"¿HOW MUCH CAN A FOOT DO INSIDE A TIGHT SHOE?" MOVEMENT AS A DECOLONIAL STRATEGY IN SONG OF THE WATER SAINTS, BY NELLY ROSARIO

"¿O QUE UM PÉ CONSEGUE FAZER EM UM SAPATO APERTADO?" MOVIMENTO COMO ESTRATÉGIA DECOLONIAL EM *SONG OF THE WATER SAINTS*, DE NELLY ROSARIO

ABSTRACT

Although the different colonizing processes were limited to historical periods, coloniality, that is, the logic connecting different colonialisms, has persisted through the centuries. It has proclaimed the universality of western thought while dehumanizing the bodies of non-white people and attempting to obliterate their cultures. On the other hand, a decolonial attitude, a reaction to various modes of coloniality/modernity, proposes alternatives to Eurocentric models, bringing to light and legitimating *other* ways of being and understanding the world. Our purpose here is to delink ourselves from an episteme situated solely in the mind – based on colonial parameters – and to align ourselves with an episteme situated in the body – based on the mostly forcible dislocation of peoples established across the centuries. Focusing on contemporary literature in English produced by artists who also search for options to coloniality/modernity, we use the concept of tidalectics developed by the poet Kamau Brathwaite in our reading of *Song of the Water Saints* (2002) by Nelly Rosario, a Dominican writer who lives in the U.S. While following the traditional Western mode of novel writing, Rosario confronts and transgresses this ideal of an enlightened literary genre, as she uses movement, a leitmotif in the narrative, as a decolonial strategy.

Key words: Decolonial strategy. Tidalectics. Movement. Caribbean Literature. Nelly Rosario

RESUMO

Enquanto os diferentes processos de colonização estão limitados a determinados tempos históricos, a colonialidade, isto é, a lógica que une os diferentes colonialismos, persiste através dos séculos. Proclama a universalidade do pensamento ocidental ao mesmo tempo em que desumaniza os corpos de pessoas não-brancas e tenta obliterar culturas. Por outro lado, a atitude decolonial, uma reação a formas diversas de colonialidade/modernidade propõe alternativas aos modelos eurocêntricos, descortinando e legitimando *outros* modos de ser e de entender o mundo. Nosso objetivo aqui é nos desprendermos de uma episteme – situada exclusivamente na mente – baseada em parâmetros coloniais e nos alinharmos a uma episteme – situada no corpo – baseada principalmente no deslocamento forçado de seres humanos através

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dos séculos. Colocando em foco a literatura contemporânea de expressão inglesa produzida por artistas que também buscam opções à colonialidade/ modernidade, usamos o conceito de *tidalectics* desenvolvido pelo poeta Kamau Brathwaite em nossa leitura de *Song of the Water Saints* (2002), de Nelly Rosario, autora dominicana radicada nos EUA. Ainda que seguindo um gênero literário ocidental tradicional ao escrever um romance, Rosário contesta e transgride os moldes do gênero, ao utilizar o movimento, fio condutor da narrativa, como uma estratégia decolonial.

Palavras-chave: Estratégia Decolonial. *Tidalectics*. Movimento. Literatura caribenha. Nelly Rosario

America. Africa. The Caribbean. Starting from the premise that there is a close connection between naming and colonizing/dominating, we add yet another term to the list: Latin America. Eduardo Coutinho ponders over the term's evolution, initially used in 19th century Europe with the purpose of establishing a difference between the America colonized by peoples from a neo-Latin origin and the one that was primarily colonized by Anglo-Saxons (COUTINHO, 2005, p. 157). Going through several changes since then, the term, which has acquired a clearly political slant, now encompasses a much wider range, as it includes colonies (former and present) from France, England and the Netherlands located in the Caribbean region. These changes, as Coutinho sums up, ensure that "the idea of *latinidade* remains alive, offering a counterpoint to an Anglo-Saxonic America, marked by its economic power", while at the same time including the other cultures that make it up and that played fundamental roles in the cultural formation of the continent (COUTINHO, 2005, p. 161; our translation).

Seeing the Caribbean region as part of Latin America helps elucidate the consolidation of hegemonic power as well as the erasure of histories of subjugated peoples through colonization. The reflections of contemporary Latin-American theorists about the colonizing processes that led to the appropriation and control of the so-called "new world" also contribute to a clearer understanding of the effects of colonization, taking place from the end of the 15th century into the next one. According to Walter Mignolo, "the epistemic privilege" of the west, which was built and consolidated thanks to its colonization of the peoples living in the Americas inaugurated "modernity". He underscores that "for five hundred years universal history was told from the perspective of one local history, that of Western civilization, an aberration, indeed, that passed for the truth" (MIGNOLO, 2012, p. IX). Although the different colonizing processes were limited to historical periods, coloniality, that is, the logic connecting these colonialisms, has persisted through the centuries, an issue addressed by Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Mar*ía Lugones, among others.*

"Coloniality of power", a term introduced by Anibal Quijano in the late 1980's, is instrumental to understand what has taken place in the aftermath of various colonialisms. The Peruvian sociologist argues that the social classification of the colonized population according to race was one of the main axes for the creation of a new model of world power, based on a supposedly biological distinction between

conquerors and conquered. The other axis stood on the articulation of a new structure of control of labor, its resources and products (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 533-34). Quijano observes that in the span of three centuries of colonization, the great number of indigenous peoples, their histories, languages and knowledges were reduced to a single "racial, colonial, and negative" identity: Indians. Those peoples brought forcefully from a continent that was named Africa went through a similar process and were also reduced to a single identity: Negroes (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 551). The loss of "singular historical identities" was compounded by yet other losses: "their new racial identity, colonial and negative, involved the plundering of their place in the history of the cultural production of humanity. From then on, there were inferior races, capable only of producing inferior cultures" (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 552).

Argentinian sociologist Mar*ía Lugones* expanded Quijano's concept of coloniality of power in order to examine how gender combined with race has compounded impositions upon the colonized. Undoubtedly, gender oppression based on the binary and hierarchical patriarchal system predates colonization, but Lugones argues that colonialism "imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers" (LUGONES, 2007, p. 186). In another text, Lugones, argues for the need to decolonize feminism in order to overcome the coloniality of gender. She maintains that that "unlike colonization, the coloniality of gender is still with us; it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power". (LUGONES, 2010, p. 746). She also proposes a "feminist border thinking where the liminality of the border is a ground, a space, a borderlands, to use Gloria Anzaldúa's term, not just a split, not an infinite repetition of dichotomous hierarchies among de-souled specters of the human" (LUGONES, 2010, p. 753). Aware of the complexity of the issues at stake, she makes it clear that she is setting up questions rather than answering them. Still, she is forthright about the path to be followed: "Decolonizing gender is necessarily a praxical task. It is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social. As such it places the theorizer in the midst of people" (LUGONES, 2010, p. 746).

Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova also discuss the need and the determination to resist Eurocentric models along with the various modes of coloniality addressed here. They also argue that border thinking/theorizing makes it possible to react "against the violence of imperial/ territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity" that was/is based on and justified by the belief that the *other* – in relation to the West – is inferior and evil. (MIGNOLO; TLOSTANOVA, 2006, p. 206). Following Gloria Anzaldúa's path-breaking work in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) while also acknowledging her place among the theorists that "brought both geo and body-politics wide and loud into the open" (MIGNOLO; TLOSTANOVA, 2006, p. 212), the critics explore the concept in its political, subjective, and epistemic dimension. They also point out that differently from frontiers, "the very concept of border implies the existence of people, languages, religions, and knowledge on both sides linked by relations established through the coloniality of power" (MIGNOLO;

TLOSTANOVA, 2006, p. 208). Border thinking, as discussed by Mignolo in several other texts, presupposes political engagement, encompassing epistemic, ethic, and aesthetic concerns. He especially defends an "epistemic disobedience" in relation to Eurocentric models, not with the objective of ignoring or invalidating these models, but with the awareness that they don't constitute "absolute knowledge". Recognizing that there are alternatives to modernity, believing that other world visions are possible once subjectivities and knowledges previously obliterated are legitimized are fundamental steps to think and put into practice decolonizing processes (MIGNOLO, 2012, p. XVI-XVIII).

In *Caribbean Discourse*, Edouard Glissant argues that the Caribbean writer must "dig deep into memory" and rely on "creative energy" in search of a collective memory that has often been obliterated. Clearly claiming a space for literature in this enterprise, he remarks: "As far as we are concerned, history as a consciousness at work and history as lived experience are therefore not the business of historians exclusively" (GLISSANT, 1999, p. 64-65). In resonance with Glissant's reflections and especially attentive to literature produced by women, Myriam Chancy assesses the relevance of contemporary Caribbean writers such as Julia Alvarez, Achy Obejas, Edwidge Danticat, Nelly Rosario, among others. Noted Caribbean scholar and novelist, Chancy, who was born in Haiti, grew up in Canada and resides in the U.S, ponders over the role that these writers play as "the new archeologists of a historical site we would call "amnesia" (CHANCY, 2012, p. XXII). She makes it clear, however, that by using the term archeologist, she is not implying that these writers do not place themselves as observers of the Other.

> they see themselves as actively participating in a critique of history and present-day culture, while offering plausible alternatives to the static constructions of nation, metropolis, dominant-versus-subordinate powers, and identity, as each has been historically determined within the Caribbean ethos. They do so, more often than not, by exploring race and class, problematizing notions of national identity, and sometimes producing problematic versions of such variegated identities (CHANCY, 2013, p. xxiii).

In an interview to the website *Haiti Now and Then*, while speaking about her most recent theoretical book, *Autochtonomies* (2020), Chancy addresses the effects of European colonization, enslavement, and displacement upon those forcefully dislocated from Africa. She argues that is spite of disruptions,

> ... people of African descent, in various geographies, communicate via their works visions informed by African gnosis and epistemes which are discernible precisely because they do not derive from European models even if the genre of transmission itself owes its form to a European model (for example, long film, the novel, etc.) (CHANCY, 2020).

The idea of an episteme whose foundations are located in the body, which was spread and established by movement of individuals and peoples, and which posits itself as an option to Western/Modern/Colonial episteme is central to the argument developed here. The goal is not to defend that movement narratives are new, but to propose that the novel selected for this discussion is part of *an-Other* set of works.

In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (2011), Rosi Braidotti dwells on what she calls nomadic subjectivity and nomadic thought, arguing that

> nomadic thought amounts to a politically invested cartography of the present condition in a globalized world. This project stresses the fundamental power differential among categories of human and nonhuman travelers or movers. It also sustains the effort to develop suitable figurations for the different kinds of mobility they embody and engender (BRAIDOTTI, 2011, p. 4).

Braidotti proposes a (re)signification of subjectivity in a process of becoming nomad. She continues, "politically, nomadic subjectivity addresses the need to destabilize and activate the center. Mainstream subject positions have to be challenged in relation to and interaction with the marginal subjects" (BRAIDOTTI, 2011, p. 5). At first glance, Braidotti's nomadism seems to be in tune with the decolonial project and practices. She emphasizes her alignment with an antiracist theory and struggle as well as with postcolonial feminist criticism; nevertheless, although her theoretical project agrees with the same critique of power as black and postcolonial theories do, she understands that "the sociological variables (gender, class, race and ethnicity, age, health) need to be supplemented by a theory of the subject that calls into question the inner fibers of the self" (BRAIDOTTI, 2011, p. 10). This theory, however, seems distant from the border thinking and even the politics of identity defended by Postcolonial scholarship. Moreover, in an interview, when answering a question about nomadism and about the figures and everyday experiences that might represent it, Braidotti recommends a nomadic citizenship which is based on participation instead of on nationality. In order to support her stance, she stresses that this kind of citizenship is important because "we have to start from the fact that the world will never be culturally and ethnically homogeneous again: that world is over" (2019). The understanding that there was recently a *world* that was culturally and ethnically homogenous sounds very Eurocentric to decolonial ears. If one takes into consideration the dislocation of the starting point of Modernity from the 18th to the 15th century, proposed by the Decolonial Turn, the idea of a culturally and ethnically homogeneous world ended over 500 years ago. Likewise, it seems relevant to remember what Mignolo (2013) has pointed out: that the suppression of the sensing and the body and of its geo-historical location made it possible for the theo- and geo-politics to claim universality (MIGNOLO, 2013, p. 133). The criticism towards Braidotti's understanding of nomadism does not intend to ignore the importance of her work; in fact, once more, the aim is

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to delink the category of movement from a Eurocentric frame of mind and look at it as part of *an-other* tradition.

Within the Caribbean context, taking into consideration the historic-political specificities of the region, the concept of tidalectics developed by the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite seems to achieve the type of delinking proposed by Mignolo. Brathwaite defines it as "dialectics with my difference. In other words, instead of the notion of one-two-three, Hegelian, I am more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear" (BROWN 1995, p.14). Elizabeth DeLoughrey's remarks about the concept resonate with Brathwaite's explanation.

> Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an "alter/native" historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This "tidal dialectics" resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics also foreground alter/native epistemologies to western colonialism and its linear and materialist biases (DELOUGHREY, 2005, p. 2).

In a recent discussion about the Caribbean trans-nation, Carole Boyce Davies remarks that "all the major Caribbean theorists have privileged oceans and seas without limiting the aquatic metaphors" (DAVIES, 2021, p. 33) to Paul Gilroy's arguments in *Black Atlantic*. After providing a quick overview of major theories/theorists, Davies focuses on the potential of the concept of *tidalectics* as a tool to "[think] through the Caribbean trans-nation not so much as fragmented archipelagoes but in terms of *movement*". (DAVIES, 2021, p. 34; our emphasis). Tidalectics confronts the rigidity, fixedness, and determinedness that is present in the movement narrative of the West, very much invested in the ideals of progress and evolution. It is also important to notice that Brathwaite's concept contains an association between women and movement, signaling a delinking attitude, a disruption from the western narrative mode that has traditionally associated movement to the masculine. In the same interview, Brathwaite provides an image of the Caribbean connected to the rhythmic, to and fro movement of a woman sweeping sand off of her yard. He further observes, "Like our grandmother's – our nanna's – action, like the movement of the ocean she's walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another and then receding ('reading') from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of their future" (BRATHWAITE; MACKEY, 1999, p. 34).

From this perspective, we may observe a *tidalectical* movement in *Song of the Water Saints* (2002), the debut novel by Nelly Rosario. A contemporary Caribbean writer, Rosario was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Brooklyn. She holds a B.A. in engineering from MIT and a M.F.A. in fiction writing from Columbia University. She is currently an Associate professor in Latina/o Studies at Williams College. *Song of the Water Saints* is a third-person narrative that, aside from occasional flashbacks,

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follows a chronological order going from 1916 to 1999. In that respect, it follows the traditional Western mode of novel writing. Nevertheless, Nelly Rosario confronts and transgresses this ideal of an enlightened literary genre, turning her storytelling into a decolonial practice. In an interview for the *Mosaic Literary Magazine*, Rosario comments that she has been accused of having written a plotless book, thus defying the idea of proper novel writing; such criticism, she says, was voiced

> Even from the beginning when I was workshopping it, that there was no real discernible plot and it just kind of aimlessly wanders. That's ok with me because I don't think our lives are plotted. We kind of aimlessly feel our way around. That's kind of how I wrote the book. I didn't know where I was going. I didn't have a master outline. I just knew my characters. That was my whole thing: try to figure it out your characters. That's how it is. I don't have a climax and that typical male structure of how stories are scripted. I think a lot of women write like that, very multi-climatic (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 35).

Song of the Water Saints tells the story of four generations of poor black Dominican women from the same family over a span of eighty-three years and two countries, the Dominican Republic and the United States. The narrative is divided in two "Songs"; the first one, which comprises most of the novel, starts in 1916 and ends in 1929, covering the life of Graciela and the infancy of her daughter, Mercedes. The second one covers 59 years in the lives of Mercedes, her daughter Amalfi, and her granddaughter Leila. Framing the entire narrative, there is the description of a fictional postcard. Besides the nakedness of a young couple, whose posture suggests they have recently had sex, the tacky staged setting, the copper of their flesh all reinforce the objectification and exoticization of their bodies. It is not yet disclosed that they are characters in the plot about to be unfolded. "There is *ocean* in her eyes" (ROSARIO, 2002, n.p.; our emphasis), one of the details about the girl, encompasses the idea of movement and functions as the main leitmotif in the novel.

Movement is a central narratological category in *Song of the Water Saints* since its inception. As Rosario mentions in the interview quoted previously, she based her novel on this idea of wandering. Movement is present since in the lives of the characters, in Nature, and through the process of the Dominican diaspora to the U.S. *Song One* focuses mainly on the life of Graciela, the protagonist, as she is in constant movement. In *Song Two*, Leila, Graciela's great granddaughter is the character who seems to have inherited her kin's hunkering for moving around. That the two women, though generations apart, have a strong emotional, even spiritual, connection attests to a cosmovision not encompassed by western parameters. Through the analysis of the characters, events, and metaphors, it is possible to demonstrate how Nelly Rosario uses movement as a decolonizing narrative strategy.

At the beginning of *Song One*, there is a reference to Graciela's skin color. The narrator says, "Her knees were ashy and she wore her spongy hair in four knots" (ROSARIO, 2002, p.7). In this short description it is possible to read the knees and the hair as metonyms for Graciela's African heritage, which openly opposes the dominant idea that Dominicans belong to a European (Spanish) lineage whereas Haitians are seen as the African descendants who also inhabit the Hispaniola Island. Despite widespread claims that Dominicans descend primarily from the Spanish colonizers, and in a much smaller scale from the native Tainos, Graciela's maroon's grandfather, mentioned twice in the narrative, is another index of the African ancestry among some Dominicans.

Graciela is frequently considered an idle girl/woman by the rest of characters, especially by her parents, because she refuses to place herself in the socially determined gender roles that incarcerate women to house affairs; she is almost always in motion, both externally and internally. A flashback that focuses on Graciela's childhood starts with the narrative voice declaring that "Graciela had always been a fool with ideas" When the nine-year-old child tells the mother about her intention to ride ships, she is rebuked; "Ideas, Ideas. That head in the clouds won't do your chores, or fill your gut" (ROSARIO, 2002, p.25). In the same section, both the mother and a nun make it clear that a girl should ask questions only about religious matters.

Thus, motion in the novel includes the physical, mental, and spiritual realms. Indeed, according to *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (2013 [1882]), the noun *emotion* has its origins on the Latin *emovere*, which means "to move away or much" (SKEAT, 2013, p. 164); therefore, it is not a novelty that movement takes into consideration the immaterial part of human beings. Graciela is not the only character in constant motion in the novel, though in her case it seems more evident.

In (Trance)forming AfroLatina Embodied Knowledges in Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints* (2017), Omaris Z. Zamorra addresses this relationship Graciela develops with movement, declaring that, "the memories of pain, loss, and the constant movement and labor of Graciela – a key character in the novel – are stored and remembered through her movement from place to place" (ZAMORRA, 2017, p. 2). According to the critic, through Graciela, Rosario creates the epistemology of (trance) formation; an epistemology which is "rooted in constant movement, or translocality, but also in the ways that this centrifugal movement of leaving and coming back pushes [Graciela's] own consciousness and subject formation into a transcendental space where new subjectivities can be formed" (ZAMORRA, 2017, p. 2). Zamorra uses t*rance* as a prefix in two ways: first, to suggest suspended consciousness, as in a spiritual trance, and second, to suggest a third space, where subjectiveness is be/coming. She concludes that

> the movement of the body and the movement of the spirit, or sacred life force within us, leave space for (trance)formation to take place as an alternative epistemological process that ensures and proliferates survival. In Rosario's novel it is through Graciela's

> (trance)formation – the process through which her embodied archive becomes knowledge – that her spirit is able to relate the epistemological tools of survival to her great granddaughter Leila (ZAMORRA, 2017, p. 2).

Movement, therefore, is a practice of resistance, transgression, and transcendence used by Graciela throughout the novel. The first time the readers come across Graciela, she is with her boyfriend Silvio, who later will become her first husband and father of her only child, Mercedes. Graciela and Silvio meet an American photographer on the beach and are paid some money to pose as models for him. When the couple gets to the warehouse where the photographer – ironically named Peter *West* – had staged a beach scene, clearly intent on capturing a sexually charged moment that objectifies their bodies, especially Graciela's. The narrative voice indicates that the girl might be having second thoughts about the arrangement, but Silvio´s reminder of the money at stake and her dream of keeping moving provide the impulse she needs to continue.

> Graciela's whisper rippled through the warehouse when the fantasy soured. The pink hand tugged at her skirt and pointed briskly to Silvio's pants. They turned to each other as the same hand dangled pesos before them.
> – *¿You still want to go way with me, Mami, or no?*
> Silvio's whisper was hoarse.
> Graciela's shoulder dropped. She unlaced her hair and folded her blouse and skirt. In turn, Silvio unbuttoned his mandarin shirt and untied the rope at his waist. Graciela folded her clothes along with his over a pile of cornhusks. In the dampness, they shivered while West kneaded their bodies as if molding stubborn clay (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 9, our emphasis).

"Invasions. *1916*", the first chapter in *Song One*, refers to the presence of the *yanquis* in that part of the Hispaniola Island. It is through Graciela's moving that the reader witnesses the effects of the U.S. invasions on the everyday lives of the poor population of the Dominican Republic. Right after Graciela and Silvio part from each other and she goes to the market in order to get what her mother had asked her, Graciela meets a woman "with the carriage of a swan and a bundle balanced on her head" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 13) who tells her that her mother is looking for her. Then, the swan woman advises the young girl to be careful with the *yanquis*. After this piece of advice, the narrative takes the reader to a short but detailed description of the disrespect and violence spread by the U.S. Marine Corps. The incident ends up with the murder and possible rape of the swan woman by a group of marines and with Graciela's running back to her neighborhood.

Graciela eventually elopes with Silvio, but the narrative voice makes it clear that within only a year they were both unhappy . Besides keeping all the money earned in their photo session, he does not give her the "turquoise palmwood and zinc

house" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 20) she wants so much, or fulfill her longing for movement. Silvio realizes that she has lost interest in him "despite his having her under a roof and being able to hitch up her skirt at will" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 20). Not surprisingly, though, it is Silvio, not Graciela, who, thanks to his male prerogative, is able to move away. After dropping his position at the Guardia Nacional Dominicana, he decides to become a fisherman. "Graciela's cow eyes and Euclides› murder convinced Silvio that he preferred the unpredictable ways of the water to the whims of the shrimp-skinned generals and to Graciela's irritating company" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 21). He takes her back to her parents' house before leaving for the sea, but she goes right back to her own place. When he does not return from one of his trips, apparently killed along with the crew he belonged to by the Marines, Graciela is left alone, pregnant with their daughter, Mercedes. Still, she does and moves as she wills

A secondary character in the novel, El Viejo Cuco, offers a clue to Graciela's restlessness. During an evening of gathering and stories, Viejo shares an anecdote about the protagonist, who, according to her father (*Pai*) was born "with hot legs, like that maroon grandpa o' yours" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 46). The maroons (name derived from the Spanish *cimarrón* – wild cattle) were Africans and African descendants who had escaped slavery and established independent communities, becoming a feared fighting force. This reference explains her restlessness as well as her blackness, confronting, again, the current idea that the Dominican Republic, unlike Haiti, is a white country. Cuco continues his narrative telling how once, when Graciela was a little girl, she followed her Pai all the way up to the hill:

> Hours later, as they set up camp by the plot, who should appear, the gal herself, beggin' for water. She'd been followin' them all along. Left her mai to all the chores, went through all that mess, just 'cause she was curious. The pai didn't snap her neck 'cause she was always in his heart, he said... (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 46, 47).

Explaining Graciela's desire for movement as part of an inheritance from her grandfather is in accordance with the traditions of Afro-descent and Amerindian cultures, both known for the cult of ancestors. It also works as a foreshadowing of her own great-granddaughter Leila's constant need to move. A childhood memory that comes to Graciela close to her death provides yet another clue of the bond between her and her maroon grandfather. Half dreaming, half awake, she recalls his telling her: " Graciela ... Goat that breaks drum pays with his skin" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 171). The awareness that their transgressions – in his case escape from slavery and in hers from prescribed gender roles – may bring harsh consequences does not keep them from choosing freedom.

Not even the birth of her child or her second husband, Casimiro, quiets Graciela's body, mind, and spirit. The narrator comments that "[e]ach time Graciela took the long walk to the market, thoughts of deserting Casimiro and Mercedita perched on her shoulder. It was during these solitary walks that her courage would bubble up."

(ROSARIO, 2002, p. 56). From an early age, her daughter Mercedes seems to sense her mother's distance. On the occasion of her birth, "[t]he child latched on tightly to her mother, not letting go even after Graciela's breasts were drained of their milk" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 36). Later, Mercedes would already understand her mother's looks. "At three years old, Mercedita could already recognize the faraway stare that stole Graciela's gaze from hers. When Graciela sat at the table to eat, Mercedita crawled under her skirt and stayed there until Graciela nudged her away with a foot" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 57).

Graciela indeed leaves her daughter and husband twice, always returning home, though. The first time she goes away, she gets some money from Casimiro and takes a train up to Santiago. By the time she gets there, there is an earthquake, signaling that the ground beneath her feet is also restless. The earthquake might be read as a symbol of Graciela's experiences in this trip which are far from liberating. On the contrary, she engages in the two activities that were traditionally destined to poor women of color. First, still during the train ride to Santiago, Graciela meets a German man called Eli Cavalier. Right from the start, the reader realizes that the man is a pervert, who is caught masturbating while sitting in front of the protagonist on the train. Nevertheless, he is able to convince Graciela of his good intentions, seducing her with his traveling narrative and food.

> Eli minded the smallness of her world. Like a farmer fattening his cow, he embellished his ride on the ship across the Atlantic, leaving out the numbing seasickness, the howls of widows and orphans. By the time the train pulled into Santiago, Graciela had eaten three more loaves of bread and many strips of salted meat.
> – Never stayed in an inn before, she said, answering his bold question in one breath (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 71).

The earthquake hits Santiago while Graciela is still at the train station, foreshadowing her troubles. The inn she is going to stay with Eli is, in fact, a brothel. There, she is mistaken for a prostitute, contaminated with syphilis, and wounded in the face by one of the women who lives there. She has her wound sewed by a woman servant and, with her help, is able to escape. Back on the streets, Graciela finds an apocalyptic scenario before her. "The earthquake had chewed up the train tracks at the station. Fissures across the Santiago soil steamed as if releasing the city's life force" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 83). She wanders for a long time through rubble, with her face hurting, hungry, and thirsty. She finally finds a house where a young couple lives and ends up being hired by the woman as a maid. Her thoughts lead her to remembering Casimiro and Mercedita, and she wonders if they can do without her for a little longer. The narrative voice makes it clear that even though she misses her family, the urge for movement is stronger.

> Despite the momentary pangs of homesickness, Graciela preferred the uncertainty of wanderlust to the dreariness of routine. Too much passion and curiosity for her own good, Mai and Pai always told her. But Graciela believed that neither Celeste, nor Casimiro, nor Mai, nor Pai could ever understand the pleasure to be had in letting risk wake every one of their senses from the stupor of routine. People back at home were simply too content being the spectators of their own lives (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 86, 87).

The protagonist fiercely resists routine because it condemns her to a narrow, numb existence; for Graciela, movement equals agency, even if it leads her to painful experiences. Her plan to reach the capital city does not come through, though. After being accused of stealing her *patrón*'s gold wristwatch and threatened to be sent to jail, she decides to return home, but it is a decision based on contingency, not on the feeling that she wants to remain there. Still in search of *something*, Graciela pays a visit to *La Gitana* to have her palm read. The description of the session is exemplary: "Then, La Gitana leaned in to examine the saluting system of lines. These lines were a tangled map of roads; some led to dead ends, others ran into each other, then swirled in opposite directions. One path led away from a road toward one of the mounts" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 113). The use of words like map and road, which are semantically related to traveling, reinforces Graciela's incurable restlessness and foreshadows her second leaving.

Years later, when her syphilis is in an advanced stage, Graciela has a dream with the statue of La Virgen de la Altagracia and decides to go to a convent. This time, she tells her plans to Casimiro and the couple engages in a quarrel and mutual accusations. The narrator observes that the protagonist's drive to move is a mystery even to her: "She could not understand what ravenous hole in her spirit made her want to jump out of her skin" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 143). Once again, the narrative is poignant and meaningful:

> Graciela arrived on foot at the Colonial Quarter. The quadrangle towers of the church of Nuestra Señora de la Mercedes had faithfully guided her like a constellation. Her knees had swollen tight as had her hands and ankles. It had been a long walk from home, the sun bearing down on her, the hillside winds blowing dust into her ears... *I call you, Graciela, but you just let my voice echo. Too drunk on the silly path, too high on the weeds along the way. But know that you always walk towards the light, even when you sit along the road for a sip of water or to pick at the calluses on your feet. You will always walk.* (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 144, 145).

Life at the convent was lonely for Graciela. Though she was only a guest there, she had to respect the same rules the nuns followed. She had her hair shaved

and there were no combs or mirrors anywhere. She worked mainly at the kitchen, preparing meals; she also helped the nuns make vestments for the priests. At night, Graciela suffered and when she could finally sleep, she was assaulted by nightmares, all of them related to movement. "The dreams continued. In one, rats chewed the calluses of Graciela's heels. She tore through dense forest, her heels further ripping on thorns and exposed tree roots. Fear of rats, then of running guardians, then of slave hunters with dogs..." (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 153). A year later, Graciela returns home; by the time she arrives, "sick and ready for death" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 166), Casimiro has already died.

Mercedes, Amalfi, and Leila – daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of Graciela – are strong-willed women who cherish their independence, but it is Leila, Graciela's great-granddaughter who inherits her restlessness. In fact, Leila and her great-grandmother engage in a type of spiritual communication which the narrator calls "the feeling": "the feeling started up again. She smiled. It had been a while since she had it. The familiar flutter center-left of her chest got warmer..." (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 242). Taking into consideration that feelings and emotions may be synonyms, it is possible to understand that Leila moves when she channels Graciela's words. Moreover, the possibility to communicate with her late great-grandmother is a reference to the cult of ancestors, present in many religious expressions across the Caribbean Island, signaling the survival of African gnosis and episteme despite the odds. According to those practices, past, present, and future are not separated entities; they are a dynamic unity. In the chapter entitled "Circles", the narrative voice reflects on this unity:

> Graciela's ghost is not a shadow, or a shiver, or a statue falling from the altar. It is not a white sheet with slits for eyes, or a howl in the wind. It is not in the eerie highlights of a portrait, or in the twitch of a nerve.
> Her ghost is in the fullness of a frog's underbelly, in a cipher of pigeons, in the river's rush. *It is threaded through the eggplant-and-salmon braid of birth* (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 202, our emphasis).

Much like her great-grandmother's, Leila's body also moves around. First, she is separated from her mother at the age of three and taken to New York by her grandparents and uncle, who are part of the generation that migrate in search of a better life in the U.S. after Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's regime ends. By the time the chapter entitled after her begins, Leila is a 14-year-old girl living with her octogenarian grandparents in Brooklyn. The age gap gets bigger every day. She complains that everyone, including her grandparents and uncle are always trying to control her. "Even the home attendant who cared for Mercedes and Andrés during the day was starting to get too preachy with Leila" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 205). And yet, nobody could make her keep still. Sometimes she waited until her grandparents were asleep so she could escape and see her lover Miguel, an older married guy who lived in the same building. Her disappointment increases right after she turns 15 and travels to the Dominican

Republic to visit her mother. Her dreams of summer romance in a paradisiacal place do not come true as she ends up spending her days with her mother and grandparents. "She had fantasized running down the beaches and dancing merengue into the night for the five weeks, instead of sipping limeade on the porch while dust-stirring scooters screeched on the main road. No, she wasn't allowed to ride her mother's scooter into town" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 219).

Leila is the character that most clearly represents the living in the third space, in the borderland. She is neither completely American, as she was not born there, nor Dominican, having migrated so young. The best example of her *inbetweenness* appears in the novel when Leila writes the letters dictated by her grandmother to be sent to her mother Amalfi. Each time the task becomes more difficult because the girl is no longer fluent in Spanish:

> The Spanish trudged through Leila's weak short-term memory and slow hands; a script full of fat spaces and balled dots. In the beginning, she faithfully included Mercedes' every "humph" and her occasional laughter (written as "ja ja ja" in comic-strip bubbles). The process: take in the words tumbling out of Mercedes, remember them, translate into English for meaning in her own mind, then translate into Spanish, and finally write them neatly and correctly on the page – all the while listening for the next barrage (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 206).

When Leila and Mercedes engage themselves in a conversation about the differences between living in New York and in the Dominican Republic, it becomes clear that they inhabit different spaces, so to speak. The old lady tries to warn the girl to be smart and not to have too many kids because there was "no village around to help you raise them" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 208). Leila tries to change the subject and her grandmother concludes, telling her to always remember the things she says. Leila's reply to her grandmother's advice also reflects her position as someone who inhabits the third space:

> "Nah, 'Buela, I live for the now. Everyone is either telling me to remember stuff I never lived, or to prepare for some who-knows future."
> Mercedes yawned,
> To Leila, those who carried the past carried the dead, and those who chased the future died of cardiac arrest (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 209).

Overall, against all odds, Graciela enjoys more freedom than Leila. Their shared restlessness underscores the strong connection between them, despite the fact that Graciela had been dead for over fifty years when Leila was born. One night when Leila leaves the house while her grandparents are sleeping, she meets Miguel

and her friends at a nightclub. She stays away for a week but ends up returning home, just like her great-grandmother had done on the two occasions when she had left. On that first night, she goes with Miguel to a motel where they have intercourse, her first time. The atmosphere of the scene brings to mind the first sexual encounter between Graciela and Eli, the man that Graciela had met on the train and infected her with syphilis. There was no pleasure involved in the act for either woman. Instead of going back home, Leila, like Graciela, continues on her movement. Whereas Graciela finds work as a servant in a house, Leila goes to the house of a friend (whose parents are traveling to the DR) and spends a week there before returning.

The chapter that closes the novel is short yet poignant. Thematically and aesthetically relevant, it completely disregards linearity, evoking a tidalectical movement. As observed by Brathwaite, the nature of this movement is not "progressive as an arrow pointing to the future" (BROWN 1995, p.14). It is more of a lemniscate, i.e., an ongoing infinite back and forth movement. The first paragraph in the chapter actually marks the chronological ending of the narrative, chronicling Leila's return home which mirrors Graciela's first return. "Mercedes and Andrés received Leila quietly, almost matter-of-factly, as they had known all along that she would come home a week later with the faithfulness of a boomerang" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 239). Leila's great-grandparents' casual attitude echoes Casemiro´s and Mercedita´s upon Graciela's first return. Further, the phrase "the faithfulness of a boomerang" to refer to Leila's disposition reinforces the link between the young woman and the great-grandmother, hinting that this movement of going and coming back will likely happen again.

Having decided to go back home, Leila does not do it straight away. Instead, she rides the subway for a while, letting her stop come and go. When she gets off, she goes into the gift shop of the Metropolitan Museum. Her familiarity and fascination with the items there indicate that the place was a favorite haunt of hers, establishing yet another link between the teenager and Graciela. In *Song One*, Graciela is entranced when a nun first shows her a world globe, stirring in the four-year old child a desire for something that at that age she did not quite know what it was.

The connection between Leila and Graciela becomes even more evident when the young woman paces the subway station, probably the most emblematic symbol of movement in Manhattan, this time with the clear intention of going home. "The feeling" starts again and Leila listens to her great grandmother's voice once more. *Song of the Water Saints* finishes with past and present tangled together in movement.

> The Feeling started up again. She smiled. It had been a while since she'd had it. The familiar flutter center-left of her chest got warmer...
>
> *Waited on a long time to get born. Still, life dealt me a shit deal. Don't listen to whoever invents magics about me. Always tried to live what I wanted. Never pretended to be a good woman. Never tried to be a bad one. Just lived what I wanted. That's all my mystery. Forget dirty tongues. They're next door, in the soup, even in your*

> *own head. Some weak soul always trying to slip their tongue inside your mouth, clean as a baby's pit. You, listen. My life was more salt than goat. Lived between memory and wishes... but ¿how much can a foot do inside a tight shoe? Make something better of it than me* (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 242).

The last five lines in *Song of the Water Saints,* a coda to the novel, focus on the effect of Graciela's message upon Leila. Feeling connected to her family, "she unpinned Mamá Graciela's amber crucifix from her bustier and put it in her mouth and was overcome with a desire to love them, to make their lives happy before they all turned to leather, then ash underground" (ROSARIO, 2002, p. 242).The tidalectical movement evident in the chapter just discussed and in the entire narrative is propelled by movement, without proposing resolution, advance, or progress. Contrary to Braidotti's idea of a world that is over, being replaced by another one which should be completely new, tidalectics calls attention to a repetition with difference. It is not being static, though, or locked in an irrational repetition; it provides more of a sense of belonging and connection and a glimpse at *an-other* tradition.

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