"I, Too, Am an Occupied Territory": Border Crossings and Personal Sovereignty in Three Novels by Dominican American Women

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Abstract
Border crossing(s) and personal sovereignty are intimately and complexly connected in novels by and about Dominican American women. Through readings of In the Name of Salomé by Julia Alvarez, Dominicana by Angie Cruz, and The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo, I argue that patriarchal forms of authority remove female autonomy by trespassing on personal boundaries, and that the renegotiation of that power is achieved through formations of community, especially with other women, through nonheteronormative relationships that are present inside and extend outside the text. The interplay of patriarchal authority, violence, and alienation on the four protagonists is examined at length, and I end by exploring personal sovereignty through community building as a remediation to patriarchal structures of power.

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“I, Too, Am an Occupied Territory”:
Border Crossings and Personal Sovereignty in Three Novels by Dominican American Women

A Thesis

Presented to
the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Leia M. Lynn
June 2022
Advisor: Dr. Kristy Ulibarri
Abstract

Border crossing(s) and personal sovereignty are intimately and complexly connected in novels by and about Dominican American women. Through readings of *In the Name of Salomé* by Julia Alvarez, *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz, and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, I argue that patriarchal forms of authority remove female autonomy by trespassing on personal boundaries, and that the renegotiation of that power is achieved through formations of community, especially with other women, through non-heteronormative relationships that are present inside and extend outside the text. The interplay of patriarchal authority, violence, and alienation on the four protagonists is examined at length, and I end by exploring personal sovereignty through community building as a remediation to patriarchal structures of power.

Keywords: Dominican American, women writers, transnational novel, borders, authority
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Introduction

Border crossing(s) and personal sovereignty are intimately and complexly connected in novels by and about Dominican American women. To combat patriarchal authority, the exercise of which leads to various configurations of violence and alienation for the female protagonists, communities of predominantly homosocial relationships are formed. These include multiple configurations of relationships within and transcending the texts, including authors and readers. Considerations of multiple forms of border crossings/(tres)passes are central to this project, with emphasis on national and interpersonal boundaries, and how those affect and are affected by personal sovereignty. Crossings, passings, and trespasses are all used to denote moving across some sort of delineation, border, or boundary. Trespass can also carry with it the connotation of nonconsensual movement across a boundary, although this is not always true; it is dependent on context. While discussions of border crossings necessarily invoke issues of race, policing, historical moment, and other factors, this study is particularly interested in gender and border crossings. Therefore, the scope is narrowed to include only brief discussions of other equally important concerns, while the particular focus is how gender, power, and border crossings interplay.
In this thesis, I argue through close reading that patriarchal forms of authority remove female autonomy in heteronormative relationships by trespassing on personal boundaries and enacting cycles of violence and alienation upon them, and I bookend this in-depth analysis by sketching a theory that renegotiation of that power is achieved through formations of community, especially with other women, through non-heteronormative relationships that are present inside and extend outside the text. I begin with an introduction to each of the three main texts analyzed here—*In the Name of Salomé* by Julia Alvarez, *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz, and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo—and summaries of each of the novels. I then offer theoretical work by other scholars that have informed my reading of these texts, as well as definitions of key terms. This includes a discussion of how the novels themselves transcend boundaries. My argument relating patriarchal authority to violence and alienation in each of the three texts follows, and I finish with a brief exploration of how the homosocial and rayano consciousness offer ways in which female sovereignty can be reterritorialized as seen in the novels.

*The Texts*

Novels of migration are often haunted with crossing multiple types of borders or boundaries, both national/international and interpersonal, and how these (tres)passings influence aspects of agency and identity, both within the narrative and in the construction of the text in the cultural milieu. *In the Name of Salomé, Dominicana, and The Poet X* are three novels written by Dominican American women which focus on female protagonists
dealing with interpersonal relationships and power dynamics in the contexts of patriarchy, identity, and diaspora. I summarize all three novels here in order to give readers a grounding in the texts.

*In the Name of Salomé* is the intertwined story of mother and daughter, Salomé Ureña and Camila Henríquez Ureña respectively, told so that almost the entirety of both their lifespans takes place within the confines of the novel. Salomé gains fame as a national poet of the Dominican Republic and finds her calling in educating girls and young women during civil unrest in her country. She falls in love with a political idealist and raises children while her husband remains involved in his political ideals, which often take him away from the family. Salomé eventually dies of tuberculosis, still deeply in love with her family and her country. Camila follows in her mother’s footsteps outside the Dominican Republic, becoming an educator and activist who works internationally. She is involved in U.S. academia, protests in Cuba, and returns to the Dominican Republic for family visits. Camila is troubled and awed by her mother’s legacy and struggles to come to terms with it, dealing with loneliness, depression, and anxiety in the process. This novel is highly concerned with the political environment in which the novel takes place.

*Dominicana* is the story of Ana, a fifteen-year-old Dominican girl who is married off to a much older man and swiftly whisked from the Dominican Republic to the United States, where her husband confines her in their apartment. She becomes pregnant. Her experiences married to a domestic abuser and carrying a child as a new migrant in New York City highlight the everyday struggles faced by migrant women in the U.S. When
her husband leaves to take care of business abroad, she enters into an affair with his younger brother. Quickly, however, she realizes that she has placed the future of both her family in the Dominican Republic and in the United States in jeopardy and chooses to remain with her husband upon his return.

_The Poet X_ is a novel in verse about a burgeoning slam poet, a first-generation Dominican American girl named Xiomara who is beginning to question her mother’s religion and fight back against the sexual objectification she experiences. It is narrated by Xiomara, a high-school teenager, who is learning how her body is sexualized in a patriarchal society and also how she can navigate her sexuality on her own terms with a classmate, Aman, to whom she is attracted. At home, she is punished by her mother Altagracia for not meeting the Catholic virginal, chaste ideal, while her father and brother are mostly withdrawn from the volatile mother-daughter relationship. Xiomara explores her feelings through poetry and joins her school’s slam poetry club to express her frustrations with the ways in which patriarchal society and religion bind her in ways she resents. Her feelings about Aman and the secret of her twin brother’s homosexuality make her question society’s treatment, especially her experiences at men’s hands and how she feels about her growing physicality.

All three works are concerned with themes of transnationalism, migration, and home (as a space where family resides, and in the wider meaning of a homeland), both in their structures and in their narratives. Although migration is paramount to the plots of the three novels, the only protagonist who crosses the border from the Dominican Republic to the United States explicitly in her story (_Dominicana_) is Ana, and that is
mostly elided in the narrative. Salomé remains in the Dominican Republic for the entirety of *In the Name of Salomé*, while Camila is highly mobile, crossing from the Dominican Republic to Cuba and back again, to Cuba, to the United States, and back and forth several times throughout the novel. Her crossings are discussed in varying amounts of detail, some passed over entirely within the narrative. Xiomara moves within the same neighborhoods in New York City for the totality of *The Poet X*. It is clear from the atmospheres of the novels, however, that the authors are writing from a space of boundary passing in their work, both as results of border crossing as part of the Dominican diaspora in the United States and as characters transgressing boundaries under their own authority or because coerced by others, creating a complicated relationship with border (tres)passing in these texts. Because of the U.S. history of crossing Dominican borders for its own gain, and the Dominican Republic’s violent and colonial history with the Haitian border, as well as the patriarchal notions of authority in interpersonal relationships, national and personal boundaries are fraught and generative spaces for the stories these authors write. I move next to a discussion of how the novels’ corporeal forms and participation in colonialist categorizations, such as genre and subject assignation, subvert these systems by refusing their bounds; in so doing, they cross boundaries set in place by those categorizations, modeling trespasses that create communities of readers, authors, and characters. These extratextual connections foster empathy and understanding in the communities they create, demonstrating the power of networks against the colonialist, patriarchal ontological structures in which they participate, another example of connection working against an oppressive authority.
Transnational Novels, Transcending Boundaries of Categorization

As transnational works concerned with migration in this milieu and written as part of the Caribbean diaspora, Dominican American women’s novels written in English for the U.S. book market are participating in a very specific kind of minor literature. Deleuze and Guattari define this concept:

A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization (16; emphasis added).

The last word is highly important to this project, as cartography/geography is used to understand concepts of import to characters in the minor literature, as well as to appeal to readers outside the minority in-culture of the literature. All three novels being written in English, with enough Spanish included to require the reader to interact with the text in a way which requires translation, is a minor literature which Rebecca Walkowitz calls “born-translated” (570). “Born-translated novels are designed to travel”: in other words, they are intrinsic border-crossers, crossing barriers of language, genre, and geography (Walkowitz 570). Taking up, first, the question of language: the reader must translate from Spanish to English as all three novels (written primarily in English) incorporate Spanish words and phrases into the text to remind the reader that this is a deterritorialized

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1 This will be further examined below.
novel,² working within the majority language of English but resisting the implication that that language is totally able to convey the writers’ meanings, and requiring the reader to know or learn Spanish in order to completely understand the text. This is further complicated: in one instance, one moment in Dominicana requires a dual translation, but readers must also interpret a transliteration of Spanish spoken with a U.S. accent: “Cwanto anyo too teeayness?” asks the New York doctor, concerned about Ana’s age and her pregnancy (Cruz 132). With this one question, Cruz reminds the reader that they, along with Ana, exist within the bounds of the novel in a space that requires the constant and multilayered negotiation of linguistic boundaries, but also provides an intrinsic critique of the majority language—the “first characteristic” of minor literature. By incorporating Spanish into their writing, the authors participate in the deterritorialization of Dominican and Caribbean literature, as argued by Dolly Tittle: “Moments of resistance and anti-assimilation through language are found in … radical bilingualism…. These bilingual uses of language are a strategy of decolonization” in direct response to U.S. interventionism (187-188). This radical bilingualism, as applied here, is the inclusion of Spanish words whose meanings cannot be adequately conveyed in English. By writing minor literature in eloquent English and including Spanish, Acevedo, Alvarez, and Cruz participate in decolonialist practices that create literature in the language of the oppressor,

² In their use of “deterritorialization,” Deleuze and Guattari imply that territories are localized social relations, which can be broken down or transformed by removal (deterritorialization) and reconfigured (reterritorialized). Other writers, such as Gil-Manuel Hernández i Martí, have explicitly tied deterritorialization to geography and migration. Redefining these terms for this project: a territory is subject to authoritarian power, deterritorialization is the removal of the authoritarian social relation, and reterritorialization is the reconfiguration of social relations on the terms of the subject.
simultaneously insisting on the value of including the language of the oppressed, subverting colonialist boundaries and structures of language and text. However, born-translated novels also “have to be accessible,” meaning they are usually considered popular literature in order to be marketed to a wider audience, which in turn means that the Spanish is often glossed in the text or demarcated by italics (although not always), marking a difference for the reader. Additionally, born-translated novels are often not considered literary fiction because they participate in expected novel structures and resist “linguistic experimentation” that is the scholarly vogue outside of the texts’ bilingualism, leading to a condescension toward popular literature or fiction (Walkowitz 570). In doing different work from literary fiction, the novels resist the constraints of monolingualism—this is an instance of the trespassing of borders or boundaries creating space in which to resist colonialist structures.

The novels cross not only the borders of language, but of genre as well. Accepting the designation of “novel” that each work acknowledges on its title page indicates that they are participating in a particular set of expectations that defines a novel. Considering *The Poet X* is a verse novel, blurring the genres of poetry and prose (as there are prose entries), the form of this novel itself is a genre hybrid, an inherent refusal to adhere to the boundaries of genre. Additionally, novels are often not considered literary fiction for the reasons outlined above. Further removing itself from literary fiction (most often marketed for adults), *The Poet X* is classified on WorldCat as having been written for a juvenile
audience, and the bibliographic record is further enhanced to say that it is written specifically for an audience of high-school readers. Instead of being given the form “Fiction” in the subject headings, as the other two novels are designated, it is classed as “Juvenile fiction.” A discussion of young adult novels’ treatment within the book market is outside the scope of this project, but The Poet X deals with themes on a level of maturity with the other two novels. In the Name of Salomé is highly concerned with mother-daughter relationships, as reflected in the subject heading “Mothers and daughters,” but The Poet X is lacking this subject heading despite it being a major focus of the novel, and although all three works have young adult characters, Dominicana is lacking the subject heading “Adolescence,” despite the fact that Dominicana’s protagonist Ana is the same age as Xiomara in The Poet X. Each novel has elements of coming-of-age stories to differing degrees, and all three works have some sort of subject heading related to Dominicans, but they vary. The point here is that although the novels have many commonalities, they are expected to fit into neat boxes of how readers consume writing. What they actually do is transcend those categorizations, reaching

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3 WorldCat is the largest database for bibliographic records used by libraries and cultural institutions in the Western world. Records are entered to describe each unique item.

4 In Dominicana and The Poet X, respectively, the main characters are teenagers: Ana and Xiomara are fifteen for the majority of their stories. In the Name of Salomé is slightly different: it traces the lives of a mother and daughter, Salomé and Camila, so they age throughout the novel.

5 The subject headings assigned to each book regarding Dominican people are as follows: In the Name of Salomé—Dominican Americans; Dominicana—Dominicans (Dominican Republic); The Poet X—Dominican Americans. Although records are highly subjective to each cataloger when interpreting a work for entry into WorldCat, especially when those creating the records rely on publishing houses’ interpretations and quick examinations to create data for each book, there is a need to try to categorize about-ness. It is considered unreasonable to read each book before entering its data into a WorldCat record.
across, into, and beyond established subject headings to break the bounds of genre and connect stories to readers outside the bounds of scholars’, publishers’, and libraries’ ontologies by engaging with subjects and participating in genres that cannot be adequately described by existing classification schemas. The books, through the stories they tell, cross different kinds of boundaries to create a community of readers, resisting colonial territorializations of knowledge categorization. In other words, the novels do similar work outside the body of the text that the characters do inside the text: although working within colonialist patriarchal structures that seek to limit the expression allowed by books and characters, both find ways to create networks in the social realm to assert the truth of their experiences. In so doing, the reader becomes part of the community of authors, characters, and other readers partaking in these boundary-crossing texts. These communities are a form of empowerment for those involved.

Broadening the text/reader relationship, Elena Machado Sáez gives insight into another aspect of born-translated Caribbean novels:

Caribbean diasporic writers see the multiple readerships, regardless of training or cultural origin, as motivated by a similar desire to access a level of intimacy that facilitates authoritative knowledge of multicultural and postcolonial experiences…. The sense of entitlement is concomitant with the reader’s desire to have intimate access to anOther knowledge. Intimacy is a defining facet of the relationship between reader and text…. Caribbean diasporic historical novels reference the challenges…by depicting author-doubles in the form of narrators or historical figures who wrestle with their roles as authentic spokespersons (22).

Sáez’s explicit interpolation of authors into the community already formed by readers and text opens a space where reality and fiction coexist, allowing for this community to inhabit a social imaginary that creates possibilities of connection and intimacy. The access to “anOther knowledge” facilitates intimacy among authors, readers, and text, crossing both sociocultural boundaries by allowing curated/guided access to anOthered experience, and delineations of what is “real” by blurring the line between reality and fiction through experience-taking, a sort of distance shortening between protagonist/author and reader (Kaufman and Libby 1). In this way, the authors bring readers to care about characters that are different from them, heightening the experience-taking and therefore increasing empathy, and in so doing, create a border-crossing community of readers, authors, and characters who transgress the bounds of the novels.

Continuing to develop the idea of “author-doubles in the form of narrators,” the concept of an “empathic narrative persona” borrowed from Lewis Ward’s reading of W.G. Sebald’s narrators is useful for understanding how Acevedo, Alvarez, and Cruz further blur the boundaries between author and narrator (1). Of Sebald, Ward writes:

[His] prose narratives exist at the borderline of the novel form. Their self-conscious hybridity, combining memoir, historical account, travelogue, and fiction, may be seen as pushing the boundaries of genre. But Sebald’s use of a narrator-figure with some biographical correspondence to the author, who takes part in the action, enables an even greater crossing of borders: those between past and present, memory and history, and current and previous generations. This insertion of what I call an “empathic narrative persona” between author and subject helps enable an approach to the past in which proximity and distance occur simultaneously in a complex gesture of empathy (1).
Although grasping this concept in its entirety and expecting it to apply completely to authors so different from Sebald is questionable at best, many parts of Ward’s description resonate with the Dominican American writers at hand. Their stories are part historical or personal account, part fiction, and preoccupied with travel. Salomé Ureña and Camila Henríquez Ureña are configured in Alvarez’s novel as fictional characters, although they are based on historical figures of those same names who rose to fame as writers, educators, and activists; the parallels to Alvarez’s own life and work are apparent. Ana Ruiz-Canción is based on Cruz’s “mother’s story as well as all the Dominicanas who took the time to answer [Cruz’s] questions about their lives and who opened their photo albums so [she] could bridge the gaps in all the silences in the telling, often painful” (321). Xiomara is written as a fictionalized version of Acevedo in her high school years, finding her voice through slam poetry. In the authors’ choosing of subjects so close to them, the lines between author, narrator, and protagonist blur, repositioning Ward’s empathic narrative persona not as an intervention between author and subject, but rather as a blending of author and subject. Even as this move reinscribes the empathic gesture, it closes the distance between author and protagonist, and therefore also affects the reader’s sense of where fiction and reality are bounded, if at all. In blurring that boundary, Dominican American writers open the possibility of including their readers in intimate, empathic communities that they have constructed within the text. By including the genre-blurring details (are these novels historical fiction? Memoir? Creative nonfiction?) and their personal identifications within the text, authors invite readers to cross boundaries of genre and even to reconsider what constitutes reality and fiction, deepening the
knowledge and intimacy (per Sáez) and granting readers access to Libby and Kaufman’s in-culture.

The idea of a dividing line of territorialization drawn by nation-states, sometimes along geographic and cultural lines but often not, also invokes its opposite: connection. “As a result, border thinking in literature is a powerful tool against a colonial epistemology that focuses on the separating border and the differences between countries and cultures” (Fuchs 69). As a form of this border thinking, rayano consciousness is an explicitly anticolonialist tool resisting the separate-ness of colonialist border positioning. Lorgia García-Peña, writing about a borderlands/rayano consciousness in Dominican migrants living in the United States, insists on the necessity of connection:

Sharing the load is the only way to survive the pain…. [R]ayano consciousness proposes communal love, forgiveness, and interdependency as the only possible option for confronting the violent oppression of the state(s)—Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the United States—that continue to separate people…” (168).

In offering heteronormatively feminine emotions (love, forgiveness, and interdependency) as the solution to oppressive violence, rayano consciousness situates the homosocial and, more widely, relationships which reject heteronormativity as possible forms of social relations in which patriarchal structures can be confronted and separation mitigated.

Although originally used by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to explore male bonding that upholds male social dominance in the face of homophobia, the idea of the homosocial is useful here and throughout this project. Applying the concept of same-gender nonsexual intimacy to women’s relationships in the novel—whether family or
friendship—is a method of understanding how interpersonal connections socially reterritorialize women on their own terms throughout and outside the bounds of the novels, especially as they begin to reject or move past heteronormative relationships. Heteronormative relationships and constructions of power are often, although not always, the ones in which female autonomy is removed by a male partner; by refusing patriarchy via homosociality and non-heteronormative relationships, women construct spaces in which the patriarchal authority is mitigated, and they can claim collective power against patriarchal oppression that seeks to separate and disempower them. Although not strictly situated in the homosocial, rayano consciousness considers the Dominican experience to allow for connections of diasporic identity (as homosociality does for gender) to create community.

Reading literature concerned with migration means that borders must also always be invoked; reading transnational novels written with characters who are different from the reader moves against colonialist biases in those readers by creating empathy, as per Ward’s empathic persona. In this way, community is not just built within but also constructed outside the text. García-Peña declares,

\[\text{A more inclusive, fair, and constructive dominicanidad in which the multiplicity of borders, experiences, and identities can be represented has begun to be imagined, allowing for the visualization of a dominicanidad inclusive of a multiplicity of borders, through which more than 150 years of oppression, silences, and hatred can finally be contradicted (169; emphasis original).}\]

Pulling on the thread of García-Peña’s emphasis, contradiction, reveals how important she considers art in pushing back against a narrative that simplifies and belittles
Dominican and Dominican American lived experiences, especially through the analysis of writing and performances that, to greater or lesser degrees, seem to contribute to the narrative of “oppression, silences, and hatred,” but upon closer inspection actually subvert them. Artists, especially writers, contribute to refusing the oppressive narrative—which is rooted in colonialism and imperialism—by creating works that refuse the totality of the bounds of this narrative and work within those structures to undermine the truth it purports to disseminate, another rejection of bounds in order to claim their own self-sovereignty. By asking readers to reject boundaries of classification, the novels invite readers into the ranks of border-crossers.

*Cartography of Border Identities*

This discussion of *In the Name of Salomé, Dominicana, and The Poet X* is concerned with not only the border crossing inherent in migration, which haunts these novels in complicated ways, but also how this border crossing encourages other types of boundary transcendence on the part of the characters. In her seminal text *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa positions identity at and against the border:

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional reside of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition (25).

From Anzaldúa’s description of the U.S.-Mexico border as *una herida abierta/*an open wound, much of Latina writing (both theory and creative) has been shaped by the idea of border/borderlands as spaces of violence and uncertainty, but rayano (“borderlands”)
consciousness creates the potential for community in Anzaldúa’s positioning of borderlands by offering rayano consciousness as a method of connection in an otherwise violent space. Borders of power and identity are examined in ways that explore how those borders are crossed or boundaries are (tres)passed, and how the circumstances of those crossings affect the protagonists’ senses of self-sovereignty and belonging/connection to other people in their chosen communities. It should be noted that borders, especially U.S. borders with countries it has colonially exploited, remain dangerous places, especially for racialized and gendered bodies.

[Transnationalism] is also an inherent part of the history of U.S. geography because of the way that the nation’s borders expanded in the nineteenth century to incorporate Spanish-speaking peoples. Global transnationalism does not dilute the material reality of the nation’s borders, which continue to be policed and militarized” (Socolovsky 23-24).

Borders and borderlands are constantly shifting, often at the authority of the imperialist power, which then works to maintain and enforce those borders through violent means. In this way, transnationalism both interrogates and reinforces border identities. While a full, nuanced discussion of border policing is outside the scope of this exploration, it is important to read with the understanding that border crossing is dangerous due to the high racialization and politicization of human movement across borders. Although legal processes have changed over time, migration is experienced both within and without legal processes, and racialized bodies are especially vilified for migrating in non-legal ways.
I will digress here for a moment to offer certain particulars of the history of the Dominican Republic and its interaction with U.S. interventionism, which is part of Socolovsky’s U.S. border expansion and incorporation of Spanish-speaking peoples, because the history of the Dominican Republic specifically as it relates to border-crossing and colonialism is important to know for the arguments being made. This historical context is by necessity brief and touches only on those events which set the international stage upon which these texts and their authors interact.

The Dominican Republic, part of Hispaniola, shares the Caribbean island with its smaller western neighbor, Haiti. The island was inhabited by Taínos until Cristóbal Colón/Christopher Columbus mistakenly landed there and began a series of cycles of invasion, colonization, and occupation that reverberate globally across hundreds of years. Columbus’s entry into the land of the western hemisphere here, on this small island, creates an origin point for long-lasting and far-reaching violence and trauma. The Taíno people were “wiped out” (or, more accurately, killed or forced to integrate into the local populations), and settlers to Hispaniola mostly self-segregated, with the eastern two-thirds of the island under the control of Spain, and the western third under France. These different communities’ interactions have led to nationalist tensions and racial hierarchies based on indigenous, Spanish, French, African, and mestizo/mulatto ancestry.

The Spanish colonial project is inherently tied to religion, specifically state-sanctioned Catholicism. The paternal Catholic trinity and the Portuguese and Spanish patrilineal monarchies based on primogeniture that stand behind Columbus’s initial invasion and subsequent colonization efforts are highly invested in male dominance and
structures which privilege patriarchal authority. The ways in which colonialism, religion, race and racialization, and gender interact with and affect the people living with those legacies is complex, especially when the colonizer/colonized binary is (and perhaps always was) present in the communities of people and migrants who embody aspects of both, as Anzaldúa positions her new mestiza.

After three centuries of colonial rule by imperial Spain and France, Haiti (formerly St. Domingue) gained independence and became the first free Black nation, and the first to abolish slavery, in the early years of the nineteenth century (Fumagalli 125-126). At this time, the Haitian military took the opportunity to cross the border under the authority of Toussaint Louverture and began to free the enslaved people living in the Dominican Republic (then Santo Domingo). This set the stage for two major, lasting tensions between the two burgeoning nations. The first was a constant fear by Dominican citizens of another Haitian invasion, which led to the second, and arguably more subtly pervasive, friction: a Dominican aesthetic preference for lighter, “less-Haitian” features. Although it is undoubtedly influenced by other colonialist ideals of beauty, tying “Haitian” or more Black appearance so closely to fears of invasion re-creates a colonialist mindset based on appearance of the racialized other on the island. The racial hierarchy thus instituted, based on historical events, nationalism, and racial appearance, makes Dominicans implicit in colonial structures of racial and national supremacy.

Haiti annexed its eastern neighbor and maintained full governance of the entire island, from 1822-1844. The Dominican Republic, too, has had its share of problems in nation-building. After a time as a French colony (1795-1809) and gaining independence
from both Spain (1795, and again in 1822) and Haiti (1844), and then remaining an infant country for seventeen years, it returned to the status of a colony under Spain for four years (1861-1865). After this period and as a newly young state, it cycled through leaders and parties quickly and bloodily.

The United States first became involved in the Dominican Republic in 1904 and invaded in 1916, ostensibly to keep it from being used as a base of operations against the U.S. from opposing forces during World War I (Fumagalli 126-127). This was not welcomed on the part of the Dominican people. Of course, there were other reasons than invasion for preventative self-protection’s sake—keeping exports from the island steady benefitted the global economy during wartime and, by extension, the United States. This move can be read as the U.S. intervening not only for self-interests, which was certainly the case, but also as a paternal “protective” occupation which lasted until 1924. Even before this, however, the United States was involved in negotiating a protectorate for the Dominican Republic after its independence from Haiti in the mid-nineteenth century.

Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, or El Jefe, rose to power as a result of U.S. interventionism in the Dominican Republic. He reiterated violently nationalist rhetoric in the hopes of consolidating his hold on the Dominican Republic. In October of 1937, under his orders, Dominican soldiers and some civilians participated in a massacre of people of Haitian descent working on the sugar plantations around the border between the two countries; using the word perejil (parsley) as a shibboleth, anyone who did not pronounce the word with the “correct” Spanish r-roll was killed (Paulino and García 111-112). Known as El Corte (“The Cut”) or the Parsley Massacre, tens of thousands of
Haitians and Haitian Dominicans were murdered as they tried to flee, many attempting to cross the border into Haiti. Julia Alvarez, in another of her novels (*In the Time of the Butterflies*), recalls Trujillo’s treatment of women: he was known to sexualize them, especially younger women and girls, but was not above having them murdered if it served his political ends—as in the case of the Mirabal sisters in 1960, which caused national and international outrage. Trujillo also participated on the global stage, attempting to assassinate political figures in other countries that he considered threats to himself. He was himself assassinated in 1961. His actions echo and amplify colonialism in their attempts to conquer and assimilate, and in his embodiment of the patriarchal state using violence to achieve and solidify its authority over its territory.

Again in 1965, after unrest following Trujillo’s assassination, the United States deployed 30,000 troops to quell the conflict over the transition of power. U.S. interference in Dominican affairs indicated that it thought of itself as an authority on conflict resolution, ironically by sending in more soldiers and escalating the situation, and not allowing the Dominican Republic to resolve its conflicts on its own.7

*Body/Border*

Borders like those between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic are complicated via embodiment, and when the body enters or becomes the borderland. In the case of

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7 The U.S. as an authoritarian power in the twentieth century plays out on more than just this stage, but regardless, as a world power, it trespasses on the borders of especially Latin American countries (like Mexico, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic) in order to impose its will and values—a continuance of colonialism.
Dominicans, their bodies are sustained by the blood of both the colonizing Spanish and the colonized indigenous people, who then cross borders to enter into another colonized/colonizing space (the United States) which has intervened in the already-complicated Dominican Republic. The colonial and racial history of the people on the island of Hispaniola are further complicated by Haiti’s and France’s own histories of colonialism, which intersect with the Dominican Republic’s Spanish and indigenous history. Inhabitants of the island may be descendants of the Taíno and enslaved Africans, but also of the French and Spanish colonizers. The practice of slavery, important for the colonial projects of both Spain and France, plays a major role in the history of the island. Enslaved people were both indigenous inhabitants of the island and Africans who were freed in the 17th century by Haitian uprising. All these communities and their histories with enslavement, colonialism, and racialization, create an island in the Caribbean where the body at and across the border is a complex and fraught corpus.

“To survive the Borderlands / you must live sin fronteras / be a crossroads” Anzaldúa asserts, positioning the body as a space of interaction and insisting on the transcendence of borders and the rejection of the colonizer-colonized binary (217). Reconstructing Latinx people’s bodies as crossroads of colonizer and colonized, and the new mestiza as accepting both of those and moving beyond that binary, Anzaldúa (although writing from a Chicana positionality) makes a move toward an anti-colonialist Latina borderlands space in which identity can be renegotiated, and in which inter- and intrapersonal border crossings can be reterritorialized. Acts of violence upon protagonists are considered trespasses of their personal boundaries, but border/boundary crossings and
passings are more complex than that one configuration. García-Peña is succinct in her explanation:

I see dominicanidad as a category that emerges out of the historical events that placed the Dominican Republic in a geographic and symbolic border between the United States and Haiti since its birth in 1844. Dominicanidad is thus inclusive of subjects…. It also encompasses multiple territories and ethnoracial identifications: Dominicanyork, rayano, dominicano, Afro-Dominican. Those, in turn, make up Dominican subjectivities across national spaces (3).

Again, the effects of U.S. interventionism engender border-crossing, but in this iteration, the plurality of identities and territories is emphasized. U.S. interventionism in the Dominican Republic and on the island of Hispaniola territorializes subjects, leading to many identifications that encapsulate the migrant experience.

García-Peña’s plurality of identities is demonstrated in media outside the novels discussed here, even appearing in films that are part of the wider culture milieu. In the song “Carnival del Barrio” from the film adaptation of the play In the Heights, the character Carla deconstructs the idea of one national identity and brings together multiple nationalities within the space of her body. Without prompting, she announces, “My mom is Dominican-Cuban, my dad is from Chile and P.R., which means: / I’m Chile-domini-curican…but I always say I’m from Queens!” (In the Heights). Within the space of two lines, Carla rejects the idea of claiming one nationality—and by extension its borders—and combines her heritage into what seems a farrago of a hyphenated word. Carla is portrayed as shallow and thoughtless in the film, but her deliberate positioning of herself as embodying multiple nationalities and of rejecting delineations of those within the confines of her body, an intrinsic border-crosser, is powerful. At the end of her thought,
Carla again shows an awareness of her own power: she chooses what to share when asked about her origin but insists on maintaining the distance from the United States, positioning herself as, “I am this, but I claim this space as my current residence, and both of these are aspects of my identity.” Josefina Báez does similar work: “As a political act, Báez opts to identify herself as ‘Dominicanyork,’ a derogatory term used to identify dominicanos ausentes living in the United States: ‘I am, like many people, from the very local and the plurality of places, from New York, from La Romana and from everywhere. But I think the nationality that fits me best is that of Dominicanyork’” (quoted in García-Peña 192). In claiming a hybrid nationality/positionality (Dominican-New York) as the “best fit,” Báez rejects the inscription of national borders upon her body and identity and creates a space García-Peña terms El Nié, “the invented space that exists in the New York underground at the margins of the Dominican Republic and the United States” (199). It is a space of liminality, of borderlands or rayano consciousness, in which the body is (re)constructed and reterritorialized as the potential of pluralities of identity.

Carla as a character and Báez as a performer are not the only ones who internalize and reconstruct geopolitical spaces within themselves, renegotiating them as they do so. In In the Name of Salomé, the titular character’s daughter Camila laments in a letter to a friend, “What an oppressive ghost my mother has become! I, too, am an occupied territory” (Alvarez 207). In so doing, and within the context of the letter, Camila identifies herself with the Caribbean countries that the United States occupies at the time
of her writing. Camila situates her body as a contested site of nationalisms, but by not naming a specific place, opens up multiple geopolitical possibilities and explicitly aligns herself with occupied spaces. Myriam J.A. Chancy, responding to a question about mapping and returning home, continues this theme of women and territorialization:

I think ‘home,’ especially for Hispaniola, is a very difficult word to categorize, to define, because what does that actually mean when you come from an island that is divided into two? Where the border isn’t very clear…. [T]here are so many women crossing the border, working with each other on issues having to do with health, reproductive issues…. [M]any men who are working on these issues are doing so in a structured way that is very much patriarchal and about the sort of instating a Dominican or Haitian independence, let’s say, from imperial powers whether it’s the past ones or the neocolonial ones. But in my sense that’s a reinscription…. [A] reinscription of the same kinds of models so that home becomes again a division, the Dominican Republic versus Haiti, and a relationship in a global world to the United States in particular. And I see the women acting as if the border shouldn’t exist (“Voices from Hispaniola” 73-74).

Chancy situates women with rayano consciousness as the solution to the problem of contested, patriarchal national powers: women transgress occupied and delineated territories, refusing the totality of borders as they cross those borders to create likeminded homosocial communities, “working with each other” to solve socioeconomic gendered issues and reject the oppressive violence of the state(s). Women are able to escape the reinscription of territorialization, becoming border-crossers in ways that undermine and resist the patriarchal violence of national borders. Their feminine bodies acting as border

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8 However, this metaphor means reading her mother as the U.S., which is not what Camila is trying to imply. Rather, within the context of the letter (which is highly concerned with the U.S. political milieu), Camila expresses a sense of being so troubled by the legacy of her mother that she can sympathize with those territories the United States haunts via occupation in the historical moment. Her mother’s standing as a national poet for the Dominican Republic both reinforces the presence of the political state in the metaphor and complicates Camila’s positioning of the occupier/occupied.
trespassers in order to create connections to confront highly gendered social issues is a
direct rebuttal of the patriarchal authority attempting to alienate them from one another,
the goal of which is making homosocial organization and interdependent community—
García-Peña’s rayano consciousness—difficult, if not impossible, thereby removing
women’s collective power.

By situating the body at the border, space for not only negotiation of identity but
steps toward creating community despite past violent trauma can be made, which has
implications for real-world concerns. Julia Alvarez in conjunction with Cynthia Carrion
and Edward Paulino began the Border of Lights movement in 2012 to commemorate, on
the 75\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, the border massacre—El Corte—of Haitians and Haitian
Dominicans that occurred under the Trujillo regime in 1937 (Alcantara). This has
remained a site, both physically and in the collective conscious of Hispaniola, of trauma
tied to the border and to patriarchal constructions of nationalism and the violent exercise
of Trujillo’s authority. Through the actions of Alvarez, Carrion, and Paulino, as well as
Haitian activists on the other side of the river, a form of network has begun creating
socially-minded communities on either side of the border that reach across the divide.
The community is connected not only by reflected candlelight across the river, but
internationally, via candlelight vigils held also in the United States—where many people
of the Caribbean diaspora live, work, and write—and virtually, enabling wider global
participation (see Figures 1 and 2). By not only exercising self-sovereignty in choosing to
take on the historical trauma of El Corte and the work of creating community despite and
across a national-international wound, but also by actively reaching across borders to

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create networks in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, the United States, and online where members of the diaspora can participate, they make connections which can confront and reconcile historical violence at the site of the individual and at the border. Because borderlands are often situated as places of interpersonal and patriarchal authoritarian violence, reading the Border of Lights alongside the fiction of women who write characters struggling for autonomy and connection after violence offers a hopeful model for reclaiming self-sovereignty and for creating networked communities across personal and political borders, even where those borders are, according to Anzaldúa, wounds.

Ways in which violation of personal autonomy interacts with violence and alienation in each of the three texts is examined closely. These violations occur most often in intimate relationships with family, friends, and romantic/sexual partners, reflecting Anzaldúa’s statement that “[i]n the Borderlands / you are the battleground / where enemies are kin to each other; you are at home, a stranger, / the border disputes have been settled…” via violence. The danger at the personal border is the intimate—the family, the home (216). The underlying patriarchal power structures on both a personal and national level are situated as an analogy. A discussion of how remediations of these violations of personal sovereignty through community-building and connection with others who respect personal boundaries, especially through rayano consciousness and the homosocial, follows in the last section.
Sovereignty, Agency, and Governance

I will here define key terms as I am using them in my arguments in order to give readers common understandings within this specific context. Several of the terms discussed are chosen specifically in order to invoke similarities or connections between the individual/personal and the political-national, writ rather largely. According to Maya Socolovsky, allowing multiple connotations of key terms makes space for literal and figurative understanding…[and] does not imply that [different definitions] are the same things. It does imply, however, that they always intersect in ways that are important to our understanding of both of them. To understand [key words] in both figurative and literal terms allows the categories to constantly invoke one another (5).

This double invocation is useful for the readings made here. Borrowing from Socolovsky’s methods of meaning-making: self-sovereignty and personal sovereignty are here used interchangeably to indicate the ability to exercise personal choice and define individual boundaries, while sovereignty without the personal identifier is a political term which signifies the authority of a state to govern itself. Agency, authority, and autonomy are also useful terms in this sense and will be used throughout synonymously, but emphasis is placed on how the uses of the term sovereignty can blur the lines between the personal and the political as characters exercise decision-making and meaningful power for themselves. Authority can also be used, as in its related term authoritarian, to denote one entity wielding decision-making power over another.
It is also useful to define how governance and government intersect and diverge for my arguments specifically.⁹ Here, government will refer to the political regulation of behavior at the level of the nation-state or the body who is responsible for that regulation, and governance more broadly to the act of ruling or commanding any organization of people. Governance exists on a sliding scale of scope, from a single cell, to a person, to a household, to a nation; Nelly Rosario succinctly collapses these together: “I think that all family relationships do reveal a microcosm of the entire country or the entire community” (”Voices from Hispaniola” 70). In drawing out the connection between country, community, and household, Rosario not only acknowledges the different levels of governance (since there must necessarily be leadership at each level of relationship she mentions), but also recognizes the space in which governance and government begin to blend. Family and domestic governance is especially important here, but keeping in mind the ways in which these two concepts interact with one another and in which they are tangled at their roots of often patriarchal power is necessary, as it shows how intertwined colonialism is with questions of power and gender. As a sort of response to government/governance and sovereignty, the idea of connection functions in its broadest senses here: intra- and interpersonal; between two people, among many people, or between or among groups of people. All aspects of connection are important for building a community in which there is support for identity formation, exploration, and combating alienation caused by patriarchal violence.

⁹ Both come from the Greek kybernan, to steer; through Latin’s gubernare, to direct, guide, govern or rule; to Old French governer which is to steer, be at the helm of, govern, rule, command, or direct; and then into English as the root word govern.
This type of reading, wherein words with connected etymologies and multiple definitions are allowed to slide into one another is particularly important because it allows us to understand the ‘blending’ of the United States and Latin America as a process whereby geographical landscapes, cultural practices, and narrative spaces all become intersecting aspects…[and] sites of resistance (Socolovsky 5).

This can be scaled down from not only narrative spaces, but into definitions of words. While acknowledging and exploring the limits of vocabulary is essential for creating a coherent set of readings and analyses, mapping the spaces of intersections and forms in which they often slide into and among each other are important in a discussion of border/boundary crossing.
Patriarchal Authority and Trespass

Cycles of Violence and Alienation under Patriarchal Authority

Salomé and Camila, the Dominican mother and daughter whose lives are entwined in Julia Alvarez’s novel of historical fiction *In the Name of Salomé*, have complex relationships with the men in their lives, especially Salomé’s husband and Camila’s father, Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal. His political involvement reverberates throughout both Salomé’s and Camila’s lives, his patriarchy shaping how they interact with the political. More clear-cut, and similarly male-perpetrated, is the violence that *Dominicana*’s protagonist, the young Ana Ruiz-Canción, navigates with her abusive husband Juan and his brother César. She experiences several forms of violence within the authoritarian space curated by Juan after her migration from the Dominican Republic to the United States in the 1960s. Taking a different angle on gendered forms of violence,

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10 Per the Merriam-Webster dictionary, patriarchy is a “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; broadly: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power.” Here, this will include the political and social ways in which men exercise power over women.

11 Violence is here used to mean action or inaction/neglect on one actor’s part that violates another character’s self-soverignty. It includes physical, racial, emotional, mental, and structural components, but emphasis is placed on its effect(s): damage, trauma, or injury done to a character. Authoritarian should be understood as “favoring or enforcing strict obedience to authority, especially that of the government, at the expense of personal freedom” (from Oxford Languages), particularly as it corresponds to patriarchal authorities in government and in personal spaces; the boundary between the two is blurred purposefully in places here.
the verse novel *The Poet X* follows Xiomara, coming of age as a first-generation Dominican American woman in the early twenty-first century, and the violence she experiences from both male and female characters. While her relationship with her highly religious mother permeates the other relationships in the novel, Xiomara’s complicated interactions with her largely absent father, her impassive brother Xavier, and her first love Aman expose the ways in which male (in)actions reinforce patriarchal power structures in a space of authority. These four women experience different levels of authoritarian exercise of power, often tied to the patriarchal environment in which they live or have lived. Jennifer Harford Vargas explicitly connects authoritarian power with patriarchy through colonialism/imperialism:

> Latino/a novels depict these [Latin American authoritarian regimes, U.S. imperialism, and U.S. structural discrimination] as simultaneously interlocking structures of power. In doing so, their counter-dictatorial imaginary insists that dictatorship, imperialism, white supremacy, *heteropatriarchy*, neoliberalism, and border militarization are all dictatorial modes of control (22; emphasis added).

By situating the use of dictators in Latino/a novels between heteropatriarchy (patriarchy functioning within heteronormative structures, automatically relegating women as subjects to men in interpersonal relationships) and political authoritarian structures, Vargas draws a connection between authoritarian power and patriarchy. These are explicitly tied to violence in the discussion of Cristina García’s *King of Cuba*, as Vargas asserts that there are, “of course, different kinds of violence, but the novel suggests that both are authoritarian and are rooted in the exercise of patriarchal authority” (155).

Vargas offers a theoretical framework for how authoritarian exercise of power,
heteropatriarchy, and violence are bound together in the Latino/a novel, closely tying heteronormative patriarchy to authoritarian power. This is a legacy of both Spanish and U.S. colonialism, which situates the male as authoritarian and insists on the heteronormative relationship in which women are to be subject to male authority. With the shadow of Trujillo looming over all three writers, the idea of patriarchal authority and violence are inherently tied through his dictatorship. Dominican women especially would be thinking of his violence against and oppression of women when writing about violence and patriarchal authority.

Anzaldúa’s concept of machismo occurs throughout all three novels, in different forms. Machismo, according to Anzaldúa,

is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of hierarchical male dominance. The Anglo, feeling inadequate and inferior and powerless, displaces or transfers these feelings to the Chicano by shaming him. In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation. Around Latinos he suffers from a sense of language inadequacy and its accompanying discomfort; with Native Americans he suffers from a racial amnesia which ignores our common blood, and from guilt because the Spanish part of him took their land and oppressed them. He has an excessive compensatory hubris when around Mexicans from the other side. It overlays a deep sense of racial shame. / The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them (105).

This very specific formulation of violence, a response to “the Gringo world,” (white supremacy) is especially present in novels in which migration destabilizes the heteropatriarchal authority. Although Anzaldúa’s formulation of machismo is specific to Chicanos in the United States, especially in Texas and southern border states, this idea of violence perpetrated by Latinos on Latinas as a response to feeling emasculated when
subjected to white supremacy is useful to consider in all contexts wherein the United States and its racial structures interact with Latino masculinity. It should be noted, however, that the different colonial histories of the United States and the Dominican Republic influence Anzaldúa’s machismo and vary regionally, especially as they relate to specific colonial histories—for instance, the machismo of Anzaldúa’s southwest United States differs from Trujillo’s machismo in the Dominican Republic, although both are predicated on the objectification of women in order to shore up Latin American masculinity in the context of white U.S. supremacy. Juan, in particular, embodies machismo as he struggles to maintain his control over Ana; however, Pancho’s fall from power leads him to make demands of his children, especially his daughter Camila, and the men in Xiomara’s Washington Heights neighborhood enact sexual violence of varying degrees on the teenager in order to prove their manliness in the face of poverty.

The female protagonists of *In the Name of Salomé*, *Dominicana*, and *The Poet X* experience patriarchal violence and are alienated through personal relationships, especially with men, which violate their self-sovereignty via trespass of their physical and mental boundaries. These trespasses on the protagonists’ autonomies are a form of violence which drive these women to self-estrangement or to withdraw from their social environments—forms of alienation. The trespass of characters’ self-sovereignty in authoritarian interpersonal relationships can be read at times as embodiments of state violence (as in the case of the U.S. invasions and occupation of the Dominican Republic)

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12 Although not all four protagonists are adults at all points during their respective novels, “women” is a useful group noun to refer to them collectively.
in that their actions cause feelings and experiences of alienation in those upon whom the violence is being perpetrated. In Salomé’s case, for example, alienation removes her from her family, and her daughter Camila becomes violent when confronted with an embodiment of the U.S. government’s betrayal. The authoritative figures discussed should not be read as direct parallels to the United States or nations in general, however, because in many cases the actions of the nation also affect those characters, and the problem of drawing true equivalences between characters and political entities is fraught at best. For instance, Juan is just as subject to migrant oppression and racism as Ana is, only she is also suffering from domestic violence at his hands; Xiomara’s mother is as much a victim of patriarchal power and misogyny as her daughter is. A better reading offers the authoritarian characters as imperfect distillers of certain violent structures, who internalize and embody patriarchal power imbalances present in national structures and re-perpetrate/perpetuate them against the novels’ female protagonists, violating their self-sovereignty and trespassing on their autonomy by forcing authoritarian power across the protagonists’ boundaries. This results in alienation on the part of the protagonists as they deal with the consequences of trespasses on their self-sovereignty.

The violation of self-sovereignty occurs on multiple sociopolitical levels; colonialism’s legacy again entangles explorations of territory, nation, power, gender, and race. While the texts and readings explored here are mostly occupied with trespasses of sovereignty on the interpersonal scale, the national and international moves which underpin these relationships are important to keep in mind as historical context, especially regarding the United States’ interference and occupation of the Dominican
Republic. “The frontier mentality or manifest destiny, for example, that ploughed not just westward but also southward toward Latin America imagined (and to an extent created) porous borders between nations” (Socolovsky 24). In situating itself as a world peacekeeper and using that façade as a rationalization for expanding into the Latin American Dominican Republic to satisfy the greed for more and more territory, a complex border (tres)passing situation is created, in which ideas, values, money, communication, and bodies permeate the border(s) in both directions, creating a Dominican-American space in which identities of those living in both nations continuously shift. While the authoritarian characters should not be read as parallels to the United States’ paternalist authority, they do recreate similar power dynamics, denying self-sovereignty to those upon whom their authority and power comes to bear. In the trespassing of the protagonists’ autonomy, the authoritarian characters re-create on a smaller, domestic scale this stripping of power from the subject of the patriarchal authority. However, the national/international stakes permeate these relationships as well, making a true analogy impossible: the authoritarian characters (e.g. Pancho, Juan, Altagracia) are just as subject to the sociopolitical structures of the United States as their targets are.¹³ Reading the novels with this nuance in mind is important, because the national trespass of the U.S. on the Dominican Republic affects the interpersonal relationships of the characters, even as the authoritarian characters trespass on the personal sovereignty of the protagonists.

¹³ This holds true both within or without the bounds of the United States, as the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic subjected Dominicans to U.S. authority and power.
Alienation operates alongside violence in important, but different, configurations in each of the three novels. Alienation here should be understood as functioning in two ways: 1) the divergence of parts of a character’s identity, resulting in a feeling of loss of sense of self, or intrapersonal alienation; and 2) isolation or estrangement from other relationships of support, interpersonal connection, or the socio-political environment at large; withdrawal from surroundings. Alienation within this context is always negative, as connection to self and others is necessary for community formation and refutation of the separation oppression engenders in the protagonists. The latter is a somewhat Lacanian definition of alienation, and the former more Marx-leaning, with important exceptions: there is the possibility of bridging the separation alienation brings through homosocial reterritorialization, not possible in Lacan’s position of alienation as intrinsic to the subject; and, while Marx’s critique of capitalism does interact with the structures mainly concerned here through imperialist capitalism, the social alienation from others is not due to work and competition, but to heteropatriarchy. Alienation as used in these arguments is meant to gesture toward an inter- or intrapersonal distance which isolates the protagonists from wholeness with themselves or with their chosen community—a denial of rayano consciousness.

Alienation is present in the texts, but as discussed earlier in the introduction, structures that operate within the text can have effects outside them as well, and vice versa. Long Le-Khac describes how alienation affects literature and migrant writing: using the term “transnarrative” (stories which “generate meaning from one story to another, across and beyond the boundaries of individual stories”) about writing in the
Asian diaspora, he describes how U.S. interventionism can cause “tension” within and outside the text of migrant stories (109). The United States has created problems of displacement by meddling in other nations’ affairs, then alienated those who are displaced by the chaos left in the wake of that interference by refusing to take responsibility and even positioning the U.S. as a sort of savior-state. When people and characters are displaced because of U.S. foreign policy, the interference and contamination occur in the transnarrative; the borders between stories mirror the borders between countries, with the characters’ experiences crossing those borders, and Le-Khac believes this form encourages the reader to consider the border crossing that has already occurred before the migrant characters ever consider emigration. The Dominican diaspora, also implicated in U.S. interventionism, participates in this alienation caused by interventionism, as Tittle states (186-187).

Within the texts, alienation is caused by other characters’ actions (the main focus here), but also by international interventionism on the part of the U.S., which underlies the plots of all three novels to varying degrees. To take just one example, in *Dominicana*, one of Ana’s brothers-in-law is privy to the information of a woman who acts as a maid for U.S. diplomats:

> What housekeeper doesn’t keep an archive of her boss’s invaluable trash? Ramón [the brother-in-law] mentions documents dating back since 1963 that prove the United States has been meddling in the Dominican Republic’s affairs…. There’s no way any Dominican leader will win without America’s guns (Cruz 162-163).

Even in the Dominican Republic, U.S. “meddling” permeates the narrative, and the violence inherent in the interventionism shows that Dominican leaders have been
alienated from their power without the go-between of “America’s guns,” isolated from one nation by another. In this way, the novels participate in the concerns of the transnarrative, which highlight the alienation people and characters (again blurring the line between reality and fiction) experience because of U.S. interventionism.

Patriarchal authority and its social structures affect the protagonists of each novel in different ways. The ways in which violence and alienation interact in each novel differ, but they are nevertheless closely entangled. In *In the Name of Salomé*, patriarchal authority produces alienation, in some instances leading to violence, but mostly functioning to isolate the protagonists from one another and intrapersonally. In *Dominicana*, patriarchal violence leads to Ana’s inter- and intrapersonal alienation, separating her from her social environment; here, patriarchal authority becomes a space for violence, which in turn results in the protagonist’s alienation. In *The Poet X*, the protagonist’s alienation from patriarchal social and religious structures precedes violence on the parts of both the authoritarian figure and the protagonist as they battle for control of Xiomara’s self-sovereignty. In each case, the protagonist’s experiences of violence and alienation cause resentment for patriarchal authority and result in the character searching for other ways to regain their power.
Salomé’s husband Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal does not become president of the Dominican Republic until after her death, but he remains a towering authoritarian figure over Salomé’s life from the time they meet until her demise. Although their relationship first begins with Pancho trying to “outdo himself” proving his love for her, it quickly becomes apparent that the younger man holds the power in their relationship, reinscribing patriarchal power and authority in a relationship in which he could have interrupted it and valued Salomé as an equal if he had chosen to (Alvarez 128). Instead, he works to find an area he can exploit—her lack of scientific knowledge—and immediately takes advantage of the chance to raise his standing in their relationship, offering to “transfer all the scientific knowledge in his mind” to Salomé, reinforcing heteronormative structures to retain his power over her (Alvarez 136). Although he values Salomé’s poetry, he finds a way in which he can become an authority in tutoring her; this is a fairly thin excuse to spend time courting her, but also in asserting his will and his superiority in the knowledge hierarchy the two of them comprise. Pancho “was a man easily possessed by grand and noble ideas. A few months ago it had been Salomé Ureña, la musa de la patria,” and his interest in Salomé lay in the value of her nationalistic art (Alvarez 134). Already it is clear that Pancho’s interest in Salomé is tied to her status as a national poet. This also foreshadows the ease with which Pancho would replace Salomé, his current obsession, with other pursuits; although he continues to

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14 Also called Pancho by close associates and friends, and Papancho by his family, in the novel.
venerate her poetry, he refuses to acknowledge her value beyond that. The same year they marry, he “insists [her] book had to come out…. ‘Poetry comes first!’” Pancho pronounced” (Alvarez 169). While he asserts that poetry is of utmost importance, Salomé is far more interested in their marriage and making a home—her desire is for a husband and a family, but Pancho does not listen to Salomé about what she wants and maintains that he knows best what she should be doing as an artist; he also edits her poems, imposing his will upon the art he esteem so highly (Alvarez 282). Her husband’s demands that she perform her poetry, create on command, give it highest priority despite what she wants, and submit to his creative authority over her work alienate Salomé from the art that has always been a way in which she expresses her own thoughts, asserting her autonomy by writing and publishing as a woman in a country whose academics and artists are mostly men. In these ways, Pancho begins to remove her autonomy, both in writing and in intimacy—commanding her performance in the former and denying her desire in the latter, subjecting her to his authority and prioritizing his will over hers in both matters, effectively territorializing her.

Alienation from Salomé’s identity as a poet and artist as a result of Pancho’s control is compounded by his familial absence due to his involvement in the politics of the Dominican Republic. His duties and studies often take him away from Salomé, denying her the intimacy with him that she desires as his wife. He is simultaneously too present in her writing, removing her creative agency, and too absent when she craves closeness—exerting authority by withholding intimacy on his terms. Salomé is alienated from the possibility of family that she desperately wants, estranged both by physical
distance from Pancho and emotionally by his inattention to her in the interests of
Dominican politics. For him, pride and nation are enough; he wants to be the “‘new man
for the new nation’” that he lectures her about (Alvarez 175). But she wants a physically
present, loving husband. “‘I am a woman as well as a poet’” Salomé reminds Pancho, to
which he responds by chiding and dismissing her (Alvarez 177). He does not accept her
identity as both a wife and a poet as she presents it to him, saying, “‘You’re right,
Salomé. I sometimes confuse my muse with my wife.’ ‘I want to be both,’” she replies,
and his reassurance that she is does not ring true. In saying that he confuses the two,
Pancho implies that they are two separate things when, to Salomé, they are both parts of
her identity. Her disappointment that Pancho does not recognize her as a mother when
she is pregnant with their first child, and he instead believes she is offering him a new
poem, is bitter. He is preoccupied and, according to their mutual friend Hostos, “put[s]
every other duty before [Salomé]” (Alvarez 183). She remains maritally faithful to
Pancho as he repeatedly requests in his letters (which are elided from the novel but
referred to in Salomé’s), even though he takes a mistress in France. Salomé’s letters
display her feelings of betrayal upon learning of Pancho’s affair with a French woman
while he was gone for four years, while at the same time demanding assurances of her
faithfulness to him (Alvarez 218, 231). Pancho wants to control Salomé’s behavior from
afar and command her loyalty, exacerbating the power imbalance in their relationship. He
excepts himself from the rules of marriage while he insists on Salomé’s adherence to
them and to her obedience to him. He is governing his wife from self-imposed exile as he
studies abroad, a situation which he will repeat decades later as the exiled ex-president of
the Dominican Republic. Pancho in exile insists for decades on his right of authority over the Dominican Republic, even as he remains in Cuba, forcibly removed from the island he claims as his territory. The analogy between Salomé and the Dominican Republic as his governed territories, even from afar, situates Pancho as a patriarchal authority working to impose his will on what he sees as his subjects without those subjects’ consent, trespassing on their self-sovereignty and claiming them as his territory as he sees fit—a direct result of colonialist interpretations of power, to subjugate and create subjects which he can exert his authority over.

He was “in love with [Salomé’s] poetry, not with [her]” and he ultimately rejects her as a multifaceted individual and as a woman (Alvarez 132). He prizes her ability as a patriotic poet above any other aspect of her identity, including that of his lover and eventually as the mother of his children. He chooses instead to take other lovers, choices which Salomé interprets as a sign that he does not find fulfillment with her, and his rejection and desertion are traumatic for her (Alvarez 293). When Pancho returns, the strain he subjects her to has aged her: “I was utterly changed. Everyone told me so. I was so thin…. I could barely catch my breath. My hair had turned gray. The lines on my face were deep, almost as if all the writing I had not done on paper, I had done on my skin” (Alvarez 253). She has spent her body in the service of her husband and her nation, writing, teaching, bearing children. Even so, Pancho is peevish with her, accusing her of taking an opposing stance on political matters just to be difficult with him; he will not be disagreed with, as the patriarchal, political authority of their household. At the end of her life, when consumption forces her to keep her family at a distance, it is as though she is
exiled from her family and her husband, the always-statesman. This physical and emotional exile from her husband, her children, and her girls’ school is indicative that she is estranged from the things on which she bases her identity: her family and her work as an education activist. This is both a social alienation from others with whom Salomé craves connection, and a self-alienation, caught between her health and her desires for important work and relationships. Alienation here, for Salomé, is not a result of violence, but rather a consequence of her body’s subjectivity to patriarchal authority over what should or should not be done with that body. Pancho does not relent his authority over his wife in childbirth or in death, making choices for her that contradict what she wants. In this way he trespasses on Salomé’s autonomy, resulting in her alienation from the things she loves the most: him, her children, and her work.

Pancho’s patriarchal authority affects his daughter as well, the daughter Salomé struggled to stay alive to give birth to. Camila, whose story takes place in juxtaposition via alternating chapters with Salomé’s in the novel, recognizes the threat that men present and she keeps relationships with men, including her father and at least two lovers, at arm’s length. She learns from her mother’s example that willingly submitting to patriarchal authority can and does remove women’s autonomy, and Camila recognizes and struggles with how to retain her self-sovereignty in both a family ruled by Pancho and in a patriarchal society—her distance from men, a form of social alienation, is a direct response to Salomé’s loss of self-governance to Pancho. When Camila is a child, Pancho refuses to let her “go back home for a visit, even though the two islands [Cuba and the Dominican Republic] are only a day away by steamboat” (Alvarez 276). He uses
his power as patriarch of the family to alienate her from the Dominican Republic, the
place that Camila at that point considers home and which ties her to her mother. Pancho
is highly political as a character: to Salomé he is inextricable from the Dominican
Republic, and to Camila he is an authoritarian force in her young life. Pancho spends
much time away from his family, dealing with political matters in the state in which his
identity is grounded; at one point in Camila’s childhood, “Papancho has been in the
Dominican Republic for several weeks, summoned by the new government to be
considered for a possible post” (Alvarez 279). He continues to be politically active even
in exile, unable to extricate himself from his nation, pursuing positions of power in
government while also making decisions for those in his household from afar. He
envisions himself as both the patriarch of his family and of the government of his
homeland, which sentiment does not abate with age or with time spent away from the
Dominican Republic. Pancho not only claims the Dominican Republic as the territory of
which he is the patriarchal governor, but he territorializes Camila in a similar way; he
“does not like the idea of his children wandering off…. No wonder he doesn’t want
Camila to leave his side. What unhappy thing would she become apart from him? My
own person, she thinks, excited at the thought of what that might mean” (Alvarez 292).
As he loses his authority over the Dominican Republic because it is removed from his
governance, he projects that loss of authority onto Camila wanting to become her own
person, “apart from him,” and exerts his authority over her to a greater degree to
compensate for the loss of the Dominican Republic as his territory. Understanding her
father as an overly-controlling patriarch, Camila longs to define her identity without his
influence. Pancho’s unwillingness to allow Camila to grow into her own person outside his authority or to make decisions regarding homeland and identity cause friction between father and daughter. Pancho trespasses on his daughter’s ability to make choices about reconnecting with her mother’s family (especially Salomé’s sister Ramona, who resists his authority, and with whom a homosocial relationship would undercut Pancho’s authority over his daughter), or even just get too far from him physically—out of his domestic authoritarian space in which he can govern her behavior—at a time when she is beginning to form a sense of identity; her father removes from Camila the power to make choices for herself. Pancho ensures that he maintains his paternal authority over Camila as she leaves childhood behind, trespassing on her growing autonomy and claiming her as his territory, much as he did Salomé.

As she grows into adulthood, Camila begins to chafe under her father’s influence even more. She resents him for his multiple affairs while married to her mother. She regards with growing scorn Pancho’s role as a former president of the Dominican Republic, elected to the position while exiled in Cuba with his family. She writes to Marion, confessing of the time by which Pancho defines himself as an authority,

Papancho was president for only four months. The family hadn’t been reunited a month—only twenty-seven days!—when Papancho came…[in] with the news that the Americans had invaded the island. ‘I refuse to be their puppet!’ he pronounced…. We went back to Cuba, cabinet in tow—yes, even Peynado came along—to establish a government in exile (Alvarez 190).

Pancho insists on his own sovereignty, and that of the Dominican Republic, against the U.S. occupation, going so far as to try to govern from outside the bounds of the
Dominican Republic. Pancho is alienated from what he considers his territory, exiled physically and governmentally by the U.S. military, but even as he resists the colonialist authority of the United States occupying his nation, he recreates that patriarchal authority in moving his family back and forth from Cuba—in turn alienating them from the Dominican Republic because of his choice, not theirs. He also refuses to recognize the ways in which he parallels the American invasion: after not being part of the everyday life of the family, away traveling for so long, Pancho invades their domestic space and begins making authoritarian demands, uprooting their lives, making them exiles from their home in Cuba, and then just as quickly re-exiling them from the Dominican Republic. He also makes decisions that affect Camila and his other children for the rest of their lives with no regard for their autonomy:

Seven years later, the cabinet has disbanded, but Pancho still persists in his claim to presidency. Camila has tried to talk sense into him. He cannot save a country that does not want to be saved in the way he wants to save it. But if she has not fully known him in this incarnation before, she is now encountering her father as a Force of History (Alvarez 190-191).

Subjecting his children to his irritation at the loss of authority, Pancho clings to his lost power, long since stripped from him, and refuses to listen to the country’s needs as they clash with his vision for how it should progress. Camila is forced to negotiate on his behalf, acting as a diplomatic envoy for an authority that no longer exists while Pancho insists that he maintains it: the Dominican Republic must be subject to his will in order for him to save it. Camila is forced to acknowledge Pancho’s authority as she acts on behalf of it, even as she wishes to reject its hold on her; this conflict indicates that she is experiencing interpersonal alienation, a disconnect between parts of her identity as
Pancho’s daughter and as Camila. As he realizes that the Dominican Republic has rejected his territorialization, Pancho refuses to listen to “sense” and insists on the Dominican Republic as his territory and subject to his authority, years after he has been de-authorized. As a “Force of History,” maintaining his authority as historical patriarch, Pancho’s alienation from the Dominican Republic is due to United States interventionism—but he refuses to relinquish the ghost of his national power, even though its substance is already gone. The blow to his self-esteem results in the macho attitude within which he makes demands of his daughter, reenacting patriarchal and colonialist violence in privileging his needs above hers by virtue of his belief that his authority supersedes Camila’s because she is a woman and his child. Pancho undermines Camila’s autonomy through his insistence that, as the authority, his wants and needs must be met first, rather than supporting his daughter or, alternatively, tending to his own needs and letting Camila do the same—he is treating her as his subject. His alienation is re-enacted on his family, which is displaced to Cuba and forced to navigate the distance between Pancho’s imagined authority and the reality of the situation. He is a source of frustration for his daughter, and she actively works to put mental and physical distance between them: “…by then she will be far away, and Pancho’s campaigns and enthusiasms won’t be her responsibility” (Alvarez 235). For Camila, her father is always tied to the political, and she does not want to participate in her father’s authoritarian politics, in which he is and will always be the head, and his will supreme. She is politically active, but resents the influence her father wields, and she wants distance from him to define herself politically apart from her father. Part of her resentment, however,
stems from the fact that she does feel a responsibility for him and for the country he and Salomé worked so hard for. Toward the end of his life, he insists Camila set up a meeting for him with the U.S. president, which mission she finds humiliating; she is “weary with his anger” on behalf of the Dominican Republic and, by extension, himself. Pancho still believes he has some claim to political authority based on his four-month presidency, and Camila recognizes that absurdity even as she advocates on his behalf, knowing others see the faded authoritarian as a self-important nuisance. Camila rejects her father’s binding of his own identity so tightly to his position within the nation and begins to distance herself both from her father and from the Dominican Republic.

Even after his death, Pancho’s ghost interferes with Camila’s self-sovereignty, especially her sexual autonomy. Looming over her major romantic/sexual relationships in the novel is the figure of her father. In one of the two main heteronormative relationships, a Cuban sculptor commissioned to fashion a memorial bust of Camila’s father invites Camila to his studio in order to use her as a model (Alvarez 149). There is a rising sexual tension between Camila and the artist Domingo as she returns to sit for multiple sessions to further his sculpture, finally culminating in a sexual encounter (Alvarez 166). While Domingo is more concerned with art than with matters of state, his commission and even his name invoke ties to Camila’s father and to the Dominican Republic. The specter of her father haunts each of their interactions, most present when Domingo blurs the line between Camila and her father in an artistic rendering of embodiment that should be

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15 The Dominican Republic was called “Santo Domingo” as late as the early 20th century and its capital city still carries that name.
Pancho but is revealed, in the moment of sexual encounter, to be Camila. As they make their way to Domingo’s bedroom at the back of his studio, the bust of Pancho that has been their reason for continued meetings is finally revealed, and Camila sees herself instead of her father. The text is unclear whether this is Camila’s projection of herself onto a bust of her father, or whether Domingo has been sculpting her under the pretense of a commission of Pancho all along, but as Camila sees Domingo’s conflation of her and her father, her immediate reaction is disgust and horror. She requires distance from Pancho and in that moment, he is all too present in a discomfiting threesome; Camila’s internal rejection of Domingo is tied to her efforts to reclaim her sovereignty from her father’s authority by distancing herself from him, and Domingo has unwittingly brought Pancho into a space of Camila’s sexual autonomy. Camila has sterilized Domingo into an embodiment of the ideal artist so that, when she tries to meet him as a lover whose trysts are haunted by the ghost of her father, the encounter goes poorly: “His mouth closes on hers…. She stiffens and pushes him away…. She is revolted by his big hands, his hardness pressing against her thigh. The word become flesh is not always an appealing creature” (Alvarez 166). From this point, their relationship—which flourished so long as it was in the abstract, and Camila could keep Domingo and her father’s ghost at a distance—fails. Desire unfulfilled creates space for longing, but Domingo’s physical touch disgusts her; and, although she is resistant to the encounter, a social bargain has been struck and she follows through with sex despite conflicting signals: physically she recoils from Domingo, but she vocally assents when he asks to be sure of consent. She allows this trespass, albeit grudgingly. In so doing, Camila begins creating distance at the
moment of their greatest physical intimacy in order to separate herself from Domingo and, by extension, her father, and it is clear from the opening of the novel that this relationship is broken off due to waning interest on Camila’s part. For Camila, Domingo is best when he is an ideal, at a distance to be admired and desired, but the shattering of that fantasy in its culminating moments is indicative of her discomfort with the reality of Domingo as a sexual object over whom her father’s authority still hovers; she prefers Domingo as an artist, but the physical reality of the artist overshadowed by Camila’s political and familial patriarch is not one to whom Camila will grant access to her intimacy. Camila realizes that she cannot escape her father’s influence, since Pancho, Domingo, and the denial of her personal and sexual sovereignty are entangled in her mind.

At the beginning of the novel, Camila lives alone and is moving with the help of her friend Marion to Cuba. The reader knows that her sexual relationships are doomed before the details are ever offered; since Camila’s story is told in reverse, the ends come before their beginnings. An early relationship with Scott Andrews, who works for the U.S. State Department, is destined to fail. In a letter to her confidante Marion, Camila writes, “Do you remember…. [t]he young marine who was so kind to us during our last trip…. Anyhow, we had dinner together last night…. I am glad he wears civilian clothes when we go out. I could not bear sitting across from someone dressed in the uniform of our occupying force” (Alvarez 194). Camila’s attempts to separate the man from the United States nationalism—and her implicit joining of the nation to its military complex in the statement—by accepting Andrews in civilian clothing indicate that she
is attempting to understand the man as separate from his career. Scott Andrews in this moment embodies the military nationalism of the United States in his ability to don and doff the uniform of the occupying nation and in physically participating in war as a member of the Marine Corps. Camila goes on: “Now he is a military aide at the White House, a position which suits him better” (Alvarez 195). Andrews is tied to not only the military complex, but also to the government of the United States, a nation Camila recognizes as an “occupying force,” although whether she is referring to Cuba or the Dominican Republic being occupied is unclear. The year is 1923, so either or both countries could be what Camila has in mind. Even though she resents the United States’ occupation of her other homelands—the Dominican Republic and Cuba—Camila forces herself to separate Andrews and his participation in the U.S. military and government in order to pursue a relationship with him. At the same time, she cannot do so completely. While Camila and Scott discuss why U.S. President Harding cannot meet Camila’s father (a former revolutionary and president of the Dominican Republic, a dignitary in his own right) for the long-requested interview, Scott indicates that President Harding has scheduled a trip to Alaska to get away from scandal and stress. Camila retorts immediately:

‘Why not encourage him to go to the Caribbean?’ I asked curtly. ‘He practically owns all of it now…’ I enumerated all the occupied or supervised islands: Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, as well as the Dominican Republic. I am afraid I am becoming as shrill as Papancho, Marion, and this nice man [Andrews] will run hard and fast in the other direction (Alvarez 197).
Camila is politically minded, and she finds in Scott Andrews someone who will take her seriously and respond on her level to political matters, but they find themselves on opposing sides. Andrews works for and supports the U.S. president, a patriarchal colonialist authority from the perspective of the Caribbean countries Camila calls home. She is torn between desire for a relationship and speaking up to an agent of U.S. interventionism. Camila is all too aware of the U.S.’s occupations and supervisions and is frustrated with the U.S. executive branch and its refusals to meet with her father:

I explained to S.A. [Scott Andrews] about Papancho and how we must have an interview with Mr. Harding…and S.A. said the usual, that there is nothing he can do, we must go through the proper channels. Proper channels! We have to go through proper channels to protest this country’s outlaw actions toward us! (Alvarez 196).

Camila is simultaneously recognizing the authority of the United States as a state that must be appealed to and its global interventionism as an unethical act—the U.S. acting as a colonizer of Latin American countries and setting itself up as an authority, continuing the legacy of colonialism. Although Andrews cannot or will not secure a meeting, he is familiar enough with President Harding to know what his plans are for relaxation, and even which clairvoyant the President frequents. Camila is not just interested in Andrews romantically; she is also using him for his connections to the U.S. president in order to get the meeting her father so desperately wants. While Andrews as an individual does not interact with Camila as an authoritative figure, he is so bound up in the U.S. government that his authority is invested in him by proxy. Her relationship with him is complex—she both needs him to fulfill her goal of obtaining the meeting with her father (which Pancho wants and expects as a former head of state), and she would like to be involved with
someone who is politically minded as she is, but she also detests his military service and what that military service indicates to someone like her, who considers several of her homelands to have been invaded and occupied by the United States military. She does not want to lose her connection with him (“I am afraid…this nice man will run hard and fast in the other direction”), but at the same time, she must curb her feelings about his employer and military experience in order to accommodate him as an individual with whom she can be romantically involved. All these intrapersonal tensions alienate Camila from herself, separating the political activist and Dominican from the woman who wants a sexual/intimate relationship.

There are more than just political tensions at play between them. Scott Andrews is involved in two moments of racial tension with Camila. While on an outing to the Lincoln Memorial with her family, Camila sees Andrews in uniform, walking with an attractive young lady, as fair as he, her arm slipped in his…. I pulled down my hat at an angle, hoping he would not notice me…. Of course S.A. turns and takes in the whole family at a glance. I thought maybe he would tighten his hold on his young white goddess, and walk off, but no. He hurried over. ‘So it is you, Camila! What a surprise!’ (Alvarez 203).

Although the woman turns out to be his sister, Camila’s heightened awareness of his companion’s fairness/whiteness and her immediate response to try to avoid attention by hiding her face indicate that, although she has been on several dates with Andrews at this point, she is unwilling to confront Andrews when she believes he is out with another woman—one who is whiter than she is, to match the fair-completed “Douglas Fairbanks lookalike” Andrews (Alvarez 194). He is tellingly in uniform here, as everyone is touring
national monuments; not only does Camila not want to challenge his relationship to the white woman, but she does not want to be recognized by this man in a military uniform while out in a highly patriotic space with her Dominican/Cuban family. Again, Camila experiences self-alienation in the form of internal conflict as she is caught between wanting his recognition and respect of their relationship with distancing herself from the uniform—a metonym for the U.S. military—and the man wearing it. She is both relieved and embarrassed, a feeling which is quickly reinforced as the party of Camila, her family, Andrews, and his sister are turned away from a café:

Ay, Marion, what a painful moment. The establishment would not serve us. They said they did not have enough room for such a large party, but there were many empty tables, and we all guessed the reason…. Before we parted, [Andrews] turned to me and said in the most feeling way, ‘Camila, I am so sorry.’ I cannot tell you how moved I am by this demonstration of S.A.’s support (Alvarez 204).

Alvarez has already established that Salomé’s children, especially Pedro and Max, are “darker-skinned, a kink in their hair, [with] all the telling features” that, in the racial context of the United States, would be perceived as Black (Alvarez 201). They are visually racially non-white and not welcome in the “elegant” café. Andrews’s implicit acknowledgement of the wrongness of their treatment and witnessing of that racism ensures that he gains Camila’s trust, especially because he does not insist on being served at the establishment, sparing them the embarrassment of a public scene. But his decision about how to handle the situation also allows him to save face and handle his reaction to a public act of racism in a private moment. In fact, when they first met at a White House Dinner, Camila had gotten lost trying to find the powder room and was accosted by
Andrews, “on detail to keep guests within the reception area” (Alvarez 192). Upon revisiting this meeting, Camila realizes that “although he had not meant for her to draw this conclusion, Camila understood that his first impression of her—a tall, serene woman from a Spanish-speaking country—was that she was engaged in petty thievery” in the White House. Andrews’s racism is subtle: he is willing to date and even propose to a non-white woman, but he is also quick to make judgements or to allow unfair treatment if it benefits him. Things with Andrews come to a head when Camila issues an ultimatum:

S.A. leaned close and asked if I had given any thought to his proposal…. Before we went any further, I decided to tell S.A. that it is absolutely necessary to arrange an interview between Papancho and President Harding. Absolutely necessary…. ‘But what if I can’t line up an interview?’ S.A. asked. So I looked him straight in the eye and said, ‘If you want a future for us, you will not refuse me’ (Alvarez 206; emphasis original).

Camila’s internal conflict, caused by Andrews’s subtly racist attitude and behavior toward her, the United States, and the Dominican Republic, makes her doubt herself and how she feels about him. In so doing, Andrews causes self-estrangement in Camila, as she second-guesses how she feels about and around him. She is alienated from Andrews by his racist behavior and his synecdochical representation of the U.S., but also from herself as she is torn between disgust and attraction for him. Effectively, Andrews has been territorialized by the U.S., and he is attempting to extend that territorialization to Camila if he can.

In the resolution of the situation, Andrews chooses his career over Camila’s request, again revealingly wearing his military uniform. He preserves his authority by not
giving in to her demand, and in so doing, ends any chance the two might have at an egalitarian relationship:

So, Scott Andrews has indulged her, has made her think an interview might be possible, and then when she has confronted him, he has called in Peynado [a countryman and former supporter of Camila’s father] to come help get her father off everybody’s hands. Now, when they have become close, when she is falling in love, when it will hurt to lose [Andrews] (Alvarez 210).

Again, her father and her romantic interest are problematically entangled, but this time Andrews’s rejection and betrayal of Pancho is, by extension, a betrayal and rejection of Camila and her authority. Andrews again chooses to let her face public humiliation on her own and then tries to pull her aside for a private word, and Camila’s extended efforts to separate Andrews the man from Andrews the Marine and government servant are exploded as “she cannot hold in the fury any longer [and] brings her hand down hard on the major’s pale face” (Alvarez 211). Camila’s relationship with the man who embodies, for her, the U.S. military and government ends in violence—a moment of rage in response to racial microaggressions, in his refusal to condemn the actions of the people and institutions he serves, and in his betrayal of her family through the involvement of an old friend of her father’s and the invocation of his political clout. Camila was forced to ignore the parts of her conscience that detested Andrews and what he stood for, both because she needed him politically and because she wanted to have a romantic relationship with him, and she believed she could love him as an equal partner; but when she realizes that Andrews is unwilling to intercede on her father’s behalf (and therefore support her), and that he will literally and figuratively clothe himself in nation to avoid
losing any of the patriarchal power invested in him—which is amplified by the proximity to political power—a space for physical violence is created as Camila is forced to deal with the effects of self-estrangement and alienation from the object of her affection in one moment of fraught decision. Camila’s rejection of and by the United States as she moves to Cuba, a gesture of deterritorialization, to involve herself in the revolution there echoes her decades-earlier relationship with Andrews, as she finally has had enough of the social and political environment of the United States and rejects her tenure at a university there as firmly and conspicuously as she rejected Andrews (Alvarez 2). Only in the space of the homosocial, verging on the homoerotic, with Marion can Camila escape from these doomed heteronormative relationships which are haunted by the specters of her father and the United States.

Salomé’s and Camila’s stories, converging with Salomé’s death and Camila’s birth, end the novel under Pancho’s authoritarian rule. Salomé begins the novel as a poet devoted to her nation and ends devoted to a husband who does not accept her as anything other than a poet. Camila begins her life under the same authority, but spends years trying to escape it via other relationships with men haunted by authority and nation. Although Salomé ends her life still devoted to Pancho, Camila is able to break free from his influence and exercise her own sovereignty, discovering her identity as she does so. *In the Name of Salomé* positions alienation and violence as separate processes that sometimes intersect. Both work to remove women from positions of power in their interpersonal relationships. Through the authoritarian figure of Pancho, Salomé and Camila are separated from one another, from their work that they find meaningful, and
from aspects of their identity that are important to each of them—alienated both inter- and intrapersonally.

**Authoritarian Violence Begets Alienation in Dominicana**

In *Dominicana*, physical violence alienates Ana from her family and from the world around her. Her husband-to-be, Juan Ruiz, is introduced in the first line of the novel as proposing to an underage girl as part of a business scheme (Cruz 3-4). The three Ruiz brothers living in the United States, but especially Juan, work long hours in order to make enough money to pay for living expenses in the U.S. and also to save money to put toward their interests in the Dominican Republic. Juan and his younger brother César work several jobs in the United States in order to save up and start their own businesses and to send money back to Santo Domingo to build a restaurant as a joint venture with the other two Ruiz brothers, Ramón and Hector (Cruz 65-66). Juan’s ubiquitous suit “with pockets full of dollars” evokes specifically the successful U.S. businessman, and his multiple jobs worked concurrently throughout the novel indicate the importance he places on earning money (Cruz 4, 65). Even when he is not at work, his apartment in New York serves as a place for his suit business, blending domestic and work spheres (Cruz 56). Although it is a common migrant worry to save enough money to live and to bring family members to live in the United States, Juan’s affiliation with American business ideals places him firmly in the context of the post-U.S.-interference Dominican Republic,
and he embodies the American drive for capital. The restaurant that he and his brothers begin to build in La Capital, Santo Domingo, of the Dominican Republic highlights this interplay: one must have capital to build in La Capital, and the multiple meanings of capital as both “political center” and “money to invest” tie Juan to the political economy of the United States and the Dominican Republic as he moves funds from the former to the latter. Ana must hide any earnings that she makes inside her little Dominicana doll, as the novel implies that Juan would not allow Ana financial power. Juan following his economic interests and bringing U.S. dollars into the Dominican Republic to increase his own financial gain as he moves back and forth across the borders of both countries evokes the United States’ military invasion—crossing the border in order to protect its own interests in the region (Fumagalli 126-127). Although Juan and his brothers were all born in the Dominican Republic, and money was and is necessary for his family’s survival (especially after the death of his parents), Juan’s adoption of and assimilation into the U.S. political economy aligns him with the colonialist and capitalist interests of the United States, as he moves money and his own physical presence from the United States into the already-complicated Dominican Republic. He creates porosity in that

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16 The United States and America are not equivalent. Although “America” encompasses more than just the United States, much of the migrant discourse conflates the U.S. and America (e.g., the American Dream, going to America).

17 The flow of money across the U.S. and Dominican borders is a reversal of the migration from the Dominican Republic to the United States.
border, as the U.S. did, by crossing it for economic interests and bringing U.S. influence into the Dominican Republic.\footnote{This is a moment in which it is important not to read Juan as the United States, but rather as implementing in a microcosm certain practices in which the nation engages. As an individual, he is already operating in a Dominican Republic in which the U.S. has interfered and created a tense economic/political atmosphere, so Juan and the U.S. are not analogous. Rather, his actions are informed by state structures, which he internalizes and reenacts with variations at an individual level.}

Ana is brought to the U.S. as live-in, unpaid household labor for Juan, allowing him to increase his profits by having meals prepared for him (instead of buying them or taking the time to cook them himself, time that could be spent working), the house cleaned (again, instead of contracting out for services and paying a cleaner or taking the time to do it himself), and gaining an extra hand in his business run out of their apartment. Because she is entirely subject to his authority, and he can demand her time, labor, and profits, Juan’s removal of Ana from her family and homeland echoes that of the U.S. displacing migrants due to its own economic interests, re-creating a microcosm of Le-Khac’s cycle of alienation and migration within the larger U.S. interventionism environment. Asserting his authority, Juan instructs Ana not to open the door to the apartment or to go out alone without his express permission (Cruz 93). He confines her to the bounded domestic space of their apartment, effectively claiming the apartment as his territory and relegating Ana to only move within it. Here, “domestic” can function in two senses: not just the household which has traditionally been women’s domain, but also as the interior of a nation. Juan is controlling: he is not only physically violent toward Ana, but he actively works to sever her connections to others. Juan only allows Ana to admit into their apartment those he deems financially worthwhile. Men like Antonio, who pose
a threat to Ana but are profitable for Juan, are welcomed, but Ana must hide her non-
profitable friendships because they are a threat to the amount of control Juan wants over
his domestic space and over Ana’s financial freedom. Juan, who has modeled himself on
the successful U.S. businessman, only admits into his domestic space those from whom
he can draw a monetary profit; all others are threats to his influence. Juan wants to
protect his financial/economic interests. One way of doing so is to prevent his wife, who
provides unpaid labor in the form of cooking and cleaning, from creating outside
connections with which she could support herself, or ways in which he could lose her
help in the suit business he runs out of their apartment.19

Given the domestic/foreign political binary, an extension of the microcosm of
Juan and Ana’s apartment to the U.S. and its interior holds true as well. Juan’s power
outside his own sphere is limited: while he wants to hold absolute power over Ana within
the domestic space, outside that space he is subject to other actors. Juan taking out his
frustrations on Ana is a perfect example of Anzaldúa’s machismo. Because he has been
disempowered in the sociopolitical environment of New York City and the U.S., he
ensures that there is someone over whom he can exercise his authority to the point of
committing physical violence. Employers, police, airline companies, even the caprices of

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19 In keeping Ana’s time and labor under his authority, Juan profits by not having to take the time away
from his own work—which generates profit for him—or hiring someone to do it for him. The
heteronormative gendered division of labor, in which the running of the household is considered women’s
work and belittled while also being fundamental for men being able to work and therefore generate income,
provides Juan with “free” (unpaid) labor gained by marriage in order for him to spend his time in the
pursuit of higher income. Ana also runs the suit business out of their apartment, and since the income from
this work goes to Juan, he is in essence generating two incomes: one while he is working, and one while
Ana runs a business for him and makes none of the profit.
his own brothers chip away at his authority when he is outside the domestic space of the apartment, so he must reify for himself his power within the space through machismo. Considering the domesticity of the nation in which they reside, the United States, like Juan, attempts to tightly police its domestic sphere, and the spaces where that sphere is bounded and passed; but, like the sly Antonio who enters the apartment while Juan is away in order to win Ana’s attention, there are always those who manage to disrupt the vision that the authoritarian has for entrants. The Vietnam War is evoked multiple times in the novel, and although protests against the war indicate that not all is well within the borders of the U.S. domestic space (much like Juan cannot keep Ana from disagreeing with him in her mind, even if she does not have the power to change his behavior), America must accept its partial loss of face on the world stage.20 The authoritarian façade outside the domestic is eroded, and so the actor must return to the domestic to solidify the feeling of power/authority over its subject(s) in the interior. Secrecy is also a key aspect of the domestic—what occurs within the domestic space (bounded by borders or walls) is silenced by the authoritative figure to keep order or maintain peace, even though often those events that are silenced are ones of extreme violence. For the United States of the 1960s, persistent issues like racism—resulting in the continued practices of lynching and discrimination and (as explicitly mentioned in Dominicana) the assassination of figures like Malcolm X—were considered problems to be solved without exterior interference, the U.S. insisting on its authority to solve its interior troubles despite decades, often

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20 Although the U.S. profits enormously from the military industrial complex, its inability to win a decisive victory in Vietnam, coupled with the amount of resistance to the war from within the country, resulted in some national embarrassment, even as military power and profit increased exponentially.
centuries, of failing to do exactly that. So, too, does Juan only commit physical violence against Ana within his domestic sphere, refusing to hit her in public when she disobeys his ruling that she can choose one dress and one dress only while they are out shopping (Cruz 129).

Using methods other than physical violence to compel Ana to obey him, Juan leaps from threats to guilt to fear tactics, demanding of Ana, “You better not be going around telling people our business. Do you know how much I love you? You want someone to come and take our baby? Take you away from me? You think they won’t do that? This is America. You hear me?” (Cruz 152). Juan’s machismo drives him to try to control Ana through whatever means possible, including several types of verbal/mental manipulation in quick succession. His invocation of America carries the threatening undertone that this is a foreign land with foreign ways, willing to separate families, and that that would be a bad outcome for Ana and their child. Previously, right after Ana’s arrival, he warns, “I have eyes everywhere, you understand me?” (Cruz 61). Juan knows that Ana will be disoriented and alienated from others, and he territorializes her by sowing a seed of fear that she will be surveilled by systems Juan has in place to police her behavior. The United States has recently dealt with criticism for its increased surveillance of its subjects, examples of which include the NSA’s large-scale digital monitoring, initially without the public’s knowledge or consent, or infringements on human rights committed as interpretations of the Patriot Act. Although the novel is set in the 1960s, contemporary readers of the novel (published in 2019) would recognize current U.S. practices in Juan’s threats of ever-present surveillance. In this way, the U.S. practices a
model of increased and more diffused surveillance than panopticon theory posits in order to maintain control of the people living within and at its bounds (Walters 192). Juan’s positioning of himself as a surveillance state and Ana as his territory is meant to frighten his newly-arrived wife into submission and obedience by implying that he is aware of her every action. This echoes the United States’ attempts to control the actions of its subjects in the domestic space and abroad via surveillance. The safety of the domestic sphere protects only those who have authority within. Implicitly, the domestic space creates privacy for violently patriarchal figures like Juan to abuse their authority, and trespass both bodily via physical violence and emotionally/mentally with verbal abuse on the boundaries of those subject to their power. In a space where she should be safe—at home—Ana is most vulnerable to the patriarchal violence Juan perpetrates, so she withdraws even further into herself, alienated from any support her family could offer and from feeling safe in her own home.

There is a rhetoric constructed around the United States being the place to which refugees can flee and earn their way to a better life which is still somewhat in circulation in the 1960s, albeit with severe restrictions, when Ana migrates. Questioning the United States’ supremacy or exceptionalism as a country causes backlash; in a domestic version of this, Juan asserts his own exceptionalism toward Ana: “Nobody’s gonna take

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21 Introduced by Jeremy Bentham and adapted by Foucault; Walters works from Foucault’s rendering.

22 At the time of Ana’s migration (the end of 1964/beginning of 1965), national quotas put in place in 1924 were the rule of immigration to the United States, severely restricting the American Dream. After the implementation of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which removed U.S. national quotas for migrants, many migrants took advantage of the clause permitting the immigration of families trying to reunite in the United States.
care of you the way I take care of you. You know that?” Ana answers in two ways: “Yes, Juan, I know.” and “Pretending, pretending. If I pretend enough maybe it’ll feel true” (Cruz 66). Ana knows that she cannot question or push back against Juan’s vision of his own supremacy as a husband and authority, or she risks violent backlash. In the divergent responses, Ana’s inner alienation from the façade she must maintain to remain safe is already present and continues throughout the novel. This self-estrangement, forced by Juan’s repeated attacks on Ana’s sovereignty, is a response of alienation as a result of violence. Similarly, the U.S. requires migrants to accept its exceptionalism in offering them a place to migrate to, but the colonialist structures already in place there disadvantage those migrants. They are forced, like Ana, to pretend that the United States is the best situated to provide a new home for them when in reality, that is not the case. The U.S. wants to maintain its status in the historical moment as a caretaker of the “poor, huddled masses” and be vaunted for this,\(^{23}\) even while not providing support for migrants and covertly and overtly tolerating racism and xenophobia toward them (Lazarus).

Continuing the verbal manipulation, Juan repeatedly demands for Ana to affirm her love for him: “Do you love me, Ana? Juan asks. I bite my tongue and tuck in my lips…I clamp my legs together. I wish him dead,” which he quickly follows with, “Tell me you’re happy with me” (Cruz 98). Ana denies Juan access to her interior, closing the borders of her body to him at the moment he demands verbal demonstrations of love and loyalty, which Ana does not or cannot speak. She cries instead, in response to which

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\(^{23}\) Inscription on the Statue of Liberty.
“Juan slams his hands on the table, raises his fist to punch the wall, but holds himself back. He grabs his coat and stomps out, slamming the door behind him.” Ana is expected to respond with thankfulness and displays of love for the man who has brought her to the United States and given her the opportunities toward which her mother insistently pushed her, even though she is unhappy and caught in cycles of violence, because she is subject to her husband with no other support network in the United States. When he does not receive the praise and lip service Juan believes he is due, the reaction is violence and desertion. Machismo again rears its head in Juan’s behavior as he reacts to what he perceives as Ana’s disobedience or resistance to his power with violence in the domestic space, the raised fist and slammed door implicit threats that those inanimate objects could very well be replaced by Ana next time if she continues what he sees as her defiant behavior. The potential for violence in the aborted punch and the translated violence of the slammed door are manifestations of Juan’s shame and anger in the one space, the domestic, where he has power and can enact that anger and shame in the form of violence on someone who is even more oppressed than he is on the basis of her gender and subjection to his authority.

Ana’s marriage is built on false pretenses: their wedding certificate and her identification documentation are falsified, and there is no ceremony in which the two are actually married (Cruz 42). This is an allusion to the disillusionment Ana, and other migrants, feel with the reality of life at their destination as compared to what they were led to believe before migrating. Ana is dressed up for and expecting a wedding celebration; instead, she is unceremoniously given a document with falsified age and
marital status information and told that she and Juan are now married. On their wedding
night, Juan creates a no-win situation for Ana: when he realizes she does not want to have
sex with him, he offers her champagne and backs off only long enough to offer a
semblance of comfort by singing and holding her while getting her intoxicated, removing
her ability to make informed decisions for herself (Cruz 46-48). There is no way in which
the night will end without Juan getting what he wants, although he offers the semblance
of a choice and of understanding to his teenage bride. Like the United States invading the
Dominican Republic under the pretense of helping restore order, the outcome of the
situation will be that which the more powerful player (Juan/the U.S.) wants, whether that
is the consummation of a marriage or the installment of a political figure of choice. The
authoritarian will have its way, territorializing social relations by insisting on using its
power to subject others to its will. In Juan and Ana’s continued sexual relations are
echoes of the periodic colonial interference of the United States in the political
environment of the Dominican Republic after its initial invasion in the early 1900s, with
all the connotations between invasion/penetration that are present in those interactions. It
is clear Ana does not welcome the intercourse, but she is basically powerless to refuse,
and it costs her less to be coerced: “[Juan] stares long and hard at me. Usually he gives
me the I-want-to-stick-it-in-you look, and I close my eyes and just let him stick it in”
(Cruz 64). Ana closes her eyes, denying him access in one fashion as she is forced to
grant it in another. In order to avoid greater violence, Ana allows access to her interior
and rebels in small ways (by closing her eyes) to avoid the greater violence that
resistance would engender. Patriarchal authoritarian power dynamics are again at play as
Juan sees himself as entitled to Ana’s body in return for his protection and providing for her, without taking Ana’s wants and needs into account, therefore territorializing her. So, too, did the United States take the task upon itself to “stabilize” the Dominican Republic as many times as the U.S. deemed necessary, forcing entrance through military might and strength, trespassing the border of the Caribbean country as Juan trespasses Ana’s body. Juan’s forcing himself on a younger, physically smaller Ana who is conflicted about their relationship is suggestive of the United States deciding to police the smaller, newly-sovereign Dominican Republic in the middle of civil unrest and violence. It is unlikely that the Dominican Republic could have resisted the invasion of U.S. forces into its interior, and so access was granted in order to not create a greater violent conflict that will be carried out on the body of the subject. Juan here embodies patriarchal strength and authority in order to get what he wants, which is periodic access to the interior of another sovereign entity—a domestic reenactment of U.S. interventionism on the world stage.

Juan sees Ana as a secondary citizen, with the more assimilated/Americanized Caridad as his first choice and as deserving of his love. While his relationship with her is complicated, since it is an extramarital affair for both of them, Juan’s desire for and elevation of Caridad over Ana reads as the U.S. preferring migrants who assimilate and whose families serve as part of the military complex, as Caridad’s husband is fighting in

24 By the late 1950s and into the 1960s, around the time Juan began making advances on Ana, the Dominican Republic had experienced several colonizers (Spain, France, Haiti, the United States), multiple political structures, and a slew of short-lived political figures in charge of governing the nation (Fumagalli 126-127, 261). By this time, which was during a period of civil unrest and immediately prior to another U.S. occupation, the Dominican Republic had been fighting both within its own borders and dealing with outside forces in order to maintain political sovereignty.
Vietnam. The military industrial complex, part of colonialist systems of subjugation, has swallowed Caridad’s husband—reminiscent of imperial/colonial practices of conscription to fight wars of expansion for territory. Particularly because she is a working woman, and her introduction in the novel indicates that she predates Juan’s arrival to New York City, Caridad represents (for Juan) the attainable America. She is assimilated to the degree Juan wants to be: she works in a hotel and chooses workers “on the line” (Cruz 18), speaks English without the accent that Juan has, and her husband is part of the United States military (whether by choice or by force is not clear). On the other hand, Juan resents Ana’s reliance on him, even as he insists on it: “When Juan gets mad, it’s as if my dependence on him fuels the transformation in his body…. [H]e yells, You want trouble for us?” (Cruz 69). His anger is a response to Ana opening the apartment door; he wants to both control and limit her ability to interact with others at the border of his domestic space, and feel righteous fury at her dependence on him. Juan consistently chooses to emulate American sociopolitical interests over treating his migrant wife humanely, in effect territorializing Ana by extending structures of the state into their relationship. Juan’s controlling, authoritarian treatment of his wife creates more and more alienation in Ana, expanding the space between who she is forced to be to survive with Juan and who she wants to be: an educated businesswoman and mother.

César, Juan’s brother, offers Ana a version of the American Dream specific to her situation; he is the counterpart to Juan’s Caridad. When Juan is away, César encourages

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25 While the specific instance of the American Dream shifts for each migrant because of personal desires, national origin, and time period, there is a monumental understanding of the American Dream as fulfillment of migration from a country where socioeconomic situation is stagnant to America, where
Ana to move beyond the bounds of the apartment to which Juan has confined her (Cruz 199). He protects her from the unwanted sexual attentions of other men (Cruz 201), supports her entrepreneurial aspirations (Cruz 199, 211), and alters a dress to accommodate her pregnant body to take her out dancing, wanting to celebrate with her and show her joy and fun in New York City (Cruz 261-262). Most important of all, he offers Ana a plan to remove her from his brother’s authoritarian, abusive sphere of influence and take her away physically from the city Juan lives in (Cruz 267). Although César is inextricably bound to Juan and the other Ruiz brothers, what he represents for Ana is the freedom and opportunity promised to migrants as part of the American Dream, which are denied to her as she lives under Juan’s reality. César not only meets Ana on her own terms in her domestic space, but removes her from that domestic space—with her consent—in order to encourage her to enjoy herself and her body, to take first entrepreneurial steps, and to experience sex without coercion and within the bounds of her own choice. As Ana and César prepare to go out to see a movie, Ana putting on extra makeup and a bright scarf to tie back her hair, César says, “If Juan saw you, he’d throw us to the lions” (Cruz 180; emphasis original). Ana’s immediate, telling, internal response is, “There is an Us. It’s undeniable. An Us that can’t exist when Juan is around.” Ana

opportunities abound and migrants can better their social standing by hard work. See, for example, Lawrence Samuel’s *The American Dream: A Cultural History*. Syracuse UP, 2012.

Ramón, the eldest brother, is tied to a symbol of nationalism as he is described as “lean and tall like a flagpole” (p.5), and Hector is married to a woman who was born in the United States and is “without a mother tongue” and not Dominican (p.142-143). The brothers, collectively, are “a family of hard workers, good men, and entrepreneurs…. The Ruiz brothers started poor…. But they work together” (p.25). In the end, however, the family is betrayed by its patriarch Ramón, who has taken all the money set aside for their family restaurant and cleaned out the bank account. The brother most explicitly tied to nation-state in the text turns out to be the one who steals the fruits of his brothers’ labor for personal gain.
must reject Juan to accept the Us/us/U.S. that César constructs for her. Ana begins taking steps toward reterritorialization on her terms with César. However, he is still an authoritative presence, encouraging her to wear clothes that he approves of and pushing her to make money by taking steps to start her own small business, selling pastelitos.

One of the main tensions, besides the unspoken competition for Ana, between Juan and César is how their appearances are racialized in the context of the United States. Compared to Juan, César is “darker-skinned” and so is refused jobs and entry to public spaces because he is less white-passing than Juan, an instantiation of the systemic racism instilled and perpetuated by colonialism (Cruz 91-92). César is the one present with Ana when Malcolm X is assassinated across the street, and although he does not respond in the moment with anything resembling sympathy or empathy, he is not the brother who warns Ana to stay out of the Black neighborhoods. Eventually, César “combs his hair out into a big puffball” and takes part in a protest against the U.S. government’s foreign actions in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, a moment reminiscent of the protests against the social treatment of African-Americans that Ana watches from her apartment window, actions indicating his acceptance of the fact that the United States has decided he is “Blacker” than Juan (Cruz 179). Although Juan acknowledges César as his brother, César is denied entrance to a tacitly non-Black bar: “The bouncer at the door lets Juan inside but holds César back…. César, pointing to Juan[, says,] Thas mi brotha” (Cruz 92). Both are escorted out, and Juan punches César in a rage. Because he cannot take out his machismo anger on the bouncer, Juan turns instead to César in order to express anger and frustration in a socially accepted way for men: violence. This time, Juan’s violence is not
enacted on Ana, but on César, who is a stand-in for a more egalitarian America—one in which race is not measured on a physical sliding scale and personal/social worth tied to that appearance. The violence between the brothers in the scene reverberates with the tension between the reality and the ideal of America for migrants. César, for Ana, represents the simultaneous promise and the failure of the American Dream: the false promises of an America that values and celebrates its migrants, that creates spaces for them in society, and that does the things in the macrosystem that César does for Ana personally. But the life with César proves a fantasy, with the promised apartment space in Boston turning out to be “a shithole,” when César goes to see it (Cruz 284). César is just as much a philanderer as Juan—before, during, and after his flirtation with Ana (Cruz 179). She sees the cracks in the life César offers her, and refuses to leave Juan, despite his inhumane treatment of her, for César’s daydream. Seeing this hope crumble before her, Ana is forced back into a relationship she does not want, distancing her from César and from the life she would choose if she had a choice. Ana recognizes the impossibility of César’s fantasy life as he constructs it, sentence by sentence, for her, and instead chooses her family back in the Dominican Republic and the child she is currently carrying. Ana sees that César is offering her another kind of territorialization in separating her from her family in the Dominican Republic and, in so doing, would be alienating himself and Ana from both of their families. With no other support system in place, and only a daydream offered, Ana is even further alienated from what she wants: a stable, loving family.
Neither Juan nor César offers a reality that Ana can accept, leading her to withdraw even
further into herself, since she cannot count on either brother for a meaningful, solid connection.

The main male players in Ana’s life create spaces for violence and alienation: Juan curbs Ana’s self-determination in multiple ways, and César exists to offer moments of respite but, mainly, reminds her that what he stands for is impossible for either of them to reach. By subjecting Ana to violence, Juan creates in her feelings of alienation from the social—her family and prospective friends, with whom the formation of homosocial relationships in networks of rayano consciousness could allow her space to reterritorialize her social relations and reclaim self-sovereignty in interpersonal relationships—and César’s embodiment of the distance between fantasy and reality only serves to reinforce this alienation. In *Dominicana*, patriarchal authoritarian violence directly begets alienation in the protagonist: alienation from other people, from the hope for betterment, and even self-estrangement. The violence in action or inaction of the patriarchal authoritarian figures and spaces in which Ana’s relationships unfold results in growing alienation for her: distanced from her family, from her environment and her homeland, and from who she wants to be.

*Alienation Engenders Violence in The Poet X*

*The Poet X* presents more gender nuance in relationships than does *In the Name of Salomé* or *Dominicana*. This verse novel complicates the gendered reading of the patriarchal authoritarian somewhat: Xiomara experiences patriarchal violence mainly through her mother and through male inaction. Her father and her brother choose not to
act at crucial moments to counteract her mother’s religious authority, and her brother and
her biology partner, for whom she develops feelings, also choose inaction when Xiomara
faces sexual harassment, both of which result in her feeling as though she can only rely
on herself. Xiomara’s alienation is therefore mostly that of withdrawal from her
surroundings. She experiences this alienation as a result of structural, gendered violence
predicated on heteropatriarchy, but in Xiomara’s experience, alienation precedes the
personal violence she undergoes at the hands of an authoritarian.

Altagracia, Xiomara’s rigidly religious mother, is expected to submit to her
husband in all matters, but this does not hold true in Xiomara’s experience. Her mother is
the parent who makes and enforces the rules for her children, and disobedience comes at
a high price. She is without doubt the authoritarian in her household. However, Mami
does not upend the authoritarian gender dynamic as entirely as it may seem: Altagracia’s
internalized ideas of power are heteropatriarchal, stemming from either her religious or
cultural background (the novel is unclear). Altagracia accepts these structures of power as
fact, and her authority does not belong to her: it is a dominative power held by men over
women, 27 so she sees herself as merely the conduit for patriarchal power through God
and her husband to govern her daughter’s behavior. Her patriarchal ideals manifest in
double standards for her twin children. Some of her differential treatment may be due to
their differences in temperament—Xavier is quiet and intellectual, and Xiomara
boisterous and physical—but when it comes to dating and having relationships, there is a

27 For further feminist readings of patriarchal power, see for instance Kate MacKinnon’s Feminism
Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law (1987) or Nancy Fraser’s “Beyond the Master/Subject Model:
clear case of their mother (and by extension, their father) holding them to different standards: “Our parents always say that as la niña de la casa / expectations for me are different than for Twin. / If he brought a girl home they would probably applaud him. / I don’t know what they would do / if the person he brought home was not a girl” (Acevedo 155). All relationships are forbidden for Xiomara, because her mother places such importance on the untouchability of her daughter’s body, but she does not feel the same way about her son. Relationships outside the heterosexual norm are unthinkable for both children, but Xavier choosing to date heteronormatively is not the threat to Mami’s domestic authority that Xiomara choosing to date at all would be. The implication of this is that Xiomara’s bodily autonomy must be guarded by her parents until it is safely passed to a man who will then guard it for her, and that she cannot make that choice for herself; at the same time, Xavier is allowed his own bodily autonomy within heteronormative restrictions, with the hope that he will then be the authority for himself and his future wife’s bodies and sexuality. Altagracia has internalized patriarchal authority and reenacts it in her relationships with her children, since her husband will not; his absence as authoritarian head of the household creates a vacuum into which, obedient to heteropatriarchal norms, Altagracia stands in for divine patriarchal authority. Although Altagracia is a woman, she has so internalized heteropatriarchal structures that she unquestioningly accepts the patriarchal view of women as sexual objects to be possessed, a direct consequence of the legacy of Spanish colonialism and the permeation of Catholicism in the Spanish colony of the Dominican Republic. The aspect of virginity and feminine purity in Catholicism has been so instilled in the Dominican imaginary that,
even after escaping the Dominican Republic, Altagracia brings with her and models her ethics on the religion of the Spanish colonizer, further complicating her own subjectivity as both a colonizing and colonized subject by multiple colonial forces (Spanish Catholicism and the U.S. whose interventionism destabilized the Dominican Republic). In this way, patriarchal authority does not entirely fall along gender lines, and it is so pervasive that just removing male authority figures from a family or relationship does not imply a freedom from heteropatriarchal ways of thinking. Unlike the previous two novels, *The Poet X* offers a more nuanced view of how heteropatriarchal authority operates between and among genders; it is necessary to recognize that women, too, can embody and reenact patriarchal authority through internalized misogyny.

As Xiomara gets older, Papi has witnessed the tension between his wife and daughter grow, but he chooses not to take action until the violence done is so great (Mami burning Xiomara’s poetry notebook, which Papi passively allows to happen, although he does try to calm both women and to put out the fire in the aftermath) that it can no longer be ignored and Xiomara feels the need to flee their domestic space.

Xiomara’s father functions as an absent presence for the majority of the novel:

>You can have a father who… / calls back to the island every couple of months/ to speak to Primo So-and-So. / … But even as he brushes by you / on the way to the bathroom / he could be gone as anybody. / Just because your father’s present / doesn’t mean he isn’t absent* (Acevedo 65).

Papi is a passive spectator in her life, a man to whom her mother, according to Altagracia’s religious beliefs, is supposed to be submissive; but Mami’s presence looms taller, overshadowing her husband as the household authority in her daughter’s eyes.
Although Xiomara experiences Papi as an absence, and he therefore does not exert paternal control over her, Mami fills the role by acting as a lightning rod for God’s patriarchal authority, territorializing Xiomara on his/His behalf. Later, Papi is willing to do the work to mend the harm done, so long as he does not have to initiate that work (Acevedo 343). Papi exists as a reminder of influence that is not exercised to avoid conflict, of authoritative power uninvoked.

Xiomara’s brother, too, exists mostly in the novel as a tacit support but does not actively intercede on her behalf. Xavier, or Twin as Xiomara calls him, is an introspective boy hiding his own secret, and therefore trying to protect himself from the wrath of their mother by remaining silent. He comforts Xiomara in quiet, nonviolent moments that she needs him, but she cannot count on him to reinforce her bodily autonomy: “And Twin must see it on my face. / This love and distaste I feel for him. / He’s older (by a whole fifty minutes) / and a guy, but never defends me. / Doesn’t he know how tired I am?” (Acevedo 54). Twin’s inaction, his refusal to exercise the power he is granted by virtue of being born male in a patriarchal society, is frustrating for Xiomara; she does not want to have to constantly fight her own battles against sexual harassment and against her mother’s double standards and restrictions. The inaction of her brother and Aman pushes her into violence outside the domestic space, at school and in the community: “I already had to curse a guy out / for pulling on my bra strap, / then shoved a senior into a locker / for trying to whisper into my ear.” Although Xiomara is tired and does not want to have to constantly physically defend herself against the machismo inherent in her community and at school, the inaction of the men in her life
force her into a violent space she does not want to inhabit—in this case, her alienation from those who could help her leads to Xiomara exercising violence in order to respond to attempted patriarchal territorialization. The inaction extends beyond simply choosing not to intervene in moments of violence; by refusing to engage in relationships with Xiomara that resist the norms of heteropatriarchy, Twin and Aman negate the possibility of rayano consciousness for Xiomara and refuse her those connections of interdependency and forgiveness—until, at the end of the novel, they take steps to reterritorialize their heteronormative relationships with her and move toward, if not the homosocial, then at least a refusal of the bounds of the heteronormative in which they as males hold the power by default.

Despite the overall positive relationship with Aman, her partner from biology class and Xiomara’s first love, he too is guilty of inaction in the face of sexual harassment. When he does not step in to protect Xiomara as she looks to him for help, she feels betrayed (Acevedo 218-220). This in itself is a form of violence, of forcing confrontation by refusing to take action during moments when authoritative intervention could protect someone experiencing sexual violence. In the context of the United States, sexual harassment and violence against women continue because it is difficult to make authorities act on complaints, and Xiomara experiences this daily. When she comes home, Papi and Twin continue this inaction and force her into situations where she must defend herself verbally against Mami and neighborhood harassers, because the men in Xiomara’s life will not interfere with the authoritarian in their home or their neighborhoods; Aman refuses to use his inherent position of power, as a man in a
patriarchal society, to do so at school. As bystanders who witness violations of Xiomara’s autonomy by Mami and by other men, Papi, Twin, and Aman allow that violence to happen, and Xiomara knows they see it and refuse to help her, leaving her to fight for her self-sovereignty alone. She knows that they have more power just by virtue of their being male in a patriarchal society, and yet she must struggle for her autonomy not only against those actively trying to remove it from her, but against the tacit maintenance of the status quo that men’s silence and refusal to interrupt heteropatriarchal norms condone. By passively allowing violence to happen, the men in Xiomara’s life participate in and perpetuate that violence, alienating Xiomara from them because they are aligned with her oppressors—Papi, Twin, and Aman are the territory of the patriarchal authoritarian until they choose to de- and re-territorialize themselves to acknowledge her sovereignty by recognizing Xiomara as the authority over her body and her poetry, and actively supporting her decisions, thereby reconfiguring their social relationships with Xiomara. Their passivity forces her to fight back physically, even though she doesn’t want to, “because no one will ever take care of me but me,” relying solely on herself (which is a form of alienation from the social) and retreating into herself and her poetry (Acevedo 219). She eventually does return to Aman when she flees the authoritarian space her mother creates, and in that moment, he demonstrates he has learned to respect Xiomara’s personal sovereignty; in so doing, Aman becomes part of the community Xiomara chooses to surround herself with—this is the reterritorialization between the two of them,
in which Xiomara can make social determinations on her own terms. While not necessarily a homosocial relationship, Aman’s acceptance of Xiomara as not his sexual subject, but as an autonomous equal, rejects heteronormative structures in which he is expected to claim Xiomara as his sexual territory.

Xiomara longs to be able to make choices for herself: “As much as boys and men / have told me all of the things / they would like to do to my body, / this is the first time I’ve actually wanted / some of those things done” (Acevedo 146). Instead of being subjected to catcalls and sexual harassment from strange men or being chaste as her mother would have her be, Xiomara wants to navigate the space of sexuality on her own terms: she wants to inhabit a space wherein she is “…not expect[ed] to be a saint, respect[ed] as whole grown-ass woman” (Acevedo 126). Xiomara is coming into an age where she wants to exercise self-determination in making sexual and physical decisions for her own body. Machismo manifests here as men in the Washington Heights neighborhood (presumably also Dominican or Latinx migrants, and therefore racialized by and in the U.S. social milieu) enacting their power as men to make Xiomara uncomfortable walking down the street or watching boys play basketball, putting her down by subjecting her to degrading comments. The machismo of these men gives them power that they do not have in the white U.S. over Xiomara; the comments, while sexual in nature, have at their core the men’s desire to project their feelings of inferiority onto their object—young girls over whom they do have power. Xiomara confronts this by

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28 See next section for a more in-depth discussion of community formation.
yelling back at them and fighting boys her own age, regaining her self-sovereignty by responding violently.

Altagracia, too, goes to greater and greater lengths to remove that power of self-determination from her daughter. The physical violence Mami subjects Xiomara to is tied to Xiomara’s attempts at bodily and intellectual/artistic autonomy. Although “Mami told me I’d have to pray extra / so my body didn’t get me in trouble,” Xiomara defies her, refusing communion, skipping confirmation class, and choosing to pursue a relationship with her biology classmate Aman—knowing fully well that her mother would not approve of her spending unchaperoned time with a boy or holding hands with him (Acevedo 151). When Xiomara exercises physical bodily autonomy, both by fighting and engaging in physical intimacy with Aman, Altagracia responds in kind with physical punishment. Mami’s authoritarian control over Xiomara sees her daughter’s growing self-sovereignty over her body as a threat to its power, and so it responds in a physically violent way. A kiss, however, gets Xiomara in the worst trouble regarding bodily autonomy. Xiomara grants Aman access to her body, allowing a physical trespass via kisses on the train. In this instance, trespass of bodily boundaries is clearly not always violent or nonconsensual; in exercising her physical agency and granting consent, Xiomara models a healthy trespass of bodily boundaries—she is the authority when it comes to her body and how Aman interacts with it. However, Altagracia sees them, and her response is physical punishment for what she sees as a physical transgression of her, and therefore God’s, authority: “My / mother / yanks / my / hair, / pulling / my / face / up / from / the / tiles, / constructing / a / church / arch / of / my / spine” after pulling
Xiomara by the shirt down the hallway to her shrine to the Virgin Mary. Altagracia pushes Xiomara to her knees to kneel on scattered grains of rice, trying to force repentance: “Mami’s hard hands / make me dizzy and nauseous. / Mami prays and prays / while my knees bite into grains of rice” (Acevedo 198, 209). The entanglement of the religious with the physical indicates that Xiomara’s mother considers herself a corporeal conduit for the authority of God, and that she acts as an authoritarian with the power of the divine behind her. Altagracia’s insistence on Xiomara’s adherence to the virginal, chaste ideal as dictated by her religion imbue Altagracia with, she believes, the authority to punish physical transgressions with physical violence, creating a circle in which Xiomara and Altagracia both try to gain control of Xiomara’s physical and sexual autonomy. Xiomara’s growing alienation from the religion that seeks to control her sexuality, as corporealed through her mother, leads to Altagracia’s violent reprisals against her daughter’s self-sovereignty.

The culminating act of violence occurs when Altagracia finds and reads Xiomara’s poetry notebook, which not only contains poems that Altagracia considers proof of bodily rebellion but also of doubt in the authority of God and the Catholic Church. Anzaldúa discusses how the Catholic Church, as it subjugated Mexico, positioned its God over Mexican mother goddesses and broke them into the categories of virgin/puta (49-50). The Catholic God’s authority, projected by Spanish colonizers onto the Mexican people, to dictate the sexual value of goddesses and therefore women is continued into the relationship in the Batista household. Those systems of religious and colonial subjugation, especially as they relate to women and women’s sexuality, have
been internalized by Altagracia, who in turn projects them onto a resistant Xiomara. The violence committed when Mami burns her poetry notebook is almost a physical violence committed against her daughter, so closely does Xiomara relate herself to her poems and the notebook: “‘Burn it! Burn it. / This is where the poems are,’ I say, / thumping a fist against my chest” (Acevedo 308). Xiomara blurs the line between herself and her poetry, between the physical body and the artifact of written poetry. By asserting that the poems are corporealized, present in her body at the moment that her mother is destroying their other physical form, Xiomara equates her body with her notebook as the vessel for her artistic and intellectual identity. The notebook bound in leather is almost an extension of her own skin; at the moment that it burns, Xiomara wonders, “If I were on fire… / If I were a pile of ashes… / If I were nothing but dust / would anyone chase the wind / trying to piece me back together?” (Acevedo 310). Xiomara aligns herself with the burning notebook by positioning herself as the result of its burning, feeling the emotional loss as the physical object is destroyed. Earlier, during the punishment of kneeling on dry rice grains, Xiomara remediates her mother’s attempt to belittle her: “‘Cuero,’ [Mami] calls me to my face. / The Dominican word for ho. / …. See, a cuero is any skin. A cuero / is just a covering” (Acevedo 205-206). Xiomara is growing into her physical and sexual autonomy, which her mother disparages by calling her a “ho.” The blurring between Xiomara’s physical sexuality and her body (especially her skin) is codified in the use of the word cuero. So, too, is cuero the leather covering for the book of poems, the skin/cover/cuero containing Xiomara’s sexual and physical autonomy within its bounds in the form of the poems with which she is exploring these new aspects of her identity.
Cuero is both her skin, her body-cover, and the covers of her poetry notebook: coverings for the poems which Xiomara holds inside both her body and the notebook. Altagracia will not allow her daughter’s ho-dom, her cuero-ness. She burns her daughter’s poetry notebook in a desperate attempt to regain authority over Xiomara’s body and mind, thinking that burning the poems is tantamount to destroying the ho in her daughter, committing artistic and physical violence in the act.

In *The Poet X*, Xiomara’s alienation from her family, patriarchal society, and restricting religion result in violence (both perpetrated by Xiomara on harassers, and on Xiomara as Altagracia tries to control her daughter) as she attempts to break those bounds. In a direct reversal from *Dominicana*’s cycles, alienation leads to violence as Xiomara tries to reclaim her place in the world, while Ana shrinks from it in order to protect herself. All four protagonists in the three novels deal with violence and alienation in different forms, but whether interpersonal, national, structural, or a mixture, they work to disempower women and violently alienate them from their own self-sovereignty.

The protagonists grow as people and navigate their identities, but the authoritarian state (as both nation and as interpersonal power imbalance) wants its subjects to remain fixed, in order to more easily territorialize and exert power over them. A character deciding her own identity outside the influence of the authoritarian, especially the patriarchal authority, is a threat to that power; as identity shifts and changes over the contexts of time, location, and environment, the authoritarian finds it more difficult to categorize and control the territorialized subject (Posner). Escalating efforts to control subjects are often violent and increasingly trespass on the autonomy of a character,
leading to alienation from aspects of identity and to withdrawal from the authoritarian
(and the environment that grants power to the authoritarian) in order to protect
themselves. Through patriarchal violence and the alienation of the subject, the
relationship of which is configured differently in each novel, women’s authority is
removed from them.
Chosen Community: Reterritorializing Sovereignty through the (Homo)social

In response to the trespasses on autonomy perpetrated on the protagonists, I explore one method of remediation—community building—as it appears in the texts, especially in context of the homosocial and rayano consciousness and how that positioning reterritorializes social relations damaged by heteronormative patriarchal violence. After spending much time investigating how power is removed from the protagonists, I briefly offer the homosocial and rayano consciousness as possible methods of community-building in which the patriarchal authority explored in detail above can be subverted through de- and reterritorialization. Because of the myriad ways in which these relationships can be structured, and may be any construction between fleeting moments and lasting connections, the instances explored here should be considered illustrative and not exhaustive. The reader can and should find other moments of de- and reterritorialization throughout the texts. Unlike the patriarchal authoritarian relationships discussed above, which are intimate and sustained throughout the novels (and therefore can be analyzed across the texts in depth), moments of community-building occur even when the protagonists don’t know the names of the people with whom they connect or when the characters only interact for one textual moment. Through relationships with others, especially with other women and those not exercising power over the
protagonists, Salomé, Camila, Ana, and Xiomara remediate the authoritarian influences in their lives by creating communities from which they can draw support and renegotiate their self-sovereignty. These homosocial and more egalitarian relationships occur in many different instantiations and can range from prolonged connections to moments of encounter. Networks of support and collective power built on (homo)social connection and rayano consciousness create space for the protagonists to exercise their individual self-sovereignty and to explore or claim aspects of their identities. The novels offer fictionalized representations of these constructions and connections, manifestations of García-Peña’s rayano consciousness; in so doing, they model connections for readers that, as discussed above, implicate readers in their communities. Several of the important homosocial relationships, each with differing configurations of intimacy or sociality, in the novels are discussed here: friendships and familial relationships are the most common. I return to the heteropatriarchal relationships explored in detail above and investigate ways in which they are directly subverted by the homosocial and rayano consciousness (deterritorialization). I also consider how these relationships not only undermine patriarchal authority, but how they function to return self-sovereignty to the protagonists and consolidate that personal power, creating small spaces of reterritorialization within pervasive colonialist gender and power structures.

Beginning the discussion again with In the Name of Salomé, familial relationships are the majority of the homosocial in this novel. Salomé’s sister Ramona supports her for the entirety of the narrative, serving as a go-between for society and the shy Salomé, encouraging her and trying to protect her from Pancho. Even beyond Salomé’s death,
Ramona acts in support of her more reclusive sister; and of course the relationship between Salomé and her daughter Camila is one of the main preoccupations of the novel. The exception to the familial homosocial in this novel is Camila’s relationship with Marion, which is the only explicitly homoerotic friendship in any of the novels, remaining within the realm of the homosocial but adding a sexual component that is not present elsewhere—and this has reverberations for Camila’s relationships with men.

Salomé ends her life still very much under Pancho’s domestic rule. Nevertheless, Salomé asserts facets of her identity through her children, especially Camila, and her relationship with her sister Ramona. Salomé’s relationships with her sister and with her daughter allow her space to resist Pancho’s authoritative control over her decisions. Throughout the novel, Ramona advocates for Salomé, especially when Ramona sees Pancho exercising his power over Salomé in ways that Ramona considers detrimental to her sister. While this could be read as Ramona also acting against Salomé’s self-sovereignty by thinking Salomé unable to make decisions for herself, Ramona offers insight and support—even when Salomé does not do what she knows Ramona wants—instead of making demands. Ramona is the one who points out to her sister, even before Pancho and Salomé enter into a relationship, “‘Pancho’s in love with your poetry, not with you. Even if he mistakes the two, you should not” (Alvarez 132). What is not present in this comment is Ramona telling Salomé how she should act or what she should do to handle Pancho—she offers Salomé information and leaves it at that. Ramona allows Salomé the space to make her own decisions, and does not penalize Salomé for making those decisions (no matter the outcome), unlike Pancho’s reactions to Salomé’s attempts
at autonomy. Ramona remains close to Salomé throughout her marriage to Pancho, even to the point of helping to take care of the children when Salomé is ill and continuing to interact with Pancho after Salomé’s death in order to care for her sister’s family.

Ramona’s support of her sister, while maintaining her own autonomy by voicing her opinions, never reaches the point that Pancho’s does—exerting authority over Salomé to make decisions for her. Ramona understands that if she chooses to do so, she is violating Salomé’s self-sovereignty, one of the things she resents Pancho for; in refusing to impose her will on Salomé, Ramona constructs a homosocial relationship with Salomé in which both sisters retain their autonomy. The homosocial relationship with Ramona undermines the absolute authority Pancho desires over his wife, creating a space in which the two sisters can work together to make decisions that do not align with Pancho’s will.

Ramona’s resistance to Pancho’s authority begins early in his and Salomé’s relationship. Even as he professes his love for her poetry and offers to tutor Salomé, Ramona pushes back against his authority, warning Salomé against his version of machismo, of his centering of his intellect over Salomé’s. Ramona denies Pancho access to their house at the beginning of this courtship, but relents when Salomé rebukes her (Alvarez 133). Ramona tries to protect her sister from Pancho’s heteronormative authority (invested in him solely because he is male) while simultaneously allowing Salomé the freedom to make her own choices. In so doing, Ramona works to deterritorialize the social relation between Pancho and Salomé by creating not only a physical space—their shared home—where Salomé can practice her autonomy and be away from Pancho, but she allows mental space as well.
When Pancho offers to begin tutoring Salomé, after their mutual attraction has become apparent, Ramona again tries to empower Salomé to resist the sexual and social authority Pancho has begun to exert over her. Ramona calls him arrogant and inappropriate, knowing fully well what his designs on her sister are (Alvarez 136). Despite Salomé’s refusal to enter, or enter fully, into the homosocial space Ramona has made for her, the presence of that space and Salomé’s freedom to choose whether or not to accept that construction is, in itself, indicative that Salomé is able to exercise her own agency in her relationship with her sister.

When Pancho returns from his time in France to a physically and emotionally frail Salomé—her state due in large part to his actions—Ramona is there, tacitly supporting her sister. She helps with the return party, putting Salomé and Pancho’s sons to bed and closing up the house after the guests leave, quietly taking on the physical work that Salomé is too weak to undertake after entertaining (Alvarez 255). Ramona’s silent presence as she takes on the work of the household that should have belonged to Salomé and Pancho as parents and hosts removes burdens from her sister while implicitly passing judgement on Pancho’s failures as a father and a husband. Ramona’s continued labor even after Pancho’s return (taking on Salomé’s duties at her girls’ school, helping care for their sons, even making Pancho breakfast once Salomé is unable to do so) indicate that she is a more committed partner to her sister than Pancho is. In taking on this work out of love, Ramona demonstrates a sort of rayano consciousness in forgiving her sister for the choices Salomé has made that have limited Ramona’s own options, in the love she shows by swallowing her pride to make sure Pancho is fed because this is important to
Salomé, and by acknowledging the interdependency between herself and Salomé necessitated by Salomé’s failing health. In so doing, Ramona undermines Pancho’s authority over Salomé by offering her sister an alternative to continuing to be wholly subject to Pancho’s will—Ramona offers herself as a sort of substitute for Salomé after Pancho has ground his wife down with his heteropatriarchal authority through his demands on Salomé’s body and mind. Ramona offers her sister a space in which she can make the choice to carry out the pregnancy Salomé wants and, for a while, allows Salomé to directly undercut Pancho’s and her doctor’s male authority by asserting autonomy over her own body—only possible because Ramona willingly takes on the burden of labor that Salomé can no longer bear. Pancho’s authority over his wife is undermined by Ramona as she maintains her dislike of him and carries out her tasks in quiet resistance, deferring instead to Salomé. By claiming her own power to decide what she does and consulting with Salomé, Ramona offers Salomé a space in which she can be the authority, even as Pancho positions himself as the household patriarch. Ramona and Salomé exist in a homosocial microcosm within Pancho’s household in which Ramona both maintains her autonomy outside Pancho’s reach and also offers Salomé the option to reclaim her own power and make decisions that contradict Pancho’s will, which Ramona carries out, sometimes at a cost to herself. Ramona is willing to sacrifice some of her autonomy in order to give Salomé space to resist Pancho’s authority and make her own decisions.

In her refusal to terminate the pregnancy that results in Camila, knowing that is what Pancho would want, Salomé chooses her identity as a mother and a future relationship with her child rather than submitting to the will of her husband. Salomé is
aware this choice is life-threatening because of her health, but she keeps the pregnancy a secret until it can no longer be terminated against her will and she clings to life for another three years to spend time with her only daughter. By keeping this secret, Salomé not only exercises her self-sovereignty by making the decision, but also relies on her failing physical strength to carry the pregnancy to term and her mental and emotional fortitude to deal with the twin secrets of her daughter’s birth and her own death. Salomé, finally relying on and reterritorializing herself, draws from the potential of her daughter the strength to act against Pancho’s and her (male) doctor’s wishes. The fact that the child of Salomé’s rebellion is a daughter, after so many sons, is telling—Camila is born from Salomé’s exercise of her own agency, and the homosocial relationship formed between mother and daughter creates a space in which the two can bond. Camila’s birth is an act of homosocial defiance, especially “because from the beginning, [Salomé] knew” the baby would be a daughter (Alvarez 297). Their connection, sharing Salomé’s body as a defiance of Pancho’s will and her doctor’s advice, positions Salomé’s body for the duration of her pregnancy as a homosocial space in which the patriarchal authority is repudiated simply by the presence of a fetus that defies that authority, undermining Pancho and the doctor more each day as Salomé’s belly grows with the developing child.

Similarly, Salomé’s present absence as a mother haunts Camila’s life even as it empowers her. Camila cherishes, even if she hardly remembers, the three years that her mother’s life and her own overlapped; she invokes her mother as a sort of guiding deity in times of difficulty (thus the title of their shared novel); and much of Camila’s life’s work as an activist for education and women’s rights is a direct response in her own life
to Salomé’s school for girls. Camila transcends the geographical borders within which Salomé was confined (the Dominican Republic), her activism manifesting in the United States and in Cuba especially. At the end of her story, and in the epilogue of the novel, the diffident Camila takes a stand on ensuring her mother’s name—part of Camila’s full name, Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña—is present on her headstone as she prepares for her own death. Camila’s name can be read as a miniature of their relationship: Salomé does not want to name Camila after herself, a tacit expression that she wants Camila to have her own name and identity; for most of her life, Camila does not acknowledge her mother’s name as part of her own, an attempt at asserting her individual identity. When facing her own mortality, however, Camila insists that her mother’s name be present on her headstone as part of her epitaph when she dies, accepting her mother’s role in shaping her life and her own memory. In returning to her mother and her mother’s legacy at the time of her impending death, Camila resists being defined by her father and his governmental authority, instead choosing to align herself with her mother—a return to the mother/daughter homosocial relationship as a space in which Pancho’s authority is mitigated, an echo of Salomé’s defiance in conceiving, concealing, and giving birth to her daughter as an act of rebellion against Pancho’s patriarchal authority. Salomé and Camila have a complicated relationship, built just as much on what is present as what is not, but ultimately they rely on one another and on their connection for personal power to act for

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29 Although Camila is a revolutionary, she finds her power in numbers and networks—demonstrations with other politically-minded women, speaking out with her brother in the newspaper, or bolstered by her father’s needs and wants to make demands on his behalf. When it comes to asserting her own personal authority, she experiences asthma attacks and anxiety.
themselves in the face of both people and sociopolitical structures that would remove their autonomy.

Although Salomé is present for the majority of her daughter’s life as a physical absence, Camila’s relationship with the legacy of her mother is a source of identity and agency for her, a reflection of Salomé giving birth to Camila as a way in which Salomé asserted her identity as a mother against Pancho’s wishes. This reflection is present not just in the relationships, but in the structure of the novel: Salomé’s story is told in chronological order, while Camila’s bookends the story but is otherwise written in reverse chronological order. Except for the epilogue, the novel ends with the convergence of Salomé’s death and Camila’s birth. Further complicating this reflection, Salomé’s sections are narrated in first person and Camila’s in third, situating the reader more closely to Salomé, counteracting Camila’s positioning as bookends of the novel and again inviting the reader into the intertextual community by fostering a sense of community with Camila and Salomé in different ways. Myriam J. A. Chancy says, drawing from her personal experience as a migrant writer from Hispaniola:

I think that part of my identity is formed around this idea of separation from the mother…. And so in a way, I think I’ve evolved a sense of identity that articulates even for men a feminized sense of identity. That the intergenerational connection is formed by the mothers who may be absent… (“Voices from Hispaniola” 72).

Chancy’s insight applies to Camila in that Camila shapes much of her identity around her mother, in whatever ways she can grasp Salomé: hanging her mother’s Europeanized portrait on her wall and comparing herself physically to that portrait, and later talking with her aunt Ramona to understand in what ways that portrait modified Salomé’s
“mulatto” body through her father and the painter (the portrait functioning as a moment in which her mother’s appearance is de- and re-racialized in order to fit Dominican standards of beauty, which contain the echoes of colonialist and nationalist structures of race and how those inform ideas of physical ideals); reading and re-reading, reciting, and studying her mother’s poetry; teaching Spanish to groups of American college students, especially women and girls; and in becoming an activist in Cuba, demonstrating for women’s rights and for socialism. In short, Camila engages with the absence of her mother via the remnants and margins of Salomé’s life.

Camila’s relationship to Tivisita, her stepmother, also shifts as her relationship with her mother changes: the childhood dependence on a mother figure morphs to rage and rebellion against her mother’s “replacement” and finally, transforms to acceptance of Tivisita as a woman doing the best she could by her mentor’s family, a position complicated by the licentious patriarch. Camila accepting Tivisita as a woman in a complicated situation and forgiving her for what Camila considers a betrayal of her mother undermines patriarchal and colonialist oppressive power which seeks to separate and pit women against each other for male attention. By revising her stance toward Tivisita, Camila participates in the forgiveness necessary for rayano consciousness. In Camila’s attempts to connect with her mother, the absent Salomé creates through her legacy the “intergenerational connection” through which Camila defines aspects of her identity and acts upon them, exercising her self-sovereignty.

Camila’s relationship with Salomé is rivaled only by her unconsummated homoerotic relationship with Marion, her student-turned-friend. Camila and Marion
remain close friends, staying with one another’s families, communicating via letter-writing, and helping one another move, but underneath this friendship runs Camila’s barely concealed desire to be romantically and sexually involved with Marion. Unlike the homosocial relationships of the other protagonists, Camila’s desire for Marion is homoerotic, if not outright homosexual. This alternate construction of same-gender relationships does similar work as the homosocial, creating a space removed from the heteronormative which requires submission to a patriarchal authority. Through their letters, Camila reveals with Marion an intimacy that she does not share with any of the men in her life, an intimacy that she is embarrassed for her college student archivist intern to have access to when sorting the family papers. Camila’s desire for Marion and the spurning of long-term heterosexual relationships both reifies and undermines patriarchal gender norms: while her homoerotic desire and refusal for committed sexual intimacy actively work against patriarchal societal norms, her abstention from a sexual relationship with Marion reinforces the outside perception that she conforms to social heterosexual norms. Although not acting on her desire allows Camila to keep her friend and confidante for decades, outlasting any other romantic or sexual relationship, the space of longing creates a method of connection for Camila to interact with another activist and to claim personal power outside a male-dominated relationship. The activism and travel in which Camila participates with Marion is a direct response and destabilization of Pancho’s political authority. Camila’s anxiety about her family discovering her involvement with Marion indicates that she knows her father and brothers would not approve of a homosexual relationship. Although Pancho was and is himself a
political activist, Camila participating in activism that intersects with her homoerotic desire and allows her to become closer to Marion undercuts Pancho’s authority and the heteronormativity he expects from his family. As Pancho makes his demands of Camila, her homoerotic desire presents a competing demand which, even though it remains unfulfilled, acts to undercut Pancho’s political authority over his daughter with Camila’s personal sexual agency, and Marion’s feminist activism blends the political and private spheres into a reterritorialized space in which Camila can claim her sexual identity. Camila, as her own person which she becomes apart from her father, experiences homosexual desire that is directly opposed to his heteropatriarchal authority.

However, Camila’s friendship with Marion is underpinned by another consideration: race.

Marion has always avoided the subject of Camila’s race. As if to mention it were to bring up the unmentionable. ‘I don’t care what you are,’ Marion has often said to her. But she wants Marion to care about who she is. She wants to be apprehended fully, rather than be seen only through the narrow lens of a few adjectives the other person finds acceptable (Alvarez 160).

While Camila’s friendship with Marion is a space for sexual identity, it is not one in which Camila can openly claim a racial identity. Because of the major barrier of Marion’s professed color-blindness, the two can never really have the sort of relationship Camila wants—one in which all aspects of her identity are acknowledged, respected, and valued. Reterritorialization is impossible without Marion’s “full apprehension” in the homoerotic space. As with the relationship with Andrews, in which race plays an important part in its failure, Marion’s color-blindness is a major reason the
reterritorialization of their social relationship is only partial. Unlike Andrews, however, Marion offers other options in the form of the homosocial, rejecting heteropatriarchy in their shared connection, which is why Camila’s letters to Marion are more intimate than her relationship with Andrews ever was. The unfulfilled sexual and romantic relationship with Marion is an answer to both Domingo and Andrews, with whom Camila was involved in those ways, in heteronormative relationships. Keeping the relationship between herself and Marion fraught with desire, Camila refuses the moment of consummation expected of heteronormative relationships—which is both frustrating for her, and also allows her to keep this as a homoerotic space of expectation that undermines her heteronormative relationships with its intensity, intimacy, and longevity.

Friendship is a fraught space in *Dominicana* as well. Ana meets Marisela when the latter waltzes into Ana’s apartment, asking for a loan and offering her wedding ring as collateral, dressed to the nines and exuding confidence. Ana’s friendship with Marisela—a glamorous and Americanized woman whose husband is fighting in Vietnam, leaving Marisela to conduct her own business with Juan and Ana—is not an ultimately beneficial one. While it lasts, however, Ana learns not only that she can make her own money and hide secrets from Juan when Marisela brings Ana wedding favors to assemble for profit, but she also picks up survival tactics for dealing with others in a world that wants to exploit her: skepticism, weaponization of beauty, duplicity. Although the friendship is founded on Marisela’s manipulation of Ana, the moment of power Ana feels in finding a friend is a step toward rejecting patriarchal constructions of femininity and reterritorializing herself:
I want to share so many things with [Marisela], but Mamá—even if she’s far away, all her warnings against friendships keep me from truly allowing myself to speak freely with Marisela. And yet she is doing more than anyone else has ever done for me…even when to her I must look like some naïve child. She’s here…being with me…. It’s impossible for me not to love her…. For the first time, in a long time, I’ve found a true friend (Cruz 138).

Sra. Canción’s concerns about women’s inability to be friends is rooted in patriarchal beliefs that women are constantly in competition with one another for male attention, and therefore that true, caring friendship—rayano consciousness—is impossible, but Ana believes she has broken out of this patriarchal territorialization of female friendships. The homosocial relationship between Ana and Marisela functions here to undercut the absolute authority Juan tries to exert over his wife, offering Ana small ways in which she can rebel (by saving money and working for herself, or even just taking time to socialize and create connections that he does not know about). The power which Marisela offers Ana to earn her own money eventually empowers Ana when she starts her own business, undercutting Juan’s absolute financial authority over his wife and household finances. In this way, the friendship deterritorializes the financial from a space completely controlled by Juan into one in which Ana can interact, offering her the first steps toward her financial independence from Juan. Without the complicated deterritorialization that comes with the relationship with Marisela, Ana would not have been able to reterritorialize both social and financial spheres into places where she could exert her own agency, making her own money and her own friends outside Juan’s influence.

Ana’s optimism about their friendship is proven to be unfounded, as Marisela uses Ana for her money, abandons her, and then is forced to interact with her again by
their husbands’ business. In the unspoken plea from Marisela to Ana in the interaction between the two couples after Marisela’s abandonment, Ana’s erstwhile friend acknowledges that she, too, is subject to her husband and also, in that moment, to Ana, imploring her not to give Marisela away to either her husband or Ana’s. ³⁰ By asking Ana for forgiveness through the note she leaves, Marisela acknowledges that she no longer holds the upper hand of the social power in the relationship between the two women, offering to her former friend the power of decision-making, and therefore a measure of self-sovereignty. Even though the loss of Marisela’s friendship is painful for Ana, the reterritorialization it allows by returning to Ana some of her social agency is still a move toward her re-empowerment in Juan’s domestic space. Similar to Ramona relinquishing some of her power to Salomé within Pancho’s domestic space, Marisela subverts in a small way Juan’s power by being outside Juan’s authority but placing herself under Ana’s decision-making power. However, Marisela is not acting voluntarily and out of love as Ramona does, but out of fear of exposure and discovery; the effects are the same, but the impetus behind Marisela’s decision reveals that she is working for self-preservation, indicating that the homosocial can be constructed involuntarily, or in spaces of tension. Marisela introduces an outside agency not territorialized by Juan and undermines his authority by placing herself at Ana’s mercy, giving Ana the power to make decisions that Juan denies her. In the note she leaves Ana at the end of this anxiety-

³⁰⁰ Since the two women have ostensibly never met, Ana holds the power in this social situation involving Juan and Marisela’s husband, and could easily choose to revenge herself on Marisela for her betrayal by indicating that they already know one another.
inducing visit, Marisela explicitly requests forgiveness (Cruz 288). While certainly a selfish move in order to try to protect herself from Ana’s wrath or possible revenge, Marisela’s demand (“forgive me”) is a move toward rayano consciousness, of solidarity, as she recognizes that they are both subject to their husbands’ machismo, and that only through forgiveness can they create a connection strong enough to confront heteronormative oppression in their marriages. Marisela’s note is a gesture of reconciliation, yes, but it is also a move toward reterritorialization of their social relationship. In reading the note, and getting away with their deception of being strangers, Ana and Marisela undermine Juan’s surveillance and control of his domestic space.

Ana’s autonomy is cemented at the end of *Dominicana*, as her eventual rejection of both Juan and César in favor of her mother, her remaining siblings, and her new daughter acts as a powerful indication that Ana is no longer subject to Juan’s authority. Much like Salomé’s connection to Camila, Ana draws strength from the needs and the potential of her daughter. She chooses to stay in New York, not because Juan has stripped her of the ability and confidence to leave (as occurred earlier in the novel), but because the people with whom she has chosen to create a family after rejecting Juan’s and César’s heteropatriarchy are now there. Ana is able to negotiate her autonomy on her own terms in a homosocial space with her mother, daughter, and sister. It is significant that emphasis

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31 Although power dynamics have shifted with her mother since Ana is now the American connection, Sra. Canción remains a force to be reckoned with. However, she acknowledges Ana in her own right as a mother and an English-speaker who can help her navigate the social milieu of the United States. A balance is reached.
is placed on these female family members’ involvement in Ana’s new life, and her father is barely mentioned.

Sustained relationships are not the only connections from which Ana, and the other protagonists, draw personal power and space for autonomy. Even small moments such as Ana’s feeling of kinship with the woman in the red hat, implied to be Malcom X’s widow Betty, give Ana space to think about love, race, and gender in the United States. The female doctor and nurse who do not force her to report Juan’s abuse, but offer information and support regarding her choice about what to disclose in the doctor appointment where Ana finds out she is pregnant, are in positions of power over Ana but do not exercise that power. In that brief but poignant moment, the women in the medical field create space for Ana to make a decision for herself, and give her the tools to change her mind later if she wants to. In so doing, they effectively give Ana her autonomy back in that moment, even if they don’t agree with what she chooses.

Ana sees rayano consciousness at play in her encounter with her sister-in-law, Yrene, who is a “gringa…without a mother tongue” (Cruz 143). In Yrene’s kitchen, Ana is uncomfortable, visibly pregnant and unable to communicate in English with her sister-in-law, who cannot speak Spanish and has in turn just had a child who was born mentally disabled. Ana’s and Yrene’s interaction imply a gulf between the two, with both of them trying to connect to the other but being unable to; they can neither speak the same language, nor work together to cook without conflict. Without a rayano consciousness—the sense of community, love, and forgiveness—the two women cannot overcome the violence that has alienated them from one another, perpetrated both by the United States
on racialized migrant women and also by their own husbands. Their inability to connect is explicitly tied to Yrene’s Americanization/assimilation after her parents’ immigration from Puerto Rico. Separated by language and nationalistic barriers, Ana and Yrene cannot connect in a way to confront the authorities of their husbands, because they lack the consciousness to challenge oppression and build community in spite of structures of patriarchal violence. This changes after Ana gives birth: Yrene cares for Ana when she is taken ill. The two bond over shared motherhood and difficult births, creating the interdependent community García-Peña situates as the answer to oppressive patriarchal violence. They have gained a borderlands/rayano consciousness, sharing the pain and joy of childbirth and defying the oppression of their husbands, neither of whom is satisfied with the children their wives gave life to. Ana and Yrene overcome the interpersonal alienation caused by violent oppression by creating community. These are the only two moments in which Ana and Yrene interact in the novel, but the shift from tension and separation to homosocial connection is palpable and telling for the effects that rayano consciousness can have for community-building.

In *The Poet X*, Xiomara builds a community for herself. The trio of Xiomara, her brother Twin, and their friend Caridad supports one another. Caridad especially (again invoking the homosocial, as Twin seems to be the odd one out of the three) is close to Xiomara. Caridad, like Ramona for Salomé, offers advice and support even if that advice is not followed; in so doing, she respects Xiomara’s right to make decisions for herself. In covering for Xiomara to attend her poetry club meetings, Caridad creates a homosocial space in which Xiomara’s determination of how to spend her time is privileged over how
Altagracia thinks her daughter should spend her time, despite the fact that Caridad knows how her friend’s mother would feel about that arrangement if she knew. Caridad offers a homosocial space of reterritorialization, in which Xiomara can exercise her own autonomy, undermining her mother’s authority by choosing how and where to spend her time—outside the Church and confirmation class.

Xiomara has a developed sense of self when it comes to the borders of her body and who is allowed to (tres)pass them, despite her mother’s best efforts. As Xiomara’s best friend, Caridad cautions Xiomara against getting involved with boys and she worries about Xiomara blowing off confirmation classes. After the poetry journal burning, however, Caridad asks what Xiomara needs and says, “I’m here for you,” offering unconditional support (Acevedo 315-316). Xiomara is known for fighting her own battles, but she finds support in the steadiness and stability of Caridad. This is García-Peña’s interdependency at play—when Xiomara needs her, Caridad is present. Caridad’s choice of phrases (what do you need, I’m here for you) allots decision-making power to Xiomara and implicitly accepts that Xiomara would know better what she needs than Caridad does, placing the responsibility and power of knowing and communicating those needs back on Xiomara, insiting on her autonomy to know and choose for herself. Unlike Altagracia, who has territorialized her daughter by dictating to her how she needs to act and how to exist in her body, Caridad’s insistence on Xiomara’s self-determination undermines Altagracia’s authoritarian control of Xiomara by returning the agency to decide what she needs and wants to Xiomara herself. In this way, Caridad creates a space between the two of them for Xiomara to renegotiate her social and sexual existence on
her own terms. Unlike Salomé, who rejects Ramona’s space outside the authoritarian, Xiomara leaps at Caridad’s offer and gladly enters into that homosocial space in which she can exercise her self-sovereignty.

Xiomara aggressively defends her own bodily boundaries: she fights the boys and men who harass her, both with fists and with words. Her violence is a move toward deterritorialization of her body, which has been territorialized by the machismo of men in her community and boys at school. She takes up space unapologetically as a “morenita,” a moment in which race is negotiated in spaces of autonomy: her reterritorialization of her appearance as an Afro-Latina with big, curly hair is an indication of the ways in which race between the Dominican Republic and the United States is heavily dependent on social constructions and colonial legacies of how racialized bodies are perceived as belonging to certain racial categories based on appearance.

The communities Xiomara craves are often composed of women—reterritorialization through the homosocial—because the shared experience of patriarchal oppression serves to connect them, but this is not always the case. Xiomara has several relationships through which the power of her authoritarian mother is repudiated, and a number of these are also ones in which their inaction allows authoritative power to remove her self-sovereignty. Both Twin, with quiet support and the shared secrecy of a covert relationship, and Aman, in the moment he accepts and respects Xiomara removing consent and does not respond as though this were a threat to the power invested in him by a patriarchal society, show that they can be parts of Xiomara’s support system which allow her bodily autonomy and self-sovereignty. Xiomara’s father, too, becomes a part of
her support network when he joins in the family counseling sessions and begins to interact with his children and his family. These relationships further complicate the assumptions that power imbalances and patriarchal dynamics operate strictly along binary gender lines. Men who recognize aspects of oppression and work against them by treating women as their equals can also become parts of a loving, forgiving community and demonstrate rayano consciousness by rejecting machismo.

The novels, as discussed above, also produce extratextual communities. This community-building returns again to the earlier questions of intimacy in community and rayano consciousness combatting patriarchal power that seeks to separate women, especially in spaces that are not strictly inside or outside the text. The Dominicanas NYC Instagram page, curated by Angie Cruz, carries this construction of networks into a digital and collaborative space (see Figures 3-5). Dominicanas NYC is a virtual archive that works to collect photos and stories of Dominican women in the New York City area in the latter part of the twentieth century (Dominicanas NYC). Not only does this partially reconstruct the communities that would have existed among the Dominican women who lived and worked at the time, creating an accessible and crowd-sourced digital archive, the page creates a new community of users posting photos and stories, and readers learning from those posts in numerous ways. Many submissions tell stories of resilience and community-building in turn, featuring photos of more than one woman and describing the relationships of the photo subjects, many of whom are the mothers of those submitting to the archive. The mother-daughter connection Chancy writes about, in which absence is part of the intergenerational connection, is both remediated and
reinforced in this archive. Collecting and telling their mothers’ stories can create a sense of connection between generations, but having so little space to give details (most of which are names, number of children, place of residence, and job information) serves to highlight the absences in the stories and photographs shared. Spaces of community connection are often partial, as in this case where people must follow the page or read comments to be interpolated into the community. As with the homoerotic friendship between Camila and Marion where aspects of identity are not openly shared, or shifting as in the case of Ana and Marisela where new information causes a change in the homosocial relationship, community connection is fraught with ways in which that connection is mediated. Identity also shifts across space and time, as mothers become grandmothers and different locations become formative places. Recognizing the fluidity of identity and homosocial relationships creates space for reterritorialization on the subjects’ terms.

Border Crossings: Multiple Modalities Facilitating Connection

A common thread in the three novels is exercising autonomy, claiming identity, and creating connections through writing. Returning to García-Peña’s idea of contradiction, the power of words and writing allow for homosocial reterritorializations between and among characters; it is important to note that the social reterritorialization occurs often by crossing geopolitical territories and boundaries. Salomé refuses to be only “la poetista de la patria” (the poet of the nation) and writes about her desire for Pancho and her anxieties for her children. Although Salomé’s identity, for others, is tied
to her nationalistic poetry, Salomé uses that medium to express herself in different aspects of her identity—not always in ways of which Pancho approves, which is why he edits her poems. In The Poet X, the first-generation daughter of migrants, Xiomara, too, uses poetry to explore and claim aspects of identity, which is why it is so devastating when her book of poetry is discovered by her mother and destroyed. Even the title of her novel, The Poet X, abridges Xiomara’s name to X but qualifies her as a poet. Ana’s letters from home in Dominicana connect her to her family, from whom she is physically distant. Camila’s in In the Name of Salomé are a bit different: through their correspondence, Camila and Marion create a relationship that refuses, however briefly, heteropatriarchy and blends the homosocial/homoerotic, allowing them to rebalance power interpersonally in a space carved out from the patriarchal authority that dictates their other relationships—a small but important trespass within the bounds of patriarchal power. Camila’s letters, in which she relates the fate of the relationship with Scott Andrews, foster a desired closeness with Marion; Ana writes to her family, maintaining the connection to her mother and her sister Teresa in the Dominican Republic. These letters cross national borders in the service of creating community for their writers. Salomé’s poems are read and even reprinted outside the bounds of the Dominican Republic, writing and poetry again enabling border crossing in a physical book form, much as the novels themselves do.

[32 Salomé, too, writes letters, but they act more to anchor her to Pancho’s authoritarian power while he is abroad than as a mechanism of subversion of that power.]
Communication via letters and the written word crosses national and geographic borders, which sometimes coincide and sometimes do not, but there are myriad forms in which borders are passed in the novels. By crossing borders to communicate, these women actively reject colonialist ideas of territory and nation, fostering transnational communications to build the connections so necessary to their reterritorialization. Similarly, in *Dominicana*, telephone calls between Ana and her family in the Dominican Republic make communication even more immediate. Using electricity and airwaves, conversations are instantly enabled which continuously cross borders for the entirety of their durations. Xiomara’s parents, too, call back to relatives in the Dominican Republic in *The Poet X*. Even more so than letters, international telephone calls refuse the ideas of borders as spaces of total delineation. As discussed above, money is a global concern, and can be carried across borders in the suitcases of migrants or sent through the mail, as several of the characters send money home to family in *In the Name of Salomé* and *Dominicana*. The porosity of borders when it comes to money benefits nations and global industries, but also allows migrants to maintain financial connections to their families at home, much as Ana does for her mother and Teresa.

*Dominicana* offers a unique study of how the natural world, impinging on the urban, can also enable multiple modalities of border crossing. Ana names the pigeons who roost outside her window after her cousins and siblings and imagines them flying to the Dominican Republic. This flight of fancy not only indicates her homesickness and makes her feel less alone by giving her a connection to her family, but invokes the breadth of the natural world that is not constrained by geopolitical borders. Even the
ocean, itself serving as a geographical border between landmasses containing nations, is a space of border crossing as it facilitates the movement of creatures, plants, and water between and among shores. The pigeons leave and when they return, letters from the Dominican Republic arrive. Pigeon Betty’s death provides a way for Ana to strike back at Juan. Through the pigeons with whom Ana constructs a connection to her family, she makes a move toward crossing the national border back to the Dominican Republic.

In *The Poet X*, the Dominican Republic echoes throughout without having a physical presence in the book. It is always called “DR” or “the island,” the latter of which in its use erases Haiti and the border on the island while opening it up as a site of possibility of borderlessness. Caridad visits, but for Xiomara the Dominican Republic is a faraway, foreign place where her parents grew up. It is used to threaten Xiomara with social exile (her mother considering sending her there to get Xiomara away from what her mother considers sociocultural temptations like dating and refusal of religion). In this way, its influence and culture act transnationally, crossing borders to haunt Xiomara as a vague and distant presence but a present threat. Similarly, in *Dominicana*, after Ana has migrated to the United States, she is confronted with the distance from the Dominican Republic: Juan leaves her to travel back for family business, and the space created by his crossing back over and leaving Ana in New York allows her the freedom to dance, learn English, and go on walks around the city that Juan has denied her. The United States’ interference in Santo Domingo, the capital city, necessitates Juan’s traveling back to protect his land investments; by this point, the Dominican Republic is little more than a memory for Ana. Juan’s border crossing in *Dominicana* (from the United States to Puerto
Rico to the Dominican Republic), like Caridad’s for Xiomara in *The Poet X*, serves to
distance Ana and Xiomara from the national realities of the Dominican Republic while
simultaneously directly impacting their lives from across international and geographic
borders. In these ways, border crossing is positioned as a space for reterritorialization for
the protagonists, and the potentiality for rayano (“borderlands”) consciousness
engendered through connection across borders.
Conclusion

The relationships and power dynamics investigated here are examples of wider patterns seen in diasporic and women’s writing at large. The uniqueness of this study comes from the history between the United States and the Dominican Republic and the ways in which borders and migration interact between the two countries, as well as within the space of Hispaniola. Dominican American women write situations in which the self-sovereignty of women is compromised, often through relationships of power imbalance with embodiments of patriarchal authority which echo colonialist structures of power. These relationships result in different iterations of violence and alienation, which in turn are remediated through (homo)social connections or instances of rayano consciousness that create space for the reclaiming of self-sovereignty. In loosely aligning national sovereignty with personal sovereignty, and using language applicable to both, women’s bodies and border spaces are situated as bounded/unbounded sites of negotiation of autonomy and identity. Borders function as boundaries, and women’s autonomy is confined both physically by the bounds of embodiment and by patriarchal authority that removes self-sovereignty. However, by refusing the totality of these bounds and creating non-heteropatriarchal social connections to others with which to reclaim autonomy, crossing those individual borders, the protagonists of *In the Name of Salomé*,
Dominicana, and The Poet X reassert their sovereignty and create spaces in which work of solidarity and identity formation can be done—a move toward decolonization and reterritorialization of their social relationships. The colonial legacies of heteropatriarchal power are undermined by the homosocial rayano consciousness in the hands, hearts, and minds of women. Acevedo, Alvarez, and Cruz continue the work of these representations in their novels, writing women who cross individual and national borders to claim their autonomy from patriarchal structures that seek to strip it from them.
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Appendix of Figures

2020 virtual Border of Lights

OCTOBER 3, 11AM EST: CAFECITO WITH JULIA ALAVREZ (FACEBOOK LIVE EVENT WITH DOMINICAN WRITERS ASSOCIATION: HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/DOMINICANWRITERS)

OCTOBER 9, 7PM EST: SCREENING OF STATELESS HTTPS://WWW.CYA.LIVE/EVENT/5248

OCTOBER 10, 7-9PM EST: VIRTUAL VIGIL, #BOL2020

BORDEROFLIGHTS.ORG, @BORDER_OFLIGHTS

Figure 1. Flier for the 2020 virtual Border of Lights event, held during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the Border of Lights Facebook page.
Figure 2. Photograph of people holding candles across the river that comprises the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. From the Border of Lights Facebook page. Photo credit: Azuet, 2017.
Figure 3. Screen capture from the @dominicanasnyc Instagram page showing a photo of three young women standing on the street with a bus behind them. The caption reads: “Stumbled upon this picture today of my grandma (on the right) in New York in the early 1970s. After talking to my mom this morning, I learned things I had never known about the woman that helped raise me. I learned that this was mamá Natalia’s first time in the U.S., that she had come to work in order to send money back to the Dominican Republic for her 5 children after divorcing for the sake of her safety and the safety of my uncles and mom (who was only 3 years old at the time!), that she was barely able to call home in that 2 year timeframe, but that she sent a letter home each month. She knew zero English, and had no clue what New York would offer her, but she did what she had to do, without ever sacrificing that sophistication, grace, and confidence that she was known for all of her life. What a woman. What strength, toughness, and damn good style. She told me so many stories growing up, but never this one. Lately, I’ve been thinking a lot about what she’d say to me if she were still here, if I were to share with her how I’ve felt navigating this new chapter of my life. This picture, and what I learned from it, gave me a sort of answer—yes, this WAS mamá Natalia, but mama Nataliá continues to BE in all of her strength and wisdom and resilience, and she continues to be through me @cat_ventura #dominicanas1970s #manhattan1970s.”
Figure 4. Screen capture from @dominicanasnyc Instagram page. Photo shows five girls in dresses and hats. Comment is captured which reads, “Wow, very similar story to my mom’s! These women are beyond badass, I ask her how she did it all the time. My mom’s family is from Sabana Iglesia too-I’m told we’re basically all somehow related in that town 😊 @diplomatina.”
Figure 5. Screen capture from @dominicanasnyc Instagram page. A woman in a striped dress stands cooking on a stovetop. The caption reads: “This is my grandmother Indiana Gonzalez. She arrived in The Bronx on December 29, 1979. She lived with her siblings who were all petitioned for by their brother. She left behind her adolescent children in the Dominican Republic, as did her 3 other sisters who arrived with her. She was widowed with 3 children in DR for nearly 10 years, raising her children without any social net. She came here to give them opportunities at education, better jobs and a better quality of life. She, too, arrived to a burning Bronx but she saw past the fires and looked to the bright future she could give her children and their children after that. She immediately began working in a factory in Brooklyn packaging cucumbers, saving enough to move and bring her children. They don’t make them like my Abuela anymore. Una mujer luchadora. Gracias Abuela. @ohcindyson #dominicanas1970s #bronx1970s.”