of fear, and in fact, invites death at its earliest convenience. However, Derrida also claims that because the present is perpetually deferred, the subject is only fully constituted upon the arrival of the Other. Hence, his solitary entrance into the country means that he is ontologically bound to the occupation of both roles of guest and host, since he cannot achieve subjectivity alone. Thus, when he does encounter the Other, the aspect of chronological and historical time prevents him from fully claiming

ownership over his “newfound” Mexico, and simultaneously disallows him from solely occupying the role of foreign guest. Consequently, his actions throughout his journey fall under the order of unconditional, or limitless hospitality, due to the fact that the stakes for him are low. As a result of the wide chasm that he is afforded for maneuvering among the Mexican people in his role as the ever-unwelcome guest, we can interpret the Old Gringo’s exemplification of hegemonic masculinity in his embodiment of both host and guest in terms of the United States’s manipulative press, the Díaz dictatorship, and revolutionary heroes such as Pancho Villa.

First, the Old Gringo’s pretext for crossing the Rio Grande is inspired by a desperate yearning to live boldly and authentically upon realizing that he has spent his entire life working as a delusional workhorse for a greedy and corrupt newspaper baron. When he imposes himself in the center of a tussle with the *Federales* and brazenly charges through the battlefield unprotected and unafraid, he realizes upon receiving the congratulatory remarks that the merit of any lingering fight left in him has dissipated.

Para el gringo viejo, aturdido por el quebradizo planeta que separa a la realidad de la ficción, el problema era otro: periodista o escritor, la alternativa lo seguía persiguiendo; no era lo mismo pero debía sacarse las opciones de la cabeza. Ya no podía seguir creyendo que iba a vivir, a trabajar, a optar entre la noticia dirigida a Hearst y sus lectores, o la ficción dirigida al padre y la mujer, y que no era posible seguir sacrificando ésta a aquélla. Sólo había una opción y por eso le dijo, como única respuesta, a Arroyo: —No es muy difícil ser valiente cuando no se tiene miedo a la muerte” (60).

[For the old gringo, dazed by the fragility of the planet that separates reality from fiction, the problem was different: journalist or writer, he was still pursued by alternatives. It was not the same, but he must shake all the options from his head. He could not go on believing that he was going to live, to work, to choose between the news directed to Hearst and his readers and the fiction directed to the father and the woman; nor was it possible for him to continue to sacrifice the latter to the former. There was only one option, and that is why his only response to Arroyo was: “It’s not difficult to be brave when you’re not afraid to die”] (56).

The battle scene is all the proof that the Old Gringo needs to realize that he is no longer blind to the aspects of his life that once brought him meaning. He can neither live a meaningful life by continuing to justify the sanctity of his former occupation, nor can he hijack the Revolution's mission to fill the void that has opened upon realizing the farcical means by which he has lived his life. The Old Gringo's epiphany forces him to come to terms with the fact that his efforts to expose the hypocrisies of Manifest Destiny as a muckraking journalist nonetheless kept him tethered to the pockets of the Hearst media empire.

In his work, Bierce was always blinded to the multivariate realities of the situations going on in the countries about whom he investigated. He confesses to Harriet that although he was a "Un despreciable reportero remuevelodos al servicio de un barón de la prensa" [contemptible, muckraking reporter in the service of a baron of the press], he declares that he was nonetheless uncorrupted: "Pero yo era puro, miss Harriet, ¿me lo cree usted? Puro pero amargo. Yo atacué el honor y el deshonor de todos, sin hacer distingos. En mi tiempo fui temido y odiado" [But I was pure, Miss Harriet, do you believe me? Pure, but bitter. I attacked the honor and dishonor of all men, without distinction. In my time, I was feared and hated] (72; 68). In admitting his faults and failings to Harriet, he recounts his regrets:

—Hubiera aceptado el ofrecimiento de Stanford y le hubiera tirado su puesto a la cara a Hearst, en vez de andar juntando para vivir y negándoles cosas a mi mujer y a mis hijos y luego incrementando mi culpa gastando lo poco que ahorraba en esos malditos bares de San Francisco donde los californianos nos reunimos a mirar hacia el mar para decirnos: Se acabó la frontera, muchachos, se nos murió el continente, se fue al diablo el destino manifiesto, ahora a ver dónde lo encontramos: ¿sería un espejismo del desierto?

[I should have accepted Stanford's offer and thrown Hearst's job in his face, instead of going on scrimping, denying comfort to my wife and children, and then

compounding my guilt by squandering what little I'd saved in those damned bars in San Francisco where all good Californians got together to stare off into the sea, so we could tell ourselves: The frontier's gone, boys; the continent's dead; Manifest Destiny's gone to hell in a hand basket; so where are we to find adventure? In a desert mirage?]

 (74; 70)

He finally admits to having been a fool for believing that he could “forma al destino ajeno a través del periodismo de denuncia y sátira” [shape the destinies of others through a journalism of accusation and satire] (76; 72). After living and fighting alongside the Mexican revolutionaries, he shamefully comes to terms with his own complicity in the perpetuation of the mono-perspective capitalist machine of American politics:

Luego recordó que Hearst mandó a un radical del periódico a reportear sobre el México de Porfirio Díaz y el periodista regresó diciendo que Díaz era un tirano que no toleraba oposición alguna y había congelado al país en una especie de servidumbre, donde el pueblo era el siervo de los hacendados, el ejército y los extranjeros. Hearst no dejó que esto se publicara; el poderoso barón de la prensa tenía a su radical y a su tirano, le gustaban los dos, pero sólo defendía al tirano. Díaz era un tirano, pero era el padre de su pueblo, un pueblo débil que necesitaba un padre estricto, decía Hearst...

Bierce remembers that a radical reporter was sent by Hearst to report on Porfirio Díaz's Mexico and that the journalist returned to say that Díaz was a tyrant “who did not tolerate opposition and had frozen the country in a kind of servitude where the people were the servants of large landowners, the army, and foreigners” and that Hearst did not allow this story to be published: “this powerful baron of the press had his radical and his tyrant; he liked them both, but he defended only the tyrant. So what if Díaz was a tyrant, he was the father of his people, a weak people who needed a strict father, Hearst had said...” (83; 79)

Upon acknowledging that his misguided journalistic endeavors have long been in the service of making a profit for an anonymous press magnate rather than of illuminating truths, he resolves to renounce journalism indefinitely and seek an alternative mission. After seventy years of angling truths to fit a crooked agenda, he relinquishes control, and in doing so, he finally begins to witness life and relationships from a more objective standpoint. However, the Old Gringo does not necessarily exhibit masculine patterns of

behavior that stand in contrast to the hegemonic model because he still manages to impose himself into every scene of the revolutionary backdrop that swirls around him. He is neither a welcome nor a legitimate part of the Mexicans' world, and yet the nature of the war prevents him from existing simply as a passive bystander. Although his foray into Mexico is motivated by an opaque longing to discover the truth of a foreign land with full objectivity, upon realizing that the premise of such a longing presupposes a pre-emptive self-awareness, he soon comes to learn that such a mission is fundamentally impossible. In failing to remove himself totally from the center of attention, the Old Gringo ultimately fails to achieve what he set out to do – to die a noble death.

For the man who has always been privy to the advantages of hegemonic American masculinity, the closest that he can come to dying nobly is to accompany others along their paths towards self-discovery. Towards the end of the novel, Harriet Winslow, the American governess of the Miranda *hacienda*, remembers her final conversation with Inocencio Mansalvo, a peasant-cum-revolutionary who grasps the truth about the complicated relationship between colonization and the limitations of revolution. When he accompanies Harriet to the border at the end of the novel prior to her return home, he tells her, “para los mexicanos la única causa de guerra eran siempre los gringos” [for Mexicans the only reason for war was always the gringos] (186; 182). Further, he reflects, “El gringo viejo decía que ya no hay frontera pal los gringos, ni pal este ni pal oeste ni pal norte, sólo pal sur, siempre pal sur” [The old gringo used to say there weren't any more frontiers for the gringos, not to the east or the west, not to the north, only to the south, always to the south] (186; 184). Inocencio's comment suggests that the Old Gringo's presence was simply another manifestation of Manifest Destiny, in

which the white man's entry into a place where he was never wanted inevitably interrupted the status quo, leaving those in his wake worse off than before. Although the Old Gringo forces Harriet and Tomás Arroyo to realize the truth in their relationship to the United States and to Mexico, it is still the hegemonic prototypes of the white man – in the form of Harriet and Bierce – who are granted the privilege to discover their own truths and continue to go on living on their own terms.

Fuentes's portrayal of the troubled relationship between Mexican idealism and North American dominance in *Gringo viejo* illuminates his philosophical vision of a Mexico that could one day wed individual freedom to the creation of enduring communal bonds. His depiction of the Old Gringo's triumph over nihilistic death through the exploitation of the Mexican conflict underscores the arbitrariness of national borders and the need to transcend such rigid conceptions of place and nationality. Fuentes hints at the futility of a national revolution in his narration of the Old Gringo's deliberations of the cross-country wanderings and former battles held among the ancient indigenous peoples of Mexico. The Old Gringo understands that the Indians' marginalization status is the product of their willingness to choose cohabitation over war: "Con razón todos se cansaron de tanto huir y se quedaron enredados en las espinas de las haciendas durante más de cien años" [No wonder they had all tired of the continual flight and for over a hundred years remained entangled in the thorns of the hacienda system] (20; 10). From the Old Gringo's perspective, the Indians have resigned themselves to toil forever as peasants rather than continuing to run from their oppressors or engaging in an unwinnable war against colonial powers. The Old Gringo appropriates this historical narrative to his own life, and considers how his own journey to Mexico parallels his late

divorce from his dishonest past. Despite having spent his professional life waging journalistic wars as a muckraking reporter for the Hearst media empire, it is only when the Old Gringo accepts that his boss belongs in the same category as those politicians and figureheads whom he has spent his life exposing and denouncing. The Old Gringo recognizes that an authentic sense of self can only be recovered upon his rejection of the myth of Truth that is propounded by Hearst's journalistic profit machine. For the indigenous peoples, their decision to fight in the Revolution is predicated on their belief that identity should be guaranteed by virtue of their rightful claim to the land. The Old Gringo identifies with the indigenous peasants upon realizing that their subordination is the consequence of their collective defiance of the myth of nation, rooted in their denigration of federal policies that only benefit the richest landowning elite. Similarly, the Old Gringo realizes that his "fight" must also be founded in sacrifice. However, he neglects to realize that sacrificing himself for an impersonal cause in the Revolution is not his "war" to fight if he hopes to reclaim his manhood.

Inocencio Mansalvo is a marginalized peasant whose decision to join the revolutionary movement is inspired by the hope that one day the fight will give way to a better means of existence for him and his people. Harriet remembers a conversation she had with Inocencio, whose motives for fighting differ from Arroyo's. He told her:

—No me gusta la tierra, señorita. Le mentiría si le dijera esto. No quiero pasarme la vida agachada. Quiero que se destruyan las haciendas y se deje libres a los campesinos, para que puédamos ir a trabajar donde quiéramos, en la ciudad o en el norte, en su país, señorita. Y si no, yo no me cansaré nunca de pelear. Agachado así, nomás no: quiero que me miren la cara (67).

[Me, I don't like the land, señorita. I would lie if I told you I did. I do not want to spend my life stooped over in the fields. I want the haciendas to be destroyed; I want all the people who work the land to be free, so we can work wherever we want, in the city or in the North – in your country, señorita. And if it is not to be

so, I will go on fighting forever. No more stooping for me; I want me to look me in the face] (63).

Whereas the Mexican land means something altogether different than it does for peasants like Inocencio and Arroyo, the Old Gringo views this “uncharted” territory as the last remaining frontier to be conquered. By contrast, Inocencio will never be able to claim ownership to the land; therefore, he wants the Miranda *hacienda* to be destroyed so that he can be liberated from his past. However, Arroyo’s mixed-blood heritage provides him with a conceivable alternative option that is outside of Inocencio’s realm of possibility, which happens to align more closely with the Old Gringo’s. If Arroyo were to succeed in claiming his rights to the land, his actions would reflect the operative nature of the United States’ patriarchal order. Thus, Fuentes criticizes the relationship between masculine power, wealth, and land ownership, and presents an alternative conception of masculinity that is rooted in the quest for spiritual freedom that is not tied to the distractions of money and possessions.

The enduring centralization of power that has long characterized Mexico’s government has historically prohibited the clear demarcation of distinct classes and political parties. In *La región más transparente del aire*, Federico Robles has witnessed first-hand the apparent futility of the long civil war, and reasons that he cannot depend on political ideals to overcome the obstacle of his birth. He recognizes the potential for gain in Mexico’s transition into a pre-capitalist society and wields his power to take advantage of the confused aftermath of the Mexican Revolution to shape himself into a business tycoon. Robles’s belief that a capitalist system modeled on his North American neighbor is the only path worth following upon the termination of the Revolution.

Robles's political ideology is juxtaposed with Manuel Zamacona's throughout the novel. Zamacona laments, "No puedo pensar que el único resultado concreto de la Revolución Mexicana haya sido la formación de una nueva casta privilegiada, la hegemonía económica de los Estados Unidos y la paralización de toda vida política interna" [I can't believe that the only concrete result of the Revolution had to be the rise of a new privileged class, economic domination by the United States, and the paralyzing of all internal political life] (333-34; 221). However, Robles scoffs at Zamacona's lack of faith in the prosperity that such an economic system can bring to Mexico and tells him, "eso que usted llama casta privilegiada lo es en función de su trabajo y del impulso que da al país" [the class you call privileged is so only by reason of its labor and contribution to the country] (334; 221). Here, we see two opposing models of masculinity embodied by the father-son duo. Hegemonic masculinity in Mexico during the mid-twentieth century can be characterized in terms of those who possessed land, and hence, money and power. Robles exhibits the hegemonic model, which is contrasted with Zamacona, who *chooses* to occupy a non-hegemonic position in society. Thus, subordinate masculinities do not necessitate that one comes from a poor environment; however, because the flows of power in the patriarchal economy produce the social structures that favor certain men over others, it is evident that Zamacona has consciously decided to situate himself outside of the patriarchal economy and therefore not participate in the hegemonic order.

Furthermore, we can examine the gender dynamic between Robles and Zamacona in terms of Derrida's conception of hospitality, in which one's perceived orientation to the Other reveals his position and nature of participation in the gender hierarchy. For instance, Robles perceives himself as occupying the position of "host", in which he

believes that his hard work renders him worthy of his elevated social status. Therefore, Robles situates himself in a position in which he establishes the terms in which the Other is welcome into his life. Derrida posits that the immanence of existence always necessitates that the welcome is conditional, wherein it ceases to exist as hospitality in a practical sense. Robles lives his life detached from others, and in considering himself to be distinctly isolated from social and historical forces, he denies the aporia of hospitality, thus operating only according to conditional hospitality, and is ultimately unable to form meaningful relationships with those who are closest to him. Furthermore, his reverence for the influence of American capitalistic hegemony, and his battle cry “apresurar la marcha hacia el capitalismo” [to hasten the march towards capitalism] suggests that his self-worth is contingent upon his continued business success (328; 268).

Robles provides a brief synopsis of the history of Mexico’s rise to capitalism in his discussion with Ixca Cienfuegos, in which he names the contributions that Presidents Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) and Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) made to Mexico’s society. He explained that these men helped to nurture the conditions in which a market could flourish, expanded public works programs, and ended feudalism:

El capitalismo mexicano le debe gratitud a dos hombres: Calles y Cárdenas. El primero puso las bases. El segundo las desarrolló en vivo, creando la posibilidad de un amplio mercado interno. Aumentó los salarios, dio toda clase de garantías a la clase obrera, haciendo que se sintiera protegida y sin necesidad de armar borlotes, instaló definitivamente la política de gasto gubernamental en las obras públicas, aumentó los créditos, repartió las tierras y, en todos los ámbitos, logró desatar una vasta circulación de riqueza estancada. Éstos son los hechos vivos y permanentes. Su perniciosa demagogia me parece secundaria. Si Cárdenas no le imprime un carácter oficial al obrerismo, los gobiernos posteriores no hubieran podido trabajar en paz e incrementar de tal manera la producción nacional. Y, por sobre todas las cosas, con su política acabó Cárdenas con el feudalismo mexicano. Después de él, México podrá ser lo que se quiera, menos un país latifundista regido por una inútil plutocracia agraria (110).

Mexican capitalism is indebted to two men: Calles and Cárdenas. Calles laid the foundation. Cárdenas brought it to life by creating the possibility of a large internal market. He raised wages, gave labor every conceivable guarantee, protected workers so there was nothing for them to agitate about; he established once and for all the policy of Federal investment in public works; he broadened credit, broke up land holdings and on all levels tried to stimulate a vast circulation of stagnant wealth. Those were permanent accomplishments, still living. If Cárdenas hadn't given the labor movement an official character, administrations since would not have been able to work peacefully and increase national production. And above all, Cárdenas ended Mexican feudalism. Mexico might become anything, but never again a kingdom of great absentee landlord estates ruled by a perfectly useless agrarian plutocracy (89-90).

In "Diplomatic Weapons of the Weak: Mexican Policymaking during the U.S.-Mexican Agrarian Dispute" John J. Dwyer claims that after Cárdenas passed the Agrarian Code, which permitted the expropriation and redistribution of millions of acres of American-owned property to the peasant classes, a large-scale increase of agricultural production occurred, but the reversal of these reforms resulted in the return of land to capitalist entrepreneurs and the creation of large-scale private *haciendas* (375). Fuentes's novel reflects the widespread view that the presidencies of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946), Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958), strayed from the Revolutionary policies sought by president Cardenás (1934-1940). Rather than carry out the ideals envisioned by Cardenás in terms of economic development and support for social justice, these three presidents instead opted for capitalist development and stronger ties with the United States. We learn that Robles's wealth is the partial result of this reversal of President Lázaro Cárdenas' land reforms, in which he admits to Cienfuegos that after the Revolution, "they" had to compromise rather than continuing to adhere to political ideals (141-142; 86). Robles's complacency with his prosperity and his complicity in reinstating the monopolization of landholding in Mexico mirrors the attitude shared among elite landholders in Mexico following the Revolution. Hence,

Robles's unapologetic adherence to the "compromises" made in the name of capitalism following the Revolution reveals that he indeed embodies the hegemonic masculine model of this era of Mexican history, characterized by his active participation in the political decisions which ensure the dominance of wealthy magnates like himself who occupy the top tier of the patriarchal order.

Next, Fuentes's characterization of Zamacona criticizes the idea that hard work and self-reliance are constitutive elements in the hegemonic paradigm of masculinity that Robles associates with the United States, as well as with his own power. Throughout the novel, Fuentes reveals his personal political beliefs through the conversations shared among Zamacona, Ixca, and Robles. He intimates that the pursuit of capitalism must be tempered by harkening to the conditions that led to the Revolution, and that the only way to prevent against the monopolization of wealth is to remain wary of capitalism's tendency to propound notions of "progress" in efforts to deny the impulse to erase the lessons of the past that serve as a reminder of the social reform objectives formerly sought in the Revolutionary fight for more equality. Zamacona states:

¿No resulta bastante contradictorio que en el momento en que vemos muy claramente que el capitalismo ha cumplido su ciclo vital y subsiste apenas en una especie de hinchazón ficticia, nosotros iniciemos el camino hacia él? ¿No es evidente que todo el mundo busca fórmulas nuevas de convivencia moral y económica? ¿No es igualmente claro que nosotros podríamos colaborar en esa búsqueda? (331-332)

Isn't it rather a contradiction that we should be striving toward capitalism just when we observe that capitalism has lost all vitality and hangs on only as a kind of fictitious vanity? Isn't it clear that all the world is searching for new moral and economic formulas? Isn't it just as clear that we could be taking part in the search? (219)

Fuentes's portrayal of two different male characters bound only by their mysterious filial relation is a testament to his complex vision of a Mexico that considers multiple aspects

with regard to its national identity, history, and masculinity. Zamacona's views echo the author's philosophy to a certain degree, but his practical sensibilities are obscured by his utopian hopes. Thus, Fuentes's insistence on revealing the underlying hypocrisies and pretensions of the elite strata of Mexico's businessmen calls upon us to consider a revised notion of masculinity that remedies the oppressive forms of hegemony by invoking the intertwined nature of history and the present. Zamacona tells Robles:

“¿Pero qué vamos a hacer cuando todo el poder real emanado de la Revolución se ha entregado, voluptuosamente, a las cosquillas de un cresohedonismo sin paralelo en México? Éste es el problema, el poder real. Pues nunca este poder real del hombre ha sido tan grande y, a la vez, tan desprovisto de valor para el hombre (73).

[But what can we do when the Revolution gives itself over voluptuously to the tickling of a hedonism unprecedented in Mexico? This is the problem: real power. While real power has never been so great, at the same time it has never been so unproductive of human values. This is the problem: real power. While real power has never been so great, at the same time it has never been so unproductive of human values] (48).

Zamacona struggles to fathom a reality capable of reconciling individual greed with humanitarian values, and he reminds his father that the changes that were unleashed by the Revolution were often adopted for self-serving ends. Similarly, the capitalistic political structure of the United States, Zamacona warns us, is liable to become paralyzed in the same fashion as the Revolution, which will inevitably lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a select few if it is not tempered by economic liberal socialism.

However, Zamacona still refuses to accept the reality of Mexico's turn towards capitalism and remains paralyzed by his idealism. This paralysis ultimately brings about his demise. Zamacona wants to remain at the threshold of hospitality in which both the host and the guest remain at the proverbial “door”, so that neither party is faced with the practical obligation to act. Thus, while Zamacona's philosophical leanings are often

couched in beautiful poetry, his inability to conjure up practical solution keeps him subordinated to the margins of society, in which his mind endlessly toils in turbulent imaginings of meaningless creation. Zamacona declares at one point that “La Revolución nos descubre la totalidad de la historia de México” [The Revolution reveals the entire history of Mexico] an avowal that Maarten van Delden affirms in *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity* exactly replicates statements Fuentes has himself said in the past (271; 219). Nonetheless, the reformulated notion of masculinity that accords with Fuentes’s portrayal of Zamacona characterizes the marginalized man who can successfully contend with hegemonic dominance as one who regards the open-endedness of Mexico’s many pasts as valuable in informing one’s actions in the present. More specifically, a formulation of masculinity capable of withstanding the instability of social upheaval caused by modern economic shifts is situated in informed, practical action, in which one’s respectful regard for Mexico’s many pasts and its diverse peoples can force one to remain cognizant of humanitarian values in his personal pursuit of financial prosperity.

The patriarchal model of inheritance plays a significant role in the formulation of masculine behavioral expectations in Fuentes’s characterization of Mexico both during and following the Revolution. We can consider Emmanuel Lévinas’ philosophy on the uniqueness of the filial relationship as that which transcends dynamics of power on the basis of the relationship between father and child. Lévinas explains in *Éthique et Infini: dialogues avec Philippe Nemo* that filiality, that non-symmetrical relation which characterizes the primordial dynamic with the other means that « je suis responsable d'une responsabilité totale, qui répond de toutes les autres et de tout chez les autres,

même de leur responsabilité. Le moi a toujours une responsabilité de plus que tous les autres » [I am responsible for a total liability that meets all other and all in others, even their responsibility. The self always has more responsibility than any other (*Translation mine*)] (105; 98-99). Thus, the father-child relationship is mysterious, since it is a relationship with the radically Other that is still in some way the same as me (74; 69). In other words, inscribed in the father's ego is an alterity that both is and is not constitutive of him, but is nevertheless not his possession or his property. In this way, the father remains intimately invested in the possibility of the Other, (his son) who is an extension of his own possibility. Such a relation implies that the father is primordially occupied with trying to escape the closure of his own identity and what has been bestowed onto him, but that he is also obliged to the persistent forsaking of that which, at the same time, is not his to claim. Lévinas's conception of paternity therein lies in acknowledging the relationship with someone who is at once wholly intertwined, yet totally independent of the father, which inevitably renders the father a familiar stranger whose existence is always already plural, exterior, foreign, and intimately close. Therefore, the fundamental intimacy of this paternal relationship is unavoidable, even in the absence of the father's immediate presence. However, in Fuentes's novels, the phantom of the father, whether he is known or not, haunts his progeny with his legacy and his accompanying expectations. The legacy of patriarchal inheritance as concerns wealth and reputation greatly affects how the sons of Señor Miranda in *Gringo viejo* and Manuel Zamacona and Rodrigo Gervasio in *La región más transparente del aire* orient their own behavior in relation to their fathers' legacies.

Ambrose Bierce carries the weight of his father's disreputable legacy with him as he ventures across the dusty desert expanses of northern Mexico. Bierce holds his own father, a former Southern Confederate soldier, in contempt for having fought successfully on the wrong side of history. Escaping this shameful legacy proves impossible when the Old Gringo situates himself in the center of an amateur exchange of gunfire between the *Federales* and the revolutionaries and becomes self-indulgently deranged upon imagining himself both *as* his father, and as following in his father's shameful footsteps:

Todos corrieron hasta él para que parara, para felicitarlo, sacudiéndose la tierra y las espinas del pecho, pero él continuaba disparando a lo alto y al aire, sin atender el clamor de sus camaradas que no podían saber que aquí se estaba volviendo realidad fantasmal un cuento en que él era un vigía del ejército unionista que se queda dormido un minuto y es despertado al siguiente por una voz ronca escuchada por mortales: la voz de su padre sureño, montado en un caballo blanco en lo alto de una peña: —Haz tu deber, hijo (60).

[Everyone ran to the old gringo, to stop him, to congratulate him...but he was still firing toward the cliff, toward the sky, oblivious to the shouting of his comrades, who could not know that for him a story was becoming a ghostly reality, a story in which he was a Union Army lookout who had fallen asleep for a minute and then was awakened by a voice never heard by mortal, the voice of his Southern father, riding a white horse along the ridge of a high cliff: Do what you conceive to be your duty, sir] (56).

The invocation of the phantasmal vision of the Old Gringo's father on the American Civil War battlefield arises from the immediacy of the Old Gringo's situation. The son of the war hero has inserted himself into an imagined memory that both is and is not his own. The Old Gringo is confronted with the contextual and temporal chasm that separates him from his father when he imagines that the elation he experiences in his solitary and courageous expedition across the Mexican battlefield parallels his father's. Bierce intimates that both men wage war against a people that are not their enemies; rather, their participation is based on the pretext of duty. However, the discordance between the

Old Gringo's awareness of his complete lack of national allegiance and his internal experience of glory forces him to see this pretext for what it really is. His fantasy reveals that his impetus to fight is simply an alternative form of the same narrative that led both him and his father to abandon their paternal responsibilities formally in the pursuit of self-interested glory. However, the weight of the paternal bond exceeds this fleeting parallel existence. The Old Gringo imagines Arroyo to be his own flesh and blood, since both men experience a paradoxical deep affinity for their father (father[s], in Arroyo's case) as well as a yearning to kill them. Although Fuentes's discussion of patricide remains vague, we can imagine that perhaps the impetus to eliminate the father stems from the desire to achieve independence from his influence. The Old Gringo muses over the pitiable fact that sons inevitably grow up and become men in their own right, as well as critical of the inauthenticity of their fathers:

Qué impalpable, pensó el gringo viejo esta madrugada, es la información que un padre hereda de todos sus padres y transmite a todos sus hijos: él creía saber esto mejor que muchos, dijo ahora en voz alta, sin saber o importarle que Arroyo le entendiera, tenía que decirlo, lo habían acusado de parricidio imaginario, pero no al nivel de un pueblo entero que vivía su historia como una serie de asesinatos de los padres viejos, ahora inservibles. No, él realmente sabía de lo que hablaba, incluso cuando tan rápidamente diagnosticó y etiquetó a Miss Winslow: él, el viejo, el juglar armado llegado al fin de su particular atadura humana, el hijo de un calvinista iluminado por el terror del infierno que también amaba la poesía de Byron y un día temió que su hijo lo matara mientras dormía, el hijo primero demasiado imaginativo y luego tan horrendamente desdeñoso de todo lo que la familia había heredado y prolongado naturalmente, la parsimonia, el ahorro, la fe, el amor hacia los padres, el sentido de la responsabilidad (84).

[The old gringo feared a similar fate: seeing the fate of his father; he was riding beside a son: Arroyo, the son of misfortune. How subtle the old gringo thought in that early hour, is the knowledge a father inherits from all his fathers and transmits to all his sons....He had been accused of fictional parenticide [patricide], but not at the level of an entire people who lived their history as a series of murders of old, no longer useful fathers...he, the old man, the bitter jester who had come to the end of his personal tether, the son of a hell-fire Calvinist who also loved Byron, and who one day feared his son would try to kill

him as he slept, this son, first overly imaginative and then hideously in contempt of everything the family had inherited and naturally hoped to prolong: parsimony, thrift, faith, love for one's parents, a sense of responsibility] (80).

The audience momentarily envisions the Old Gringo as a young man, whose criticism of his father for his radical piety and affection for the Romantic fuels his rage, which he directs at his father for his paradoxical nature as well as his unloving austerity. Certainly, this rage is likewise self-directed, for the Old Gringo understands all too well, especially upon comprehending the basis of his own fear, that his father's hypocrisies mirror his own. Hence, it seems that Fuentes's musings on the conflict that defines this filial relation is indicative of the psychological fragmentation seen in the Old Gringo's lapse in conscious reality. The motif of the inclination to patricide symbolizes the need to "kill" the fear-based absenteeism and reverse the status quo of paternal behavior that divides families. Fuentes's depiction of this motif across all racial and economic classes supports the idea of a radical re-centering of the filial bond, in which a strident commitment to one's family has the capacity to temper the very human tendency towards inconsistency, pride, and fear.

Finally, towards the end of the novel, the Old Gringo asks himself, "¿Cuál es el pretexto más hondo para amar?" [What is the strongest pretext for loving?], and then concludes,

Si es necesario, nuestra conciencia pulverizada inventa el amor, lo imagina o lo finge, pero no vive sin él porque en medio de la dispersión infinita, el amor, aunque sea pretextado, nos da la medida de nuestra pérdida. Llega el tiempo de renunciar incluso al pretexto y él lo escribió así: «El tiempo de largarse es cuando se han perdido una gran apuesta, la esperanza vana de un éxito posible, la fortaleza y el amor del juego (144).

[If it is necessary, our atomized consciousness invents love, imagines it or feigns it, but does not live without it, since in the midst of infinite dispersion, love, even if as a pretext, gives us the measure of our loss. The time comes to renounce even

the pretext, he had written, “The time to quit is when you have lost a big stake, your fool hope of eventual success, your fortitude, and your love of the game”] (140).

In the final hours of his life, the Old Gringo meditatively accepts his failings, and acknowledges that his fragmented consciousness clouded his ability to be totally self-aware up to this particular moment in time. He realizes that his aim to die a glorious, noble death was indeed the pretext for his coming to Mexico, and in fact, that this blinded him to the truth undergirding his final mission: to experience and act upon genuine paternal love for a child. Again, this corroborates the argument that Fuentes’s conception of an alternative, enduring form of masculinity must be based on actions that are conducted in the pursuit of truth and humility, and that will still persist in the event of loss.

Lévinas’s idea of the paternal relation as that which implies an exposure to and dependency upon the Other (the son), who simultaneously conceives of the father as wholly independent and utterly bound to him, means that the father-son relationship constitutes a foundation upon which all men form an idea of themselves and of the world they inhabit. As such, the importance of this filial bond implies that men can react to its certainty in a number of ways, via resistance, emulation, or acceptance. The tension between Mexico’s entrance into a new capitalist era and the legacy of the elite *mestizaje* and land-owning elites in *La región más transparente del aire* is situated in the ongoing dialogue between the former revolutionary, Gervasio Pola, and his son Rodrigo, which is mediated by Ixca Cienfuegos, the seemingly omniscient mediator and sage who ambles among the members of the various social classes. Gervasio and Rodrigo’s fraught relationship illuminates the irreconcilability of the men’s conception of masculine

responsibility, which is as much a product of the discrepancy between their generational expectations as it is their shared shame for their obligation to Rosenda, Gervasio's wife and Rodrigo's mother.

Similar to *Gringo viejo*, an analysis of the relationship between Rodrigo and Gervasio using Derrida's framework of hospitality allows us to consider the limitations of each man's perceived sense of agency in creating a legacy that accords with hegemonic notions of masculinity; a legacy of which he can be proud, as it is influenced or hindered by his filial responsibility and the spheres that he occupies. Each man strives to create a legacy in which his friends and family deem him important, powerful, and brave, but both fail to fulfill such a dream due in part to their neglect of others' needs – others whom are dependent on them for their own self-realization. This neglect stems from an inhospitable orientation to the Other, who, as guest, is only welcomed on the condition that he or she can facilitate his quest for subjectivity defined according to hegemonic masculine definitions. The predominant role that Ixca Cienfuegos plays in the novel is to serve as a guiding light that illuminates the contemptible limitations of all of the men's individual quests to assert their personal uniqueness while simultaneously neglecting their most precious familial duties. In the case of Rodrigo, his conversations with Ixca inevitably lead him to realize that his choices as an adult are shamefully reminiscent of the same decisions that led his father down a disgraceful path. He tells Rodrigo that the father is the “El clavo de dónde crucificarse: el clavo es siempre un hombre, mi padre” [The spike with which we crucify ourselves; the spike is always a man, my father] (94; 52). Thus, given both men's marginalized social status, Ixca subtly makes the argument upon stating that humble men who seek the glory and the prosperity of esteemed men

tend to fall short on account of the grave sacrifices that must be made in the midst of such pursuits.

Fuentes's portrayal of the internal dilemma that Gervasio Pola faces during his fight for the Zapatista cause plants the seeds for his son's existential crisis later in life. Gervasio's abandonment of his fellow comrades-in-arms is indicative of the detrimental consequences that arise when one refuses to occupy the roles of both guest and host in this subjective experience. After witnessing General Gabriel Hernandez get shot and killed by the *huertistas*, we learn that during the Revolution, Gervasio escaped from prison with three of his fellow revolutionaries and they head towards the nearest Zapatista camp. Gervasio proposes that they divide into two groups, and then perhaps go it alone: "Más vale que uno viva solo y no que los cuatro mueran juntos" [For us to die together isn't so important as that one of us not die] (85; 54). However, the others prefer to remain together and risk dying as a group. Gervasio believes – or at least – convinces himself – that he can only save the others if he accomplishes the escape alone. Thus, he is convicted in his belief that it is only through his individuality that he can relate to, and preserve, the collective. However, he ends up not only sacrificing the group, but also himself, when they are all caught, tried, and executed. Therefore, his decision to assume the role of host in which he decides for the rest, followed by his subsequent refusal to honor the group's decision, not only precludes the other three men from occupying any position other than guest, but renders all three of them are more vulnerable to the external climate.

In Gervasio's case, solitude signifies his awareness of his own isolation and mortality, but later when he is caught and learns that he will be executed, he cannot tolerate the thought of dying alone. He confesses the whereabouts of his comrades to the officer Felipe Zamacona, and they are subsequently executed together. Before they are shot, he murmurs to them, "Nos

salvamos juntos” [We saved ourselves together] and they defiantly face death while holding hands. Finally, Gervasio closes his eyes in a final gesture of mercy upon seeing that “vio los ojos de sus compañeros, y sintió que por ellos se aparecía primero la muerte, y cerró los suyos para que la vida no se le fuera antes de tiempo” [death had appeared to them first [he] closed his own eyes so that life would not leave him before its time] (93; 62).

Ultimately, Gervasio realizes the impossibility of his own survival, yet even his selfish attempt to seek comfort through solidarity with others fails to resolve his existential suffering. Gervasio’s betrayal of his comrades in each of these moments indicates his vain refusal to share in the suffering of the others, and his death signifies that neither self-resilience nor self-sacrifice can result in Gervasio’s solitary salvation. Furthermore, Gervasio is well aware of what it means to be a noble warrior, but his paralyzing fear of dying alone renders his self-deception highly dangerous. He redoubles his efforts to rationalize his fear by convincing himself that it is more honorable and less risky to involve others in his poorly planned escape scheme. Similar to his son, Gervasio believes that a man’s worth is judged by actions that reflect upon his family, but which are based on archaic and unrealistic notions of glory that are informed by hegemonic masculine conceptions.

The details surrounding Gervasio’s death have left a black mark on Rosenda’s memory of him, and her anger with him for pursuing revolutionary ideals and for not seeking a means of living that would have spared them from poverty and her from destitute widowhood is interpreted as sublimely selfish and akin to abandonment. She vows that she cannot forgive him, and she laments “no me diste ni tu amor, ni las pocas cosas necesarias para vivir a gusto” [you gave me neither your love nor the little I would need to live comfortably] (275; 181). However,

she vows that she will not raise her son without knowing the truth about his father, and about the ideals for which he fought.

[Le diré] que no hay triunfos ni derrotas en este que no hay triunfos ni derrotas en este país, que no hay memoria para el paso de los hombres sobre esta tierra, que todos fueron y serán fantasmas antes de nacer, sin proponérselo, porque sólo los fantasmas rondan en la verdadera vida de México, y ellos traen sus batallas muy hechas, muy sólidas, para que sean reales nuestros ejercicios de polvo, nuestras individualidades aplastadas por esa otra batalla permanente de fantasmas y sus luchas que no se han resuelto: dígaselo así (275).

[[I will tell him] that there are neither victories nor defeats in this country, that no man can leave the print of his foot upon this land, that all have been and all shall be, without intending it, ghosts before birth, because in the heart of Mexico's hearts only ghosts walk, only they carry battles well fought; our gymnastics in the dust are a struggle which has no resolution: tell him that] (182).

Still, Rosenda aims to sow the seeds for a better life for her son, in which the truth will serve as the crumb path that Rodrigo must avoid in order to become as victorious as the men that she hoped to find in her husband. She declares that she will educate him and teach him “le enseñaré a buscar a los poderosos y a ser sumiso con ellos, para que no me lo vayan a matar junto a un paredón como a ti y él sepa darle un vida normal a la mujer que escoja y esté presente en el alumbramiento de su hijo...” [search out the mighty and submit himself to them so that they will not assassinate him against walls, and he will learn to give normal life to the woman he will choose and to be beside her at the birth of his son ...] (275; 182). From Rosenda's vantage point in life, Gervasio's neglect of his basic paternal and marital responsibilities constitutes the worst of all sins that a man can commit, which results in her conflation of the pursuit of comfort with masculine responsibility. We can surmise that had Gervasio not abandoned them to participate and perish in the war, she would likely not be as quick to equate prosperity with familial duty. Nevertheless, Gervasio's shameful legacy is not lost upon his son, who is told about it by his mother, when she scornfully reveals the history of his father's cowardice to Rodrigo.

However, Rodrigo believes himself to be the continuation of his father, whereas he views himself as wildly different from his mother, both in terms of his dreams and his temperament. Rodrigo regrets that he is not privy to his father's line of honorable action, and feels smothered by his mother's co-dependency on his validation of her, which thus becomes the impetus for his rebellion. Rosenda laments that Gervasio neither summoned her to witness his honorable fight, nor invited her to share in his death, and she becomes even more destitute upon realizing that like his father, Rodrigo also does not wish to share his life with her. Both father and son become men in their own right, but at her expense, despite her vain attempts to keep Rodrigo close.

Rodrigo has convinced himself that he is a victim of his mother's manipulation, and his self-deluding denial of the pain that he endured as a result of this broken maternal tie nonetheless affords him solace. He accuses his mother of refusing explicitly to invite him, her own son, into her home, and declines to delve further into any possible reasons that may have prevented her from ushering him back home. Rodrigo is only able to accept that he was orphaned upon denying accountability in his own complicity in being unconditionally unwelcoming. Thus, Rodrigo's inhospitality towards Rosenda in turn closes off the future, and, in Derridean terms, renders his relationship with his mother void, which for her, is akin to death.

Whereas Rosenda conceives of an easy life for Rodrigo as that which can protect them both, Rodrigo scorns the idea that self-realization can be achieved by fulfilling someone else's dreams. Thus, he too abandons his mother and pursues a career as a poet, but eventually becomes frustrated and forgoes his dreams in favor of becoming a successful screenwriter, but which has been possible not by his creative brilliance, but

due to his mastery of a simple formula. In short, he becomes a hack writer, and allows himself to substitute ill-begotten prosperity for torturous authenticity.

Rodrigo and his mother go eleven years without seeing each other, so that when he does return home, he becomes nearly deranged and experiences delusions at the threshold of his original home. He realizes that upon facing her, she too, will realize he is a fraud, for despite having the money to support them, his abandonment of her renders him worse than his father. Thus, in his caricature of the similarities between father and son, Fuentes depicts masculinity as that which is defined by members of both sexes, and which requires everyone to do his or her part to nurture its manifestations. For instance, after Rosenda dies, Ixca passes by her corpse and equates Rosenda's unrelenting demands to Mexico City, which he imagines transforms into a "en una vasta placenta hinchada de fusilamientos y amor exigido e indiferencia personal y sacrificios gratuitos" [great placenta, swollen with firing-squad volleys and by demanding love and unasked-for sacrifices and indifference] (284; 189). Ixca alludes to the idea that those who uphold the expectations of masculinity must too be held accountable for affirming that which it offers and nurtures. Nonetheless, the difference between self-affirmed duty and obligation illuminates the impasse that exists between Rosenda's expectations of the men in her life and her men's expectations of themselves.

This impasse can only be reconciled, at least theoretically, by considering Ixca's discussions with Rodrigo. Ixca asks Rodrigo if the purpose of life is to fulfill its creator, but to do so through enormous sacrifices, or whether the purpose can be defined as a passive compromise. Rodrigo is confused by his question, and initially thinks that his father achieved both – living for his family and fighting for the Revolution. However,

Ixca clarifies his question by alluding to the Aztec god Nanahuatzin, who became the sun without fear of sacrifice:

—Fue un leproso... un leproso, sí, el que se arrojó al brasero de la creación original para alimentarlo. Renació convertido en astro. Un astro inmóvil. En que un solo sacrificio, así fuera ejemplar, no bastaba. Era preciso un sacrificio diario, un alimento diario para que el sol iluminara, corriera y alimentara a su vez. No, no veo un solo Dios ni un sacrificio aislado. Veo al Sol y a la Lluvia en la cima de la Ciudad. Veo los elementos visibles e inmediatos, copulados sin intermedio a la vida de cada hombre. Veo las pruebas fehacientes —sol, lluvia— de un poder superior, y sobre la tierra mi delgada pared de hueso y carne. Ésta es la zona del encuentro. Más arriba, los Dioses puros. Más abajo, los restos de nuestras vidas, escondidas a los ojos temerosos. Nada más. ¿Tú que quieres? (310-311).

[It was a leper, yes, a leper, who first leaped into the brazier of original creation in order to feed that flame. He was reborn, changed into a star. A motionless star. One sacrifice by itself, even one like that, isn't enough. One sacrifice by itself, even one like that, isn't enough. Daily sacrifice is needed, daily feeding so that the sun will give light, and in turn feed us. No, I don't see one God, nor isolated sacrifice. I see the sun and rain. I see visible and immediate things joined without intermediary to every man's life. I see true proofs, sun and rain, of higher power, and on the earth I see my thin reed of flesh and bone. This is where we meet. Higher, the gods. Lower, the remnants of life, hidden in frightened eyes. That is all. Which do you want?] (206).

Hence, it seems that Ixca's allusion to the Aztecs suggests that to achieve glory without fear of sacrifice is a possibility provided only to deities – to do so as a simple human is inconceivable. What *is* possible, however, is not to think of life as only possible as one of two extremes. For mere mortals, Ixca suggests, the real purpose of life is to achieve balance in steadily pursuing those desires that nurture the soul, while still sacrificing oneself every day for the sake of the harmonious cycle of creation. In Gervasio's case, he indeed sacrificed on account of having no options available to him other than to fight for a better life for him and his family. After this speech, Rodrigo makes peace with his father's life because he sees that his father had no other options. Rodrigo thereafter describes his own failings, and Ixca says that because Rodrigo neither sacrificed nor

renounced fame, love, or extend a hand of generosity, he thereby lived and operated in half measures, and consequently brought his diminished value of life onto himself.

Rodrigo confesses that had he given his mother his word, perhaps they could have brought back his father.

Thus, Ixca's lesson to Rodrigo suggests that masculine responsibility differs for those who have different opportunities available to them. In Rodrigo's case, the privilege of his birth affords him a chance to be a self-realized man in terms of his poetry, but to do so, he would have had to sacrifice the other elements of his life altogether; which he does not do. Instead, he makes weak promises and fails to channel his energies into pursuing his truest ambitions. This seems to be a meditation on the irreconcilability of love and fame, but ultimately a condemnation of the pursuit of the latter.

Hence, the inclination to patricide and the neglect of one's paternal duties are symptoms that arise in the sons of fathers whose vain pursuits of glory achieved by demonstrating hegemonic forms of masculinity manifest in problematic ways for the sons. This seems to be especially true for men who belong to subordinate social classes as their ability to respond in kind to their father's legacy, whether in the form of emulation or rebellion, leaves them coming up short. Therefore, we should consider Bierce, Arroyo, and Rodrigo as negative examples of the consequences of failing to imagine and display alternative types of masculine behavior that are comprised in the realm of possibility for such men.

Conclusion

Examining the portrayal of masculinity in Fuentes's works from the lens of Derrida's conception of hospitality and Lévinas's rendering of the masculine filial relation enables us to critique reigning notions of hegemonic masculinity in Mexico during the twentieth century. Because Mexico has undergone such drastic social and economic changes in less than a century, it is necessary to consider how such shifts have affected the backbone of Mexican society – specifically, its familial relations and gender expectations. Men who are members of marginalized populations are often obstructed from obtaining spiritual freedom as a consequence of their economic limitations, and as a result, the construction of the male self in such a population must be considered in terms of how history has shaped the world in which he lives. Fuentes's treatment of masculinity is convoluted, in that seemingly few, if any of his characters, are depicted as fully self-realized. What is the reason for this? It seems as if the marginalized man's failure to achieve self-realization and spiritual freedom in his works is a commentary on the limited scope of staid, if not archaic, conceptions of masculinity, especially definitions that are based on those which characterize hegemonic populations and societies.

A thorough examination of how the Revolution and modern capitalism have affected the paternal legacies and masculine gender dynamics across the country can illuminate the patterns of behavior and value systems that have remained intact despite widespread hardship and conflict. If hegemonic masculinity is embodied in oligarchs, authoritarian leaders, businessmen, and the United States, then Fuentes's portrayal of his characters, juxtaposed with his characterizations of men who live and operate in the margins of society, calls upon us to explore different conceptions of masculinity, for in

doing so, it is possible to better understand broader social phenomena, as well as historical forces that have ensnared these marginalized populations of men in a web of frustration, self-doubt, and stagnation.

Alternative forms of masculinity can be considered positive according to the degree in which those who embody them align with Derrida's idea of unconditional hospitality. Negative masculine patterns of behavior displayed by men are determined as such according to their inhospitable nature. Derrida's framework is useful because it allows us to draw a link responsibility and time in order to analyze how shifts in the masculine hegemonic order affect the status quo and alter notions of responsibility. The way in which the male characters' particular social positions enable them to extend unconditional hospitality illuminates the social conditions that have led to patterns of hegemonic and marginalized masculinity. In sum, inhospitable behavior is reflective of socioeconomic truths. Although Derrida posits that humans are ontologically obliged to be hospitable, the conscious refusal or failure to do so is indicative of one's place in the hegemonic order, since one's ability to choose fully implies that he occupies a privileged and dominant social position.

III.3 Dismantling the Rebuilding: Ernest Gaines and Black Subjectivity

Men are so constituted that they derive their own possibilities largely from the estimate formed of them by others. If nothing is expected of a people, that people will find it difficult to contradict that expectation.
Frederick Douglass

Ernest Gaines's narratives expose the mystical foundation of law while simultaneously reiterating the pertinence of racial history in the United States to the configuration of black masculine subjectivity. In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004), bell hooks attributes black male pain and powerlessness to the impossibility of realizing the unattainable ideal of patriarchal masculinity. She contends that in order to offer meaningful alternatives of masculinity to black males, it is necessary to identify feasible strategies of resistance (xv). In his works, Gaines redefines black masculine subjectivity by challenging conventional white American-centric conceptions of manhood that have been founded upon notions of wealth, land ownership, paternal inheritance, freedom, and democracy. He accomplishes this by examining the black male psyche from emotional and psychological perspectives to illustrate the complicated internal discourse with which black men privately grapple in their daily interactions with the white patriarchal order. This chapter examines how Gaines's novels present a formulation of black masculinity characterized in terms of the black man's perception of his potential for self-mastery and the actions he takes towards achieving it. According to Gaines, masculine selfhood necessitates that one take responsibility by transcending expectations and assuming responsibility for the entire community.

In "Re-(W)righting Black Male Subjectivity: The Communal Poetics of Ernest Gaines's "A Gathering of Old Men", Keith Clark discusses how Gaines's refusal to

portray a central character in both *A Lesson Before Dying* and *A Gathering of Old Men* represents black male subjectivity as a process that is multiple, fluid, and in a perpetual state of becoming (76). Gaines's depiction of the psychological and emotional processes that the characters undergo enables him to demonstrate how black male subjectivity is the product of complex cognitive acrobatics that avoid adhering to conventional white capitalist supremacist patriarchal conceptions of masculinity founded upon notions of freedom and democracy. The author accomplishes this by depicting scenarios in which the direct individual loss or sacrifice that his black protagonist(s) might suffer as a consequence of *not responding to* a certain situation can be deemed equivalent to the consequences, understood both in terms of spiritual and physical risks, that one might face if he *does choose to respond* to the same situation. Gaines's intricate portrayal of the multiple processes that his protagonists undergo prior to making momentous decisions enable them to assert their defiance of the existing white paternal social order. Ultimately, his protagonists succeed in subverting the paternalistic code to various degrees by choosing to take grave risks in challenging the political foundations that sustain black oppression and by empowering the members within their community to redefine strength and resilience in their own terms.

Patriarchal masculinity in the United States has historically prevented black males from having access to socially acceptable positions of power and dominance because they have been obliged to base legitimate notions of manhood on white patriarchal manhood as defined by the patriarchal order. Sociologist Michael Kimmel explains in *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities* that white patriarchal manhood in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century has evolved

to take on new meanings today. He focuses predominantly on white masculinity, and claims that “manhood” was nearly synonymous with “adulthood”, and that “to be manly was to accept adult responsibilities as provider, producer, and protector of a family” (38). He further explains that white landowning men were considered part of the elite, gentrified class, and in which manhood was characterized by paternal responsibility, property ownership, and the possession of wealth embodied hegemonic masculinities. By contrast, Kimmel asserts that men who occupied the class of laborers expressed their masculinity through physical strength and aptitude in their craft. According to Connell’s model of gender hierarchy, both classifications of white men – those of the landed elite and the general labor class – exhibited positive, albeit different, masculine traits. The laborer classes fall into the complicit masculinities category, since such men “accept and participate in the system of hegemonic masculinity” and enjoy and take pleasure in the material, physical and symbolic benefits of the patriarchal order (Levy 254).

Furthermore, Kimmel explains that the rise of capitalism during the early part of the 1800s displaced antiquated conceptions of masculinity with a notion of manhood that was predicated on traditional idealized models defined according to individualism, self-determination and economic power. This hegemonic model of masculinity remained relatively unchanged until the 1960s, when the United States’s global economic status fell under intense public scrutiny during the feminist and Civil Rights movements, the nation’s highly contentious involvement in the Vietnam War, and an increasingly growing distrust between the public and the nation’s political leaders. With late 1960s capitalism came the collapse of not only a gender system conceived in terms of patriarchal superiority of men over women, but also an end to certain institutions such as

American legalized segregation in the United States. Unfortunately, the injustices resulting from both capitalism and the gender system are still all too prevalent. While Kimmel concedes that specific conceptions of “manhood” during this period were firmly embedded in the class strata, and that this strata is undeniably intertwined with race, Kimmel’s work offers an incomplete rendering of black masculinity in the United States as it pertains to notions of hegemony.

As a result of the inadequacies of Kimmel’s analysis, therefore, we turn to bell hooks’s discussion of patriarchal manhood in America in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* to understand how the economic and political dynamics of the United States South during the middle and latter part of the twentieth century have affected – and continue to affect today – the constitution of the African-American male self. hooks provides a more nuanced conception of the idea of patriarchy in her work on the formation of black hegemonic masculinity in the United States. Specifically, she argues that the values associated with what she terms “imperialist white-supremacist patriarchy”, or the particular type of patriarchy that structures society in the United States, can be described as “the embrace of capitalism, the support of patriarchal violence, the conservative approach to gender roles, and the call to liberal individualism” (*We Real Cool* 151). Furthermore, she argues that “black males who fully embrace the patriarchy will always be wedded to self-destructive behaviors, will always court death” (158).

In particular, hooks contends that for black males, because there is no freedom in the model of domination in masculinity or in human relationships, we need to pay particular attention to how black men’s history of exclusion from the reigning white hegemonic order has been and remains particularly damaging to the black male psyche

(66). The marginalization, racism, and lack of opportunities that have historically plagued black men as a result of what hooks's refers to as "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" reinforces the "pathological narcissism that keeps many black men trapped by their identification with being a victim" (99-100). Given its 2004 publication date, hooks's conception of the victimization that plagues black men refers to a particular moment in American society that differs from the 1940s setting of *A Lesson Before Dying* and the 1970s setting of *A Gathering of Old Men*. In an interview held between Gaines and Elsa Saeta and Izora Skinner in *Conversations with Ernest Gaines*, Gaines explains that although he does not explicitly "show the racism and prejudice" in his works, he refers to his short story "The Sky is Gray", which is also set in the 1940s, to describe the setting of that time in the Deep South:

...the people can't go into certain places. There's a wall there, they cannot enter the place to have a drink of water or to eat or to even get warm, because they're cold outside. So the thing [that casts the shadow] is there without your having to have all the other overt obstacles there. The thing is there, that wall is there, that law that has been written thirty is still there. So that when you say slavery ended one hundred thirty years ago, that wall is still here, that law is still there, although many things have broken down since the 1940s [...] but there are many of those walls that are still there, invisible walls to most people, but they're still there (258).

Similar to *A Lesson Before Dying*, the palpable oppressiveness of segregation permeates as well as orders the entire town of Bayonne, despite the fact that the physical apparatus of slavery has long been eradicated.

Despite the thirty-year difference between the settings of the two novels, the characterization of black masculinity in both novels portrays men whose struggle to achieve selfhood is less the product of a victim complex and has much more to do with the real threat posed to them if they dared to defy the white patriarchal order.

The gender value system that supports patterns of hegemonic masculinity in Gaines's works characterizes the groups of people who comprise the neo-slavery sharecropping system in rural Louisiana, in which the white land-owning bourgeoisie class is distinguished from the less wealthy white Cajun farming class, the latter which often uses coercion and possesses bigoted racist attitudes, and which remains preoccupied with distinguishing themselves from the members of the black community who live in the former slave Quarters. The differences in the configuration of gender in the 1940s compared to the 1970s in the Deep South are slight but notable in Gaines's two novels. The forces at work that shape gender dynamics in Louisiana during these periods define hegemonic masculinity according to social and economic power over others on account of one's race, family name, and relation to the white plantation owners. The difference in the conditions that determine the masculine parameters of Gaines's characters is situated in the different historical setting of the two novels; namely, the fact that *A Lesson Before Dying* takes place prior to the changes that affected racial dynamics in the South after the Civil Rights Movement. However, one must always remain cognizant of the racial distinctions that order the social dynamic within the black community in Gaines's Louisiana.

Crisis tendencies refer to changes in the perceived stability of the existing gender order. The historical moment lived by the old men in *A Gathering of Old Men* and by Grant in *A Lesson Before Dying* creates a desire to both emulate and reject the repressive masculinity that the plantation and the white ruling order represents. In *Masculinities* (1995), Connell defines marginalized men as those who are incapable of fitting into the mold of hegemonic masculinity due to one or several demographic identifiers, including

their race, ethnicity, or nationality (76; 80-81). Men in marginalized populations who are unable to exhibit hegemonic masculinities often lack, or are prevented from expressing, the agency that is necessary to affirm their autonomy. In Gaines's Louisiana, race and the nuances of skin color that constitutes the racial stratification of society take on new connotations as challenges to the existing racial power dynamic reshape the social fabric. Specifically, legalized racial segregation has firmly established the relationship between gender and race, which has shaped a national discourse that has dictated different gender roles for men of different races throughout history.

Although *A Gathering of Old Men* portrays the limited agency afforded black men following the reversal of Jim Crow laws and segregation, the protagonists in both novels avoid exhibiting what hooks refers to as “constructive resistance” until the stakes are raised high enough that the men reach their breaking points. hooks defines constructive resistance as that which “names the problems, affirms the ways folks are victimized and hurt, while also mapping strategies for healing” (*We Real Cool* 99). In each novel, the “breaking point” takes the shape of the punishment of a peer. However, inscribed in this novel's punishment is the threat that the black community will forever be forced to submit to a tacit policy of white supremacy. Thus, Ernest Gaines's portrayal of black masculinity in *A Lesson Before Dying* and *A Gathering of Old Men* offers a more positive outlook on the legacy of struggle characteristic of black men in the American South than that which hooks proposes. While Gaines depicts the realities of racism and oppression in the sharecropping societies of Southern Louisiana, his male protagonists give one the impression that rather than possessing such a “pathological narcissism” that functions to maintain their subordination, Grant Wiggins, Jefferson, and the group of old men develop

strategies of resistance to the white hegemonic patriarchal order in which they decide to act only when the spiritual survival of their communities is threatened.

It is possible to gauge how hooks's appeal for constructive resistance as a solution to dismantling white patriarchy is mirrored in Ernest Gaines's novels; however, we must remain cognizant of the real fact of the historical context in which Gaines's protagonists resist the patriarchy. If we accept hooks's conception of constructive resistance as the foundation upon which we can erect a revised formulation of Southern black masculinity that can be considered in its own right, separate from the impulse to relate such alternative notions of manhood directly to the white hegemonic patriarchal model, then it is imperative to nuance hooks's appeal for constructive resistance. In order to do this, it is first necessary to acknowledge the lasting and endemic consequences that Jim Crow laws have had and continue to have on the black masculine psyche in terms of self-confidence, fear, and trust of one's self and others. We must then turn to Gaines's works to identify his portrayal of "strategies for healing" that take into account the particular historical moment that his protagonists negotiate. Upon doing so, it will then be possible to conceive of a Southern black model for masculinity that is flexible and fluid, and which describes how men, regardless of the era in which they live, can work to destabilize the mythical community that is founded on the myth of white superiority in order to achieve mental and spiritual liberation.

Nancy's conception of freedom as it is discussed in *L'Expérience de la liberté* supports hooks's claim that as long as the will to dominate others is present, there is no possibility of liberty (*We Real Cool* 66). As discussed in the second section of this project, the fact that existence is in and of itself freedom implies that freedom is given to

singularities by the self's exposition. If freedom is measured by a singularity's sharing of its being with others, then Nancy posits that justice, or "fraternity" is « l'égalité dans le partage de l'incommensurable » [the equality of sharing in the incommensurable] (77; 69-72). Nancy's idea of freedom frames our understanding of how social, political, and economic forces limit individuals and communities. Gaines's characters confront obstacles that are constructed and wielded by the white hegemonic patriarchy, which functions as a symbolic patriarchy, in order to resist any threats to the status quo that might disrupt the hierarchal order. Thus, his characters' freedom is ontologically limited by the white patriarchal order. Yet if we consider Derrida's idea of freedom as contingent on the imperative to act and sacrifice all other Others as he posits in *Donner la mort*, then we always return to the unavoidability of the community of Others that is comes about in this sacrifice. Thus, returning to hooks's argument that liberty is absent whenever the will to dominate others is present, we must assess how the white hegemonic patriarchy limits the freedom of Gaines's characters. However, rather than identify how Gaines redefines black masculine subjectivity in comparison with, or in contrast to, "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy", we can construct a revised formulation of black masculinity based on strategies employed by his male characters which challenge and expose the mythical constructs of the legal foundations that sustain oppression. Thus, the ontological limits of freedom according to Nancy and Derrida allow us to conceive of parameters by which the behaviors of Gaines's characters can be evaluated according to how they challenge the patriarchy while resisting the desire to emulate the dominating model of white patriarchal hegemonic masculinity. Ultimately, Gaines's formulation of

masculinity is the product of persistent, sundry, yet understated displays of courage that defy or challenge the existing social order.

A Lesson Before Dying

Gaines's novel is based on the real-life legal case of Willie Francis, a fifteen year-old black man who was sentenced to die in the electric chair in 1947 for the murder of St. Martinville, Louisiana pharmacy owner Andrew Thomas. In Gilbert King's *The Execution of Willie Francis: Race, Murder and the Search for Justice in the American South* (2008), he explains that Francis suffered a botched execution in Louisiana's traveling electric chair "Gruesome Gertie", and was forced to approach the same chair a year later in St. Martinville, Louisiana. Francis was successfully executed the second time. Similar to the storyline in Gaines's novel, King tells how Francis did not take a stand at his own trial, but did write a pamphlet called *My Trip to the Chair*, in which "Willie purported to have described, in his own words, the events leading up to, during, and just after he survived his own execution" (xi). He concludes the pamphlet by writing, "Mr. Montgomery [who wrote the pamphlet] says that in writing this I may have helped someone, somehow. I hope so" (16). Similarly, in *A Lesson Before Dying*, Jefferson's journal elucidates for several of the men in Bayonne certain universal truths concerning humanity and humility. Taking liberties with the details of the actual story of Willie Francis, Gaines's novel illuminates the endemic injustices that inhabited the judicial system in the Deep South during the mid-twentieth century.

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, although Jefferson and Grant Wiggins belong to the same social class, they are exposed to different experiences as they grow into young men.

Grant's college experience drastically contrasts with the lack of opportunities that have been presented to Jefferson, but despite the trouble in which Jefferson finds himself, the fact of Grant's skin color proves as problematic for his perception of self as it is for Jefferson. Grant returns to his hometown and discovers that what he has learned in college does not guarantee an equal place in the white male hegemony; thus, his marginality excludes him from the patriarchal order, despite his personal achievements. In fact, his apparent intelligence seems to be more hurtful than helpful most of the time, as his mannerisms and speech are deemed impudent when he makes a visit to the Sheriff's house to request permission to visit Jefferson. Although Grant uses his education to set himself apart from the rest of Bayonne's black citizens, his marginalization prevents him from experiencing the same realities and privileges as those enjoyed by white men. In order to contend with the white hegemonic patriarchal order, he is forced to comply with the behavioral expectations set by the patriarchy by feigning dumb subservience to the white men in charge of Jefferson's surveillance. Although Grant is aware of the mechanisms that are employed to sustain the myth of white supremacy, he realizes that he must orient his actions to appear that he complies with this myth or else risk grave consequences. Both Grant and Jefferson's marginalization prevents them from accessing the very system that determines their potential and dictates their fate.

Aunt Emma regards Grant's college degree as proof that Grant has the rhetorical tools needed to convince Jefferson of his manhood, a task that Jefferson's aunt seems to deem out of the realm of possibility for anyone else in the town. Her association of a college education with the ability to effectively "teach" Jefferson such a complex lesson

is a testament to her own belief in the power of education to change social realities. However, Aunt Emma might be more cognizant of Grant's potential to reach Jefferson than it seems. Perhaps, the fact that she calls upon both Reverend Ambrose and Grant to assist in Jefferson's counsel is indicative of her own past experience, which has taught her about the limitations of the capacity of religious faith alone to heal matters of the psyche. Jefferson's failure to avoid getting into trouble has neither been remedied by religion, nor has he ever been privy to the influential power of a masculine role model. Hence, Aunt Emma's actions are informed by her own history, which inspires her to take an ironic "leap of faith" beyond her religious faith.

Grant's circumstances and dependency on his aunt force him to choose between self-control or homelessness. Thus, he is obliged to meet with Jefferson, which initially makes him angry. However, as Grant begins to witness and awakening in Jefferson, and this forces him to reflect on his own responsibility as a teacher. His own perceived lack of self-worth is taken out in anger out on his students when he witnesses their enjoyment one day as they chop wood for the schoolhouse's fire. Their glee seems to reinforce the cynical perspective of his own former teacher, Matthew Antoine, who once told Grant that like their fathers, the purpose of education is futile in elevating them out of poverty.

The psychosis of rage, hooks explains, can be understood as a compensation for depression: "Black males who feel powerless, who feel as though they are not able to bring any level of meaningful purpose to their lives, are often depressed. That depression may be the outcome of unreconciled grief." (97). As a consequence of this avoidance of intimate human relationships, Grant has closed himself off to developing into a fully realized man. Thus, when he does begin to accept that he has a reputation and a role to

play in his community, he begins to form authentic relationships with people around him, and inevitably is able to convince Jefferson of his own humanity. Derrida discusses the need to be cautious of the idea of community, because they tend to reduce the incommensurable alterity of the Other by thinking it according to the same. However, in *Papier Machine* (2001), Derrida's discussion of the absolute secret describes that which is inaccessible in the Other, in which « une singularité est par essence au secret » [a singularity is of its nature in secret] (397; 162). The secret of the Other is what Derrida asserts constitutes the condition of responsibility, for it is in the respect of the alterity of the Other that one can avoid totalitarian thinking.

In Derridean terms, Grant's refusal to bond with others is the result of the selfish behavior that stems from his troubled sense of self. He initially reduces all the members of his community – save for Vivian - to the *same* in the attempts to maintain his self-pitying isolation. Consequently, he ends up sacrificing himself in his isolation. Nonetheless, Grant is able to challenge the myth of white supremacy upon embracing the ontological dynamic of the fundamental relation to the Other in Jefferson.

Unlike Grant, Jefferson's social status has forever relegated him to the margins of society. Although the nature of the expectations that others have set for Grant and Jefferson vary greatly, Gaines's the juxtaposition of the men's "lessons" suggests that masculinity and humanity are interchangeable in this narrative. The severity of the situation presents limited options for Jefferson to take any action that could be made in the name of self-preservation, and hence masculine affirmation, other than walking to his death chair "like a man". Thus, Jefferson's capacity to defy the patriarchal order is limited to two options – he may either choose to embrace or refrain from asserting his

individual autonomy. Grant's job is to convince him that if he so chooses to stand up straight as he walks to the chair, those who witness his execution, as well as the rest of the townspeople who learn about it afterwards will be forced to acknowledge his subjectivity as they reckon with Jefferson's humanity. Furthermore, Grant understands that how Jefferson decides to approach his death will remind Bayonne's citizens that he is an individual man in his own right, rather than a stereotype of a young, black criminal.

Next, Grant learns to redefine success in terms of what he can contribute to the greater good of the black community, who is counting on him to make Jefferson believe in himself. Similar to Jefferson, the community also looks to Grant to pull them out of the depths of hopelessness. Jefferson's impending execution symbolizes the indomitable and arbitrary cruelty of white law. Thus, as his death date draws nearer, the community is forced to confront the stark tyranny of the white patriarchy that rules their lives. Grant finally guides Jefferson to come to terms with his honorable humanity. In turn, Grant learns to accept that although the legacy of black subjectivity in the South is fraught with hardship and suffering, he can most effectively combat oppression through re-integrating himself into his community and serving their needs. Ultimately, he turns away from his inclination towards stubborn individualism and embraces the deconstruction of the myth of self-reliance.

Jefferson's final testament in his journal names the people who have been active participants in his life during his final days in jail. His "roll call" of the novel's central main characters marks a spiritual gathering conveying how black male friendship can foster spiritual wholeness. Together, Jefferson, Grant, and the entire community must learn the lesson that all Gaines' protagonists struggle to learn: that manhood is really

strong and sensitive humanity, which includes the perceptive and reactive comprehension of others' acts and feelings, and the moral and relational values that enable one to learn and love" (Doyle 207).

At the end of the novel, Grant reconfigures his own subjectivity when he accepts that he plays a pivotal role in his community's welfare. Although the legacy of black subjectivity in the South has been fraught with hardship and suffering, he realizes that he can triumph over this history of oppression by reasserting a revised version of black hegemonic masculinity. Inevitably, Grant turns away from the inclination towards individualism and interrupts the myth that personal salvation can achieve through escape or self-reliance.

A Gathering of Old Men

In the gender hierarchy model proposed by Connell, hegemonic and complicit masculinities take a hierarchically superior position to subordinated and marginalized masculinities, the latter two categories that tend to include most minorities in the United States. The difference between these hierarchically inferior types of masculinities is that as opposed to men in a marginalized position, a man in a subordinated position can appear to possess the "physical attributes necessary to aspire to hegemony", while marginalized men usually cannot aspire to hegemony, and are "most often men of color and men with disabilities" (Levy 254). In Gaines's Louisiana plantation setting, the realities of Connell's claim are most apparent in the racial dynamics that characterize the American Southern plantation system. Although racial segregation became legally outlawed in 1964, the actual circumstances of life for black people, especially black

sharecroppers, remained unchanged. hooks writes that by the late sixties and early seventies, “most black men had made the choice to identify their well-being, their manhood with making money by any means necessary” (17). Due to the obstacles faced by black men in the work place, hooks reasons, black men were less likely than other groups of men to believe that employment could gain them self-respect. This last statement seems to refer more to non-farming forms of occupation, but nonetheless, the idea applies to Gaines’s settings. She further explains that the disassociation between work and self-worth had been the case since the end of slavery, when work meant being subjugated to a white man and being obliged to submit to his demands as an employer or else be fired. As a result, “work becomes synonymous with loss of respect” (hooks 23).

In *A Gathering of Old Men*, the elderly sharecroppers do not work to accumulate wealth; the farm work is their only foreseeable means of existence. Consequently, special attention must be paid to the construction of “plantation masculinity”, which differs in several ways from the form of black hegemonic masculinity described by hooks. Thus, it is necessary to posit a nuanced definition of meaningful manhood for this particular subset of men. For the sharecroppers, work does not constitute a context, nor has it ever, in which their patriarchal manhood could be affirmed. We do not know what the men make for an income, but they accept their plight with passive resignation, and history teaches us that the very nature of the sharecropping occupation implied some degree of long-term, consistent debt to the plantation owner. The men’s chance to defend Mathu is the first time they are offered a meaningful alternative to the existing structure. hooks cites Julius Lester’s claim in *Look out Whitey! Black Power’s Gon’ Get Your Mama* that the American rhetoric of freedom is inscribed in the white masculine patriarchy: “[White

power] makes us sharecroppers. We work at jobs we care nothing about so that we can buy food, pay the rent and buy clothes. We're paid enough so that we can stay alive and work and make money for somebody else. That's life in America" (56). Likewise in *A Gathering of Old Men*, the men are denied opportunities within the sharecropping plantation structure to achieve a meaningful self-made existence, and as a result, they have long ago surrendered their hope for something better. Therefore, the men's masculine sense of self-worth is predicated on their ability to provide for their family, as well as their past trials and triumphs as black men who have always existed at the mercy of white law and order.

Gaines interrogates masculinity in *A Gathering of Old Men* by situating his characters in a myriad of contexts in which masculine self-actualization is achieved through the assertion of intolerance for the existing social order. Such defiance is seen in moments of courage, confession, and self-affirmation as the citizens of Bayonne reconsider their relationships to the complex racial order of the plantation. Almost every person on the plantation veers from his or her racially scripted roles after Beau Boutan is killed, and the process by which the confession offered by Charlie, the true perpetrator, is exacted comes only after each participant in the stand-off verbally deconstructs the existing conception of black masculinity and forces the white Sheriff to bear witness to their grievances.

The journey towards self-actualization begins in the minds and homes of the elderly men on their day of rest in each man's deliberation on Candy's call to arms. Chimley narrates the event that leads to his and Mat's decision to obey Candy's directive. The men learn of the trouble in the Quarters during their weekly fishing date. The news

disrupts their routine, and the urgency of the situation prevents them from deliberating on the possible consequences of the situation. Furthermore, the implicit power of each other's company raises the stakes surrounding the implications of their individual decisions because each man depends on the other's validation of their manliness.

The traumatic, lingering deep-rooted fears of Jim Crow continue to haunt the old men. For instance, when Mat's wife threatens to "call the law" upon realizing that Mat is actually going to involve himself in the debacle, she calls him "an old fool" and demands to know if, "Y'all gone crazy?" to which Mat replies, "That's right. Anytime we say we go'n stand up for something, they say we crazy. You right, we all gone crazy" (36). When his wife persists in stopping him, Mat reveals that the source of his persistent rage constitutes the very reason why he is finally choosing to stick up for himself and his people. He implores God to give him "one more chance to do something with his life", and tells his wife "I know I'm old, maybe even crazy, but I'm going anyhow. And it ain't nothing you can do about it" (38). Mat's attitude towards his wife is indicative of hooks's regard for the "psychohistory that represents black males as castrated, ineffectual, irresponsible, and not real men" (88). Moreover, Mat's resolve to risk death in the quest for retribution for all the suffering he has endured is tantamount to the degree to which he vehemently contests his wife's attempts to thwart his mission.

The sharecroppers challenge the myth of the master-narrative that is integral to the dominating power of white hegemonic masculinity by tacitly affirming that the survival of their community hinges upon their collective call to action. The context for masculine self-affirmation is provided by the stalemate that transpires between the gun-toting elderly sharecroppers, Sheriff Mapes, and Candy during the interim period as they

await the arrival Cajuns. Although the whereabouts of Beau's actual killer remains a mystery until the end of novel, his absence opens up a unique temporal-spatial dynamic within which each person reconsiders the dynamics of the plantation order.

In contrast to the landowner Candy Marshall, Mathu is the only sharecropper who does not exhibit marginalized masculinities. However, Mathu's elevated social position that is afforded him on account of his paternal relationship to Candy is an anomaly, and comes with too many burdens to be emblematic of a desired form of hegemonic masculinity. Mathu is an ailing, solemn man who has a reputation for unapologetically retaliating against the Jim Crow order of law using violence. However, in his paternal relationship to Candy, the unlikely pair enjoys a symbiotic relationship in which his affection is rewarded with her protection as the "patriarch" of the Marshall plantation. Up until the point in which Mathu is forced to either stand with the men or obey Candy, his filial relationship to Candy has allowed him to exhibit what Connell refers to as complicit masculinity, since he has received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Candy, on the other hand, embodies a unique form hegemonic patriarchy, in which she governs the white patriarchal order and believes that she is justified in "using" the black men as pawns when her interests (Mathu's safety) are threatened.

After all of the men have gathered at Mathu's, Sheriff Mapes's ineptitude in dispersing the band of men incites a drastic shift in Mapes's understanding of the conditions of his own agency. When the men refuse to go home, Mapes employs a new strategy in the attempt to make his point. He singles out Clatoo and subtly admonishes him for "looking for trouble". Clatoo replies that indeed, his failure to do just that very

thing has been his trouble all along. Clatoo reminds Mapes that he is old, and so it is “about time I had li’l trouble with the law before I died” (86). Clatoo’s sardonic reply demonstrates that he speaks for all the men in his dismissal of the threat of retribution for his insolence. Mapes’s realization that neither abuse nor pandering will convince the group to go home demotes the Sheriff from his authoritarian position to a passive representative of the law. As Mapes relinquishes control, he is forced to bear witness to the successive stories of the men’s individual grievances with their former encounters with Jim Crow law. In his ineptitude, Mapes must passively listen to the men verbalize their reasons for standing their ground. As they share their stories, Mapes empathizes with the men, but pinpoints the inherent hypocrisy of their objective by pointing out the irreconcilability of their wishes to fight fire with fire:

You told God you wanted Salt and Pepper to get together, and God did it for you. At the same time, you wanted God to keep Fix the way Fix was thirty years ago so one day you would get a chance to shoot him. Well, God couldn't do both. Not that He likes Fix, but He thought the other idea was better – Salt and Pepper. Well? Which do you want? Salt and Pepper to play together, or you want God to keep Fix the way he was thirty years ago so you would have a chance to shoot him? (171)

Mapes offers a solution in which Fix Boutan’s son, Gil “Salt” Boutan, and Pepper, Gil’s teammate on the Louisiana State University football team, would play football together, and the men would return home instead of bracing for battle. However, the men’s idea of progress is complicated by their own individual quests for glory and retribution. Mapes’s speech gives the men pause and provides an opportunity for the group to confront their own real motives for coming to Mathu’s rescue. With this silent moment of reflection, the urgency of the situation dissipates, allowing the men to channel their energies toward actions that best serve the interests of the group.

Beau's murder is a grave affront to the racial order, since the magnitude of the crime exceeds that which has ever been committed against a white man by a black man on the plantation. Therefore, the strength of the entire group of sharecroppers is needed to stand up against the Sheriff, as the men realize that the only way to protect Mathu is to harness their collective might against their oppressors. Since Mathu is the only member of the group who has publicly defied the Jim Crow code of etiquette – namely, Mathu's refusal to acknowledge his inferior status - employed by people like Fix Boutan and his Cajun lynch mob gang, he represents a moral bulwark that the black community looks to for protection and courage.

Race relations during this time period in the American South were especially fraught in the transition to a new era that was no longer characterized by legalized racial discrimination. Consequently, the traditional exercise of power enjoyed by whites became threatened. As Sally Robinson explains in *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*, “the symbolic vulnerability of the white male body made visible and material became the motive for a claim of victimhood” (21). Thus, the disruption of the patriarchal order as a result of legal changes at the federal level seems to embolden the sharecroppers, whose fear of the Cajuns' vengeance is tempered by their rightful claim to justice.

Reconstructing Black Masculinity in A Gathering of Old Men

In her essay “Reconstructing Black Masculinity”, hooks writes, “the image of black masculinity that emerges from slave narratives is one of hardworking men who longed to assume full patriarchal responsibility for families and kin” (4). According to

hooks, the socialization of black men by the white hegemonic patriarchy has taught black men that they should strive to become patriarchs by seeking the freedom to provide for and protect women and children (to be benevolent patriarchs). In patriarchal culture, hooks asserts that all males learn a role that restricts and confines (xii). The white patriarchal order that governs the black men's lives in Gaines's novels condones violence as a means of control, so that emulating patriarchal masculine behavior entails the will to do violence.

Given that the historical context that defines the men's lives has been structured to ensure that interracial violence is one-sided, hooks's theory only applies to the elderly sharecroppers in terms of the violence they might administer in their private lives onto others or onto each other. While the men's will to exert violence is influenced by the white patriarchal order, their gathering of arms is *not* an emulation of white-supremacist hegemonic patriarchal manhood. The gunfight in the final scene is in fact an anomaly, considering the unique circumstances of the men's situation. Most of the sharecroppers were born around the turn of the twentieth century; hence, they have lived the majority of their lives at the mercy of Jim Crow laws. Therefore, they have never participated in, much less conceived of, confronting the Boutan clan *en masse* with the threat of deadly retaliation. Moreover, because the men's affirmation of their will to violence is necessary to interrupt the traditional order of "taking care of business" in the event of an affront to a white man by a black man, their gathering is initially the consequence of their conditioned obedience to Candy, the plantation's *female* patriarchal leader. The line formed by the men signifies a collective gathering of *nonviolence* when Mapes resorts to tried and true violent tactics from a bygone era in efforts to extract information. However,

when the Boutan clan finally arrives at Mathu's house, the men make an unspoken, unanimous decision to stand their ground. At this point, they realize that if they were to turn back now, their courageousness would be in vain. Furthermore, when Mathu joins the group of men, this affirms their resolve to not succumb without a fight.

Eventually, the true executioner of Beau Boutan emerges from the cane field. Charlie returns from his hiding place in the field upon declaring "I'm a man, Sheriff. I want the world to know I'm a man. I'm a man, Miss Candy. I'm a man, Mr. Lou. I want you to write in your paper I'm a man" (189). We learn that Mathu was willing to incur blame for Charlie's crime all along, but upon witnessing the bravery of his peers, he decides to confess to his crime. Finally, it is Charlie who has the floor. He explains

All my life, all my life. That's all I ever done, all my life, was run from people. From black, from white; from nigger, from Cajun, both. All my life. Made me do what they wanted me to do and 'bused me if I did it right, and 'bused me if I did it wrong – all my life. And I took it. I'm fifty now. Fifty years of 'busing. All my natural-born black life I took the 'busing and never hit back. You tried to make me a man, didn't you, Parrain? Didn't you? (189).

Charlie intimates that Mathu, to whom he refers as "Parrain", planted the seeds for Beau's murder when he placed the shotgun in Charlie's hands. He parrots what Mathu told him:

If I run from Beau Boutan he was go'n beat me himself. He told me he was eighty-two, but he was more man than me, and if I run from Beau he was go'n beat me himself...Parrain told me he had a gun there, too, and he said he rather see me laying there dead than to run from another man when I was fifty years old (191).

Charlie admits that initially, he tried to have Mathu take the blame for him. He admits, "I ran, I ran, I ran – I don't know how long. But no matter where I went, where I turnt, I was still on Marshall place....Something like a wall, a wall I couldn't see, but it stopped me every time" (192). The metaphor of the prison-like cane fields describes the multiple

intricate structure of oppression suffered by sharecroppers like Charlie. Not only do the cane stalks resemble literal prison bars that have functioned to imprison him physically and financially, but the seemingly interminable layout of the land forces Charlie to realize that the inescapability of the plantation mirrors his enslavement to his plight as well as to the consequences of Beau's murder. However, the cane fields paradoxically symbolize the location in which Charlie undergoes a psychological "decolonization". Eavesdropping on the sharecroppers' stories from his hiding spot in the swamp, Charlie fully attains selfhood upon his admission to the crime. However, before the Cajuns come to avenge Beau's death, Charlie takes the opportunity to ensure that everyone hears the truth from him first:

He cussed me...I was doing my work good. Cussed me anyhow...I told him he didn't need to cuss me like that...He told me he wouldn't just cuss me, he would beat me, too. I told him no, I wasn't go'n 'low that no more, 'cause I was fifty years old – half a hundred. He told me if I said on more word, he was go'n show me how he treated a half-a-hundred-year-old nigger...You don't talk to a man like that Sheriff, not when he reach half a hundred (190).

Mapes encourages him to continue after gesturing for the men to give him space:

I told him I was quitting. I jumped down from the loader. I was coming home. He got down off that tractor and came at me with a stalka cane. I grabbed me one, too. I don't know why I did it. I had never done nothing like that in my life before. But I did it today. Bent over and got me a stalka cane just like he had. That made him stop for a second, then he started grinning at me. Grinning, just grinning at me. He knowed I wasn't go'n hit him. That's what he thought. And he came on me. He caught me twice, once on the shoulder, once in the side. Then I swung back. I caught him side the head, and down he went. I saw his head bleeding, and I thought I had kilt him, and I started running for the quarters. I came here and told Parrain what I had done. While we was standing there talking, I heard the tractor coming up the quarters, and I knowed then I hadn't kilt him. But I told Parrain I was go'n run anyhow, 'cause he was go'n beat me now for sure if he caught me (190-191).

Charlie pauses to reflect, and although he directs his speech to the Sheriff, the speech is intended for the men to hear:

But they comes a day, Sheriff, they comes a day when a man got to stand. I don't know how I did it. But I helt that gun steady as a rock....He kept coming toward the garry. Just grinning and grinning. Said: 'Nigger, I was go'n have a little fun with you first. Was go'n hunt you like a rabbit, and shoot you when I got tired. But now look like I ain't go'n waste my time.' He raised the gun, and I pulled the trigger (191).

As long as black men like Charlie are unable to envision an alternative to patriarchal manhood, hooks claims that they will act out violently against those who they perceive to be weak. However, Charlie's speech suggests that his decision to shoot Beau was not inspired by rage, and he had doubtfully never perceived Beau Boutan to be weak. Rather, even before Charlie's encounter with Mathu, his fate was sealed when he decided that he would no longer subordinate himself to Boutan's abuses. Although hooks asserts that to embrace and act out on the ethos of violence is akin to "expressing [one's] allegiance" to the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, Charlie understood that his retaliation against Beau left him with only two options – to shoot or be shot. Lacking any conceivable option that would not end in death, Charlie's use of violence enables him to achieve selfhood, albeit at a fatal cost.

Although Charlie offers himself up for arrest, the Cajun mob interrupts this final confessional scene. Prior to their arrival the elderly men have tacitly decided that they will see out their mission: a confrontation with Luke Will and his gang is necessary to ensure that justice is properly served. Moreover, their rebellion against the purveyors of Jim Crow law signifies their devotion to Mathu, without whom they would likely have never been granted the opportunity to stand up against the white men responsible for their lifetime of subordination. In sum, the elderly men lack the privilege to choose to turn away from what hooks names "primitive models of patriarchal violence" precisely because doing so would reinforce their marginalized status and enable Jim Crow "justice"

to be served to Mathu (*Will to Change* 65).

The novel posits two definitions of hegemonic manhood that are different for white and black men southern men, in which black men are compelled to equate masculinity with violence, whereas white men are entering a new era in which wielding violence to maintain their superior positions has come to be regarded as low-class. As Suzanne Jones explains in “New Narratives of Southern Manhood: Race, Masculinity, and Closure in Ernest Gaines's Fiction”, “in order for Gil to be a man, he must refuse to kill the black man who has killed his brother Beau; in order for each black man to be a man, he must be ready to kill a white man” (20). The behavior that is deemed manly for each racial group suggests that for marginalized black men, the ideal hegemonic model of masculinity parallels a hegemonic ideal that has, or is becoming, obsolete for the white men of Bayonne. However, hooks contends that creative alternative ways of living only come into being when there is “an awakening to the awareness that collectively black male survival requires that they learn to challenge patriarchal notions of manhood, that they claim nonviolence as the only progressive stance to take in a world where all life is threatened by patriarchal imperialist war” (64). Thus, Jones’s conclusions that notions of hegemonic masculinity differ depending on one’s race seems to contradict hooks’s argument that nonviolence constitutes the golden standard for black masculine behavior that is capable of resisting the white hegemonic patriarchy. This begs the question: because the sharecroppers used violence to wage war against the Boutans, can we still consider them as having succeeded in performing a different masculinity, or in having protested the hegemonic parameters? More importantly, do the sharecroppers, in their use of violence, fail to be “awakened” in their collective decision to go to battle against the

lynch mob? As has already been established, the sharecroppers indeed succeed in the performance of a masculinity that defies the status quo in which white men assert total authority over the lives of the black farmers. They therefore protest the parameters of the white hegemonic order which relies upon force to bolster the racial hierarchy. Furthermore, while hooks advocates for nonviolence as the only progressive stance that may succeed in dismantling the white hegemonic imperialist patriarchy in the long run, we must consider the sharecroppers' series of actions as a composite *event* in terms of Derrida's formulation of responsibility. The men's decision to stand up for the group's best interests at every stage of the day is indicative of the sacrifice inherent to decision-making. Each decision made in the name of defying the Jim Crow law keeps the sharecroppers' collective future open to a legitimate administration of justice.

Reconstructing Black Masculinity in A Lesson Before Dying

We can examine the conclusion of *A Lesson Before Dying* to determine if either Jefferson or Grant exhibits hooks's idea of constructive resistance by the end of the novel. It is possible to consider how the stereotype of the absentee black father as it relates to the novel can help us understand how the absence of a strong male father figure in both Grant and Jefferson's lives factors into how each man regards the other, as well as his own, sense of self-worth. In *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*, Tom Burrell describes one of the most effective mechanisms that was used to rob black slaves of their individual identities as that which started with the destruction of the black nuclear family:

Deconstructing the black family was central to the massive enterprise to build a new economy, and to lay the cornerstones of personal fortunes...the black family

had to be destroyed and the first order of business was to annihilate the black family's designated protector – the black man (20).

Burrell argues that the deliberate undermining of the black family had catastrophic consequences, in which black men and women were stripped of their “natural roles as parents and protectors, and [were conditioned] to accept physical and psychological abuse [which] were initial steps in the brainwashing campaign” (21). Similarly, John Lowe explains in *Conversations with Ernest Gaines* that in the Louisiana setting of Gaines's novels, because white men occupy almost all positions of power, this has detrimental consequences on the self-confidence of young black males:

The Black father is in a position of non-respectability, and the white is still in control. The Black man is seldom the owner, still is not the public defender in court, not the judge. The young black man almost always sees a white in these positions, not an older Black man, not his father...So the son cannot and does not look up to his father. This is not natural. And the cycle continues, and continues, and continues (164).

Furthermore, in an interview with Charles H. Rowell in “The Quarters: Ernest Gaines and the Sense of Place”, Gaines himself discusses the fragmentation of the African-American family life as it relates his treatment of manhood in his own novels: "I feel that because of that separation they [father and son] still have not, philosophically speaking, reached each other again" (40). Gaines emphasizes slavery's culpability in sustaining the tenuous dynamics of the nuclear family, which was often forcefully disallowed from remaining intact. He further insinuates that the divisive and often fraught nature of father-son relationships in the South cultivates a society in which boys without father figures suffer in their development in ways that he does not specifically name. Grant and Jefferson's relationship exhibits the dynamics of a paternal-filial bond that is fluid, in which both men take turns emulating hegemonic masculinity in his guidance of the other. Despite the white-supremacist culture of the justice system's complicity in reinforcing the idea

that black men “embody a brutal patriarchal maleness that white men and women must arm themselves to repress”, Grant inevitably teaches Jefferson how to deconstruct this myth by providing him the tools and honesty he needs for self-discovery (*We Real Cool* 51). Meanwhile, Jefferson teaches Grant how to relate emotionally to others and how to face the truth of his responsibility to the community of Bayonne. By the end of the novel, the basis for what a new black masculinity could be like are clear: a man who does not impose his power through the subjugation of other subordinated or marginalized men and who acknowledges his need for others. Moreover, this new masculinity acknowledges women’s role in its own constitution as a participative subject.

Conclusion

Gaines’s cast of characters do more than challenge the existing white paternal social order; they subvert it by acting in a myriad of ways that, to varying degrees and in different ways, expose the foundational myths of the law that allow the persistence of such oppression. The varying forms of resistance exhibited by Gaines’s characters allows us to envision how Gaines portrays the means by which the functions of law in American society, particularly in the Deep South during the middle of the twentieth century, operated according to racist myths and unfounded definitions of justice.

In both novels, we see how particular displays of non-hegemonic masculinity reshape the existing hegemonic masculine bloc. A close examination of representations of masculine gender roles as manifested in Gaines’s texts, specifically of the white sheriff and the black inhabitants of the former slave quarters, reveal a destabilization and crisis of the sharecropper/overseer archetype in the contemporary Deep South. As a result, it is possible to determine how such a crisis reshapes the existing conception of hegemonic

masculinity in the South, which is evidence of Gaines's defiance of the tendency to define black masculinity according to the hegemonic form.

CONCLUSION

This project has focused on the relationship between social oppression, mythical notions of national identity, and formulations of masculinity in Haiti, Mexico, and the American South. The effects of globalization in these three places are complex and have brought about a reconsideration of the nation as the marginalized populations of men in each country struggle to come to terms with their own masculine sense of self as they combat political oppression. In examining the protagonists' journeys towards achieving selfhood as it is affected by each nation's political situation, this project has examined the complexities of masculine relationships portrayed by René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines to understand how the protagonists' attempts to emulate or rebel against the reigning patriarchal order can illuminate how marginalized masculinities contend with dominant forms and inevitably effect shifts in existing patterns of hegemony.

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to reimagine conceptions of manhood which are capable of resisting patriarchal hegemonic models of masculinity that often lead to violence and oppression. Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophical conceptions of community, subjectivity, and responsibility are useful for identifying how the protagonists' decisions inform or beget the best version of these ideals as they are portrayed in each of the narratives. The conflicts faced by the protagonists illuminate the value systems associated with patriarchal hegemonic masculinities with which the characters contend. Thus, the dynamics of these conflicts, as well as their resolutions, also inform a revised analysis of the character's process towards self-realization by examining how their behaviors resist the hegemonic order.

The ontological conception of being-with, which is challenged and improved upon by Derrida's deconstructive approach to thinking about the community, allows us to consider the question of the political in terms of a contemplation of the space in which being-together happens in the form of movements and encounters between and among singularities. The dynamics of being-together requires a community that resists the formation of permanent bonds among singularities, and which requires that perpetual efforts are made to prevent these bonds. Thus, Nancy's philosophy has informed the analysis of how, and to what degree, the decisions made by the male characters in the works of René Depestre, Carlos Fuentes, and Ernest Gaines maximize the freedoms that they and others are afforded within their communities.

Furthermore, Nancy's idea of the mythical community frames an understanding of how a country's political history can drive people and regimes to violence in an effort to label and divide people according to obsolete notions of race and nationality. This project has identified and described the myths that sustain political oppression and models of hegemonic masculinity in Haiti, Mexico, and the Southern United States during the twentieth century. In doing so, it has been possible to discuss how such myths have been exposed in each of the narratives through heroic actions, solitary journeys, and interpersonal confrontations. Exposing such myths is necessary to destabilize totalitarian regimes and to foster a discourse that can lead to new definitions of community and masculinity that align with Nancy's notion of being singular plural.

The poetry and literature of René Depestre exposes the contradictions and hypocrisies that stem from a strident adherence to political utopian ideals. A common trope throughout Depestre's works is the historical reminder that Haiti was the first

nation to achieve independence as the first black republic in the Americas. Depestre concedes that the Haitian identity is especially unique due to the legacy of its historical position as the black man's place on the most "African" land in the New World. Thus, Depestre's works call upon us to consider Haiti's unique position in the movement against the institutionalization of black oppression while acknowledging that Haiti is simultaneously engaged in the greater struggle; it is this regard for the preservation of culture within an ever-changing global context that Depestre believes can help in bridging the gap between dependency and collective agency.

Depestre's writings reveal how Haiti's racial hierarchy has had detrimental effects on the formation of community, national identity, and individual subjectivity. *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* and *Le Mât de cocagne* underscore how the masculine psyche of Haiti's marginalized masses has been damaged by state-sanctioned racial discrimination and the despotic abuse that was inscribed first in the patriarchal order imposed by the American Occupation and later during Duvalier's dictatorship. First shaped by white colonial forces that imposed order by relegating black Haitians to the margins of society, the hegemonic patriarchy shifted during Duvalier's reign, but still wielded the myth of racial inferiority to assign value and rank to individuals. These works demonstrate how the Haitian male individual must embrace the collective in the hopes of repairing Haiti's legacy of divisiveness. Most notably, the rainbow that Depestre invokes in *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'Occident chrétien* symbolizes the "voice of the human future", and the unifying love of the heart, which he conceives of as the only path that can lead to future creation.

The evolution of Depestre's literary aesthetic is the product of his own ideological transformations. In 2016, food insecurity, extreme poverty, and homelessness are among the numerous chronic problems that plague Haiti. Despite its woes, Depestre still believes in a better future for Haiti and in a universal culture yet to be born. Thus, his literature features his idea of *realutopia*, which enables him to imbue a sense of the wondrous into his works to bolster the Haitian spirit and cultivate the collective imagination of a better world to come.

In Mexico, the collapse of the peso in 1994 forced the Mexican government to turn to the United States for a large loan, an event which Carlos Fuentes identified as a testament to "the rapid erosion of our sovereignty." In order to stymie the effects of Mexico's increasing dependence on the United States, he called upon the people of Mexico to seek "solutions within ourselves, our tradition, our culture" (van Delden 199). Fuentes's call to arms underscores Mexico's troubled history with its identity. While Mexican nationalism is a necessary defense against the expansive economic influence of its powerful northern neighbor, Fuentes uses literature to impart his own political ideologies onto his readers. Mexicans must continually and simultaneously look back upon the past lessons taught by the Revolution while looking to other nations for evidence of the problems that capitalist economical systems pose for the marginalized populations in numerous societies around the globe. Even today, Fuentes's works invite us to consider the question of the role of that the state should play in Mexican society and

Inscribed in the "lepra americano barato" [cheap American leprosy] that has permeated Mexican society is also the institution of a hegemonic masculinity in which ideal masculine traits have become associated with wealth and financial power (*La región*

más transparente del aire 213). Fuentes's depiction of the complicated ethnic dynamics in *Gringo viejo* and his portrayal of the diverse set of Mexico City-dwellers in *La región más transparente del aire* showcases the plural political ideologies that must be integrated into a revised conceptualization of Mexican identity that refuses to turn its back on any of its diverse heritages if a true democratic order is to function and thrive in modern Mexico. Consequently, Fuentes advocates for the dismantling of the hegemonic masculine order that promotes a rigid ideal of manhood in favor of several hegemonic masculinities that permits its plurality of ethnic groups to adopt various mutually respectable forms of masculinity.

Finally, although legalized slavery in the United States has come to an end, vestiges of the deplorable institution are evident throughout the country today. In our contemporary society, African-American safety remains illusory, and social media has been useful in exposing totalitarian forms of legally sanctioned racism and discrimination in the application of law and violence on black bodies. African-American men routinely face arbitrary and unjustified stop-and-frisk encounters, and continue to suffer from economic inequities as well as disproportionate death and incarceration rates. In short, the stark evidence that African-American boys and men continue to be criminalized for their blackness underscores the importance of examining a variety of historical and literary sources that may be useful in shaping conceptions of effective, constructive resistance to the white patriarchal hegemonic order.

Finally, Ernest Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying* and *A Gathering of Old Men* are two novels which challenge the racist and classist myths that poor and working class blacks are impoverished because of poor choices, intergenerational pathologies, or high

crime rates. Rather, Gaines places the onus and responsibility on the white legal system of the Louisiana sharecropping plantation society to interrupt the myth that the vicious cycle of racialized poverty in America is the consequence of a legacy of state-sanctioned racism and the legalized mechanisms which have long functioned to keep black men from emulating the hegemonic masculine order that governed the United States during and following the Jim Crow era in the South.

The decision to examine literature focusing on elderly men allows for the meditation on the expectations concerning the performance of masculinity as one nears the end of his life raises one's personal stakes in certain circumstances that require risk-taking. Old age can also serve as an impetus for reconfiguring priorities in men in different and often unimaginable ways than is often conceivable in younger men. However, the failed attempts carried out by the characters to achieve full masculine subjectivity and the characteristics of what could constitute a new form of hegemonic masculinity cannot be underestimated. Thus, the performative quality of gender provides room to reconsider how masculine gender is reconstructed as it is steered by the forces of globalization. Furthermore, the possibility of observing a plurality of masculinities with equal status within Mexico, Haiti, and the United States could be imperative to empowering men to resist the hierarchical gender system that still dominates other masculinities.

Finally, this project is concerned with the implications that globalization may have on undermining the issue of Nancy's idea of *mondialisation*, or the only conceivable means by which the totality of different civilizations' values can be protected and celebrated. Many of the negative consequences of globalization have already been

enumerated in this project. Most significantly, the authors' various depictions of the conditions that lead subordinated men to triumph illuminates why aspiring to pluralism, (*mondialisation*), can foster the opportunity to elevate the level of solidarity in the world, especially with consideration to marginalized populations.

The male characters of study do not exhibit an alternative form of masculinity that embraces gender equality, nor do the characters embody non-hetero-normative masculinities or sexualities. In all of the examined works, the authors depict characters that exclusively identify as heterosexual males and enjoy hetero-normative sexual relations. Thus, the fact that this project does not account for alternative sexual identities or non-heterosexual relationships is due to the authors' apparent insistence that heterosexual and hetero-normative identities constitute the prototypical norms that are reflective of the real-time social dynamics characteristic of the national and regional settings depicted in their works. Nonetheless, a future comparative study examining representations of gender in the authors' more contemporary works would be a fruitful and endeavor, particularly for the sake of determining whether this author's rendering of the authors' conceptions of alternative masculine models remains evident and relevant in their later portrayals of gender dynamics in Haiti, Mexico, and the American South.

In identifying the masculine behaviors that can withstand tumultuous global forces such as political and economic paradigm shifts and civil war, we can imagine new formulations of masculinity that are capable of transcending rigid identity categories. Ultimately, this project situates each author's notions of masculinity and community according to the ontological and political framework that is constituted by Derrida and Nancy's philosophies, and advocates for the need to redefine responsibility on an

individual and societal level in order to imagine how closed, mythical communities can be opened up from within in order to conceive of a more ethical form of togetherness.

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