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Regular Revolutions: Feminist Travels in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*

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How do representations of women's social subjection and political activism travel across national borders, shape our notions of what it means to "be a woman," and organize feminist imaginaries? As significantly, how do these traveling discourses of women's existence consolidate our sense of those very political borders in the first place? In this essay, I consider how a transnational feminist vision can reinscribe our conceptions of revolutionary politics and their significance for women's lives.[1] A transnational feminist practice of reading and writing difference allows us to reconceive of politics in a hemispheric frame, for example, to revise significantly our assumptions of both North American liberal feminism and various strands of nationalist politics—such as liberal idealism, *realpolitik*, socialist utopianism, and cultural nationalism—deployed during the Cold War and its aftermath.

In her groundbreaking study of revolutionary discourse, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*, María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo has already begun to elaborate how a hemispheric transnationalism can refuse to take at face value the claim that post-1945 reformist theories of liberal developmentalism and theories of socialist revolutionary movements comprised polar opposites. Saldaña-Portillo instead uncovers the way in which "developmentalist and revolutionary speech acts are constitutive of each other."[2] She considers the continuities of developmental discourse *across* national borders, discerning what she describes as a "meliorist model of subjectivity and theory of agency" that ultimately contributed to the "failure" of Latin American revolutionary movements by the end of the twentieth century (7).

Adopting Saldaña-Portillo's comparative approach that moves between US ethnic American and Latin American Studies, I am here primarily concerned with how such a transnational reading practice refracts postcolonial politics for the US minoritarian subject. How, that is, might we differently understand the historical conditions that enable, and limit, the (feminist) agency of the person of color "at home" in the United States, given US hemispheric involvement in what Saldaña-Portillo describes as "the age of development"? If development discourse proved a unifying undercurrent in twentieth-century hemispheric politics, I propose that transnational feminist literary practice uncovers the productive fissures, contradictions, and ambiguities of this history.[3] In this essay, I consider the feminist figures of reform and revolution in two novels, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), by the Dominican American author Julia Alvarez. In particular, I examine how the novels critique the political constructions of the Latin American Third World as deprived and depraved. Illuminating the ways in which these representations have deeply informed North American cultural discourses of female need and subjection, Alvarez's work also recognizes how significant the construction of political borders has been for women's agency in the Americas.

In order to discern women's agency in relation to the geopolitical production of borders, I also turn to anthropologist Veena Das's noteworthy model for feminist agency, one that remembers and responds to the violence of the past and that inhabits a world remade by that violence, thus rendering the "everyday" a significant site for analysis. Das describes women's "descent into the ordinary," which works to repair the past with "not any momentary heroic gesture but the patient work of living with . . . new knowledge."[4] As she writes, paradigms that dichotomize resistance and submission—and that privilege tropes of "imprisonment" and liberation—are too "crude" to discern how "originary moments of violence are lived through" everyday life (78). Normative cultural paradigms of "female need" can certainly constrain and deflect women from a range of possible social and political subject positions. Yet, Das argues, "If the social context alters suddenly, the woman herself or others in her social world might evoke a different definition of female 'need.' Thus, individual lives are defined by context, but they are also generative of new contexts. . . . It is not that older subject positions [are] simply left behind or abandoned—rather, there [are] new ways in which even signs of injury [can] be occupied" (64).

The process of incorporating what Das calls the "poisonous knowledge" of violence and loss into everyday life is supple and long-term (54). For this reason, it can, from the perspective of a power/resistance model, merely disappear from sight altogether, appearing as a "return" to previous and repressive conditions. In speaking of women's everyday needs and agencies, my point is not so much to recuperate an authentic, indigenous women's practice (which Alvarez does not seems to offer us in any case). Rather, I seek to draw out in her novels a dialectical

and ethical form of critique that allows us to conceive of agency as always rooted in an original violence. This ethics, in turn, demands our recognition that other ways of being take form in the lives of "other women," whether they be the white Dominican woman displaced by the assimilating US woman of color, or the white Dominican woman's others displaced by her racial and class privilege, or "other others" whose existence we have yet to recognize.[5]

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents is a fictional account (albeit loosely based on Alvarez's own family) of the García family's move from the Dominican Republic to the United States, following Carlos García's involvement with a failed coup attempt against the long-term Dominican dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. Assisted by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Carlos escapes Trujillo's national police, the notorious Military Intelligence Service (SIM), in 1960 and resettles in New York with his wife Laura and four daughters, Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía/Fifi. *In the Time of the Butterflies* offers a fictional recounting of the historical Mirabal family, four Dominican sisters, Dedé, Patria, Minerva, and Maria Theresa/Mate, the latter three of whom participated in a revolutionary movement against Trujillo. *Butterflies* describes the politicization of the three sisters, their rise to leadership in the revolutionary June 14th Movement, and their murder by Trujillo's forces on November 25, 1960.

Very little of the criticism available on Alvarez's fiction considers these two novels, which have both been well-received critically and widely taught, in relation to one another.[6] Instead, most critics of *García Girls* approach the novel as a story of immigration and cultural conflict but bracket the history of authoritarianism against which Carlos and his compatriots rebel.[7] Analyses of *Butterflies*, on the other hand, focus on the novel's central themes of political rebellion, gendered nationalisms, and processes of collective memory, while largely ignoring the broader context of Cold War bipolarism and US–Dominican relations.[8] In contrast, I suggest that, when put into dialogue with one another, Alvarez's novels traverse the disciplinary division between US ethnic literature and postcolonial/Latin American/Caribbean literature in order to make visible the relationality of women's subjection and of feminist agency across national borders.

The construction of the United States as a site for refuge from Trujillo's authoritarian regime and the migrant subject's "development" of a liberal feminist perspective entail actively forgetting the history of US (non)intervention in the Americas. I will argue that, in narrating the collective consciousness of two sets of Dominican sisters, these novels instead pose a doppelgänger or spectral relationship between the "deprived" woman under "depraved" Latin American/Third World postcolonial leadership and the freedoms and protections that North American (neo)liberalism purports to make available. This ghostly doubling opens a window onto the twentieth-century *collaboration* between the United States and authoritarian state regimes in the Americas. If conventional historiography neatly demarcates authoritarian repression, socialist revolution, and liberal reform,

Alvarez's portraits of women's needs, desires, and everyday life instead reveal the more muddled history of collaboration that remains behind the image of the United States as a site of refuge from the illiberalism of the Third World.

A Regular Revolution

The title of this essay comes from the curious chapter located structurally midway through *García Girls*, "A Regular Revolution." Narrated in a notable first-person plural ("we") that approximates the externally focalized perspective of a collective subject, no single sister ever takes up the first-person singular ("I"), but each one is nonetheless addressed in the third-person singular ("she"). The chapter moves quickly through a summation of the sisters' assimilation, primarily by their attending an elite boarding school, into American social mores and cultural practices. The girls explain the contrast between themselves, and the perceptions of the García family's wealth, and those of their white classmates, the heirs of US corporate elites, such as the "Hoover girl and the Hanes twins and the Scott girls and the Reese kid": "those brand-name beauties simply assumed that, like all third world foreign students in boarding schools, we were filthy rich and related to some dictator or other. Our privilege smacked of evil and mystery whereas theirs came in recognizable panty hose packages and candy wrappers and vacuum cleaner bags and Kleenex boxes."[9]

In this portrait, Alvarez pointedly employs what Saldaña-Portillo terms the "idiom of development"—that is, the tropes of "civilization" and civilization's necessary, underdeveloped others—that sustained the structural adjustment policies of the 1950s and 1960s.[10] As Saldaña-Portillo argues, discourses of "development" prevailed internationally after 1945, seizing the attention of a broad audience, including colonizing elites in Africa and Asia, liberal economists in the United States and revolutionary leaders in the Americas alike (23). As she points out, development discourse was remarkably effective in unifying this heterogeneous range of actors around the estimation that the Third World did, in fact, exist in a condition of "underdevelopment."[11] Moreover, as Saldaña-Portillo explains, the object of development became, first and foremost, not national economies but subjectivity; that is, development discourses became concerned with locating the "desired/desiring subject of (under)development" who was ideologically disposed towards "freedom from want."[12]

In particular, development discourse assumes "progress" according to the history and standards of Western nations, including the desirability of technological mediation, commodity production, and consumer practices.[13] In Alvarez's novel, the sisters' adoption of a politics of liberal feminism, portrayed as sexual freedoms, free movement, and public outspokenness, corresponds to an assimilation to consumer culture, providing a gendered sign of the changes they undergo. Such an idiom of development marks the growing ideological differences between the García girls, on the one hand, and their parents and Dominican relatives, on the other. As the

narrators explain, the García girls quickly cultivate "a taste for the American teenage good life, and soon, Island was old hat, man": "We had *more* than adjusted."[14] In "adjusting" and assimilating to American consumer culture—and its self-image of progressive development—this portrayal concomitantly affiliates the *deprivation* of the island with an ideological *depravity*, for example, the "filthy" "evil and mystery" of "some dictator or other," that, as Americans, the girls seek to transcend.

Their schoolmates certainly cannot place the name of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, and, in the United States, the García girls' memory of him only reaffirms the political border *between* their present home and the Dominican Republic. Indeed, during the era of Trujillo's dictatorial regime, the United States approached the Dominican Republic according to the strictures of the Good Neighbor policy. Building on the Pan-Americanism of the late nineteenth century and implemented by Franklin Roosevelt to secure hemispheric stability, the Good Neighbor policy proclaimed principles of noninterference and mediation between states to solve regional conflicts. Yet, as Eric Paul Roorda explains, the Good Neighbor policy was steeped in the contradiction "between fraternity with neighboring republics and domination over them": "Its goals . . . [had] always been geared to gain [US] national security and prosperity, by whatever means seem likeliest to work, from persuasion to invasion."[15] The strength of Latin American militaries, combined with nonintervention by the United States, led to the rise of authoritarian regimes in the region, beginning in the 1930s.[16] Although the brutality of governments such as Trujillo's posed public-relations problems that required constant diplomatic attention by the US State Department, the Good Neighbor policy and the desire to protect American interests (private debt held by US investors and national security, to name the two most salient) ensured that the United States did not interfere with the internal governance of the Dominican Republic.[17] The State Department hoped to demonstrate "that the U.S. government was completely impartial, abstaining from both interference and judgment, neither disapproving nor advocating."[18]

Yet the history of US–Dominican relations is only partly one of nonintervention. That era is bookended by episodes of "gunboat diplomacy" in the early twentieth century—including the military occupation of the Dominican Republic by the US Marine Corps from 1916 to 1924—and the likely role that the CIA played in organizing Trujillo's assassination in 1961.[19] The eight-year military occupation of the Dominican Republic had an enduring effect upon the nation, resulting in an unprecedented national integration of the political system and its military. However, it also resulted in bitter anti-US sentiment and left the Dominican Republic largely bereft of any political infrastructure to sustain a democratic government.[20] The US Marines also founded and ran the Haina Military Academy for the professional training of officers, its most famous alumnus being of course Rafael Trujillo.[21] Most significantly, the United States found it could not overtly act against Trujillo's increasingly authoritarian government after his election in 1930, because of the tremendous hostility that Dominicans felt toward the earlier Marine occupation.[22]

Thus, if the Good Neighbor policy implies that the United States begrudgingly extended international respect to the Dominican Republic—begrudging because of the vicious character of the Trujillo government, but respectful of the Dominican people's "self-determination" and sovereignty—this scene took place against the backdrop of earlier US expansionism, where US interests underwrote the Monroe Doctrine's claims to hemispheric solidarity. The effects of those early interventions lasted well into the latter half of the century.

Moreover, Trujillo expertly exploited US anxieties about the Soviet Union's growing international influence during the Cold War, so that by 1948, despite previous disapproval of the regime, the State Department conferred on Trujillo the status of an ally.[23] The postwar rise of anticommunism in the United States only further consolidated the State Department's alliance with Trujillo's regime, as the bipolarity of the Cold War subsumed and rearticulated all other geopolitical and diplomatic concerns.[24] Poised as "the hemisphere's chief mainstay (self-appointed) against communist aggression," Trujillo was able to purchase from the United States weapons and equipment, used mostly to intimidate and constrain the Dominican populace.[25] Ultimately, US support for Trujillo (and other Latin American dictators like him) was, as Roorda observes, "rooted in the enduring notion that order among nonwhite people can be maintained only by strong discipline."[26] Not until the late 1950s, when Trujillo's grip on power began to loosen and the domestic opposition to his regime grew stronger and more vocal (partly in response to the Mirabal murders, which I address below), did the United States shift its relation to his government.[27] In a hope to avoid a "second Cuba," by taking a role in the transition to a new government (and to distance itself from a dictatorship with which it had allied itself for years, so as to secure its role in the transition), the State Department imposed an arms embargo on the Dominican Republic.[28] It also made clear to Trujillo's opponents that the United States would grant recognition to a new government after a coup d'état if it comprised "moderates" rather than radicals or socialists.[29]

Although the macropolitics of this history might seem worlds apart from the daily lives of the Latina women that concern Alvarez, I contend it is precisely through her attention to women's everyday lives that she establishes a dialectical critique of the collaboration between US liberalism and Dominican authoritarianism. The "regular revolution" of the *García Girls* chapter title refers to the "constant skirmishes" and then the "open" battle by which the sisters challenge their parents' gendered restrictions on their social behavior throughout their adolescence and young adulthood,[30] culminating in their being shipped off for summers to the Dominican Republic (after Trujillo is overthrown). In the Dominican Republic, the García sisters deride their aunts and cousins for maintaining traditional expectations of women. When their youngest sister Fifi becomes involved with a Dominican man whom the other sisters find overbearing, they plot a campaign for "our Fifi's heart and mind," again making use of liberal Cold War rhetoric to ideologically figure the feminist rebellion they undertake (122). Worried that Fifi will engage in sex without

contraception, and further, that she might choose to remain on the island rather than return to the United States, they set out to end the relationship. Their cousin Mundín points out to them, with reference to their boasting of their own substantial sexual experience, the irony of this effort: "[Fifi's] got her rights too," he tells them. Carla, Yolanda, and Sandi nevertheless assume that because Fifi submits herself to Manuel's sexism, "she's brainwashed" and, as such, not a capable subject of rights and choice (126).

They employ a metaphor of revolution to describe their plan to save Fifi. However, this trope depends upon a *literal* politics of confrontation, obliquely involving their father, in the urban setting of the island: "we're staging a coup on the same Avenida where a decade ago the dictator was cornered and wounded on his way to a tryst with his mistress. It was a plot our father helped devise but did not carry through, since by then we had fled to the States" (127). Their own plan is a relatively simple one, tactically speaking; in returning from an evening out to the family's compound without Fifi and her *novio*, the sisters reveal that the lovers have been spending time unsupervised, thus risking Fifi's reputation. Their mother decides that the four girls must return to the United States: "I'm not going to send them anymore to cause trouble," she tells her sister, which is exactly the result they had hoped for (130). Yet, when their Tía Carmen worries over how much she will miss them, the three sisters feel ambivalent about the success of their plan: "We are free at last, but here, just at the moment the gate swings open, and we can fly the coop, Tía Carmen's love revives our old homesickness" (131).

Fifi's anger at them—she bitterly calls them "Traitors," before moving out of their shared room—further heightens this ambivalence. The others console themselves: "'She'll get over it.' Meaning Manuel, meaning her fury at us, meaning her fear of her own life. Like ours, it lies ahead of her like a wilderness just before the first explorer sets foot on the virgin sand" (132). The sisters describe "our" lives as "virgin" land yet to be explored and conquered. This trope of *terra nullius* is the colonial construct of a liberal imagination that uses and discards the maternal affections and protections that their aunts and mother extend to them, their selves at once the unsullied object of revolution and the knowing agent who will usher in change. Yet, given the dizzying array of metaphors used in this story—those of discovery and conquest, liberal adjustment, and revolution—and the ambivalent affections and desires these tropes represent, it is extremely difficult to draw out unambiguous lines of agency and subjection in this chapter.

Clearly this is a story about effecting one's will on others, but *whom* the chapter privileges as its heroic or enlightened subject remains uncertain (indeed, who constitutes the *individual* subject of the chapter remains uncertain, since no single "I" ever speaks in her own name). Our attempt to locate a pure agency uncompromised by the sexual and gender hierarchies of "tradition" or, for that matter, class privilege, proves impossible. Instead, the sisters' "revolution" loops back into and is enabled precisely by the "traditional" social differences that they attempt to transcend. They

exploit the same patriarchal attitudes of their Dominican family to "save" Fifi from herself, that is, to produce her as the subject of liberal feminist "choice," despite Fifi's own desires otherwise. The girls do not destroy the past, nor do they transcend or simply repeat it. Rather, Alvarez portrays a dialectic forged *through* traditional social relations. The contingency of their revolution on these relations alters the meaning of their freedom, rendering it a betrayal of Fifi and an abandonment of their aunt's love, and they come to doubt their own orientation toward it. This moment of emancipation would signal, in the conventional *bildungroman*, the character's coming into "her own" as an American woman. However, in *García Girls*, the stories that precede this one structurally (but succeed it chronologically, due to the novel's regressive chronology) about the adult sisters in the United States revolve around failed marriages, nervous breakdowns, and pervasive self-doubt.

The contradiction that structures the story's plot, that is the plot of a "regular revolution," in fact formulates the entire novel. It hence proves instructive for reading the much-commented-on reverse chronology by which the narrative unfolds, moving from the sisters as adult individuals, embroiled in familial and romantic complications, back to their "origins" in the Dominican Republic.[31] In its drive toward a chronological beginning and a narrative origin, the novel suggests that the loss of the Dominican homeland is not (as the "immigrant narrative reading" would have it) the *cause* of the adult sisters' individual feelings of alienation and estrangement from their parents and from others (with which *García Girls* discursively opens) but rather a *symptom* of a pervasive loss that temporally *precedes* and determines the entire family's displacement to the United States (the chronological beginnings that Alvarez depicts in the last chapters of the book).[32]

In the haunting final chapter, where the Garcías still live in the Dominican Republic, a young Yolanda steals a newborn kitten from its mother, despite a hunter's warning that to do so would be "a violation of its natural right to live."[33] Riddled with guilt, Yolanda throws the kitten out a window and watches it "make a broken progress across the lawn" back to the coal shed in which she had first come upon it (288). Yolanda finds herself haunted by the mother cat, who (she imagines) sits wailing by her bedside for years afterwards. With its wrenching portrait of a "broken progress," this closing chapter decisively refuses a liberal schema that reifies subjects as *either* deprived feminine victims of depraved repression *or* feminist agents of choice and change, the binary that organizes the sisters' lives as adult women in the "Regular Revolution" chapter. The final paragraph instead returns to the contradiction of violation that enables the subject:

> Then we moved to the United States. The cat disappeared altogether. I saw snow. I solved the riddle of an outdoors made mostly of concrete in New York. . . . I went away to school. I read books. You understand I am collapsing all time now so that it fits in what's left in the hollow of my story? I

> began to write. . . . I never saw Schwarz [the kitten] again. The man with the goatee [the hunter] and Kashtanka [his dog] vanished from the face of creation. I grew up, a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and peer into the darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art. (289–91)

Taken as an allegory for Yolanda's own subsequent displacement from the "motherland," the story of the kitten poses the García girls' migration to the United States as a violation of a "natural right." Yet, as with the regular revolution, in the *literal* story, Yolanda is the agent of violence and, to the extent that it enables her "art," its beneficiary. This literal dimension therefore reinscribes the positions that the metaphorical dimension assigns. As such, the "stories" that Yolanda constructs as an adult, to fit the "hollow" of the novel, do not offer an ordered account of cause and effect, progress from victimhood to liberation, but rather return us to the tangle of loss and violation, rebellion and will, that her literary imagination attempts to fill up and to order through narrative.

Moreover, the image of the cat's open mouth that ends the novel recalls for us the opening story of *García Girls*, "Antojos," in which an adult Yolanda returns to the Dominican Republic, hoping that "this turn[s] out to be my home" (11). An American advertisement image of a "creamy, blond woman" in a shower, with her "head thrown back in seeming ecstasy, her mouth opened in a wordless cry," closes out this story: "her head is still thrown back, her mouth still opened as if she is calling someone over a great distance" (23). The woman's open mouth anticipates and calls to the image of the cat, twinning its melancholic "wailing over some violation" and converting the woman's ecstasy into a sign of enduring loss. In her search for fresh guavas, Yolanda seeks to quench her own "antojo," which, as Yolanda's aunt tells her, "is like a craving" and her aunt's maid describes as like being "taken over by *un santo* who wants something" (8). Yolanda cannot, however, find her way to a prelapsarian island home, one that exists before the violence she enacts upon the kitten and before the violence that the state enacts upon her family. As Lucía M. Suárez eloquently argues, the losses that the novel encrypts are not only "the loss of language and the losses necessitated by assimilation" but also "the wound caused by the inherited legacy of the indecipherable horrors of the thirty-one-year Trujillo dictatorship that imposed loss of both memory and geography on many Dominican families."[34]

Instead, the story illustrates Yolanda's coming to an uneasy recognition of her contradictory class, national, and gendered status as she travels in the Dominican countryside. Unwilling and unable to identify with her aunts and female cousins and

their embrace of "traditional" roles, she "plans to bob up again after the many *don'ts* to do what she wants."[35] Nevertheless, when her borrowed car breaks down as she drives alone searching for guavas and she meets two *campesinos* she perceives to be threatening, Yolanda calls on her family name and her position as an American to "save" her: "She has been too frightened to carry out any strategy, but now a road is opening before her. . . . she begins to speak, English, a few words, of apology at first, then a great flood of explanation. . . . The two men stare at her, uncomprehending, rendered docile by her gibberish. Only when she mentions the name Miranda do their eyes light up with respect. She is saved!" (21).

From beginning to end, *García Girls* thus figures as ambiguous and contradictory the lines of subordination and agency that define its subjects. This central contradiction brings to bear an ethical truth, in which *any* (liberal, feminist, revolutionary) subject's agency takes place against a scene of original violence and naturalizes subaltern others. These others often appear intelligible through grids of racial, national, or class formation. For this reason, the brief narration offered from the point-of-view of the Haitian Chucha, the Garcías' long-term and loyal servant in the Dominican Republic, after the family has departed for the United States, provides a significant perspective on those "left behind" in the ascendance of (or into) American liberalism. Moving through the house filled with memories of the Garcías, praying to *loas* and *santos*, and ritualistically preparing for her own death, Chucha feels her own heart and blood to be like "something that I have forgotten to turn off in the deserted house" (224).

Emergent only in the margins of the García girls' narrative, Chucha's voice nevertheless spectralizes those others, naturalized and "deserted," whose presence actually and necessarily enables the subject's "development." But, just as often, Alvarez represents *other* others by way of an *intra*-subjective violence (e.g., splitting Yo between the mother cat and her kitten) and demands from us a critical care toward those who have yet to be named, but whose "natural right to live" nonetheless haunts the subject. This structuring contradiction that interrelates the United States to the Dominican Republic and the First World feminist to Third World women registers, for the transnational feminist reader, the political histories of the postcolonial Dominican state and American imperialism that so crucially ground liberal metaphors of social change.

The Ghosts of *Other* Women's Rebellions

The "development" of the four García sisters, who as adults avail themselves as (troubled) subjects of First World liberalism, forms a key for conceiving the other four sisters, "the Butterflies," of the second novel. The structuring contradiction of *García Girls* extends an opportunity for interpreting Dominican patriarchal "traditions" as discursive *artifacts* that liberalism creates, instead of positing them as the preconditions of underdevelopment that the liberal subject transcends. Shadowy

doubles to the García girls, the subjects of *Butterflies* offer a type of ghost story to haunt the former, like the "story ghosts and story devils" that trouble Yolanda. As Avery Gordon, citing Walter Benjamin, writes about the "animating" force of materialist historiography, "the oppressed past or the ghostly" provokes "a different kind of encounter and recognition" of that past.[36] *Butterflies*, I contend, animates the metaphors of revolution and rebellion that otherwise have sedimented into the liberal common sense of immigrant narratives and feminist individualism. Indeed, in *Butterflies*, Minerva's adult daughter Minou claims to speak to the spirits of the three murdered sisters through the medium of a family servant. And, although the one surviving sister, Dedé, mostly dismisses Minou's contention as superstition, in the novel's closing paragraphs she too admits to hearing the sisters' "soft spirit footsteps" at night as she falls asleep.[37] When Dedé insists, "I'm not stuck in the past, I've just brought it with me into the present," she illumines the dialectical critique that Alvarez's novels impart (313).

As a witness and survivor, Dedé adopts the role of official memory-keeper, maintaining in the family home a museum-shrine to her sisters and serving as a repository for other Dominicans who wish to share their own memories of the Butterflies. But beyond such official acts of memorialization, which translate individual lives into collective symbols of patriotism and resistance for the nation, Alvarez seeks through Dedé to offer a "different kind of recognition." Crossing the border between the personal/familial and the nation, and between the national domestic and the international/hemispheric, Alvarez frames the novel with the character of the *gringa dominicana* journalist to whom Dedé recounts her sisters' stories. Shifting from the third-person narration of the novel's opening to the first-person perspective of the subsequent chapters, where each of the sisters tells of her own involvement in the June 14th Movement, the novel indicates the need for "a way to enable Dominican history to write itself out of its repressed position in the U.S. historical imaginary without becoming exotically or voyeuristically 'othered.'"[38]

Alvarez imagines each Mirabal sister's involvement in the revolution against Trujillo as materializing from the daily social relations of romance, family, and religion, in which each is embedded. The paths that they follow are quite disparate; Dedé realizes that, despite her own longing for neutrality and security, she ultimately has no "choice" because her fate is entwined with that of her sisters.[39] Patria meanwhile understands her involvement as an extension of her religious convictions. Mate follows her girlhood crush (and later husband) Leandro into the movement. And Minerva approximates most closely a "modern revolutionary consciousness," which Saldaña-Portillo characterizes as having been favored by Latin American socialist movements, the "risk-taking, resolute, frugal, nonornamental, productive, fully masculine, fully national fellow."[40] Outspoken and unwavering in her commitment to the June 14th Movement that plotted to unseat Trujillo, Minerva occupies the often idealized role of a female revolutionary. Yet, precisely because Alvarez situates Minerva within the familial relations of sisterhood, never transcending them for a

purely masculinist version, I suggest that *Butterflies* posits the subjectivity that she embodies as one among an array of possible positions from which social transformation originates. Thus, even Minerva finds herself at moments exhausted by the demands that her Mariposa image requires, although she tries to bracket those uncertainties as the "woman in her."[41]

In its model of a feminist politics that does not transcend the relations in which women are situated, *Butterflies* simultaneously depicts how such transformation occurs through the subject's difficult but sustained inhabiting of spaces of vulnerability, upheaval, and damage. For example, Mate's diary records the experience of her own and Minerva's imprisonment by the SIM in La 40, a detention center. In this secret journal, Mate records her experience of bodily trauma at the hands of the military police. When Mate suspects that she might be pregnant and considers an abortion, so as to prevent a baby being taken from her and given "to some childless general's wife," the novel evokes the question of reproductive rights, so central to a North American liberal feminism, but with the crucial difference that the context of state terror makes to its significance. This entry is followed by one which reads, "Still very weak, but the bleeding has stopped. / I can't bear to tell the story yet. / Just this—I've either bled a baby or had a period. And no one had to do a thing about it after the SIM got to me" (240). In the subsequent pages of the diary, the introduction, "Here is my story of what happened in La 40 on Monday, April 11th," is immediately followed by a note: "pages torn out" (242). The novel does however return (to) these pages at the end of the chapter. Those diary entries have been, we are told here, secretly submitted to a representative from the Organization of American States (OAS) investigating the conditions in which political prisoners are being held (254).

Nevertheless, when Minerva earlier urges Mate to share with the OAS representative "about what happened at La 40," and Mate equivocates, Minerva, "all fierce," responds, "You have nothing to be ashamed of!"[42] Mate also notes in this entry that Minerva has begun to collect an "arsenal" of contraband (e.g., a knife, sewing scissors, scalpels, etc.), and the younger sister observes, "Sometimes I think revolution has become something like a habit for Minerva" (243). Here Alvarez casts Minerva's revolutionary stance as a "habit," echoing the "regular revolution" of *García Girls* and again posing a materialist critique of an idealized notion of rebellion. *Butterflies* interrogates the construction of such a revolutionary subjectivity by placing it in relation to the various feminine others against whom it is authorized: the "other" Mirabal sisters (i.e., the daughters of their father's mistress), the "non-politicals" held in the same prison cell, *campesinos*, and Haitian servants.

But even further, in what is perhaps the most difficult but most ethically significant account that the novel extends (and which recalls the kitten's "broken progress" in *García Girls*), *Butterflies* suggests that the production of the privileged subject-in-resistance *requires* a scene of violation such as the one that Mate undergoes. Mate's experience of extraordinary pain and suffering therefore

consolidates Minerva's fierce defiance. In the restored account of her visit to La 40, Mate describes first how the SIM officers force her to witness the beating that they give Leandro and then the electric shocks they administer to her in order to "persuade" Leandro, successfully as it turns out, to supply them with information on the resistance movement (255). Notably, the names of all the insurgents, including Leandro's, are blacked out in this account when she passes it to the OAS investigator; as Mate explains, "I am afraid of getting innocent people in trouble" (254). However, if, as Elaine Scarry has argued, pain evacuates the subject's grasp of a meaningful reality, effectively destroying that existence, this scene also intimates that it is not only the state regime that seizes on the vacuum that extreme pain generates.[43] Rather, the moral authority of the *revolutionary* subject is also forged through the foundering of the tortured subject. The blacking out of names suggests an absence of the revolutionary subject prior to the scene of torture. Alvarez thus proposes that the subject of resistance cannot occupy the position of the body in pain but is instead founded on the undoing of the latter. At the same time, when Leandro cries, "I'll do it, I'll do it!" (i.e., provide information on his comrades) and calls to Mate, "Tell them I had to do it," the scene suggests that the affective dimensions of their marital relationship overdetermine *his* "betrayal" of the revolution.[44]

As Page DuBois explains, classical conceptions of truth as a hidden essence that must be wrenched into "the light" to be known, manage both to incorporate and to justify a logic of torture. In the "conviction that truth is located in another space," the space of the body of the other (the slave, the woman), getting "at" the truth necessitates torture to "deliver up from the space of forgetting the sought-after prize."[45] Hence, DuBois demonstrates the radically antidemocratic character of this philosophical notion of truth that can only be known through an essential violence. With reference to our contemporary world, she distinguishes between political torture enacted in order to establish the totalizing authority of a powerful agent (i.e., Scarry's repressive regime) and the forms of sexual and domestic abuse that women (and children) undergo, aligning the latter with the older notion of the quest for truth in the body of the other (148–49). But, insofar as the desire for the extraction of truth actually effects the *creation* of the other, that is, makes the tortured person over into a feminized, enslaved, or inhuman other, the two different functions of torturous violence might not be so apparent. The "truth" that the tortured other substantiates is that of the total and ideal authority of the agent who has enabled the tortured unmaking of the body in pain.

The particularly "inventive" forms of torture that women undergo reflect this dual purpose, signifying the spectacle of women's pain and suffering not only as a physical wounding of the woman herself but as an object through which to "get at" her kinsmen. *Butterflies*' depiction of (the memory of) the sisters' husbands as they receive the news of their wives' deaths draws out the SIM's use of the woman's body in pain as a mode of "persuasion": "Manolo tells how that Thursday they were taken out of their cell and marched down the hall. For a brief moment they were hopeful

that the girls were all right after all. But instead of the visitors' room, they were led downstairs to the officers' lounge. Johnny Abbes and Cándido Torres and other top SIM cronies were waiting, already quite drunk. This was going to be a special treat, by invitation only, a torture session of an unusual nature, giving the men the news."[46] Although early in the novel Minerva describes how the revolutionary project provides "a new way for men and women to be together that did not necessarily have to do with romance," the persistence of more "traditional" relations becomes manifest in the "special treat" and "unusual nature" of this torture (76). In the context of state terror, kinship is disarticulated and rearticulated as forms by which the men can be newly devastated. Insofar as the women "belong" to their families as much as they do to the revolution, the state wields the news of their death as especially potent weapons against its (male) subjects.

Alvarez's novels stage the substantiation of power through such original violence and questions the justness of *any* power materialized in this experience. Obviously, this includes an overt critique of Trujillo's regime, but, more subtly, it involves, as I have shown, the revolutionary stance that Minerva adopts. And, perhaps even more elusively (in that we must return to *García Girls* to recall it), it queries a self-congratulatory American liberalism that deplores the "filth," "evil," and "mystery," of "some dictator or other." For, as DuBois surmises, a global economy of punishment and discipline inextricably intertwines First World disavowals of torture as barbaric with Third World practices of such violence.[47] The spectacles of torture and political repression "comfort American liberals who rest contented in their view . . . that barbarism resides elsewhere, in the other, that other world, unenlightened, steeped in medievalism and bloody cruelty" and that the United States instead offers a space of refuge and healing (155–56). In this multilayered and multipolar distribution of violence, truth, and power, a global spectacle of torture can, at once, secure the revolutionary's idealized self-image of resistance, the authoritarian regime's dominion over its citizenry, *and* the First World's sense of political security and moral superiority.

As Alvarez notes in her postscript to *Butterflies*, "November 25th, the day of their murder, is observed in many Latin American countries as the International Day Against Violence Towards Women."[48] We see in this memorializing move women's political agency explicitly remade into an occasion of women's victimhood; the sisters' active involvement in the revolution becomes reimagined (only) as their vulnerability to gendered forms of violence (which, in turn, serves as a liberal feminist call to action). Such liberal representations make over women's activism *as* their subjection to patriarchal and authoritarian depravity; their otherness proves an artifact of North American liberalism rather than an "authentic" cultural difference.

Alvarez, in contrast, teases out the ways in which feminist agency always emerges from and is folded back into the material, corporeal, and affective conditions that constitute femininity in the first place. Rather than comprising an abandonment of feminist agency in nationalist politics, I suggest that *Butterflies* casts

such agency as radical but also, as Saldaña-Portillo describes it, quoting Judith Butler, as "radically conditioned," emerging from the contradictory conditions of women's lives.[49] Without understanding women's lives as thusly situated in the historical conditions of their subjective possibility, we too easily dismiss Alvarez's novel, which Lynn Chun Ink does, as "reinstating gendered national dichotomies" simply because "the Mirabals return to their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers upon their release from prison."[50] Ink argues that Alvarez "reifies masculinized collectivity": "Rather than being agents of nationalism, the Mirabals become subjects of patriarchy."[51] For Ink, the Mirabal sisters "become" subjects of patriarchy, presumably because of Alvarez's limited feminist imagination rather than the actual limits of the history they inhabit.[52]

I contend that we might understand the Mirabal sisters' "return" to their gendered roles and their subsequent murders differently, by recognizing the work that comprises, in Das's terms, the descent into the ordinary as a form of agency. For example, placed under house arrest, Minerva considers herself to be at once both "falling apart" and beginning "a new life" with her sisters, their children, and her mother.[53] Unexpectedly undone by her time in prison, Minerva "returns" to a domestic space, but the context and meaning of home has been absolutely altered by her and Mate's knowledge of violence and suffering acquired in prison, not least because their husbands remain incarcerated and the women are placed under house arrest. Likewise, the sisters' murders occur as they travel to visit their imprisoned husbands, hoping to keep up the men's spirits but also to relay information surreptitiously about the resistance movement. It is precisely their participation in the everyday roles of wives and mothers that reanimates their active roles in the underground resistance, and vice versa. The descent into the ordinary defines their conditioned agency, as well as the ambivalence with which Dedé remembers their loss.

The novel both opens and closes with Dedé's memory "racing backwards . . . to the moment she has fixed in her memory as zero": "And I see them all there in my memory, as still as statues . . . and I'm thinking something is missing now. And I count them all twice before I realize—it's me, Dedé, it's me, the one who survived to tell the story" (7, 321). Dedé's absence in this recovered past simultaneously indicates her survival into the post-Trujillo era, where she will then be haunted by her other sisters. Their absence impels her to afford them a different type of recognition. As a witness to the violent past and subject to ghosts, Dedé—who otherwise refuses an active role in the revolution—mediates for her audience (notably, the *gringa dominicana*) the knowledge of state violence and women's rebellion in the Dominican Republic. *Butterflies* thus asks us to reconsider the everyday "grounds" of revolution that liberal feminism takes up as metaphor but also screens out in its appropriation.

Free Zones

With this carefully constructed model of political subjectivity, *Butterflies* refutes the representations of Third World deprivation through which a North American rhetoric and policies of assimilation, development, and (non)intervention take ground. At the novel's end, set in 1994, Dedé is reunited, at a reception in honor of the martyred sisters, with an elderly Lío, who had served in the late 1940s as Minerva's introduction to the underground movement. When Lío reassures Dedé that the sisters' deaths contributed to the nation's eventual freedom, she reflects, "He means the free elections, bad presidents now put in power properly, not by army tanks. He means our country beginning to prosper, Free Zones going up everywhere, the coast a clutter of clubs and resorts. We are now the playground of the Caribbean, who were once its killing fields" (318). Moreover, as she scans the room, she notices the other guests: "The boy-businessmen with computerized watches and walkie-talkies in their wives' purses to summon the chauffer from the car; their glamorous young wives with degrees they do not need; the scent of perfume; the tinkle of keys to the things they own," and later, on the drive home, "the only lights are up in the mountains where the prosperous young are building their getaway houses." Dedé surmises, "Lío is right. The nightmare is over; we are free at last. But the thing that is making me tremble, that I do not want to say out loud—and I'll say it once only and it's done. Was it for this, the sacrifice of the butterflies?" (318).

In "A Regular Revolution," the oblique emphasis on the "goods" of development implies that the García girls' "liberation" is as much about being liberated into consumer citizenship and neoliberal exchange as it is about sexual freedom and physical mobility. As Inderpal Grewal has explained, in this type of affiliation between consumer culture, market exchange, and rights discourses, political liberalism becomes conjoined with economic neoliberalism, such that, internationally, an "American way of life" designates both "a symbol of 'freedom' and democratic rights," *and* an "imperial power that use[s] disciplinary as well as governmental technologies within transnational consumer culture."[54] With respect to female subjects and femininity specifically, "technologies of feminist empowerment and pleasure that were promoted by late capitalist consumer culture became yoked to the promise of new discourses of modern female and feminist subjectivity and citizenship and the removal of violence and poverty for female populations in what were called 'developing countries'" (16). When construed through Dedé's "trembling" evaluation of the post-Trujillo Dominican Republic as a chain of "Free Zones," Alvarez explicitly questions the value of such "American goods" for Dominican women. *Butterflies* instead directs us to consider the subject of tyranny and of "development," in the Dominican Republic and in the United States, through the context of a hemispheric history that has been largely conditioned by US interests and policy.

Above all, Dedé's reference to "Free Zones going up everywhere" refers to the (neo)liberalization of political and economic institutions in the Dominican state after Trujillo's assassination, even as it remained, until 1986, under quasi-dictatorial governments. With respect to the Dominican economy, this has been carried out in particular through the operations of Industrial Free Zones (IFZs), where tax and other economic incentives attract investment by private foreign capital, and through the country's submission to agreements in the 1980s and early 1990s with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that stipulated austerity measures in exchange for IMF loans.[55] By 1988, there were seventeen IFZs, made up of 220 companies (most of them from the United States), in the Dominican Republic and, by 1990, ten percent of the Dominican population had migrated to the United States.[56] These transnational linkages and the affiliated discourses of "freedom"—free elections, social freedoms, free markets—have thus come to overdetermine and obscure the formerly imperial subjection of the Dominican Republic to US interests, a history that bounded the Dominican nation to the United States for decades.

US political and economic interests instituted the cultural marker of "deprivation/depravity" that has characterized a Latin American Third World, and this perception of the region served in turn to justify the nation's political, economic, and military (non)interventions there. In its telling of the Mirabal sisters' political activities, *Butterflies* archives the experience of state terror under Trujillo's regime as one of the effects of US imperial history. But, further, Alvarez spectralizes the *form* of the four Mirabal sisters in the United States as dopplegängers to the four García sisters. In the migration of the feminine Dominican subject, "deprivation/depravity" takes on a *racial* form, underwriting the hostility that the García girls (who, like the Mirabals, enjoyed racial privilege in the Dominican Republic over resident Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans) encounter upon arriving in the United States. Alvarez most notably depicts this racialization in the story "Trespass," where she portrays young Carla's run-in with a sexual predator as embedded in and continuous with more quotidian instances of racism: "Every day on the playground and in the halls of her new school, a gang of boys chased after her, calling her names, some of which she had heard before from the old lady neighbor. . . . 'Go back to where you came from, you dirty spic!'"[57] Coupling the sexual "trespass" of the older man with the abuse that the white boys dole out, Carla's story imbues the earlier stories in the novel of the adult sisters' romantic and sexual predicaments later in life. Carla's account of racialization thus recasts stories such as "Joe" and "The Rudy Elmenhurst Story" (both of which involve Yolanda's vexed relationships with white men); the failure of sexual and emotional intimacy that seems rooted in incompatible "cultural" differences—such as differing languages or sexual mores—expands to encompass the asymmetrical national histories of power in which these subjects are situated.

We might therefore read the adult women's espousal of a liberal feminism and of neoliberal consumer citizenship as a disavowal of such racial difference, an attempt—through "adjustment"—to escape the racial signifiers of deprivation/

depravity that plague their status as Dominican women. However, as we see in "A Regular Revolution," authorizing oneself as the autonomous subject of North American liberal feminism does not evacuate racial markers but reassigns them as the cultural difference that supposedly debilitates women in the Dominican Republic (there, in turn, such difference can be displaced onto racial and class others). A transnational feminist ethics attentive to such ghostly others can reveal how the very notion of "oppressive tradition," against which the García girls' liberal feminist self-image coheres, when refracted through *Butterflies*, proves not the source of the feminine subject's Third World underdevelopment, but rather its effect. Together, *García Girls* and *Butterflies* script the complex, alternative agency of subjects fractured by divisions of gender, race, nation, and class, whose political engagement arises from the daily work that female need and feminine desire calls forth. Neither hemispheric geopolitical conditions nor women's lives under them are as static or discretely separate as our conventional histories, maps, and disciplinary divisions would make them out to be. And yet these muddied and shifting grounds also provide the very contexts and contradictions through which social and political transformation takes place.

Notes

I am grateful to Minh-Ha Pham, Lok Siu, and the anonymous readers for the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* for their very helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

[1] "Transnational" critique here refers to a "sensibility [that] lets scholars see the movement of goods, individuals, and ideas happening in a context in which gender, class, and race operate simultaneously." See Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way, "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 633. From this perspective, "'transnationalism' can do to the nation what gender did for sexed bodies: provide the conceptual acid that denaturalizes all their deployments, compelling us to acknowledge that the nation, like sex, is a thing contested, interrupted, and always shot through with contradiction" (627). In reading transnational feminism and feminist imaginaries against liberal feminism, I should make clear that feminism itself has no singular definition and has taken multiple iterations. Nevertheless, in my references to feminist practices, I am concerned with those social discourses and political projects that "share the critique of masculinist ideologies and the desire to undo patriarchal power regimes." See Ella Shohat, ed., *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 2. As Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan explain, a transnational feminist practice that is attentive to the "scattered hegemonies" to which women are subject can "acknowledge the different forms that feminisms take." See Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies:*

Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 20.

[2] María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

[3] As Azade Seyhan writes of transnational literature and diasporic narratives, "literature tends to record what history and public memory often forget. Furthermore, it can narrate both obliquely and allegorically, thereby preserving what can be censored and encouraging interpretation and commentary in the public sphere." See Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.

[4] Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 77.

[5] For a full discussion of the feminist ethico-politics that informs this essay, see Crystal Parikh, *An Ethics of Betrayal: The Politics of Otherness in Emergent US Literatures and Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

[6] Ibis Gomez-Vega and Kelly Oliver each discuss both novels but do not link them to one another analytically. See Ibis Gomez-Vega, "Metaphors of Entrapment: Caribbean Women Writers Face the Wreckage of History," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 25, no. 2 (1997): 231–47; and Kelly Oliver, "'One Nail Takes Out Another': Power, Gender, and Revolution in Julia Alvarez's Novels," in *Foucault and Latin America: Appropriations and Deployments of Discoursive Analysis*, ed. Benigno Trigo (New York: Routledge, 2006), 235–46. Jacqueline Stefanko does briefly consider the two novels in relation to one another, suggesting that *García Girls* provides "textual instruction" against reproducing feminist readings that colonize the experiences of Third World women. See Jacqueline Stefanko, "New Ways of Telling: Latinas' Narratives of Exile and Return," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 17, no. 2 (1996): 50–69. In *Butterflies*, Stefanko argues, Alvarez offers "an alternative paradigm of feminist-socialism informed by postcolonial discourse, which may act as a bridge connecting women without denying difference" (61). Stefanko does not, however, situate this thesis within the specific imperialist and transnational history of US–Dominican relations.

[7] For example, Julie Barak examines many of the same scenes and stories from *García Girls* that I explicate below. See Julie Barak, "'Turning and Turning in the Widening Gyre': A Second Coming into Language in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*," *MELUS* 23, no. 1 (1998): 159–76. However, because she treats the novel as documenting primarily cultural differences and treats the United States and the Dominican Republic as discrete national spaces, her analysis is limited to detailing the competing cultural values and choices that the García girls face, without locating the characters' "divided selves" within the context of hemispheric political relations. One notable exception in this critical reception is Sarika Chandra, "Re-Producing a Nationalist

Literature in the Age of Globalization: Reading (Im)migration in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 829–50. Chandra insightfully argues that the critical reception of *García Girls* tends to reproduce nationalist categories. Chandra does not, however, develop a full reading of the novel or consider it in relation to *Butterflies*. A number of other critics refer to Alvarez's autobiographical essay, "An American Childhood in the Dominican Republic," in which Alvarez describes her experience of North American consumer culture and Western schooling while still a child in the Dominican Republic. However, these critics do not link Alvarez's observations in this essay to the cultural critique of American imperialism that she deploys in her fiction.

[8] Some recent criticism of *Butterflies* has begun to broach the question of US imperialism in relation to Dominican history. In arguing that Julia Alvarez be considered a Caribbean, as well as Latina author, Shara McCallum details some of the critiques of US imperialism lodged in the novel. However, she does not explore how that history in turn defines US social and political formations, for example, the construction of Latino experience in the United States. See Shara McCallum, "Reclaiming Julia Alvarez: *In the Time of the Butterflies*," *Women's Studies* 29, no. 1 (2000): 93–117. Maya Socolovsky more explicitly argues that Alvarez critically judges US foreign policy and imperialism, thus "extend[ing] the American historical imaginary, and allow[ing] Dominican events to write themselves into U.S. history." See Maya Socolovsky, "Patriotism, Nationalism, and the Fiction of History in Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *In the Name of Salomé*," *Latin American Literary Review* 34, no. 68 (2006): 6. See also Steve Criniti, "Collecting Butterflies: Julia Alvarez's Revision of North American Collective Memory," *Modern Language Studies* 36, no. 2 (2007): 42–63.

[9] Julia Alvarez, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (New York: Plume, 1991), 108.

[10] Saldaña-Portillo, *Revolutionary Imagination*, 27.

[11] Ibid., 23. As Laura Briggs et al. explain, Latin American "underdevelopment," like the corresponding "development" projects undertaken by states in the region, is the *product* of transnational capitalism, not outside or "prior" to it (Briggs et al., "Transnationalism," 638).

[12] Saldaña-Portillo, *Revolutionary Imagination*, 25.

[13] Ibid., 23. See also Vandana Shiva, "Staying Alive: Development, Ecology and Women," in *The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and Documents from the Bible to the Present*, ed. Micheline R. Ishay (New York: Routledge, 1997), 253–62.

[14] Alvarez, *García Girls*, 108.

[15] Eric Paul Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 27.

[16] Ibid., 32. This is not to argue that US (non)intervention *caused* Trujillo's regime (although, as I discuss below, it certainly "created" Trujillo as a military leader). Indeed, numerous factors, not least the tremendous success of Trujillo's agrarian policies and incorporation of the Dominican peasantry into a national modernity, secured his long and repressive regime. See Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003). Nonetheless, in this section I explain that the United States policy contributed substantially and in determinative ways to Trujillo's power (and, more obviously, to his assassination). Indeed, even the distribution of land and the sedimentization of the peasantry began, if fitfully so, with the US military occupation of 1916–1924, during which period the US military government began institutionalizing a private property regime to benefit US economic, political, and military interests (71–77). The nationalist-populist movement that formed in response to US administration espoused "an alternative model of modernity" that underwrote Trujillo's early agrarian policies (53).

[17] Even in the case of the extraordinarily violent 1937 massacre of more than ten thousand Haitians by Dominican soldiers in the northwestern region bordering Haiti, the United States touted the Good Neighbor policy, facilitating a diplomatic resolution between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

[18] Roorda, *Dictator Next Door*, 62.

[19] In his 1904 corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, Theodore Roosevelt accorded to the United States the power to "correct the fiscal irresponsibility of the local states and maintain political order through the exercise of an international police power." See G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson, *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 39. The Roosevelt Corollary explicitly attributed fiscal and political instability to cultural and moral hierarchies between nations, stating that "chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America . . . ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation." See Michael J. Kryzanek and Howard J. Wiarda, *The Politics of External Influence in the Dominican Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 31. This soon led to a receivership arrangement between the Dominican Republic and the United States, whereby the United States served as the collector of customs for the Dominican Republic, and ultimately a treaty giving the United States extensive oversight of Dominican local government (32). By assuming the task of establishing economic and political stability in the Caribbean, the United States could prevent European intervention in the region and ensure its own influence (see Atkins and Wilson, *Dominican Republic*, 39–41). William Howard Taft added to this foreign policy the

practice of "dollar diplomacy," actively encouraging US investors to extend loans and private capital in the region (46). In 1916, following the Dominican refusal to comply with US demands for command over Dominican armed forces and the threat of civil war in the nation, President Wilson ordered the invasion of the Dominican Republic by US Marines on May 5. The ensuing Wilson Plan oversaw the administration of new elections, a reordered financial system, and a newly created national guard in the Dominican Republic (46). As Kryzanek and Wiarda explain, there is some evidence, although no direct link, that the CIA later supplied weapons to Trujillo's assassins.

[20] See Atkins and Wilson, *Dominican Republic*, 59.

[21] The Marines developed an officer corps that drew largely from an emerging middle class and lower class of Dominican society, many of whom were antipathetic toward the upper classes. The Haina Military Academy provided training to these Dominican nationals, often of mixed race or "black" heritage, like Trujillo. The constabulary offered an especially advantageous path to social and economic mobility for these men (ibid., 55). In contrast, few upper-class men served as officers. See Howard J. Wiarda, "The Politics of Civil-Military Relations in the Dominican Republic," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 7, no. 4 (1965): 467.

[22] Atkins and Wilson, *Dominican Republic*, 64.

[23] Roorda, *Dictator Next Door*, 231. Such an alliance was only one instance in a decades-long history of US intervention in Latin America and alliances with dictators. Between 1954 and 1989, the United States also interceded (often covertly) in Guatemala, Cuba, British Guiana, Chile, Nicaragua, Grenada, and Panama. See Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008). Indeed, in 1965, a few years after Trujillo's assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson dispatched troops to the Dominican Republic to stem a countercoup by the former president Juan Bosch, who had been ousted by Dominican military forces in 1963 (79–80). On this occasion, Johnson issued his "Johnson Doctrine," whereby the United States would proceed, unilaterally and militarily, in the Western hemisphere to prevent the institution of a communist government.

[24] Roorda, *Dictator Next Door*, 233–34.

[25] Kryzanek and Wiarda, *Politics of External Influence*, 39.

[26] Roorda, *Dictator Next Door*, 241.

[27] The reasons for the decline of Trujillo's power and popularity were multiple. These included a major shift in economic policy, whereby Trujillo acquired for himself and his regime a monopoly on the nation's sugar industry (which dispossessed large segments of the peasantry) and the increasing use of extremely violent methods by the SIM. Moreover, a major rift between the Catholic Church (which had previously supported the

dictator) and Trujillo in 1960 threw many Dominicans' loyalty to the dictator in disarray (see Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, 232–58).

[28] The United States also supported the condemnation of Trujillo by the OAS after Trujillo's involvement in the attempted assassination of Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt.

[29] Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, 259.

[30] Alvarez, *García Girls*, 111.

[31] For detailed discussions of the reverse chronology in *García Girls*, see Stephanie Lovelady, "Walking Backwards: Coming of Age in *My Ántonia* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*," *Modern Language Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 28–37; and Catherine Romagnolo, "Recessive Origins in Julia Alvarez's *Garcia Girls*: A Feminist Exploration of Narrative Beginnings," in *Narrative Beginnings: Theories and Practices*, ed. Brian Richardson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 149–65. My analysis of the narrative structure and use of terminology regarding different forms of narrative beginnings have been adopted from Romagnolo.

[32] In an interpretation of the reverse chronology that is fairly characteristic of much criticism on the novel, Lovelady writes, "the characters' tendency to return to the past through storytelling and/or visits to the homeland, stress that the process of coming of age in a new land is not a linear process, but one that requires an occasional backwards step" (Lovelady, "Walking Backwards," 30). In equating a physical return to the Dominican Republic with a "return to the past," Lovelady implies that the Dominican Republic indeed exists "in the past," rather than in what Johannes Fabian describes as "coevalness" with the United States. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 31–32. The "denial of coevalness" has the effect of eliding the specific dimensions of Dominican modernity (the postcolonial state form and its mutual constitution with American imperialism), which impel the departure from the homeland in the first place.

[33] Alvarez, *García Girls*, 285.

[34] Lucía M. Suárez, "Julia Alvarez and the Anxiety of Latina Representation," *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 5, no. 1 (2004): 131.

[35] Alvarez, *García Girls*, 9, emphasis original.

[36] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 67. Vilashini Cooppan draws on Jacques Derrida's formulation of spectral analysis to suggest a "hauntology" (also Derrida's conception) for the literary history of "world literature." Reading for spectral forms makes visible how "the past ghosts the present, the invisible ghosts the visible, the unknown ghosts the known, what is to come ghosts what is and what has already

been." See Vilashini Cooppan, "Hauntologies of Form: Race, Genre, and the Literary World System," *Gramma* 13 (2005): 82.

[37] Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (New York: Plume, 1994), 321.

[38] Socolovsky, "Patriotism," 9.

[39] Alvarez, *Butterflies*, 193.

[40] Saldaña-Portillo, *Revolutionary Imagination*, 65. She further explains, "The antagonist is recast as the unruly, feminized, not-quite-human, but not quite/not human, traditional native, the object of perpetual instruction" (65). Saldaña-Portillo argues that Latin American revolutionary discourse shared with a liberal developmental one a conception of subjectivity based on a "theory of human perfectibility that was itself a legacy of the various raced and gendered subject formations animating colonialism" (7).

[41] Alvarez, *Butterflies*, 267.

[42] Ibid., 243. Minerva further urges Mate to forego a pardon by Trujillo, because "accepting a pardon meant we thought we had something to be pardoned for" (236).

[43] See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 27–59. Lynn Chun Ink, whose analysis of *Butterflies* I discuss further below, contends that "the details [that Alvarez provides] fail to convey the extent of the abuse the sisters endured under Trujillo" and that because "even her most horrific prison experience, her torture in La 40, is described in a detached manner," Alvarez renders Mate's experience "sentimentalized" and "mythologized." See Lynn Chun Ink, "Remaking Identity, Unmaking Nation: Historical Recovery and the Reconstruction of Community in *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Farming of Bones*," *Callaloo* 27, no. 3 (2004): 796. It is not clear how a "detached manner" sentimentalizes the experience, but in demanding realistic "details" of abuse and torture, Ink problematically calls for a spectacle of suffering whereby the other's pain must be made visible, so as to provide a site of identification for the reader-self. As Saidiya V. Hartman argues with respect to the spectacle of slave suffering, "the black body is made to speak the master's truth, whether this is of terror (abolitionist's truth) or enjoyment (slave-master's truth)." See Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22. Instead, I contend, attention to the literary *form*, rather than only to the substantive detail, that Alvarez employs, tenders a critique of how such violence is integral to authoritarian state power (and, as I explain in this section, the corresponding agency of the rebels). As Hartman suggests in her discussion of Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, the silence and fissures in women's narration figure as the textual wounds of the "violated and mute body": "The bodies of these women are textual enigmas to be interpreted by the reader since they are literally pregnant with the secrets of slavery" (107–8).

[44] Alvarez, *Butterflies*, 256.

[45] Page DuBois, *Torture and Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 137.

[46] Alvarez, *Butterflies*, 309.

[47] DuBois, *Torture and Truth*, 154.

[48] Alvarez, *Butterflies*, 324.

[49] Saldaña-Portillo, *Revolutionary Imagination*, 163.

[50] Ink, "Remaking Identity," 295.

[51] Ibid., 291, 295. At points, Ignacio López-Calvo also seems to level a similar assessment of Alvarez's characterization of the Mirabal sisters, describing the "Mirabal sisters' involvement in the subversive struggle [as] problematized," because it originates in romantic, familial, and religious relations. See Ignacio López-Calvo, *"God and Trujllo": Literary and Cultural Representations of the Dominican Dictator* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 88. Ultimately, López-Calvo surmises that, "in reality, this 'questionable' stance is necessary in order to construct more lifelike and less idealized protagonists" (94). I would press this notion of the "less idealized" representation further, as pertaining not simply to a literary aesthetic of realism, but as a crucial ethical imperative for conceiving a feminist and/or revolutionary politics.

[52] Oddly, while Ink criticizes Alvarez for returning her characters to such traditional roles that have been defined by patriarchy, she also argues that Alvarez "essentially reifies American imperial hegemony by reinstating an imperial divide between the Dominican Republic and the United States" as characterized in the dialogue between Dedé and the *gringa dominicana*. As Ink writes, "the novel represents Dedé as a modern woman because she has the necessary accoutrements that come with middle-class privilege . . . and because she can balance a career and a home. . . . the text attempts to prove that Dominican women are just as progressive as American women" (Ink, "Remaking Identity," 797–98). It remains unclear how, in her own censure of the Mirabal sisters' return to their families as a negation of women's agency, Ink does not impose a similar yardstick. In contrast, Oliver more helpfully suggests that revolution in Alvarez's novels need not refer to "monumental actions" but rather to "the everyday struggles with authority that enable and empower resistance" (Oliver, "'One Nail,'" 241).

[53] Alvarez, *Butterflies*, 258.

[54] Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 8–9.

[55] Atkins and Wilson, *Dominican Republic*, 151, 206–7; Kryzanek and Wiarda, *Politics of External Influence*, 128–29.

[56] Atkins and Wilson, *Dominican Republic*, 203, 161; Kryzanek and Wiarda, *Politics of External Influence*, 136.

[57] Alvarez, *García Girls*, 153.

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