

Introduction

Spiritual and Emotional Resistance to Empire

You cannot look at a god that doesn't look like you and feel whole . . . so we must look to those spaces that keep our traditions of healing alive, because if you don't free your mind and soul you don't free the body.

—Dr. Marta Moreno Vega, talk at the
Caribbean Cultural Center and African Diaspora Institute

During my conversation with Josefina Báez, a Dominican-American author and performance artist who has published a wide array of literary works in New York, we spoke about the centrality of spiritual and emotional spaces in literary work by Black Latina women. Specifically, Báez outlined the restorative power that might be conjured by creatively engaging feelings of love and joy in this community, as well as occupying an open space of spiritual connection oriented toward those who share similar experiences. For her, these sensations felt by Caribbean women of African descent arise from the need to break through a colonial/imperial relationship not only with the United States but also with those island nations of the Atlantic to which the women can trace their roots. This is to say, these categories represent a possibility to overcome and to create reality otherwise. In our dialogue, Báez made an urgent call to embrace a politics that is “heart-centered” and proclaimed that by privileging the heart and deep spiritual connection, we might “make pain nothing.” She defined this type of heart-centered politics as one that seeks to engage spirit and emotion in everyday life in order to uncover and center the histories of Afro-Latinx women, as well as the ways in which they forge

alternative forms of solidarity, create knowledge, and take charge of the imaginary to envision other possible worlds.

Báez uses these narratives to also demonstrate how Afro-Caribbean women move together in difference, as she so eloquently explains in our conversation:

[We need] a heart-centered community that is concrete, centered in the “is” and looking forward to a future that we have to create by taking care of ourselves and others. We all inhabit this Afro-diasporic body, and in that body each one of us has a work that will define it. Some of us are here [she holds out her hands] with fists clenched in the body, and these fists are needed. Others are in the heart, others are here [she gestures toward her throat] and are very vocal. And we all have cycled through all. And we move together in a dance, an amazing dance that is the walking of all of us together. A *ritmo* that includes pauses, silences, not knowing, knowing. But we are part of this body, and for me that is what is important. (Deckman 2018)

For Báez, this spiritual centering of the “heart,” or those intimate stories that reach out and embrace the other in a mutual recognition, has a clear objective made apparent in the above passage: to empathize with the conditions affecting others, to recognize the other in one’s self, to underscore the need to love Black bodies as a reparative gesture, and to pave the way into the future through spirit and joy. For the heart beats a life force throughout diaspora and connects in sinewy difference the disparate parts of the collective whole. Báez’s advocacy for a coalitional politics of love in everyday life, then, urges Afro-Latinx women to share their experiences in such a way that this telling and retelling might perhaps move the community, as one body with many different functions, toward a future of liberation. The joy that this mutual recognition of humanity brings about, for Báez, is one that releases the body from the shackles of painful histories and creates a new *sense* of corporal sovereignty—a “ritmo” of spiritual and emotional wholeness that reclaims histories and bodies in order to create something new.¹

Báez further declares that she is not interested in engaging with any traditional academic discourse or narrative in her advocacy for mutual support. In fact, she cheekily claims that the gravest violence one could do to her work is to “Foucault it,” something that, for her, sounds too

much like to “fuck it.” She uses this language to underscore the fact that to impose another voice upon her art—especially that of a white male European intellectual—would be to smother her creation and limit the spaces she conjures on her own terms. Báez claims that this would be a type of intellectual rape that would steal her voice, spirit, and capacity to feel.² She is also clear to establish that her words are not to be understood as theory or metaphor; rather, the “centrality of the heart” should be engaged to build concrete and urgent spiritual, bodily, and emotional connections between women of color. In this way, her words stress a real spiritual connection shared by a collective “us” invoked repeatedly in her enunciations. This “us” composes the “we” of her statements, which binds together Caribbean women of African descent in a political community that marches through shared experiences of pain, historically rooted systems of violence, and the vestiges of colonial/imperial occupations that continue to manifest themselves in contemporary economic and political structures. The spirit that they share is a common but disconnected experience of dispossession and forced displacement, searching to create a world otherwise in their own way and on their own terms. This maneuver also serves to characterize “us” as an intimate diaspora of women who each dare to tell their stories in hopes of moving the collective body one step closer to liberation. Moreover, the urgency of locating these stories in the “is,” as Báez defines the “present” filled with possibilities, breaks the barriers between past, present, and future, anchoring everyday experiences in an infinite connection with history and future potential. The “is” disrupts space and time in order to break through linear movements, allowing for other ways of knowing and connecting to emerge.³

This anecdote serves to open a more in-depth conversation into the ways that the spiritual, the bodily, and the emotional converge in the writing, artistic, and spiritual activism of Afro-Latinx women of the Caribbean in order to propose new ways of moving together in difference toward reparation, love, and joy. With a focus on contemporary literary and cultural productions, this book explores present-day manifestations of continuously shared economic and political circumstances of women of the African diaspora by examining five different contexts within the Afro-Latinx Americas: the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the United States (US). More specifically, each of the four chapters studies a particular spiritual need of the “Afro-diasporic body” manifested in the literary and creative works of Rita Indiana Hernández, Edwidge Danticat, Ana-Maurine Lara, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, Mayra Santos-Febres,

Nitty Scott, María Teresa Fernández, Elizabeth Acevedo, Ibeyi, and Las Krudas CUBENSI. The main questions that bind this archipelago of voices are, How do each of these authors reach out to a spiritual community to make sense of and work through the lingering pain of colonialism, slavery, and imperial projects? How do they engage feelings of love and joy to decenter this pain through their engagement with the entities of various spiritual systems, such as Espiritismo, Santería, Vodou, and other creolizations of these? And how do they link the spiritual and the emotional to *feel* their way through transformative, experimental processes—while productively considering their differences? How does the sacred become a way of embodying a self that is an intimate part of a historical community of movement and struggle? How does the sacred embody the ideals of decolonial love toward a genealogy of enslaved women as a system of healing? What lies at the crossroads of subjectivity and collectivity, spiritual knowing and power, memory, body, and emotion, and how might they move toward a decolonial future?

“We Are All in This Afro-Diasporic Body”:
African Diasporic Consciousness and Fractality

The literary and cultural producers in the following chapters engage with Afro-Latinx/Caribbean identities through their use of African diaspora spiritual practices and emotional politics. These religious beliefs include Dominican-Haitian Vodou as imagined by Hernández and Lara; Espiritismo and Santería as written by Arroyo Pizarro and Santos-Febres; creolized beliefs and self-proclaimed *brujería* wielded by Nitty Scott, Elizabeth Acevedo, and María Teresa Fernández; and Ibeyi’s and Las Krudas’s conceptualization of Cuban *orisha*. These works all highlight the interconnectedness of diaspora and the ways in which these imaginations of spirituality look toward a radical and urgent future world through building a genealogy of ancestral spirits and loving orientations toward one another.

Further, the emphasis on spiritual healing is a direct response to an inherited reality of violence, discomfort, and pain since all subjects in these works experience the lingering effects of colonization and the Middle Passage. The practice of spiritual healing becomes a necessary force for self-care, especially for women, in order to forge new futures that are untethered from the shackles of the past. Often these spiritual practices were written off as magic, witchcraft, or sorcery and were subject to

restrictive laws set in place by colonizers (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 7). Historically, these spiritual practices and rituals acted as a collective space to protect the health of some of the most oppressed communities in the early colonies. They allowed enslaved African communities to preserve a sense of identity after suffering a violent cultural, social, and religious loss and even lent agency to African women who became the cornerstones of their new communities, as they were forced to create new modes of kinship (Murphy; Griffith and Savage; Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert; Strongman).

As Maha Marouan claims in *Witches, Goddesses, and Angry Spirits*, the criminalization of women's diasporic spiritual practices is clearly documented in the history of the Americas. She writes that this is due in part "because they provoked fear of poisoning and slave revolts . . . a result of racist ideology inherent in a European discourse of enlightenment that associates Blackness with evil" (9). Furthermore, she shows how African diaspora religious practices were often associated with magic, harm, and spells: "The knowledge of plants was seen as dangerous, because while plants are used to cure devotees, they also can be easily used to poison those in power" (9). The women in this book look to this history to rearticulate the way Afro-descendent women are represented, not as evil/demonic sorceresses but as cornerstones of their communities capable of reworking the order of things through an ephemeral connection in difference. For example, when Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro rescues the voices of enslaved women from the archives in San Juan, Puerto Rico, as part of her project *Cátedra de Mujeres Negras Ancestrales*, she charts active struggles by Black women against colonial forms of enslavement. She also converts the types of discourses that surrounded African religions, conceived as a force capable of disrupting the politics of Judeo-Christian respectability that guided colonial life, into poetic and literary creations that inform her vision of Afro-feminism in the Caribbean. At the same time, Ana-Marúne Lara immerses herself into the colonial history of the Dominican Republic and Haiti in order to communicate the violence of a self-righteous Christian male community when she describes the US occupation of Haiti (1915–1931) and the destruction of Vodou spiritual objects and persecution of practitioners of the religion in her own literary and academic projects. These are only two examples of the ways in which women of the Afro-Caribbean engage the spiritual and emotional residue of diaspora to reveal not only violent histories but also emergent forms of resistance and the radical potential of the imaginary in forging Afro-futurities.

The various spirits, ancestors, and orisha that operate in Santería, Espiritista, Vodou, and Santerista communities conjured in these creative and political works form a broad spectrum of beings that move between what Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús calls diverse “Santería worlds” (6). These presences are oftentimes described as “felt” on the body and understood as “presences” within various spiritual networks that transcend space and time—inhabiting a space not unlike the “is” that Báez privileges in her own creative acts. Beliso-De Jesús employs the term “copresences” to refer specifically to this “complex multiplicity of racial spiritual embodied affectivity” that terms such as “presences” and “felt” imply (7). This means that sensations—emotions—can act as spiritual and religious subjectivities tied to a certain form of movement or bodily experience: “Dead African slaves, Yoruba diaspora oricha, and other racialized entities form part in a reconfiguration of practitioners’ body-worlds . . . the various oricha, dead spirits (*egun*), energies of good (*iré*) or bad (*osogbo*) that influence practitioners’ lives are copresences that haunt transnational spiritual interactions, inscribing themselves as historical affective archives” (7–8). This phenomenon is similar to what Avery Gordon terms a “seething presence,” where ghosts and hauntings act on the present to call attention to “what has already past but is still very much existent” (Gordon 8). These feelings, knowledges, and otherworldly interactions conjure into existence certain spaces that “some know to be true but that others cannot fully see or comprehend” (Stoler 9). This demonstrates how embodied, emotional experiences can be understood as a type of spiritual locus of enunciation that may be crucial in uncovering the ways in which the structures of slavery and colonialism are still very much a part of the Afro-Caribbean experience—a locus that is at once singular and multiple, affecting the individual experience with ramifications for an entire community.

Rebellious Spirit/Against Western Modernity

Here it is important to describe this spiritual locus from which the authors in question speak. We must ask, What does this space look like and how does it allow for the politics of spirit to be renegotiated? How does it allow for lives to be rearranged and power to be shifted? Joseph Murphy writes that “to understand spirit . . . is to see that it is an orientation to a historical memory and to a living reality . . . the memory provides the precedent for all action. [For example in Vodou] things are

done because ‘cé commandment l’Áfrique.’ Africa becomes the criterion of harmonious and moral action, and authority derives from fidelity to the traditions and spirit of Ginen” (38). But what is at stake when this historical memory is separated from the lived reality of a Black island? What type of “action” occurs when the “harmonious” “authority” of Africa is violently replaced with the imposed spirit of European whiteness and modernity? What type of turmoil does this cause a community that has been systematically cut from its collective memory, barred from the *uno múltiple* of ancestral communion?

Roberto Strongman reviews the boundaries between self and body in order to explore this rupture in the conceptualization of spirit, the boundaries between modernity and coloniality, with a markedly “decolonial attitude” (Maldonado-Torres 12). Through a brief study of philosophical thinkers such as Descartes, Bataille, Serres, Sartre, and Foucault, Strongman concludes that Western religious and philosophical systems continually entrap the soul. He claims this entrapment represents an internalization of the self that he contrasts with Afro-diasporic systems that have been historically and violently forced to the edges of the modern nation-state. This alternative understanding of how body, mind, and spirit are connected not only to the individual but also to the collectivity, he argues, may also permit a way to break through the imposition of Western philosophical discourses and ontological models upon the bodies, minds, and spirits of the historically colonized: “In fact, a thorough study of Afro-diasporic religions reveals how—unlike the Western idea of a fixed internal unitary soul—the Afro-diasporic self is removable, external, and multiple” (Strongman 10).

This multiplicity of the self observed in Afro-diasporic religious systems finds itself at home in the Caribbean and in the Caribbean diasporas and provides a locus from which to think from the periphery, the islands and their diaspora, and offer transformative approaches to thinking about modernity and its discontents. What Strongman reviews as “duality of the immaterial self” in African traditions becomes, in one cited example, the *tibonanj* and the *gwobonanj* in Haitian Vodou. In *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizbeth Paravisini-Gerbert define these terms: “The head, which contains the two elements that comprise the soul—the *ti bónanj* or *ti bon ange* (the conscience that allows for self-reflection and self-criticism) and the *gwo bónanj* or *gros bon ange* (the psyche, source of memory, intelligence, and personhood)—must be prepared so that the *gros bon ange* can be separated from the initiate to

allow the spirit to enter in its place” (118). Strongman summarizes the roles of these two aspects of the self by writing that the gwobonanj is consciousness, while the tibonanj is objectivity: “The gwobonanj is the principal soul, experience, personality. The tibonanj is described as the anonymous, protective, objective conscience that is truthful and objective, the impersonal spiritual component of the individual, whose domain also encompasses moral considerations and arbitration” (13). Thus, unlike the Western idea of the body as enclosure, Afro-epistemologies reorganize bodies and they become an open vessel—a ritual container that can be emptied, filled, and transported, what Strongman calls a “transcorporeality of being” that defies imposed logics of European thought. Thus, personhood in Africanized systems is tethered to multiple vessels, influenced by nonmaterial entities, and constructed in multiplicities. Even knowledge and the production of modes of knowing is something to be extracted, experienced, and conjured through bodily movement, ritual, and ethereal connections with spirits and ancestors. This radical (re)understanding of the body, spirit, and emotionality through spiritual ties aligns with contemporary archipelagic thinking and allows us to imagine new ways of mapping a geography of Afro-Caribbean feminist being. It challenges us to consider the limits of thinking from a Western perspective and to see time, space, and social relation differently.

As Strongman astutely notes tension between the Afro-diasporic concept of soul and the Cartesian understanding of its connection to the body, it is also worth noting that the conceptualization of spirit in Africanized religious traditions also conflicts with the modernizing and historical “spirit” of Enlightenment as understood by Hegel. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes a historical arc bending toward the Absolute—which he traces over the course of history through four empires (“Oriental, Greek, Roman, and Germanic”). According to Hegel, Spirit is developed in three stages. The first is in the form of self-relation, the Subjective Spirit composed of the minds of individual peoples. The second stage is that of Objective Spirit, or how individual minds come together and form communities. Here, Hegel argues that Spirit manifests itself through the laws of the state and that as history marches forward, all past stages are contained within the present “much like how a modern city is built on top of ruins of its earlier phases” (10). These layers are not separate or accessible but represent a series of steps taken in linear succession. These trajectories move toward what Hegel terms “Universal Spirit,” as the past moves unilaterally toward enlightenment in a linear

manner. For Hegel, Spirit is not something to be engaged or questioned, not something that travels between times, but instead is a descriptor of periodic and progressive movement forward. It is produced in an arc by an Absolute Idea, which leaves out certain areas of the world, removing them from the “progression of humanity.”

This modernizing Spirit of Western Enlightenment has historically worked its way through the history of the colonies. In privileging certain ways of knowing and producing knowledge, it has supported political structures and nations that have emptied and alienated the inhabitants of Caribbean islands from their own stories, myths, and spiritual understanding of time and space. This has occurred in various educational missions—effectively zombifying in the name of the nation-state (Brodber 12). Thus, while moved by the Spirit of Enlightenment, the European gaze becomes predominant—the lens through which the colonized begin to view themselves. In this way, the Spirit of modernity works upon and *constructs* the colonized, who are punished and marked as deviant if they try to imagine themselves outside of this paradigm, outside of a linear progression toward a universal knowledge.

Caribbean Fractals and Space-Time Otherwise

Central to *Feminist Spiritualities*, then, is a rebellious type of spirit. It is a radical spirit that breathes into existence a united multiplicity that shatters linearity and purity, what Santos-Febres has begun to term *el uno múltiple* (taken up again in chapter 1). For Santos-Febres, who anchors herself in the Yoruban traditions of Western Africa and Puerto Rican Espiritismo, the knowledge that her body exists as a spatiotemporal crossroads bestows upon her and her literary production the power to forge other kinds of opportunities for connection and to imagine new futures while coming to terms with the past. I argue that the women of this collection all engage in an affective-spiritual conceptualization of the *uno múltiple*, a fractal understanding of Caribbean being that breaks through the colonial discourse of fracture and brokenness in linear time. If, as M. Jacqui Alexander argues, the legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean and the consolidation of modern nation-states implies an alienation from traditional indigenous and Africanized ways of knowing—fracturing the Afro-Caribbean spirit—then the women here become powerful healers who harness the multiplicity and transcorporeality of African diasporic spiritual systems to imagine

a new system. This allows what Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vásquez terms “an examination of the varied liberatory strivings that rip the seams of foundational histories, and of the practices and fashioning of radical futures that do not rely on assimilation, dispossession, or coloniality” (23). This move carves an intimate spiritual space that connects racial and political projects across time and history and allows us to examine how historical processes of racialization, colonization, and imperial expansion play out in contemporary life.

On May 18, 2020, Santos-Febres laid out her emergent project of Afro-epistemology and fractality in a talk given at the Biblioteca y Centro de Investigación Social Jesús T. Piñero. In this talk, she speaks about Afro-epistemologies, the body as open vessel, and the productive utility that this thought has in terms of how we approach and think across various geographies of diaspora, cartographies of dispossession, and histories of forced displacements. She claims that following Afro-epistemologies allows us to address the lack of studies on testimonies of the enslaved, the lack of systematic studies on practices of *cimarronaje* and *cimarrón* establishments in Latin America and the Caribbean, and—her most salient point—a lack of the incorporation of the logics of Afro-diasporic spiritualities into academic discourses. While admitting that there does exist a history of sociological and anthropological studies that center race and Blackness in Latin America (involving what she says is an overreliance on data, fractions, and scientific approaches), she claims that not enough attention has been given to how these categories are engaged creatively or imagined by contemporary artists.

She states that “cuando hablo de fractal, estoy hablando específicamente de geometría fractal y de las organizaciones que comparten todos los seres . . . yo creo que el Caribe es fractal y que la identidad afrodescendiente es fractal por historia, pero también por esa continuidad extraña que es una tecnología de vida que hace que repliquen cosas en la memoria, en los distintos países y regiones a las que nos han llevado” (“when I speak of the fractal, I am speaking specifically about fractal geometry and the organizing structures that all beings share . . . I believe that the Caribbean is fractal and that Afrodescendent identity is fractal by history, but also because of that strange continuity, that technology of life that makes things replicate in memory, in different countries and regions to which they have forcibly taken us”). This conceptualization of space and time, again, stands in stark contrast with the linear progression of Enlightenment and the Cartesian understanding of body and mind. Here,

memories seem to be passed down like genetic material, a “technology of life” yet to be uncovered that might tell “us” (her community of Black Caribbean women) where “we” have come from and recognize a similar pattern across the hemispheric Americas to perhaps forge connections of solidarity, mutual respect, and love beyond imposed geopolitical borders.

Santos-Febres argues that through the transcorporeality of Afro-diasporic being she is able to enter an “other” space in which her body is connected intimately to her past and her future. She becomes an open entity capable of disrupting the Western timeline to center the disparate histories of her people. As she continues to explain her understanding of fractality, she proceeds to display a photo of a silvery leaf on a slide and asks her audience to view the leaf as a map—an aerial view with rivers and mountains, oceans and landmasses that become more intricate and repetitive as she zooms closer. She declares that these rivers that course through the leaf have much to do with the ways in which we think spiritualities otherwise; that is, how many realities can coexist in what appears to be one singular image: “Lucen las capas de la realidad que no son lineales, sino se sobreponen, se multiplican” (The many layers of reality shine through. These are not linear; they overlap, they multiply). This is precisely where Santos-Febres locates the “logics of fractality,” a term that she coins as *una provocación*, a pattern that repeats itself in difference across the Americas from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Cuba to the southern US, the Gullah Islands, and throughout the hemispheric context. The *uno múltiple* becomes a way of creating a view of reality that might perhaps suture the fractures of history in order to inhabit a fractal being—echoing Baéz’s diasporic rhythm that moves through difference as one. It is the superposition of many layers that are at once one and multiple—a geometry of bodies and histories that repeats as each separate part is examined more closely.

Ultimately, she asks how we, as literary and cultural scholars, can use this pattern to step into the spiritual locus of enunciation and uncover truths that have for too long been kept silent: “Es algo específico. Es fragmental, NO fragmentado. Me pregunto siempre: ¿Qué tenemos que hacer [nosotres], los pensadores de esta nueva identidad o esta nueva configuración de la identidad afro en estos momentos históricos para discutir, para crear estas investigaciones? Porque les voy a decir una cosa, estas investigaciones hacen falta en el Caribe hispanoparlante para re-escribir el mapa de las presencias y de las negociaciones” (It is something very specific. It is fragmental, NOT fragmented. I always ask myself: What do

we, the intellectuals of this new identity or this new configuration of afro identity in these historical moments, need to do in order to discuss and create these investigations? Because I am going to tell you all something, these investigations are lacking in the Hispanic Caribbean and they are necessary if we are to re-write the map of presences and negotiations (Santos-Febres “Afroepistemologías”).⁴ *Feminist Spiritualities* takes up Santos-Febres’s call to map “presences” and “negotiations” across geopolitical boundaries, by grounding itself in an Afro-epistemology of spirit and embracing a logics of fractal being. In this way, the text does not seek to tell a coherent story of Afro-Latin(x) American and Caribbean colonization, enslavement, violence, and dispossession, nor does it seek to provide an in-depth overview of the spiritual systems mentioned. Rather, it attempts to evoke the ways in which those processes are disrupted when we center a Black spiritual resistance to imposed systems of (Western) knowledge. This, in turn, allows other modes of being to emerge and calls for a transformation in the ways we think of racialized belonging across and beyond Caribbean geographies. By centering the vessel, inhabiting the open fractal, each author takes on the spiritual locus of enunciation to claim for herself the crossroads of being and history in order to speak back defiantly. As the epigraph of this introduction by Dr. Marta Moreno Vega claims, the search for wholeness in difference must begin with an epistemology and spiritual understanding that is constructed from below, one that bestows its practitioner with power in identification where they become the powerful visionaries of a new tomorrow. To look at the world through someone else’s lens, to “Foucault” (fuck) it, is to continue to ghost⁵ histories, bodies, beliefs, and experiences that have the power to reshape reality and political structures.

“I Don’t Want My People in More Pain”:
Feminist Emotional Politics through Spirit

As a logic of Afro-diasporic spirituality, transcorporeality, and fractals guide the organization of this book, the women studied also engage with the emotional impressions that these spaces and entities leave on their bodies—as well as the ways in which these feelings become opportunities for connection and knowledge creation in their own right. Thus, feminist thought from women of color and decolonial approaches give us the tools with which we can engage not only the spiritual politics of these works

but also how these women invoke emotion within this spiritual connection. Returning to the opening anecdote, while Báez urges scholars not to “Foucault” the work of Black and Latinx women, she emphatically begs for us to “Anzaldúa” it. Here Báez means that she would prefer an exploration into the ways that her work addresses a type of “spiritual activism,” invoking her own vision of the *uno múltiple*. However, she also considers Anzaldúa’s teachings in *Light in the Dark* in order to question not only spiritual spaces but also how the emotions experienced within these spaces act as impressions left by social, historical, and political structures. For example, in *Light in the Dark* Anzaldúa remarks on the power of border dwellers—*nepantleras*—who engage emotional politics and embrace vulnerability to create new connections and imagine new futures. This type of thought or orientation echoes the drive toward creation that fuels the *nepantlera*, where the “thought” and creative act has the power to work on and change reality, reflecting also Édouard Glissant’s transformative poetics: “[It] spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risks become realized” (1). These spiritual and emotional politics, then, are feelings that work not only on the mind but also on the body and the boundary between bodies, times, and spaces to forge an alternative cartography of meaning-making. Lara calls this a type of “potential map to Black sovereignty,” that includes not only the spiritual but the emotional experiences of queer individuals and women “including the collapse of time in ceremony, including the manifestation of spirits through bodies, voices, and dreams, including the reconfiguration of gender and race through the corporeal-spirit body-land” (“I Wanted to Be More of a Person” 25). Here again, Lara reiterates the connectedness of spirit and bodily sensation, the importance that affect and emotion play in making sense of not only the world but also the nonmaterial, the temporal, and the spatial.

Emotional Politics in the African Diaspora and the Caribbean

In this sense, my study of emotional and spiritual discourses resonates with Katherine McKittrick’s insistence on care as urgent feminist work for women of color and Black women. More specifically, both McKittrick and Sara Ahmed explore feminist methodologies of emotion as they are manifested in a multitude of literary and cultural productions in order

to demonstrate that cultural and political structures impress themselves differently on different bodies, thereby creating publics and socials with different emotional textures and boundaries. Thus world-building within the united multiplicity of diaspora rests upon the ways in which “we” conceptualize nurturing relationships, build joy, and forge loving connections through a spiritual understanding of the self and the other. The foundations of this would mean the recovery of modes of life that have been subjugated and pathologized. This type of “familia from scratch” represents a radical fight to stay alive in spite of those who would see their way of life destroyed and a willingness to grow together in difference. *Feminist Spiritualities* will focus specifically on pain, love, and joy within a spiritual space of connection between past, present, and future as depicted by each author. It is precisely in the emotional refusal of empire that the women in this study claim for themselves positions of love and joy on their own terms—exactly what their bodies have been historically denied. Fractally together, they ask, How can we be and feel otherwise? How can we connect and share experiences of feeling otherwise? How is feeling alive, joyful, and loved a radical position in itself?

Specifically, the “affective turn” in Latin American and Caribbean cultural studies has emerged precisely from these questions. In their foundational collection of essays *El lenguaje de las emociones: Afecto y cultura en América Latina*, Mabel Moraña and Ignacio Sánchez Prado underscore the “work” that emotion can do in terms of opening up cultural and literary manifestations to further study: “El gradual e inexorable declive del poder explicativo de los vocabularios de los estudios culturales latinoamericanos en los últimos años ha dejado en claro la necesidad de nuevas formas de aproximarse a la cultura desde ese ángulo afectivo que, en la mayoría de los casos, ha sido leído como poco más que un síntoma de procesos políticos e ideológicos subyacentes” (12; The gradual and inexorable decline of the explanatory power of the vocabularies of Latin American cultural studies in recent years has made clear the need for new ways of approaching culture from that affective angle which, in most cases, has been read as little more than a symptom of underlying political and ideological processes).

The book’s several sections, which span a vast cultural spectrum, include a variety of theoretical and thematic approaches, thereby deepening in an expressive interpellation of culture and underscoring what has been posed in the introduction—that affect and emotion are critical phenomena produced in post modernity and late capitalism and are effects

in the processes of domination and marginality: “El impulso afectivo—en cualquiera de sus manifestaciones emocionales, sentimentales, etc.—moldea la relación de la comunidad con su pasado, las formas de lectura con su presente y la proyección hacia el futuro posible, deasado e imaginado en concordancia o en oposición a los proyectos dominantes” (315; The affective impulse—in any of its emotional, sentimental manifestations, etc.—shapes the relationship of the community with its present and the projection towards the possible future, devised and imagined in accordance with or in opposition to the dominant projects). Thus, emotion—grounded in the historical processes of Latin America and the Caribbean—become essential sites of interrogation in order to open up cultural criticism to its liberating potential. In this book, emotional politics will be engaged with the spiritual to approach ways in which Black Caribbean communities and their diasporas have and continue to push toward possible futures—guided by radical spirit, joy, and love.

To speak about joy and love, we must first briefly understand how pain works politically and can even be taken on as a site of knowledge forged in the imperial order of things. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde—a Caribbean feminist scholar and intellectual in her own right, who spent the last years of her life on the island of St. Croix—describes her encounter with a white woman on a train to Harlem (124–33). In this memory, Lorde is a child and her mother spots what she terms an “almost seat” (one that is barely big enough for her to fit). Her mother pushes her into this seat, and Lorde spots beside her a white woman in a fur hat. With the woman’s stare and the abrupt manner in which the woman jerks her coat closer to herself, Lorde senses a feeling of horror in the woman. Lorde attributes this horror/disgust to a roach that the woman must have seen to have reacted in such a way. Suddenly, Lorde realizes that there is nothing crawling on the seat between them, it is Lorde the woman does not want her coat to touch. The bodies come together in the “contact zone,” almost touch, and slide away. The sickening sensation that the white woman experiences becomes a rage or anger that the body of an “other” has gotten too close. The body of the young Black child is constructed as something that was sickening insofar as it has gotten too close and therefore ran the risk of “contaminating,” the body of the white woman. Furthermore, this sudden recoil of the white woman “undoes” the young Black girl. It leads the Black girl to anger. This anger is then turned into hate toward the Black female body (her own body and the body of other Black women) as well as deep psychological and emotional pain. This is why, for Lorde, it is a

political action to love the body of Black women. Lorde's conception of anger as a political force is full of information, energy, and the power to examine, redefine, envision, and reconstruct—especially for women of color, lesbians and gay men, and poor people.

Therefore, following Lorde's theorization transformed into anger and into valuable information for a politics of love, the term *pain* is used in this book to refer to specific moments of urgent physical discomfort exhibited in the examined productions. While the term has vast medical and psychological connotations, it is used here to communicate the “pain” of multiple forms of contact between the individual and the social and to demonstrate how these categories shape each other. In other words, I argue that we must consider the political, cultural, and historical work that pain does in uncovering the logics of empire that guide daily life. Thus, this book employs pain as a concept that enters into politics and opens a space from which we are better able to analyze complex relations of power. This politicization of pain requires that we take into consideration the ways in which painful experiences work in certain ways to affect themselves differently on various bodies. Through an analytical framework inspired by the texts in this book, just like Lorde's, my study will address the multiple border spaces opened by painful encounters and how we can and must move past pain to glimpse another type of spiritual-affective liberation.

Pain, and the multiple emotions with which it is usually associated (e.g., shame, anger, disgust, and hate), is defined by several scholars of the Caribbean as an intimate space of relation. I use space of relation to demonstrate how pain is bound up with how bodies inhabit the world. For example, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel uses painful ethnic humor in Puerto Rico to demonstrate what she terms the island's “interethnic borders” when she writes in *Caribe Two Ways: Cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico*: “El chiste étnico funciona como otro de los discursos represivos contra las identidades minoritarias” (163; The ethnic joke functions as another repressive discourse against minority communities). Martínez-San Miguel goes on to refer to the *repulsión* that the national subject feels toward the racialized “other” (here: the Dominican immigrant or the dark-skinned Afro–Puerto Rican) and the hostile border that the joke produces (155). She underscores the fact that the border produced through this contact of the national subject's disgust and the “other's” shame is one that is particularly uncomfortable and filled with pain directed inward, as the subject is affectively removed from the comfort of belonging. What is more, the painful border is converted into

a form of processing, articulating, and circulating hidden limits of what is considered appropriate or possible.

In *Our Caribbean Kin*, Alai Reyes-Santos addresses a line of pain in the Caribbean that is intimately linked with national and transnational kinship models. Referring to Martínez-San Miguel's conceptualization of the ethnic joke, Reyes-Santos relates the painful experience of otherness to histories of colonial subjection and dependence, as well as US military interventions (107). Therefore, painful border spaces carry within themselves the power to act as a type of decolonial locus of enunciation—that is, the border allows one to speak at the margins of well-defined categories—and to make visible structures of power that have infiltrated the social and political experiences of Afro-descendent women in the Caribbean and its diasporas. It is in this specific context that I use the term *pain*: namely to address the ways in which these women who operate from the periphery of the European canon challenge—through their engagement with African diaspora spiritual practices—the cultural and racial hegemony of the center. To dwell in pain is to bring the conditions of “modernity” and the Eurocentric categories through which the modern nation-state is perceived to the surface. It is the pain that operates on certain bodies that makes these categories visible.

Moreover, in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, M. Jacqui Alexander writes: “Since colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both material and psychic levels, the work of decolonization has to make room for deep yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert and ultimately displace the *pain* of dismemberment” (281, my emphasis). Within this framework, and following Alexander, the imprint that colonization has left on Caribbean society is one of a painful dismemberment and the yearning, desire, and constant search for ways to work through this painful inheritance toward a new form of wholeness. According to Martínez-San Miguel, pain in this sense acts as a way to identify and recognize colonial dismemberment or rupture in the present—that is the pain of the coloniality of diaspora (*Coloniality*). Here I follow Martínez-San Miguel's conceptualization of coloniality of diaspora, which is used “to refer to experiences of colonialism in the Caribbean that began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and lasted, in some cases, until today, and that frequently include the coexistence of more than one colonial system (Spanish and US American in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba; Spanish, French, US American, and English in

many islands of the Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean, such as Haiti and Martinique)” (22). Thus, my conceptualization of pain inserts these authors’ productions into the colonial discourse to disturb its dynamics by calling attention to the ways in which colonial systems are at work in their everyday lives. Pain in these texts and cultural productions is a process that challenges the articulations of cohesive national identities; it expresses the often hidden and violent social, cultural, and political realities hidden behind the “happy fantasies” (Ahmed *The Promise*) of the modern nation-state.

It is important to note that although I discuss the Black body in pain as a site of knowledge in the context of racism and xenophobia, this pain does not condemn these bodies to hopelessness and erasure—nor should it ever become the focal point of individual or community identification. Rather, it may constitute a rupture with a present that oftentimes fails to acknowledge racist and xenophobic (anti-Black) practices. I connect pain with the disruption of modes of knowledge or ignorance regarding race and oppression in order to point to coalitional possibilities across experiences and histories throughout the Afro-Caribbean. Therefore, one of the important contributions of my conceptualization of pain in this archive is to illustrate the power that emanates from dwelling in the borders created through painful encounters and the type of decolonial knowledge that this dwelling-in-pain communicates and how it often moves bodies toward a powerful spiritual and emotional experience filled with knowledge. This move toward community, pushed by a painful past, also represents the movement toward a love that may perhaps wipe away this pain and a joy that asserts bodily autonomy and self-sovereignty.

“We Need a Heart-Centered Community”:
Decolonial Love, Joy, and Ethical Relations

By taking into consideration decolonial theory, my analysis focuses on how pain performs as a kind of colonial wound—gesturing toward an interstice that is found at the borders between Western and non-Western knowledge, the one that the assumed norm of modernity marginalizes. Therefore, to study this kind of pain within decolonial thought demands a rethinking of knowledge beyond Western concerns—and dwelling in these interstices brings us closer to overcoming and embracing joy. Specifically, Walter Mignolo illuminates how this kind of “border thinking” provides

a liberating energy from which “local decolonial ‘I’s’” may “speak their truth” (xiv). That is, he explores the strategies that we may employ to imagine a landscape and knowledge belonging specifically to those traditionally left outside of modernization projects.⁶ Furthermore, I take up Mignolo’s challenge to not dwell within one disciplinary territoriality but instead intend to “dwell in the borders” of literary and cultural studies by using the tools that these disciplines provide to go beyond them and analyze those discursive, political, aesthetic, and cultural practices aimed at dismantling those residues of slavery and coloniality.

In this sense, illuminating pain as a kind of “counter knowledge” speaks back to what Aníbal Quijano, Mignolo, and José Buscaglia-Salgado have theorized as the coloniality of power. This concept can be understood as the asymmetry of power based on a racial and geopolitical classification that establishes the differences between Europe and its former colonies (Mignolo xvii). Thinking and doing decolonially means painfully and consciously unveiling the logic of coloniality and “delinking from the rhetoric of modernity” (Mignolo xviii) to engage in a knowledge from specific loci of enunciation, in our case from the emotional/spiritual experiences of Afro-Caribbean women both in the islands and beyond. Mignolo then argues for the need to decolonize knowledge and being and advocates that the “decolonial humanities” will have a fundamental role to play in this process (Epistemic Disobedience 3). Also, as Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Ben Jáuregui have noted, “the study of coloniality implies . . . the challenge to thinking *across* (frontiers, disciplines, territories, classes, ethnicities, epistemes, temporalities) in order to visualize the overarching structure of power that has impacted all aspects of social and political experience in Latin America since the beginning of the colonial era” (17). Santos-Febres’s conceptualization of Caribbean fractality and Afro-epistemologies extends this line of thought, and the women in this book engage in their own extension of this mindset: a politics of anti-colonial power that emerges from the interstices of the spiritual locus of enunciation.

Decolonial Love

It is in this sense that Chela Sandoval’s work becomes fundamental to my study. In her *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval argues for the “emancipatory potential in women-of-color formations and strategies

precisely because, unlike traditional conceptions of diversity, difference is embraced in these formations and strategies not as an objective in itself, but rather as a point of departure and a method for transforming repressive and colonial social circumstances” (xi). Thus, she creates the possibility and strategies for decolonization through what she calls “love in the postmodern world,” which represents a way of deeply understanding each other that establishes an intimate collective movement of women. Against the exclusionary politics of national love, decolonial love functions in the materials I examine here as a critical methodology that looks to the past to enact a present of hospitable possibility for those marginalized from the national promise of a love associated with national identity. Through this type of love, Sandoval exposes the underlayer of modernity by showing those historical/colonial forces that have (not so) silently influenced the history of US-European consciousness.

In “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Lorde theorizes from a Black feminist standpoint this decolonial loving attitude toward the other. In this particular essay, spirit and emotion take central importance as a force that works to move bodies toward each other in an intimate coalition. Lorde describes the erotic as source of knowledge that is spiritual in nature and lies in those unknown or unexpressed feelings. It takes the form of an episteme that disrupts masculinist “rational knowledge” (53). Lorde writes that it is particularly the space of the erotic that has been perverted by the “male world,” which fears the depths of this knowledge too much to examine it within themselves. She claims that too often the erotic is confused with the pornographic. But the pornographic represents the unknowing of this erotic knowledge: “pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling” (54). When intimate connection is flooded with feeling, a void is filled and knowledge emerges.

Thus, feeling and emotion become central components of the spiritual locus of enunciation. Power and connection come from “sharing deeply.” Lorde writes, “The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference” (56). This is to say that once one experiences the liberation and happiness that one is capable of experiencing, one can then go on to speak back to systems of power that restrict the body from the ultimate joy of life. These political and emotional categories are not separated from the spiritual. Lorde erases the border between the spiritual and the political by claiming that what connects these two categories is