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## Political activism among Dominican women in literature : imagined experiences and rising voices

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POLITICAL ACTIVISM AMONG DOMINICAN WOMEN IN LITERATURE:  
IMAGINED EXPERIENCES AND RISING VOICES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

by  
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## ABSTRACT

My thesis examines the literary portrayal of women in Dominican politics as historical figures/actors and how Dominican women have also used the medium of literature to draw attention to these lesser known heroines and inspire future participation and involvement in public life. The creation of fiction out of history, through which authors imagine the inner lives and feelings and motivations of Dominican women protagonists, can add a new dimension to the study of women and gender in the Dominican Republic, especially when written by Dominican women authors. More specifically, I will explore the following issues and areas: 1) how the works revise or expand on the traditional interpretation of political activism 2) how the works honor women historical actors, giving them a voice and 3) what the works reveal about the gendered nature of political activism.

The novels I will be analyzing are Julia Alvarez's novels In the Name of Salomé and In the Time of Butterflies, as well as Charamicos by Ángela Hernández. These works are based on real women activists who have been fictionalized in the novels, such as Salomé Ureña de Henríquez and the Mirabal sisters, as well as "imagined" or "fictional" women who are not based on specific Dominican women, but rather a fictionalized compilation created to embody the experiences of many, such as the characters in Charamicos. My analysis of the literary representation of women's activism draws from the fields of gender, political, historical and literary studies, however Joan W. Scott's discussion of her-story and social history, as well as Paul Ricoeur's theories on the relationship between memory and history are especially useful.

In conclusion, I show that these novels have created a space for the imagined experiences of these women and given them a voice which was lacking, since these women activists have been left hidden in the pages of history, without detailed autobiographies or much more than a

paragraph even in recent historical publications. I will also explore future research considerations that would build on the work in this thesis and further contribute to the expansion of the field of Dominican women's studies.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Topic of Investigation

My thesis examines the literary portrayal of women in Dominican politics as historical figures/actors and how Dominican women have also used the medium of literature to draw attention to these lesser known heroines and inspire future participation and involvement in public life. The creation of fiction out of history, through which authors imagine the inner lives and feelings and motivations of Dominican women protagonists, can add a new dimension to the study of women and gender in the Dominican Republic, especially when written by Dominican women authors. I have decided to focus solely on women authors for two reasons: to examine how Dominican women write themselves and their foremothers, and to fill the void in Dominican literary criticism since most previous studies focus on male authors such as Pedro Mir and Manuel de Jesus Galván. Choosing only women authors also narrows my study within specific parameters and avoids potential gender influences such as those mentioned by Silvio Torres-Saillant when he writes, “[T]he representation of woman by the male imagination is never unproblematic. How woman is configured by the male writer is always loaded with interpretive possibilities.” (Torres-Saillant, “Women in the Male Imagination: An Apology for Hispaniola Writers”, 33) He explains that whether intentional or not, there is an inherent placement of women that reflects the differences in power and gender relations, then he continues with the analysis of a few related examples from literature (33). Likewise, Hélène Cixous discusses the importance of women writing about women and writing as a form of activism, “in that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” [emphasis in the original] (261). This is precisely the point of my thesis, that these fictional

novels authored by Dominican women are important; the authors participate in activism via their writing in two ways: through the use of the novel itself as an impetus for change, and as a vehicle to share the activism of these valiant Dominican women activists throughout history. In addition to these reasons, many of the literary works by Dominican women have focused on both real and imagined Dominican women who are politically and historically significant. Some common topics in these novels, poems and articles are the women who inspired and participated in freedom movements, those who were openly resistant to the government's oppressive policies, and other political and social issues involving not only women but also the community as a whole. For the purposes of my study, when I refer to real women, I am describing those who actually played a role in Dominican history and have been fictionalized in the works I will be analyzing, such as the Mirabal sisters, who are portrayed in Julia Alvarez's In the Time of Butterflies. Likewise, "imagined" or "fictional" women refer to characters such as those in Ángela Hernández's Charamicos, who are not based on specific Dominican women, but rather a fictionalized compilation created to embody the experiences of many. Only the authors know how many of the situations in their novels are based on historical events and how many others were created to further the story, imagine what might have happened, or even to demonstrate an aspect of a character's personality. When I refer to "imagined experiences", I speak to the authors' creations and portrayals of these women and their choice to create a fictional world to explore the lives of these real-life activists. Paul Ricoeur's theories on memory and history are useful for exploring these historical fiction novels and David Pellauer's presentation of these theories can better help us to understand how memories can be used to tell the stories of these women. Concepts of historical imagination, collective memory, resistance and representation will be discussed within the context of the individual novels as I analyze the blurry line between



fiction and history. On the island as well as throughout the Diaspora, the scars of the past are reflected in several works of Dominican literature. Rita de Maeseneer discusses this propensity to focus on Trujillo in Dominican literature and new ways to include this unforgettable part of their history through the use of background structure and displacements; i.e. to both include the shadow of history but move into new territory in their literary explorations (De Maeseneer, “Cómo (dejar de) narrar el (neo)trujillato?”, 221). De Maeseneer analyzes this new approach as used by Dominican authors such as Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Rita Indiana Hernández, Julia Alvarez and Ángela Hernández (221-230).

The scope of my analysis includes works by both Dominican and Dominican-American authors following Elaine Savory’s concept of “Caribbean space,” which I apply to Dominican writings. If the authors in the Diaspora are shaped by their Dominican connections and memories, then their works are just as Dominican, whether they physically write from the shores of Hispaniola or a small college campus in New England (Savory, 170). The transnational nature of the Dominican community has been addressed in many academic works, such as those by Peggy Levitt, Sherry Grasmuck, and most recently Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, which further demonstrates why including both Dominican and Dominican-American authors is a valid choice for my study. My study focuses on poetry and narratives from the 1990s to the present, by Dominican women authors who portray a number of significant female historical figures, both fictionalized political actors and those created in the author’s mind to represent the activism of women at that time. This focus will bring light to these women’s struggles and their contributions to the motherland, as well as to the importance of using fiction to better understand and explore the gaps in women’s history.

The life and writings of Salomé Ureña de Henríquez, who was herself a political actor through her writings and promotion of educational opportunities for fellow women and girls, provides a backdrop for my approach to the characters Salomé and her daughter Camila in Julia Alvarez's narrative, In the Name of Salomé. I also analyze In the Time of The Butterflies by Julia Alvarez, which explores the lives of Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa Mirabal, who lost their lives in the fight to free their country from oppression during the Trujillo dictatorship. Despite the abundance of existing criticism on the Butterflies (both Alvarez's novel specifically and other works), I feel that it is still an important inclusion in this thesis because the Mirabal sisters are the most widely recognized Dominican women activists. In addition, Alvarez's English-language novel has brought their struggle and sacrifice to a whole new world of readers. Moving on to a more recent period, I focus on the novel Charamicos, by Ángela Hernández, which relies on fictional characters to represent the actions and experiences of many Dominican women who were involved in protests against President Joaquín Balaguer during his 12 year presidential reign (also known as the "*doce años*") and brings this portrayal of activism to more recent memory. More specifically, I explore the following issues and areas: 1) how the works revise or expand on the traditional interpretation of political activism 2) how the works honor women historical actors, giving them a voice and 3) what the works reveal about the gendered nature of political activism. I contrast the approach of Ángela Hernández, a well-known Dominican author within her country with Julia Alvarez, a Dominican-American author who has brought the Dominican experience to an English-speaking audience. As I answer these questions, themes emerge such as the relationship between history and fiction, the interactions between gender and politics, as well as the characters' growth and development of not only political awareness but social and personal consciousness. Activism can take many forms, such

as traditional methods of participation in political parties and organizations, as well as more unique paths to creating change, such as using literature and poetry to inspire their fellow Dominicans. By recognizing the many contributions of these women through their activism, they can be more firmly established as historical agents and their experiences can be used to create a new social history<sup>1</sup>.

### **Introduction to Political Activism among Women in the Dominican Republic**

This section will include a broad overview of Dominican history, with information regarding the women activists inserted into this historical framework. I demonstrate how recent literary critiques and works have focused on these overlooked historical figures to remedy their exclusion or muted presence from official histories. Although the Dominican Republic is not very well known internationally, both in general and specifically for gender equality and the participation of women in their political system, there have been many important Dominican women who influenced and participated in political movements during some of the darkest times in Dominican history. Some of these have been prominent literary figures, such as Salomé Ureña de Henríquez, while others such as the Mirabal sisters, Sagrario Ercira Díaz, and Florinda Soriano actively protested and participated in opposition movements. Various modes of political activism can be seen through examining the lives and even deaths of these women. Salomé wrote many of her poems as a young girl to inspire the country and express the rampant confusion of that time when their country was struggling for its independence.<sup>2</sup> Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa Mirabal became active in the underground movement against Dictator Rafael Leonidas

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<sup>1</sup> As further discussed in the next chapter and in Scott, Gender and the Politics of History: Revised Edition, 15-22.

<sup>2</sup> While common practice dictates the use of last names to refer to authors, popular sentiment in the D.R. references Salomé Ureña de Henríquez as simply “Salomé”, therefore I will refer to her thusly in my study.

Trujillo Molina for various reasons, both political and personal. Their assassination sealed Trujillo's fate by inspiring other activists to mobilize and increase their efforts to remove this brutal dictator from power. Florinda Soriano, otherwise known as Mamá Tingó, fought for peasant rights during the era of President Joaquin Balaguer, who served under Trujillo and was subsequently president of the Dominican Republic on and off for over twenty years. The fictional protagonists in Hernández's novel, Charamicos, are inspired by the many young women who protested against Balaguer during his 12-year reign from 1966-1978, such as Sagrario Ercira Díaz who was killed while participating in protests at the *Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo* (Sanchez). Non-fictional works such as Daisy Cocco de Filippis' Para Que No Se Olviden: The Lives of Women in Dominican History<sup>3</sup> are full of women, both educated and illiterate, who strove to improve their communities, fight for the rights of women in society, challenge political injustices, and give voice to those who struggled and suffered. The documentary poem Yania Tierra by Aida Cartagena Portalatín discusses the contributions of many real Dominican women activists throughout history, not only those in the political arena but also those who fought for social issues. The field of Dominican studies is growing and there have been many recent publications on their colonial history, racial identity and transnational communities. In the field of literary works, films, and critical studies, there have been various works that discuss Trujillo, as well as new authors writing about urban life experiences in the Diaspora, but few with a specific focus on women as historical figures or activists. This thesis will contribute to Caribbean and specifically Dominican women's studies by showing the connections between history and fiction, and how these novels and poems can both honor the past and create a path for future explorations and silenced voices. Separate studies have been

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<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as Cocco de Filippis, Olviden in citations

done on actual historical figures and on individual literary works, but my project will merge these areas to analyze the portrayal of these protagonists and further serve to fill the gaps in our understanding of Dominican women's experiences.

### **Existing Studies**

There have been recent studies about political activism, participation and gender issues among Dominicans, both on the island and in U.S. academic circles, but not as much specifically about the connection between the historical participation of women and their representation in literature. As a broad definition of activism, I look to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, which delineates activism as “The doctrine that action rather than theory is needed at some political juncture; an activist is therefore one who works to make change happen” (Blackburn, 5). How profound and yet simple, “one who works to make change happen”; this phrase encompasses so many of the actions taken by these Dominican protagonists, small and large words and actions that created changes within themselves, their families and homes, and even inspired the spirits of their fellow countrymen and women. Although I focus on activism by women, which may suggest a concentration on women's rights and issues, the majority of the actions taken by the protagonists were for the betterment of all in their communities and the nation as a whole. Still, feminist theories will still be helpful in exploring how gendered issues arose for these women in their process of becoming more politically involved.

Recent studies that address the political participation and involvement of women in the Dominican Republic provide background information and a starting point for my analysis of the relationship between activism as reflected in history and literature. In recent years, Isis Duarte and Julia Hasbun have analyzed the participation rates of women and the different ways in which they fight for political, economic and social rights, in addition to an article by Jana Morgan et al

that focuses on women's political representation and involvement from 1994-2004. April Mayes also explores the development of Dominican feminism and activism during the 1880s-1940s. Frank Moya Pons' The Dominican Republic: A National History provides a broad historical background for my analysis and is complemented by a recent dissertation by Elizabeth S. Manley, which focuses on women's participation during the time period from 1928 to 1978. Additional sources on women's participation in other Latin American contexts and movements will shape my approach to gender and politics in the region. Women were active throughout Dominican history and supported a diverse range of social and political ideals. Some women's groups, such as the Dominican Feminist Action organization, were openly connected with Trujillo, while other women openly opposed oppressive regimes and died for their beliefs, such as the Mirabal sisters. These aforementioned studies are helpful in understanding the historical and political contributions of Dominican women and how they are represented in literature and in the collective memory of Dominicans. The exploration of Dominican women's activism is still in its infancy, as the majority of available studies are academic articles and dissertations.

In the realm of Dominican literary criticism, women authors are only beginning to be examined. In his chapter on "Dominican Literature and Its Criticism" in A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Hispanic and Francophone regions, Silvio Torres-Saillant focuses mainly on the masculine literary heritage of the Dominican Republic and only devotes a portion of one paragraph to the discussion of gender and women writers. Also, in Torres-Saillant's Caribbean Poetics, he draws connections between various important Caribbean poets, but again, no women authors are included. In her 1983 study, Doris Sommer analyzed classic Dominican novels written by Juan Bosch, Ramon Marrero Aristy, Freddy Prestol Castillo, Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, and Pedro Mir using theories of populism. More recently, a number of works are beginning to

focus on women authors and their literary contributions. Las Madres de la Patria y las Bellas Mentiras (Imágenes de la mujer en el discurso literario nacional de la República Dominicana 1844-1899), by Catherina Vallejo, examines the portrayal of women in Dominican national literature and includes authors such as Josefa Perdomo and Salomé Ureña de Henríquez. The writings of well-known authors and critics Rita de Maeseneer, Sherezada ‘Chiqui’ Vicioso and Daisy Cocco de Filippis have contributed immensely to the field of Dominican women’s studies and literary analysis.<sup>4</sup> The book Daughters of the Diaspora, edited by Miriam DeCosta-Willis, includes a collection of writings by Afra-Hispanic writers, including Dominicans such as Cartagena Portalatín and Vicioso. However, I was not able to discover any broader comparative studies that focus specifically on how women writers portray the historical and societal experiences of female activists.

In regard to existing critiques and analyses of the works I plan to include, there are a number of articles and works that will contribute to my own frame of analysis. In his contribution to the critical companion series, Silvio Sirias presents four of Alvarez’ novels and he offers insight into the historical connections and real-life experiences behind her stories. Likewise, in Julia Alvarez’ autobiographical collection of essays, Something to Declare, she personally discusses some of the motivations behind her works. An article from Darren Broome analyzes the use of the female body in Alvarez’ novel about the Mirabal sisters, which is complementary to my focus on Alvarez’ portrayal of the voices, motivations and experiences that give us a view into their world. Other academics such as Gus Puleo, Vansan Goncalves, and Maria Cristina Rodríguez have written about the reconstruction and demythification of the

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<sup>4</sup> De Maeseneer discusses the lack of a Dominican canon and focuses her work on three areas common in much of Caribbean literature: the obsession with history, concepts of space, and popular culture (De Maeseneer, Encuentro con la Narrativa Dominicana Contemporanea, 20).

Mirabals, which will be helpful in exploring In the Time of the Butterflies. Lucia Montas interprets Charamicos as a bildungsroman and explores the role of historical memory in the protagonist's coming of age. Additional articles about Charamicos by Carmen Centeno, Esther Gimbernat González, and Nestór Rodríguez will also contribute to my analysis.

In my analysis of the works from Alvarez and Hernández, my contribution to the field of Dominican studies will be to show how fiction can supplement and even broaden historical knowledge by reaching new audiences and creating a fuller picture of the lives, experiences, and potential motivations of Dominican women activists and writers. These perspectives are unique to the imagination of their authors, but also give us a valid viewpoint into an alternate or unexplored part of the official history. Joan W. Scott discusses this “crisis in orthodox history [...] by insisting that histories are written from fundamentally different – indeed irreconcilable – perspectives or standpoints, no one of which is complete or completely ‘true’” (Scott, “Experience”, 24). Herein lies the connection between writing history into fiction and its relationship to feminist standpoint theories: a fictional version of history can potentially offer insight into the official versions of history because fictional works can explore different perspectives and persons who may have been silenced or omitted in the history books. While a discussion of the validity of the historical record goes beyond the scope of my thesis, Scott's argument can help us understand that there are many perspectives that influence how our history is constructed and remembered. I extend that concept to historical fiction and its possible contributions to a fuller understanding of our past. Whether fictional or real, these heroines and activists are relevant to the present-day experiences of Dominican women. Many women in the Dominican Republic still struggle with the same issues addressed in these works, such as patriarchal domination, the gender expectations captured in the common phrase, “*Compórtate*



*bien*” (proper womanly behavior), inequality in many spheres (political, social, economics, etc.), and the search for identity as a woman and Dominican. My hope is that the voices of these women and their authors can give hope to those who need it, to be inspired by the heroines of the past in order to raise their own voices and create their future.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

My analysis of the literary representation of women’s activism ties together the fields of gender, political, historical and literary studies. Poststructuralist and postmodern theories of feminism and power lend the most direction to this study, due to their focus on agency, activism, difference, and woman as a subject, in addition to the construction and deconstruction of her role, identity and place in society. The theories of Michel Foucault that consider the unique role of gender in power relations, as well as the more recent development of standpoint theory, are particularly applicable for these writings about Dominican women’s experiences as agents of change. Writing difference and exploring the myriad ways that people achieve and strive for power is very pertinent to these women who have fought for their country, their freedom and their identity as free Dominicans undaunted by the risk of challenging authority figures. In addition to my earlier definition of activism, it is important to consider these women as agents, i.e. “One who acts. The central problem of agency is to understand the difference between events happening in me or to me, and my taking control of events, or doing things” (Blackburn, 9). As participants and actors in their own destinies, these Dominican women and fictional characters are portrayed as writing their own lives just as much as the authors are filling in the spaces between the pages of history. I use both feminist/gender studies theory as well as political and cultural studies theories to better understand how women participated and contributed to the political history of their island, both through their own actions and in the

literature they produced. Even the fictional characters created by Dominican women authors explored various aspects of their identities as activists, career women, mothers, daughters, wives, etc. I will consider the role of gender in definitions of political activism/participation and apply this perspective to the protagonists of these works.

Susan Hekman draws on the feminist theories of Foucault in terms of how these concepts can “transform the perspective out of which the author writes” (10). This is particularly relevant when considering intellectuals who focus on localized power structures and change. She proposes that “the oppressions that women face are varied and multiple; they require specific (local) resistances designed for the particular situations that different women face” (Hekman, 10-11). These “specific” or “local” resistances emerge in my study of Dominican women excluded from or minimized in the official histories and how they used specific methods to achieve their aims. The Dominican women authors themselves focus on the specific ways their female characters navigate their own power relationships in the face of a paternalistic society and brutal oppression. Jana Sawicki presents the development of standpoint theory as it relates to Foucault’s theories of power in relation to feminism as well as Judith Butler’s perspective on the construction of identity and oneself as subject. The women authors in my study enter into this discussion through the use of particular viewpoints to develop the identities of their characters and show how they emerged from the confines of patriarchal society to promote change in their country. Their works explore multiple facets of the identities and personas reflected in their characters, not only how these women became who they were, but why and what choices they made along the way.

In addition to this focus on specific resistances and constructed identities, connections can be drawn to feminist standpoint theory and its aim to consider each unique viewpoint as

valid and important. The basic premise is clarified by a summary of Patricia Hill Collins' idea that "subordinated social groups can have a unique insight into the power relations which subordinate them" and that "everybody has a partial view, nobody has the place to stand and see everything clearly. But a partial view of power can still produce valuable, if not complete or perfect, knowledge" (McCann and Kim, 280-281). Just as relationships of power may be adjusted and manipulated to fit the specific situation or desired outcome, so too must the analysis of these works take into account the unique perspective of these characters and authors. In the case of Julia Alvarez, a Dominican-American woman and author whose own family fled Trujillo's wrath, her position as author will definitely have a unique, personal perspective on the historical situation as well as how the characters should be portrayed as real women, not as a mythical or idealized figures. Likewise, Ángela Hernández was born during Trujillo's reign and lived through Balaguer's many years of oppression, so she can contribute her own view of this tumultuous time in history. Standpoint theory, while controversial, blends well with my cultural studies approach because it has been used to understand various areas (political science, economic issues, social concerns, etc.) and how they are interrelated, specifically from a woman's viewpoint and experiences.

Furthermore, concepts of nationhood are very important when analyzing the Dominican texts and the participation of these historical figures. In her anthology of feminist nationalist movements around the world, Lois West introduces the reconstruction of "the meanings of both nationalism and feminism from a women-centered viewpoint, what some feminists call women's or feminist "standpoint theory" [...] Women in feminist national movements are struggling to define and reconceptualize their relationships to states, nations, and social movements as activists central to the debate, not as passive recipients" (West, xiii). West also expands this

relationship between women and the nation to encompass a broad range of activism, that “women are the nation-state, the culture, the family, as integral as men to these definitions, only defined in different terms and activities” (xxxii). While participation among women in the Dominican Republic is not specifically discussed in her anthology, we can extend her concept of national activism to the women in Alvarez’s and Hernandez’s works. The beginning of Hernández’s Charamicos touches on this concept of a new outlook and relationship to the transformation of the nation, when the narrator tells us: “*Cuando llegué a Santo Domingo ignoraba que pudiera participar en la transformación del mundo, en crear un hombre nuevo, una mujer nueva, y mucho menos que en la universidad la gente no solo se graduaba de una carrera sino también de época*” (Hernández, 7). Throughout the novels examined in this thesis, we can see how the authors portray the complicated relationship between women and the nation, and especially how their activities and participation can change the world. Benedict Anderson’s concept of nationalism as rooted in an “imagined community” is also applicable in the case of the poet Salomé Ureña de Henríquez since questions of nationhood and identity were central to her most well-known and inspirational poems.

In her article “Feminist Studies and Political Science – and Vice Versa”, Virginia Sapiro discusses the relationship between feminist research and political science, which “focuses on mass and elite political behaviour and orientations, exploring such problems as gender differences in public opinion, perception, and political participation and action” (72). In the novels and poetry that I will explore, the actions of not only the female protagonists, but also family members and general members of the community and political spheres are reflected as well. The different levels of the women’s individual motivations for action and how their actions are interpreted by those around them are an important part of this complex relationship of finding

their own voice and not allowing it to be silenced or co-opted by those who would twist it for their own benefit. Throughout the Dominican literature that I will be examining, various methods of participation and activism are portrayed, such as publishing anti-government poetry in the newspaper, plotting to overthrow dictators, or participating in protest movements. For example, some discussions of the Mirabal sisters have based their participation on their husbands' influence and shown them as secondary actors, but Alvarez clearly focuses on each woman's personal motivations for becoming involved and in some cases persuading their husbands to be more involved, instead of the other way around (J. Alvarez, In the Time of the Butterflies<sup>5</sup>; Manley 23).

Within this theoretical framework, I explore the literary strategies used to portray these Dominican women and how the combination of history and fiction can impact a wider array of readers. Besides outright protests and militant actions, there are many subtle forms of resistance and activism portrayed in these works, which are important to understanding both gender and political relations in the Dominican Republic during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Thesis Structure**

In Chapter Two, I will set up the basic historical timeframe and events that will be covered by the fictional works that I will be analyzing to give the reader a starting point and introduction to the Dominican Republic and women's activism throughout history. Since the novels that will later be analyzed are based on and inspired by historical figures, it is important to have an understanding of the real women who fought to change their country. By inserting their lives into the history of the Dominican Republic, we can reclaim their place in history and national remembrance.

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<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as J. Alvarez, Butterflies in citations

Chapter Three will focus on the early years of Dominican independence (1844-1900) when Salomé Ureña de Henríquez used her poetry to inspire her fellow Dominicans to get involved and strive for a free country. She was even recognized by her peers as the national poet during the struggles for Dominican nationhood and independence. In the Name of Salomé, by Julia Alvarez, presents a fictional version of Salomé and her daughter Camila's lives, giving further insight into the type of woman Salomé might have been and how her daughter was inspired to make a difference as well. This chapter will focus on Salomé Ureña de Henríquez as a writer as well as Alvarez's portrayal of the young poet and her family and how the work serves to promote political activism and imagine the world of Salomé. Camila's exploration of her sexual identity also serves to present a fresh view of the internal conflict between living as one desires and living up to others' expectations.

The following chapter explores the next generation of Dominican women activists (1900 to the present), through the novels In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez, and Charamicos by Ángela Hernández. Alvarez discusses the Mirabal sisters, who are perhaps the most famous Dominican activists, while the fictional Dominican women characters in Charamicos were inspired by real women who protested against Balaguer and his oppressive rule. By contrasting the ways that these two authors choose to give voice to their characters, we can see if their different methods serve their intended audiences and how they contribute to expanding history through the use of fiction.

In concluding, I will consider the importance of having these female models for political activism. Although stories about them circulated orally and/or were learned during childhood, it is possible that literature played a role for educated women at the time, and especially now for later generations of women reading Julia Alvarez, Ángela Hernández, etc. Those who

experienced these difficult political periods may be able to revise their understanding of the past and the role they may have in the present, and for the next generation of Dominican women, these works may give them a better grasp on their shared history and serve as motivation for future political activism and participation.

## 2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND DOMINICAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS AND AUTHORS

In his essay for a collection about Dominican cultures, the esteemed historian and author Frank Moya Pons recognizes the complexity of their history and the need for further exploration and study. “So much has changed in the country in less than a century, and these changes have happened so rapidly that Dominicans have hardly had the time to study them.” (Moya Pons, “Modernization and Change in the Dominican Republic”, 209) Likewise, the participation of women in Dominican society has changed greatly in this same period and this chapter will serve as a brief overview of Dominican history in general and discuss some of the notable Dominican women activists and authors of this time. Existing authors have mentioned these women briefly or focused on women activists during certain time periods, so I plan to use these sources to show the development of women’s activism in the Dominican Republic within their larger history. When Moya Pons wrote his Manual de Historia Dominicana, the Spanish-language predecessor and the later English-language version The Dominican Republic: A National History, he was developing a hitherto unexplored area, to create a “modern historical narrative of the economic, social, and political evolution of Dominican society from pre-Colombian times to the present.” (Moya Pons, The Dominican Republic: A National History<sup>6</sup>, 9) His contributions to the field of Dominican studies cannot be overstated and his concise yet detailed work delves into various aspects of Dominican culture and history. However, in any work, there are areas for further development or study, and authors such as Daisy Cocco de Filipis and Elizabeth Manley have taken the next step to expand the study of Dominican history and society by including the women who contributed to the growth of the Dominican Republic. In this overview, the discussion of Moya Pons’ historical studies will be interspersed with other authors’ information

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<sup>6</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as Moya Pons, History in citations



about the women activists and authors to create a more inclusive summary of not only Dominican history, but the history of women's activism in the D.R. as well. Due to the strong ties between major historical and political events and the works analyzed for this thesis, I feel that it is prudent to focus on these events and political leaders so as to better understand what these women were fighting against and the type of society they were living in. The development of feminism in the D.R. is also important, but perhaps not as directly influential to the actions of the characters in the works discussed herein.

Joan Wallach Scott discusses the challenges in writing women into history, specifically how women can be added, included, and supplemented into the existing historical body of work and if this process results in a rewriting of history. The two methods discussed by Scott, "her-story" and social history, each have their own benefits and limitations. "Her-story" involves writing about the forgotten women who played a part in history. "[T]hese historians attempt to fit a new subject – women – into received historical categories, interpreting their actions in terms recognizable to political and social historians" (Scott, Gender and the Politics of History: Revised Edition, 19)<sup>7</sup>. The development of "her-story" may also show that not all groups progressed at the same levels, i.e. some historical eras of progress and innovations did not improve women's situations and in other cases were even detrimental. In addition, this method can be applied to explore these women's actions by reevaluating the potential motivations and influences of these women, as well as the factors that affect them specifically as women in the society of their time. However, one must be careful not to use "her-story" to once again isolate women's stories from other historical events and maintain their otherness. The second method presented by Scott, social history, focuses on specific processes or systems through the lens of a

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<sup>7</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as Scott, Gender in citations

certain group's experiences, such as class and social groups. This can also involve introducing the discussion on gender differences in a certain situation, such as women's participation in the labor force or involvement in unions. The author explains that social history includes women as one of many groups to study, thus possibly not recognizing their unique contributions or differences, while "her-story" can focus so much on the different experiences of women that it creates a rupture that does not show how women can fit into the overall history. Hopefully in this thesis I will show that the writing of women into historical fiction can actually bridge this gap and show how their experiences are an integral part of the history of their country. (Scott, Gender, 15-22)

The birth of a nation and the struggle for Dominican independence has its roots in the period before Christopher Columbus first stepped onto the island of Quisqueya in 1492. Native populations of Tainos and Arawaks have been mythologized and even tied into modern-day arguments of the differences between the Dominican Republic and neighboring Haiti, although other indigenous groups such as the Ciboneys and Caribes also lived on the island. The *Museo del Hombre Dominicano* in Santo Domingo strives to acknowledge the major influences on Dominican culture from not only the Tainos, but also the Spaniards and Africans who came to their shores. In addition, France, Great Britain, and the United States also played their own parts in shaping the development of the Dominican Republic (D.R.). The Taino name "*Quisqueya*" has been used at times to refer to the island itself (which contains both Haiti and the Dominican Republic), otherwise known as Hispaniola or *La Española*, and at other times to describe only the D.R. and "*Quisqueyano*" can be used as an equivalent identifier in place of "*Dominicano*". During colonial times, the French side of the island was referred to as "*Saint-Domingue*" and the Spanish side as "*Santo Domingo*". Also, during the era of Dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo

Molina, the name of the capital city was changed from Santo Domingo to “*Ciudad Trujillo*”, and the whole country was referred to as “*Santo Domingo*” again, so even the names of places can be confusing when studying the history of this country. (Moya Pons, History, 13-72; Vega 1-27)

Events in Europe, specifically battles between France and Spain, had far-reaching consequences for their American colonies. There was great upheaval during this time as French, Spanish, and British forces struggled to maintain a foothold on Hispaniola, which resulted in the transfer of the eastern side of the island (what would later be called the Dominican Republic) from Spanish to French control in 1795 and the occupation led by Toussaint L’Ouverture. The French Revolution also inspired changes in Haiti (the western third of the island) that led to the rise of leaders such as L’Ouverture, Jacques Dessalines and Henry Christophe, who achieved Haitian independence in 1804 in the first successful slave uprising in the new world.

Dominicans fought back against the French and with the help of Puerto Rican support and a British blockade, the eastern side was returned to Spanish control in 1809 after this “War of Reconquest”. Economic damages from the war and multiple groups arguing for a different government created a very unstable period, with different groups pursuing unification with Haiti, a continued relationship with Spain, or searching for Dominican independence from Spain as other Latin American colonies had recently achieved. In a series of uprisings from these groups, Haitian President Jean Pierre Boyer took advantage of the situation and gained control of the eastern side of the island with military forces in 1822. *La Trinitaria* (a secret group led by Juan Pablo Duarte, and later by Francisco del Rosario Sánchez and Ramon Mella) organized Dominican resistance groups and pushed for Dominican independence from Haiti. With a crumbling economy and unrest due to internal struggles and a major earthquake, Boyer’s position in the east was weakening. Out of this chaos rose four different plans to free the D.R.

from Haiti: 1) reunification with Spain, 2) becoming a British protectorate, 3) turning to the French for assistance, and 4) Dominican independence driven by *La Trinitaria*. With a coup led by Francisco del Rosario Sánchez and the “insurreccional committee”, the independence of the Dominican Republic was declared on February 27, 1844. (Moya Pons, History, 91-164)

The early years of the D.R. were not without strife and many changes in leadership, and it is at this time that some of the first Dominican women activists gained recognition and inspired those around them. Elizabeth Manley discusses the importance of María Trinidad Sánchez (1794-1845) in regard to her later inspiration of Dominican feminists. Trinidad Sánchez was the aunt of Francisco del Rosario Sánchez and actively participated in the fight for freedom against the oppressive General Pedro Santana. She also worked with another woman, Concepción Bona, to make the first Dominican flag. She was later imprisoned for her rebellious activities and sentenced to death, making her the first political victim but certainly not the last. Other women also played important roles in the movement for independence, such as Rosa Duarte (sister of another *Trinitaria* founder, Juan Pablo Duarte), the aforementioned Bona, Manuela Diez, Maria de Jesús Pina, Juana Saltitopa, Josefa Antonia Perez de la Paz, the Villa sisters, and Baltasara de los Reyes. (Cassá 34-8; Lebron de Anico 91-6; Manley 121-3)

A popular phrase/song from the early years of the D.R. really summarizes the internal conflicts of identity during this time of rapid changes in their government and society: “I was born Spanish, / by the afternoon I was French, / at night I was African. / What will become of me?” (J. Alvarez, In the Name of Salomé<sup>8</sup>, 14) Two of the major power players of this time were Buenaventura Báez and General Pedro Santana, who both occupied the presidency at various times during this turbulent period. This time of changing identities and loyalties was

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<sup>8</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as J. Alvarez, Salomé in citations

compounded by then-President Santana's decision to secretly realign the Dominican Republic with Spain and become a protectorate again in 1861. Popular outrage against the Spanish led to reoccurring battles and guerilla attacks throughout the next few years, which resulted in the Spain rescinding the annexation, thereby ending the War of Restoration and establishing Dominican independence again in 1865. Numerous factions and political groups sprang up during the war years and while they managed to work together to drive out the Spanish, their common purpose ended after the restoration. The main two groups, *Partido Azul* (which was formed by prior *Santanistas* and *Cibaeños*, from mostly northern regions of the country) and *Partido Rojo* (former Baez supporters and others from the south) had "more than 50 uprisings and revolts resulting in some 21 changes in government." (Moya Pons, History, 222) Once in power, Baez used secrecy, corruption, and strong-arm tactics to promote his plans, such as his initial attempt to annex the D.R. to the United States and later plans to lease the area of Samaná to a private U.S. company, the Samaná Bay Company to establish a U.S. Naval base and further development in that area. He was ousted by a joint effort (the *Movimiento Unionista* formed by members of his own *Rojo* party and the *Azules*), and the former governor of Puerto Plata, Ignacio María González gained enough support to become the new leader. González' rule was short-lived and multiple leadership changes involving both the *Rojos* and *Azules* followed in the next 20 years, in which leaders such as General Gregorio Luperón and General Ulises Heureaux, also known as "Lilís", gained power. The thirteen year dictatorship of Lilís was marked by corruption and oppression. His policies created an enormous national debt which led to further public unrest, eventually resulting in his assassination in 1899. (Moya Pons, History, 165-278)

Alvarez also discusses these political uncertainties that shaped the youth of the national poetess of the Dominican Republic, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez. Salomé (1850-1897) was born

to Gregoria Díaz y León and Nicolas Ureña de Mendoza, a famous poet and journalist, who instilled her love of education and poetry at a young age in a time when very few women were educated. She went on to write some of her most well-known poems while still a teenager and was included in literary societies where few other women were allowed, meeting Eugenio María de Hostos and other poets and philosophers along the way. She even received the national medal of poetry and was known as “*la Musa de la Patria*” or “*la Poetisa*”. She married Dr. Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, (also known as Pancho) a fellow writer, doctor, and future politician and they had four children: Francisco, Pedro, Max and Camila, the latter three who also became well-known for their writings. Salomé Ureña de Henríquez also opened a school for women and her teaching philosophies were carried on for many years after her death by her sister-in-law Luisa Ozema Pellerano de Henríquez and others. (J. Alvarez, Salomé; Cocco de Filippis, Olviden, 25-6, 41; Ureña de Henríquez, Cantos A La Patria: Coleccion Parnaso Dominicano<sup>9</sup> 9-12)

Camila Henríquez Ureña (1894-1973), the youngest child of Salomé Ureña de Henríquez, came from an esteemed family of poets and writers, yet she still managed to find her own voice and contributed important essays about feminism and literature. After growing up in Cuba after her mother’s death and earning her doctorate at the University of Havana, she moved to the U.S. to study at the University of Minnesota and Colombia University. Camila returned to teach in Cuba for a number of years until she accepted a position at Vassar College in the U.S. in 1942. During her career at Vassar, she was also involved in summer courses at Middlebury College. Inspired by the revolution in Cuba, she moved back to Havana in 1959, where she remained for her later years. During her final trip back to the Dominican Republic in 1973, she passed away and was buried in her homeland. (Cocco de Filippis, Hija de Camila, Camila's Line 43-4, 53-4;

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<sup>9</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as Ureña de Henríquez, Cantos in citations

Cocco de Filippis, Olviden, 68; Cocco de Filippis and Gutierrez, Hostos Review - El Tambor y La Palabra: Literatura Dominicana Contemporanea, 21)

Political and social instability continued through the late 1800s and early 1900s, which drew the attention of their northern neighbor. The United States was in the final stages of building the Panama Canal and considered security in their backyard to be a primary concern as tensions in Europe were heating up. Dominican financial debts left them vulnerable to European pressure and blockades, which was unacceptable so close to a major U.S. investment. The Monroe Doctrine was used to justify keeping European powers away from the Caribbean and Latin America, which then paved the way for the U.S. to become involved with the customs offices throughout the D.R. as a means to resolve Dominican debts and develop a better functioning economy. Incoming funds were divided between creditors and the Dominican government with the aim of paying off all of their debt; however internal struggles and assassinations still left a power vacuum that even economic improvement could not solve. The U.S. continued to intervene in the repeated rebellions and political coups, which eventually resulted in their military occupation of the capital and strong influence in the presidential election of 1916. Dr. Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal (the widower of Salomé Ureña de Henríquez) briefly returned from exile in Cuba to claim the presidency of the Dominican Republic, but failed to come to agreement with the terms required by the U.S. and was removed from power. Finally in November 1916, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson decided to formally declare their occupation, which would be led by Captain Harry S. Knapp to rebuild the governmental structure of the D.R. The Dominican National Guard was created in 1917 as a means to control uprisings and maintain national security, but thirteen years later this decision would come back to haunt them in the form of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. The occupation

lasted until 1924 when U.S. leadership and policy changes led to the Hughes-Peynado plan and the formation of a new provisional government, although influences and connections between the Dominican Republic and the U.S. would remain and shape their future development. (Moya Pons, History, 279-339)

During this time of interventions leading up to the era of Trujillo, Ercilia Pepin (1884-1939) became known for her focus on education and feminism, specifically trying to attain the right for women to vote and speaking out to inspire patriotism and civic involvement. This prominent educator would eventually come into conflict with the Trujillo regime by showing support to a fallen professor who was assassinated by the regime. She lost her position as director of the girls school she was involved with and eventually died from kidney disease. (Cocco de Filippis, Madres, Maestras y Militantes Dominicanas<sup>10</sup>, 163-187)

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. Perhaps the most infamous Dominican, a controversial figure who managed to pay off the national debt and build infrastructure that would help support the future of the Dominican Republic, yet his cruelties and oppression are still remembered and have had lasting effects on their government and society. Trujillo joined the Dominican National Police (aka Dominican National Guard, created during the aforementioned U.S. occupation) and rose through the ranks, gaining power and wealth through his business investments and arrangements. In his position as “Chief of the Army” under President Horacio Vásquez, he was able to put his supporters into higher positions and used the purchasing of army supplies to further supplement his income. Despite investigations in the late 1920s regarding the army’s finances, Vásquez continued to support Trujillo and ignored rumors of a potential coup by Trujillo and a group called the *Coalicionistas*. Cohorts of Trujillo (led by Rafael Estrella Ureña)

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<sup>10</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as Cocco de Filippis, Madres in citations



would attack the San Luis Fortress in Santiago de los Caballeros in a “*movimiento civico*” and then continue on to the capital to overthrow Vasquez, while the Army stayed “neutral” to prevent escalating the potential violence. Vasquez fled to the U.S. and Ureña was named president, although Trujillo was truly in control. In the upcoming elections, various factions submitted candidates, but Trujillo’s competition came under harassment and attacks from the Army and Police and even the staff of the *Junta Central Electoral* withdrew in the face of these threats. In the end, Trujillo (with Ureña as his Vice-President) ran unopposed and “won” the election in 1930. He created a new group that would carry out his worst punishments and retributions called “*La 42*” who quickly began their reign of terror which continued throughout his regime. (Moya Pons, History, 341-356)

In the habit of the United States tolerating and even supporting dictators as long as it suited their purposes, Trujillo was accepted and supported by the U.S. for much of his reign. His intellect and business skills were put to use as he consolidated and monopolized much of the agricultural production and many other areas of the economy. In order to better connect his holdings, Trujillo greatly increased infrastructure across the country by building numerous bridges, highways and creating new areas for agricultural development. The growth of industrialization through factories and mills and even public services such as banking and electricity all fell under his control and by the end of his era, “he controlled nearly 80 percent of the country’s industrial production and his firms employed 45 percent of the country’s active labor force. Combined with his absolute control of the state, which employed 15 percent of the labor force, this meant that nearly 60 percent of Dominican families depended on his will one way or another” (Moya Pons, History, 365). Sadly, not only did most Dominicans depend on him for their livelihoods, their very lives also rested in his hands. Those who opposed him were

publicly humiliated, abused, or killed and even the borders of the D.R. did not limit his reach. “The Haitian Question” dealt with the communities of Haitians who had moved to the Dominican side of the border over the years when the actual border was not as clearly defined. Trujillo used the tumultuous history of the island, racial prejudices, and the recently established (1929) border to denounce the Haitian occupation of the border region and called for their permanent removal (i.e. death). Numbers vary, but approximately eighteen thousand Haitians were murdered in October 1937 and the border river Dajabon became forever known as “*el río masacre*”. While the incident was explained away as “a simple frontier incident between Dominican peasants and Haitian live-stock thieves”, the truth of the massacre could not be ignored and was only the beginning of such outright acts of cruelty and oppression. (Moya Pons, History, 369) Outrage throughout the U.S. and Latin America over this event was still not enough to affect his control over the country and he continued his reign of terror for over twenty more years. Although various puppet presidents were elected at different times, Trujillo remained the true power. His actions periodically gained international attention which eventually led to his downfall, such as the 1956 disappearance of Jesús de Galindez Suárez (an outspoken exile in New York City), the attempted assassination of Venezuelan President Romulo Betancourt in 1960, and finally culminating in the murders of the Mirabal sisters in late 1960. (Moya Pons, History, 357-380)

“*Las Mariposas*”, or “The Butterflies” as the Mirabal sisters are known, hold a strong place in Dominican memory and the lives of the three martyred sisters (Patria, Minerva, and Mate) are still celebrated every November 25<sup>th</sup> on the anniversary of their deaths. Patria Mercedes (1924-1960), Bélgica Adela “Dedé” (1925-present), Maria Argentina Minerva (1926-1960), and Antonia Maria Teresa “Mate” (1935-1960) grew up in Salcedo in the early years of

Trujillo's rule. Through her fictional novel, Alvarez explores their early years and how they became aware of Trujillo's abuses and decided to become involved in the rebellion. By seeing classmates whose families had been murdered and ostracized, as well as Trujillo's propensity for taking what he wanted, including the daughters and wives of his countrymen, it was both an educational and dangerous time to grow up. Minerva even had a direct confrontation with him at an event when she publicly rejected his advances, which may have directly affected her academic career. Although Minerva completed her Doctorate in Law at the *Universidad Autónoma* in Santo Domingo, she was denied a license to practice by the regime. Patria, Minerva and Mate formed the "*Movimiento 14 de Junio*" with other activists and participated in planning meetings, storing weapons in their homes and properties, building bombs and other munitions, and actively encouraging resistance and rebellion against the dictator. Their group was named in honor of previous activists who had tried to overthrow Trujillo in 1959. It will be interesting to examine the novel to see if gender could have influenced why their actions were tolerated for so long when other male activists were killed after only one offense or perceived slight. The sisters were jailed various times for their activities, but their eventual murder came when they were travelling back from a distant prison to visit their husbands. A trap was waiting for them along a dark mountain road and after they were killed, their vehicle was pushed over the cliff to make it appear as an "accident". Their deaths so inflamed the population that Trujillo was assassinated just over six months later and the country was finally free of the tyranny the Butterflies had fought so hard against all those years. Their struggle was even recognized by the United Nations and the date of their death was established as the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women" and celebrated worldwide. These women, sisters, wives and mothers who fought not only to protect their own families but to win the rights and

freedoms of all Dominicans from Trujillo's oppression, may not have lived to see his end, but their legacy has inspired others throughout the years. (J. Alvarez, Butterflies; Cocco de Filippis, Olviden, 111-2; Manley 21-30; Moya Pons, History, 372-4; U.N. Information Note)

While earlier activists such as Salomé Ureña de Henríquez tried to improve education for women, the development of feminism in the Dominican Republic really grew during the Trujillo era, which is surprising considering that these women's groups could gain power and rights at the same time that so many people were becoming more oppressed. Manley follows in the steps of earlier writers such as Livia Veloz and others, to write the history of feminism in the Dominican Republic. Veloz, a founding member of *Club Nosotros* and one-time secretary of *Acción Feminista Dominicana*, wrote poetry and books to bring attention to those women who were involved in the struggle to become educated and gain their rights in society. Manley's dissertation serves as a more in-depth examination of the events and actors specifically during the authoritarian rules of Trujillo and Balaguer. The Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW), under the Pan-American Union, was an early stepping-stone for many Latin American women to gain political and civil benefits in their own countries and communities. It was formed by Doris Stevens, a North American feminist, and other interested women from the Americas and supported by Dominicans such as Federico Henríquez y Caraval (the husband of the aforementioned Luisa Ozema Pellerano de Henríquez and brother-in-law of Salomé Ureña de Henríquez). The *Acción Feminista Dominicana* (AFD) also worked closely with the IACW, showing how local and international groups could come together for the betterment of women, even in an unarguably oppressive environment such as a dictatorship. A women's branch (*Rama Feminina/Partido Trujillista*) of the primary Dominican political party (*Partido Dominicano*) developed during this time and allowed numerous women to become active at many levels of

government. Minerva Bernardino, Abigail Mejía and others all worked for women's rights in the Dominican Republic, albeit in different ways and through different groups. (Cocco de Filippis, Madres, 207-249; Manley 45-107)

Minerva Bernardino (or as Manley calls her "The Vilified Minerva" as opposed to the "Sanctified Minerva" of the Mirabal sisters) had a controversial, yet crucial role in the development of feminism in the D.R. (Manley, 16) Her connections to the dictatorship have overshadowed many of her important feminist contributions during this time. She was the Dominican Representative (appointed by Trujillo) to the Seventh Annual Pan-American Conference during the early development of the IACW and held other international and local political positions throughout his era. While she accomplished a great deal for women's rights through her activities in various organizations and presentations to the courts, her role as a *Trujillista* defines her legacy. Carmita Landestoy was also involved in politics and women's rights throughout the Trujillo era, although she was overshadowed by Bernardino and eventually lost favor with the Partido Dominicano. (Manley, 16-20) Abigail Mejía Soliere (also known as Abigail Mejía de Fernández) (1895-1941) lived abroad in her early years, mostly in Spain with excursions to Italy, France, and occasional visits back to the Dominican Republic. After returning to the D.R. in 1925 inspired by these European experiences and influences, specifically of feminist groups in Spain, she went on to found the *Club Nosotras* which later became the *Acción Feminista Dominicana* (AFD) and was recognized by the Trujillo government as the first Dominican feminist organization. The magazine *Fémima* initially started spreading the word of these feminists and esteemed authors such as Petronila Angélica Gomez and Ercilia Pépin, but it was eventually controlled by the regime. The group created sub-committees in different regions to promote women's rights, such as suffrage and increased political participation, as well as

broader social issues including the fight against illiteracy, the creation of educational opportunities, and increased recreational and cultural activities. Sadly, Mejía did not live to see the fruition of one of her major efforts when women received the right to vote one year after her death. Delia Weber (1900-1982) was also very involved in the development of feminism in the D.R. her entire life. She struggled, as others before her, to work within the Trujillo regime for the rights of women. Weber remained optimistic in her writings and artwork as she explored the meaning and roles of being a woman and mother. She called women to fight for their rights, for their education, and for justice. It is interesting to note that so many of these feminist activists that worked within the Trujillo regime have been overshadowed by the Mirabal sisters, even though all of their political contributions were important. (Cocco de Filippis, *Olviden*, 72-3, 251-60; Manley 65-89)

In the years after Trujillo, former *Trujillistas* and those who opposed him were all involved in the transition to democracy and the newly established *Consejo de Estado*, a committee that would run the government until democratic elections could be held and a new constitution could be written. Former Puppet President under Trujillo, Joaquín Balaguer struggled to hold on to his position but was removed from office in 1962. Elections occurred at the end of that year and Juan Bosch, who had recently returned from a 25 year exile, was elected as President to begin his term in 1963. Tensions from the recent Cuban revolution threatened his position since he was perceived to be sympathetic to the Communist/Socialist policies, as well as his long absence from current Dominican culture and social norms. He was shortly removed from power and a triumvirate of businessmen and lawyers attempted to rule the country for the next few months. The eventual leader of this triumvirate, Donald Reid Cabral, was in turn overthrown in a civil war and popular uprising instigated by a new coalition of Bosch and

Balaguer supporters working together as the *Partido Revolucionario Social Cristiano* (PRSC). The U.S. again interceded militarily and politically in 1965 to prevent Bosch's return to power (due to the fear of Communism), which also drew focus away from the Vietnam War and escalating conflicts over there. Elections were held and Balaguer won, although not without the murders of 350 members of the opposition's supporters and death threats that sent Bosch into exile again. The twelve years (*doce años*) of Balaguer's rule were marked by military oppression and terroristic tactics against any opposition, and when these actions drew too much attention, he distanced himself publically while still using them to achieve his ends. In both the 1970 and 1974 elections, Balaguer ran virtually unopposed since all those who might have run against him were harassed and threatened. He also curried favor with the former revolutionaries by placing them in positions such as professors at the *Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo* and awarding state contracts and public projects. Protests and growing activism during the Balaguer era are presented within the framework of Hernández's Charamicos, which will be discussed in a later chapter. The U.S. government also gave millions in aid, which helped the struggling country to continue developing their infrastructure and economy. Foreign investments were sought, which also brought new companies and jobs to the island. However, by the end of the *doce años*, his human rights abuses and high levels of corruption within the government could no longer be overlooked and U.S. President Jimmy Carter became involved in the 1978 Dominican elections. Antonio Guzmán of the PRD (*Partido Revolucionario Dominicano*, formerly Bosch's party) won the election by a landslide, even though Balaguer's forces overtook the Junta Central Electoral during the ballot count, attacking anyone and anything (even ballot boxes) that stood in his way. The U.S. and other international entities supported Guzmán and refused to recognize Balaguer's claims since he had not been duly elected, however Balaguer

maneuvered an agreement with Guzmán that maintained his PRSC party's control of the Senate and therefore the Justice Department to prevent being punished for his atrocities while in office. However, during Guzmán's rule and decline in popularity, a certain nostalgia for the economic development of Balaguer began to creep back into public consciousness and even his own PRD party did not choose to support him for the 1982 elections. Guzmán even attempted to work with Balaguer and the military to prevent the election of Salvador Jorge Blanco, the PRD replacement candidate, but they refused his plans due to an evolving military that had become less political and more strongly influenced by U.S. policies to protect and sustain democracy. Continued political struggles and positioning during Jorge Blanco's term were balanced by his economic reforms and transformation of the army into a professional modern force, which at first gained him support, but his capricious decisions soon led to his downfall. In perhaps the fairest Dominican elections thus far, Balaguer, now eighty years old and blind, managed to win the popular vote in 1986 with his newly reorganized group *Partido Reformista Social Cristiano* (PRSC, formerly *Partido Revolucionario Social Cristiano*). Some of his first steps were to place his supporters in positions of power within the government and military, as well as instigating a public harassment and judicial investigation of his former opponent, Jorge Blanco. The stress of the court case and his conviction led to a near-death collapse due to a heart condition and Blanco was eventually exiled to the U.S. for medical care. Economic problems plagued Balaguer's term resulting in the devaluation of the Dominican peso, export issues, daily electrical blackouts, and union strikes. In further contested elections, Balaguer was re-elected in 1990 and 1994, although the fraud that occurred in the 1994 elections was blatant enough that new elections were held in 1996 in which Balaguer was not allowed to run. He ran again in the 2000 elections and lost, and died of natural causes in 2002. (Kershaw; Moya Pons, History, 381-444)



Aside from the political and economic struggles during the Balaguer years, social and agricultural challenges also faced the poorest members of the Dominican Republic. Florinda Soriano Muñoz, more commonly known as Mamá Tingó, (1916-1974) fought for the rights of *campesinos*, poor people who farmed and lived on lands in the undeveloped areas of the Dominican Republic, specifically the Hato Viejo region. The land was secretly sold to large landowners, such as Pablo Díaz, who then ejected the farmers from the lands they had lived on for generations. Mamá Tingó, then widowed, worked with organizations such as FEDALAC to mobilize the *campesinos* and she refused to leave when Díaz came, even under threats and being jailed twice for her actions. She even filed court documents against Díaz to protect their land, but when she returned to her house later that night, she was ambushed and shot. (Cocco de Filippis, Olviden, 100-2)

In addition to the activists and few writers I have mentioned thus far, there are also important women writers and poets who have contributed to the development of feminism in the Dominican Republic and bringing attention to those missing from the official histories. Aida Cartagena Portalatín (1918-1994) is known as a poet who used her talent to draw attention to the oppressed, introduce new feminist ideas, and promote political issues. She also focused on the African aspect of Dominican ancestry and culture, which had long been ignored or minimized throughout history. Her documentary poem, Yania Tierra, is a testament to all of the women activists and educators who were forgotten or silenced in Dominican history and how these women have contributed to their country and improved the lives of future generations. With contributions in both the literary and educational fields, Rhina P. Espaillat (1932-present) has shaped many generations of Dominican-Americans with her writings, artwork and poems. Sociologist Sherezada (Chiqui) Vicioso (1948-present) has lived in Santo Domingo and New

York at various times throughout her life, and this duality and transnational nature is evident in her writings, poems and plays. She has also worked to encourage literacy and fight for civil rights both in the U.S. and back on the island. It is no coincidence that many of my sources have been written by Daisy Cocco de Filippis (1949-present), who has greatly contributed to and developed the field of Dominican Studies, as well as promoting the rediscovery of literature produced by Dominican women authors throughout time. Even the titles of Cocco de Filippis' works evoke the importance of remembering these women and their political legacy, such as Documents of Dissidence: Selected Writings by Dominican Women, Madres, Maestras y Militantes Dominicanas, and Para Que No Se Olviden: The Lives of Women in Dominican History. The next author's childhood in the Dominican Republic under Trujillo and the family's subsequent exile to the U.S. definitely influenced her writings as evidenced by her focus on historical fiction and exile literature. Julia Alvarez (1950-present) has written numerous books and poetry, both for adults and younger readers, to show the experiences of growing up between two worlds and the shadow of Trujillo that still haunts those who lived during that time. Her fictional English-language novels about the Mirabal sisters and Salomé Ureña de Henríquez have brought the history of the D.R. and the actions of these brave women to new generations and audiences. Already a prolific author, Ángela Hernández (1956-present) is an activist, writer, and feminist involved with community organizations to spread awareness and educate women about their political, social, and legal rights. Her fiction and poetry bring attention to what has been lost and how women can look toward the future, such as in her novel Charamicos. (J. Alvarez, Salomé; J. Alvarez, Butterflies; Cartagena Portalatín; Cocco de Filippis, Olviden, 104-6, 122-138; Escritores Dominicanos; Hernández)

While brief, I hope that this historical background will offer a strong base for the reading of future chapters, especially to those who might not have realized how many women have played important roles in Dominican history and why the history of this beautiful island still influences so much of today's literary development. Through the insertion of women's stories and experiences into the history of the Dominican Republic, both through this chapter and via the fictional novels explored in the following pages, it is clear that this absence should be remedied and their voices should be heard.

### **3 LITERATURE AND EDUCATION AS POLITICAL ACTION IN JULIA ALVAREZ'S IN THE NAME OF SALOMÉ**

Salomé Ureña de Henríquez. In the Dominican Republic, her name and legacy are well known, but outside the island her name is largely unfamiliar and perhaps only mentioned in reference to the literary achievements of her sons, Pedro and Max Henríquez Ureña. Some of her poetry has even been silenced or muted over the years, resulting in a heavier emphasis on her patriotic poems and a seeming dismissal of her more personal, intimate poems. One contribution of Julia Alvarez's novel, In the Name of Salomé, is that it shows a more personal side of Salomé than that reflected by official biographies and her more well-known poetry, as well as introducing her daughter Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña, who is even lesser known than the rest of her family. Some of the questions explored in the novel are: What were Salomé and Camila's concerns and motivations? How could they speak out so bravely in such dangerous times? How did Salomé's interpersonal relationships shape her poetry, her life, and the lives of her children? In regard to Alvarez's approach, we can investigate how this rewriting of history into fiction expands our understanding of women's activism through literature and education. Paolo Freire explored the political nature of education, such as how it can be used as reinforcement of existing social mores or for the "liberation of the oppressed" (Roberts 58). In his analysis of Freire, Peter Roberts states "Freirean education demands a deep commitment to the goal of building a better social world, and necessitates active resistance against oppressive structures, ideas, and practices" (Roberts 2). Salomé's poetry and the *Instituto de Señoritas* both reflect this rejection of the status quo and striving to improve the lives of not only her oppressed fellow countrymen, but also improve the lives of women within their society. Gender issues are also evident in much of both Salomé and Camila's experiences and writings. Scott discusses the meaning of gender as a type of knowledge, "Such knowledge is not absolute or true, but always

relative. (...) Knowledge refers not only to ideas but to institutions and structures, everyday practices as well as specialized rituals, all of which constitute social relationships. Knowledge is a way of ordering the world” (Scott, Gender, 2). I want to extend the concept of gender as knowledge that Scott discusses to the writing of historical fiction, in that fiction can include more private motivations, relationships, and influences than traditional historical works. In regard to gender and writing about lost or forgotten actors, fiction can broaden our knowledge base to see these figures as everyday women rather than myths. Just as the fictional Camila learns who her mother really was through her memories and mementos, we as readers also discover a human side to the basic biographical picture of these historic figures.

In the Name of Salomé explores the fictionalized relationship between the muse of the country and her daughter, Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña, and the development of their identities and the multitude of roles they played, such as poet, educator, mother, daughter, etc. In this analysis, I will open with the larger questions presented in my introductory chapter: 1) how the works revise or expand on the traditional interpretation of political activism 2) how the works honor women historical actors, giving them a voice and 3) what the works reveal about the gendered nature of political activism. After a brief summary of the novel, my analysis delves into Salomé’s involvement in the struggle for independence and Camila’s acts of rebellion (their respective forms of activism), as well as gender roles and the relationship between their public and private personas. Alvarez draws connections between Salomé’s poetry and the events in her novel, so I will also discuss Salomé’s poetry as printed in Cantos a la Patria: Colección Parnaso Dominicano and other sources. The different protagonists studied in this thesis may have chosen varied forms of activism in their fight for rights, education, and freedom, but each method has its usefulness and benefits for the time and situation. Intellectuals have been involved in many

Latin American revolutions, whether through their literary contributions, educational arenas, political participation, and even protests and armed fighting. Salomé's well-known contemporaries, José Martí and Rubén Darío, are perfect examples of the power of literature in Latin American independence movements to aid in the development of an autonomous society and the creation of a new cultural identity.

The whole purpose of Salomé's poetry was to inspire change, and the writing of this novel serves to further promote political action through literature, such as the importance of education in the struggle for political freedom and the use of language as a weapon against oppression. Salomé and her children all understood the power of the written word to effect change, whether in the early years of Dominican Independence or the Cuban revolution. Alvarez reinforces this concept of poetry/writing as action in numerous places throughout the novel, some of which have been mentioned earlier in this chapter. Connections between literary contributions and political acts are clear, when young Salomé finds her purpose:

I dreamed of setting us free. My shield was my paper, and my swords were the words my father was teaching me to wield. [...] At night, I would lie in bed, and instead of sleeping I would think of what I would say if, like María Trinidad, I was bound and blindfolded before I was shot dead. I thought of what I would whisper into the ears of the Spanish governor if I had the chance. [...] I would free la patria with my sharp quill and bottle of ink. (50)

These real-life figures were inspirational in their actions and writings, yet without this promotion of their stories via historical fiction, many outside the D.R. would not know of Salomé and Camila or the other historical figures, such as María Trinidad Sánchez, mentioned within the novel. There are many ways to resist those in power or fight oppression and this novel presents a very good example of how literature was used to inspire the reader to speak up and use whatever tools available to fight their battles, whether personal or political.

In terms of remembrance, the novel is a fictionalized account of the lives of real women primarily portrayed by memories and childhood stories, so in itself it serves as a commemoration of those who came before, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez and her daughter, Camila Henríquez Ureña. Oxford Dictionaries defines “commemoration” as both a “remembrance” and a “ceremony or celebration in which a person or event is remembered”. Alvarez employs memory as a method to help us remember these women and her novel celebrates the large and small events of their lives. Even the title, oft-repeated within the text as part of a childhood prayer, is Camila’s way of remembering Salomé and asking for her guidance and blessing: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of my mother, Salomé” (4). Camila also refers to her aunt Mon as “the guardian of Mama’s memory”, who “took charge of keeping my mother’s memory alive in me” (43). Further, Alvarez and this novel are also guardians of these memories, albeit fictional, sharing the stories of Salomé and Camila with the world so that these important women will never be forgotten. Alvarez’s themes of remembrance and nationalism have been explored by other academics, such as in an article by Maya Socolovsky who details the complex relationship between U.S. and Dominican history as reflected in two of Alvarez’s works, In the Name of Salome and In the Time of the Butterflies (Socolovsky 6). Theorist Paul Ricoeur explored the relationships between memory and history, especially in regards to absence, which are especially applicable for this text due to the physical absence of Salomé in Camila’s life. In regard to accepting historical texts based on documentation and memories, David Pellauer explains Ricoeur’s view that “The historical representation of the past gives us an image in the present of an absent thing” (Pellauer 119). In this novel, Camila’s memories give us an image of Salomé, who has been absent from her life, yet always a part of it. If “the writing of history is a perpetual rewriting”, what is historical fiction but a further revision of past events? (Pellauer

121) The creation of Salomé and Camila's fictionalized lives within their historical framework is a logical step to explore the world they lived in and discover their possible motivations and inspirations.

As discussed in my introductory chapter, the stories of many Dominican women have been left out of the history books or relegated to a footnote. Alvarez fills in the gaps between the lines of their official biographies and provides a place to imagine their innermost thoughts and desires. What could possibly have inspired Salomé to write the words in "*Amor y Anhelos*" or "*La gloria del progreso*"? What shaped Camila's writings on feminism and drive to promote education? In the "Acknowledgments" section, Alvarez explains: "Given the continuing struggles in Our America to understand and create ourselves as countries and as individuals, this book is an effort to understand the great silence from which these two women emerged and into which they have disappeared, leaving us to dream up their stories and take up the burden of their songs" (357). If this novel or Salomé's poems inspire just one reader to find their own voice and speak up against the problems in their own lives, then it will not only have given a voice to these women of the past, but also helped to improve the lives of current and future women. In her book, Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism, Carine Mardorossian explains, "Voice is celebrated as the means through which an alternative truth can emerge through spontaneous expression and replace the lies of dominant representations" (19). She further explains that new authors, including Alvarez, are challenging this lack of voice and representation among Caribbean women by moving past their colonial and patriarchal legacies (19-21). Whether history has mythologized these women or just reduced them to one sentence or footnote, fiction gives them a chance to be rediscovered, for authors such as Alvarez to bring these women out from the shadows of time to inspire others and claim their rightful place in



history. Most sources that I found discussed Salomé's life in brief detail before presenting her poetry, which is in itself interesting in that her poetry is presented as part of the story of telling who she was. Additional sources mentioned by Alvarez in her "Acknowledgments", such as the Familia Henríquez Ureña: Epistolario (356), are less accessible, so this fictional novel will allow the story of Salomé and her family to reach a broader audience.

The inclusion of women from different generations in this chapter can help to show the universality of women's experiences, even though they are unique in their own right. In examining these connections between Salomé and Camila, we can apply Alison Stone's discussion of "genealogical feminism" which is developed from the theories of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Friedrich Nietzsche (4). She relates Butler's politics to the idea of women's genealogy, "to be located within a history of overlapping practices and reinterpretations of femininity... [this] coalitional feminist politics [that] requires no unity among women but only loosely overlapping connections" (Stone 4). This argument helps to find a way to discuss women's experiences and activism as a group, even if they personally do not have much in common and would not otherwise be grouped by social or economic categories. Likewise, connections between mothers and daughters are also highly relevant to the study of In the Name of Salomé due to the relationship between Salomé and Camila and how their experiences can be inspirational for other women. In Marianne Hirsch's article about mothering and female identity, she examines various theories on motherhood from theorists such as Adrienne Rich, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray, as well as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. One way she chooses to examine the complex relationship between mother and daughter is through the concept of continuity as espoused by Jung: "Every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter her mother ... Every woman extends backwards into her mother and

forward into her daughter” (Jung quoted in Hirsch, 2009). This interconnectivity is evident in the way the stories of Salomé and Camila are woven together in reverse order throughout Alvarez’s In the Name of Salomé. Camila’s story begins as she is retiring from her teaching duties at Vassar College and sorting through a trunk of her mother’s writings and keepsakes. In order to tell her life story and why she has decided to move to Cuba in the early years of Fidel Castro’s rule, she must tell the story of her family, and especially her mother, Salomé. Her own life story moves backwards until her earliest memories of her mother, then closes with the epilogue where the end of Camila’s story is revealed. The chapters describing Camila’s past are intermingled with Salomé’s chapters, which are told from Salomé’s perspective starting with her childhood and moving onwards until her death. Alvarez uses the titles of Salomé’s poems as the chapter titles, with Salomé’s chapters titled in Spanish and Camila’s in English, however she also uses this to draw connections between specific chapters, as Salomé’s first chapter “El Ave y el Nido” and Camila’s last chapter “Bird and Nest” both apply the meaning of the poem in different ways. Both chapters deal with young girls trying to understand the world full of pain and suffering around them, who hide in an attempt to find safety and peace, yet are unafraid to ask why their lives are in a state of flux. The poem “about a bird flying away because her nest has been disturbed” is reflected in the migratory nature of this family, of the challenge to remain safe when everything around you is in chaos, of the choices one must make in difficult times (Alvarez 329). Likewise, there are other parallel developments such as in their respective chapters “Love and Yearning” and “*Ruin*”, when both Camila and Salomé’s personal desires and choices about love are expressed through their own letters. Other discussions of this work go into further detail about the structure of the novel and the challenges in writing a historical figure into a fictional work. Sirias explores this novel in depth, using literary framework such as plot,

structure and character development to discuss the people, events and themes of In the Name of Salomé. In one section, Sirias discusses the feminist undertones of the novel, in the ways that “the women characters [...] exercise their creative autonomy in a male-dominated culture that operates under the highly restrictive codes of machismo [...] That is why In the Name of Salomé will resonate so strongly among Latinas and other women: it is the story of a renown Dominican poet and her daughter who speak on behalf of an entire population that historically has been without voice” (Sirias 143). This lack of voice is remedied by Alvarez as the protagonists share their memories, experiences, letters and poetry throughout the novel. Issues of gender and societal expectations are very evident during the course of Salomé and Camila’s lives and will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

In review of the novel, Judith Grossman recognizes the difficulty of this topic but closes with exactly the point that I want to explore in this thesis: “And if In the Name of Salomé raises questions about the limitations of historical fiction, leaving me with a hunger for more direct access to the factual record, and less novelistic simplification of so rich a subject, still I’m grateful to Julia Alvarez for bringing Ureña and her daughter this far into the present” (Grossman 6). With the lack of extensive biographical information available regarding the life of Salomé, I find that the novel is actually a richer expansion of the historic record, not a simplification as Grossman phrases it. Literature, specifically historical fiction, should inspire one to look further, and while I can understand her point about the limitations, I feel that this novel fills a very valuable void. By reading this novel, how many people may have learned something new or been inspired, whether about Dominican history, the myriad ways that poetry can be used as political activism, or specifically about the poet Salomé Ureña de Henríquez? I agree that it would have been beneficial to provide a list of sources at the end of the novel, for those who are

interested in further research, and even copies of the complete poems if at all possible. Alvarez mentions a few sources that she used, such as the Epistolario containing personal writings from the Henríquez Ureña family, but due to the age and rarity of some of these documents, they are not easily accessible.

In terms of activism, both Salomé and Camila participated in and contributed to the causes they believed in, such as literacy and freedom for the oppressed. Both women worked hard their entire lives to change the world around them for the better, through methods such as writing politically charged poetry and even participating in active protests and demonstrations. Freedom is always in development, in progress, not just the end result after struggle or oppression, as described by Moya Lloyd when she connects Michel Foucault's political theories to feminism, "For [Foucault], freedom is primarily a practice [...] It is an incessant process; the repeated subversion and transformation of power relations in the production of the self" (Lloyd 246). This continued activism, the desire to write and educate, this search for freedom was a constant for Salomé and Camila's entire lives. According to Alvarez's characterization of Salomé, her poetry was a form of political activism from the very beginning, as she is told early in her life by her father: "A poet puts into words what everyone else is thinking and hasn't the gumption or talent to say" (54). Later in the same chapter, she discusses the notion of poetry as a precursor to action. "In those days of being a colony again, the newspapers were full of poetry. The Spanish censor let anything in rhymed lines pass, and so every patriot turned into a poet. [...] It was the time for poetry, even if it was not the time for liberty. Sometimes I wondered if this didn't make sense after all. The spirit needed to soar when the body was in chains" (55). Salomé initially wrote under the pen name "Herminia" as she had done since she was a young girl writing back and forth with her estranged father. Some of her early poems were published

under this name by a friend with contacts at the newspaper (unplanned by Salomé), but when an imposter published a frivolous poem under her pen name, she decided to submit her next poem “*A la Patria*” directly to the newspaper office and for the first time, she signed her own name.

The opening lines of this poem were anything but subtle, “*Desgarra, Patria mía, el manto que vilmente, / sobre tus hombros puso la bárbara crueldad*” (Ureña de Henríquez, Cantos, 22).

Likewise, in a time of re-colonization, political upheaval and dictators, the following lines from the end of the poem are a clarion call for freedom from oppression:

*que ya tus nuevos hijos se abrazan como hermanos,  
y juran devolverte tu angustia dignidad,  
y entre ellos no se encuentran ni siervos ni tiranos,  
y paz y bien nos brindan unión y libertad. (23)*

Throughout Salomé’s life, she continued writing poetry that could have been considered seditious, yet it was allowed, even while many who opposed the regimes were exiled. In some cases, her poems were used as propoganda by Dominican leaders, even by those Salomé was speaking out against (in the case of Lilís). It is evident in both Alvarez’s novel and in existing poetry sources that much more attention and praise is lavished on Salomé’s political works, rather than her more intimate poems. While her personal poems are in themselves a form of activism, giving voice to a woman’s desires and disappointments, they were also a challenge to the expected gender roles of the time. The struggle to be recognized as both a poet and a woman, as well as trying to negotiate her public and private identities will be discussed further in the section related to gender roles.

In the novel, Salomé expresses disenchantment with using poetry to effect change due to continued political oppression, so she began to focus her attentions on education to develop the future minds of their long-suffering country. As portrayed by Alvarez, the poem “Sombras”

served as her “farewell to poetry. No more anthems, no more hymns to the republic. I had other important work to do” (187). With lines such as: “*Venid, que el alma siente / morir la fe que al porvenir aguarda*” and later “*la ilusión por el bien acariciada, / y huye la luz de inspiración fecunda, / y la noche del alma me circunda*”, her disappointment and sadness are evident (Ureña de Henríquez, Cantos, 76-7). With the support of her family and friend/philosopher Eugenio María de Hostos, she opened the *Instituto de Señoritas* to train young women in the sciences and literature in the hopes that they would become teachers themselves. Prior to the opening of her school, many girls in town had only attended a religious school that taught them to read the catechism (but not write) and learn skills such as knitting, using a fan in the correct manner, and what to wear to a formal dinner (J. Alvarez, Salomé 16, 50). Salomé’s institute has continued educating young minds and is now known as the “*Instituto Superior de Formación Docente Salome Ureña*” (ISFODOSU.EDU.DO). Born into a family of writers and educators, Salomé had learned the value of education and become respected for her role as the muse of the nation, so her shift into education was a new way to create and inspire change. While they struggled to remain open with decreasing funds from the government and increasing political pressure, Salomé worked to educate these young girls who would later carry on her legacy. Alvarez discusses this transition in her novel when Salomé’s pupils present their worries that she gave up her poetry for them, to which Salomé explains “my silence has nothing to do with them. My country’s sufferings, its falls, and lapses are the primary cause. – You cannot know yet – I tell them – young as you are, how deeply one can love one’s country” (220). This love for country not only motivated Salomé’s actions, but also those of her children as they struggled to find their own identities and continue her fight for a better future. In the novel, Alvarez demonstrates a parallel between love for one’s country and for one’s family through the

portrayal of the tumultuous relationship between Salomé's parents. Her mother Gregoria was strong enough to leave her cheating husband and buy a house with her sisters, yet she still loved him for the rest of his life (21-3, 99). The strained relationship between Salomé and her husband, Pancho, also takes the forefront, especially when she discovers his own infidelities while studying abroad in Paris (231, 256). This imperfect love, of loving someone even though they break your heart, can be seen in the bittersweet sentiment of love for a country that struggles to right itself, time and time again, with leaders that perpetuate past mistakes and remaining ever hopeful that this time things will be different.

Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña chose a different path of activism when she actively participated in protests, published feminist writings, and moved to Cuba after her retirement from U.S. academia to "join a revolution", yet poetry and education were still very important tools for her (47). Camila's real-life connection to Cuba (as discussed by Alvarez and in various articles by Daisy Cocco de Filippis) started at a young age when her father moved the family to the neighboring island after Salomé's death. During Dictator Fulgencio Batista's rule in Cuba, she founded a resistance group with some friends, naming it the Lyceum Lawn and Tennis Club as a cover. They organized protests and pushed for women's and students' rights even as Batista's regime became more restrictive (152). In the novel, Camila compares their work making banners and slogans to Salomé's poetry, questioning the effectiveness of words as a form of protest: "They are fighting the monster with toy swords, bright banners that announce, GIVE US THE VOTE! FREE CUBA! MARTI'S AMERICA NOW! But what else have they to fight with? she wonders. Even her heroine mother could only come up with poems" (147). When Camila is offered a position at Vassar College, she and Pedro discuss the use of poetry in

fighting for freedom. Pedro explains: “It’s all the same fight, Camila, don’t you see? Martí fought Cuba from New York, Máximo Gómez fought Lilís from Cuba” and he further clarifies:

I am continuing the fight. I am defending the last outpost [...] Poetry [...] I am defending it with my pen. It is a small thing, I know, but those are the arms I was given. Defending it because it encodes our purest soul, the blueprint for the new man, the new woman. Defending it against the bought pens, the dictators, the impersonators, the well-meaning but lacking in talent. (125)

It seems an apt comparison that even as Salomé doubted the effectiveness of her poetry after so many years of national struggle, her children are exploring and recognizing literacy and poetry as another facet of activism. In the novel as Camila reaches her later years, she comes to the decision that she must stand for what she believes just as her mother did before her. In considering her retirement plans and Fidel Castro’s request for teachers and doctors, she writes “I think it is time now to go back and be a part of what my mother started” (35). Rather than focus on the political and ideological motivations behind the Cuban and Dominican revolutions, Alvarez seems to connect the two countries and women with their struggles for literacy for the oppressed. Salomé worked for the education of young women, while Camila’s fight in Cuba focused on the education of the peasants. In her return to Cuba, Camila’s purpose is education and she explains her motivation for being there: “For I had never thought of the real revolution as the one Fidel was commanding. The real revolution could only be won by the imagination. When one of my newly literate students picked up a book and read with hungry pleasure, I knew we were one step closer to the patria we all wanted” (347). A few pages later, Camila likens this spread of literacy to a continuation and expansion of Salomé’s *instituto* and motivation that everyone should have the opportunity to learn (349). Activism through literature and education was not only a hallmark of the Henríquez Ureña family, but many other Latin American exiles



who fought for their country the only way they could, through inspirational words and preparing young minds to imagine a better future.

Camila's actual writings about the history of feminism as well as women's roles in relation to cultural development supports the idea that public issues are connected to those in the private realm. In a fragment of Camila's essay "Feminismo" (published by Daisy Cocco de Filippis), Camila discusses the difficulties women face even as they gain more rights:

[W]oman has gained ground; but as she finds herself in a moment of transition; [...] She has acquired the burden of life outside the home without freeing herself altogether from domestic ones [...] Woman has a right to be educated; but economic conditions allow only some to do so. She has the right to work; but the scarcity of employment opportunities oblige her to prostitute herself. (quoted in Cocco de Filippis, Olviden, 70)

These conflicts and connections between public and private life will be further explored in the next section, however it is evident in both Camila and Salomé's lives how their opportunities and expectations can be closely intertwined. She also mentions the relationship between women's rights and fighting for the rights of all, as well as how women can move forward:

The time that we have been given to live is that of knocking down barriers, clearing obstacles, demolishing so that building can take place later, in all aspects, to construct a new life in the relationships between human beings. There is a ground, however, where we women have to build now: our interior. Our traditional virtues have been negative: submission, obedience, silence, separation, fragility. The functions of the new life we glimpse demand of us positive qualities: independence of mind, serenity, a spirit of cooperation, a feeling of human community. That is very difficult. (quoted in Cocco de Filippis, Olviden, 71)

As many of the examples in this thesis will show, activism by women for a multitude of social and political issues can also improve and affect their personal rights and vice versa. Camila was honored posthumously for her work in the field of feminism and women's studies in 1994, the one hundred year anniversary of her birth, by the creation of a literary award for Latin American women essayists and the publication of their work in Mujeres Latinoamericanas: Historia y Cultura Siglos XVI al XIX (Campuzano).

The gendered nature of political activism during the time of Salomé and Camila, as shown in their struggles to define identity, societal expectations and gender roles, is approached by Alvarez in various ways. Both women also had to deal with conflicts between their public and private personas, such as the perceived roles and images put upon them by the public and/or family as well as defining who they truly were inside. Scott's concepts of "her-story" and social history are applicable in this discussion of public/private identities and gender expectations. Throughout the novel, we can see how the sum of the parts contribute to the entire history, "asserting that "personal, subjective experience" matters as much as "public and political activities," indeed that the former influence the latter" (Scott, Gender, 20). Fictional historical novels such as In the Name of Salomé attempt to explore this complicated relationship between public historical knowledge and the personal lives of these women. While Salomé accomplished much in a time of few women writers, she still lived in a patriarchal society concerned with image and how she would be portrayed both during her lifetime and posthumously. The revision and censorship of Salomé's poems by male relatives are referenced by Alvarez, first when her husband, Pancho, edits her poems for an upcoming publication, changing "brilliant palms" to "fecund palms" because as he says "Trust me, Salomé, I have your future in mind" (170). Later when Camila is conversing with her Aunt Mon (Ramona Ureña), she discovers that Salomé's original un-edited poems have been preserved by her sister (282). Salomé's son Pedro also continues this censorship when he prepares a new edition of her works and leaves out her "'Personal Poems," [...] as if that diminishes their value" (243-4) In rejecting her own words and phrasing, the men in her family were shaping her poetry and thereby her image to what they thought it should be, rather than how she truly was. Even in her portrait commissioned by her husband after her death and in later official representations such as a commemorative postal

stamp and the D.R. 500 Pesos bill, she is shown as more beautiful and is depicted with a lighter skin tone than the mulatto woman she actually was in real life. Camila explains her father's actions: "He wanted my mother to look like the legend *he* was creating" and later "But it was not just Pancho. Everyone in the family – yes, including Mon! – touched up the legend of her mother" (44). In some of the chapters narrated by Salomé, she discusses the disconnect between her image as the muse of the nation and whether they really looked at her, as she explained: "They don't love *me*, Ramona, They love *la poetisa*, if you can even call it love" (92) and later regarding an early admirer, "He was seeing the famous poetisa [...] He was not seeing me, Salomé, of the funny nose and big ears with hunger in her eyes and Africa in her skin and hair" (94). This issue even comes up in a discussion with her husband about her personal poems when he finally admits to her "You're right, Salomé. I sometimes confuse my muse with my wife" to which she replies "I want to be both" (177). This multiplicity/conflict of identity is not only something that the famous and well-known have to confront, but also any person that has various roles in their life. In Salomé's case, her identity and image were shaped by being a poet, wife, patriot, mother, muse, lover, *la poetisa*, woman, educator, daughter, sister, and all the myriad of roles she took on and were put upon her.

Regarding the specific gender roles and expectations that Salomé dealt with in her life, the concept of a woman writing political poetry in that time was unusual and unexpected. Before she was revealed as Herminia, a family friend commented that "whoever this Herminia was, she was going to bring down the regime with pen and paper" (62). Her aunt Ana proposed that "This Herminia is a warrior [...] In fact, my theory is that Herminia is really a man, hiding behind a woman's skirt" (63). This quote also brings up the aforementioned possibility that she was allowed more leeway in her rebellious writings than a man would in the same situation; why else

would one need to hide “behind a woman’s skirt”? The novel suggests that even later after she put her own name to the poems and was recognized with the national medal of poetry, she would still be measured against the achievements of men. Words of praise were sometimes still phrased in patriarchal ways: “I bowed my head, acknowledging the applause [...] a man’s voice cried out, “What a man that woman is!” It was meant to be a compliment, I suppose” (141). Phrases such as this have not been lost even in modern times, when we hear women praised for “having the balls to do something” or just as often used in negative terms such as “she wears the pants in the family”, as if her role as leader of the family is something subversive or immasculating. When Pancho diminishes the importance of her more intimate poems, Salomé vehemently replies “I am a woman as well as a poet” (177) which defines not only her conflicted public/private life but even the struggle within her own household to carry multiple identities on her shoulders.

In a time where women writers were rare, it was even more controversial for one to publish poems about her intimate feelings and desires. Alvarez comments on the rigidity of social norms and behavior codes through the portrayal of Salomé’s expression of desire for her future husband. As she was becoming acquainted with Pancho during a biology lesson, she begins to acknowledge her own feelings, even if she does not yet take action. The internal conflict with her own desire and the social mores of the time is apparent in her musing: “How I yearned to touch him! But I had been raised in a country where national heroines tied their skirts down as they were about to be executed. I did not know that it was possible for a woman to reach over and touch a man’s arm of her own accord” (139). Just a short time later, in response to his poem, she unleashes her innermost sentiments in a poem even while foreseeing the controversy it would cause. Alvarez captures this conflict when she describes Salomé’s feelings

upon writing "*Quejas*": "It was as if by lifting my pen, I had released the woman inside me and let her be free on paper. But even as I wrote, I knew such frank passions in a woman were not permissible" (143). As an extension of this quote by Alvarez, we can refer back to Cixous and her discussion of recovering one's body through writing about her self (261). By the release of her true self through her writing, Salomé rejects the societal repression of a woman's desires, much in line with Cixous' statement that when you "Censor the body ... you censor breath and speech at the same time" (262). While she did not originally plan to publish the poem, a neighborhood scandal forced her to question the inequality and unfairness of gender expectations at the time, "Why was it all right for a man to satisfy his passion, but for a woman to do so was as good as signing her death warrant? There was another revolution to be fought if our patria was to be truly free" (145). With the publication of her poem "*Quejas*", viewpoints varied as to whether it was even the same Salomé who published such patriotic tributes or if she still deserved the poetry medal, yet others appreciated the expression of how a woman feels when falling in love (145). Even when researching this thesis, it was difficult to access "*Quejas*" and her more personal poems, since they had been excluded from published collections of her poems, such as Cantos A La Patria: Coleccion Parnaso Dominicano and others. Recent publications of her poetry online by the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra and in a 2012 version by Ediciones Chiringa have made an effort to include the breadth of her poetry. The passion of this poem is evident in every stanza, her love, the agony of waiting for him to return, and the hope that he will return her feelings. In her article about Salomé's poetry and feminist sentiment, Vicioso reproduces a section of Salomé's poem "*Quejas*" that really explores the depth of a woman's ardor:

*Deja que al vivo acento  
que de tus labios encendidos brota,  
mi corazón sediento,  
que en pos va siempre de ilusión ignota,  
presienta enajenado  
las glorias todas de tu edén soñado.* (quoted in Vicioso 72)

The use of such words as “burning lips”, “thirst”, and “the glories of your paradise” immediately bring to mind sensuality and unquenchable lust; there is little subtlety in the anguish and desire expressed in this poem. This poem also expresses another part of Salomé’s identity, her feelings as a woman and the realization that the words help her access hidden parts of herself, as Alvarez phrases it, “Perhaps by writing my poem, I had discovered that I had a body” (146). Salomé went on to write other personal poems, such as “*Amor y Anheló*”, “*Mi Pedro*”, “*Melancolía*”, and “*Tristeza*”, about being a mother, the pain of betrayal and other intimate experiences. Salomé’s use of poetry to express her sexuality fits well with Audre Lorde’s interpretation of what she calls the “power of the erotic”: “The erotic is a resource [...] firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (339). I also believe Salomé’s use of language as way to find power in a patriarchal system fits with Foucault’s assertions regarding the power of discourse: “The object, in short, is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world [...] to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak” (11). The mere action of speaking about her desires gives her power in an otherwise patriarchal society, her poetry gives her a voice to express not only her feelings but also the experiences of any woman falling in love. The dominant (patriarchal) discourse of her time did not allow or encourage this expression of female sexuality or desire, which is why these poems were considered to be more controversial and omitted from some future publications of her

work. Her intimate poetry clearly shows a wealth of passion, jealousy, love, anger, and all the complex emotions that cannot be denied, even if polite society did not choose to speak of them.

Alvarez draws numerous parallels between the lives and experiences of Salomé and her daughter, Camila; as Camila reflects on her mother's desires, struggles and motivations, she finds the hidden parts of herself, exploring her own identity and destiny. Dianna Taylor's phrasing of a Foucaultian concept of identity is especially applicable: "identity is not simply given; rather, it is a product of one's relationships with oneself, others, and the world" (Taylor 253). By telling the story of her mother and family, Camila explains who she is and has become, and at the same time engages in the process of becoming. In both the structure of the novel and Camila's own personal narrative, her identity is inextricably tied to that of her mother. Even her name is not purely her own, she is Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña, forever reminded of her mother every time her full name is mentioned. Alvarez has situated the novel as a trip down memory lane for Camila, as she sorts through a trunk of mementos and writings from her mother's life and remembers her own childhood. The memories and stories are used as a method to explore the lives of Salomé and Camila, but also to show that this is how Camila defines herself. In the beginning of the novel, as Camila is starting her roadtrip with Marion to Florida, she is discussing her reasons for returning to Cuba in the midst of the revolution. "I have to go back a ways, [...] I have to start with Salomé [...] which means at the birth of *la patria*, since they were both born about the same time" (7-8). To which Marion reasonably replies, "I thought you were finally going to talk about yourself" and Camila answers "I *am* talking about myself" (8). Throughout the chapters, even though Camila has become a respected educator and has even written poems herself, she always compares herself to her family and comes up short. Even the project of sorting through the family history seems ironic to her, "she, the nobody among

them, will be the one editing the story of her famous family” (38). As the daughter of a President and national Poetess, as the sister of two well-known writers (albeit one within the Trujillo regime), she sees herself as a “nobody”, the one in the background. When she was asked to speak at various functions celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her mother’s birth, Camila’s perceived inferiority is an instant reaction yet still a source of internal conflict, as Alvarez writes: “She is, after all, the anonymous one, the one who has done nothing remarkable. But – and this annoys her – she is in demand for sentimental reasons, the daughter who lost her mother” (69). She finally finds her own voice when a young student challenges her complacency and lack of passion, that she has forgotten where she came from and what her mother stood for. Alvarez demonstrates this important step when Camila changes her presentation about Salomé Ureña at the last moment to connect Salomé’s activism to current events by actually addressing the problems of the Trujillo regime, which was dangerous at a time when exiles as far as New York were still gunned down by the regime’s long reach and Camila’s own brother Max held a government post. “All her life she has had to think first of her words’ effect on the important roles her father and brothers and uncles and cousins were playing for the world. Her own opinions were reserved for texts, for roundtables on women’s contributions to the colonies” (J. Alvarez 85). This contrast between public and private can also be seen in the publication of Salomé’s and Camila’s works; while Salomé published in public avenues such as newspapers and books during her lifetime, Camila kept her opinions to the more private realm of academia. Camila is definitely more of an enigma, even as she tells us of her loves, travels and memories, we don’t really know as much about her compared to what we learn about Salomé. From the beginning, their lives were tied together even though Salomé was physically absent for most of Camila’s life. She faces this realization at the end of her life, when she shares her earliest



memories after Salomé's death and how her brother told her that her mother would always remain in their hearts (320) and how she maintained that connection by explaining:

I learned her story. I put it side by side with my own. I wove our two lives together as strong as a rope and with it I pulled myself out of the pit of depression and self-doubt. [...] at last I found her the only place we ever find the dead: among the living. Mamá was alive and well in Cuba, where I struggled with others to build the kind of country she had dreamed of. (335)

As discussed previously in regards to Alvarez's portrayal, this connection to the Cuban Revolution is limited to expanding literacy to all, rather than focusing on specific ideological motivations. Both Salomé and Camila lived under and were affected by dictatorships (such as Baez, Lilis, and Trujillo in the D.R. and Batista in Cuba) and made their political contributions through literature and education. Again, Freire's view of the inherent connection between politics and education are relevant, as discussed by Roberts: "Whether in formal or informal settings, learning always builds in some way on the past and is necessarily shaped by the social structures of the present" (57). All lives, identities, experiences and memories are shaped by those around them, as exemplified by the structure of this book and the relationship between Camila's identity and Salomé.

While little is written about Camila in her biographical information (and nothing specifically about her sexuality), Alvarez had access to private family letters and documents, so the choice to portray Camila's conflicted desire for other women is an interesting one. For the Camila of the novel, gender roles and expectations were closely tied to her sexuality and desire as well, but in this case she faces them in a different way than Salomé did with her poems and familial roles. As portrayed by Alvarez, Camila's attraction to women starts at a young age, when she feels strangely possessive about a classmate that her brother Max is flirting with, "Why can't he find a girlfriend his own age?" (286) and how she hides her secret feelings, those "funny

sensations she has when they have sat together in bed, propped up on pillows, reading her mother's poems" (288). In the same way that Salomé's expression of desire via poetry crossed a new frontier, Camila's desire was also revolutionary and risky to reveal, both in regard to her family's expectations and her own. She meets Marion Reed while teaching in graduate school at the University of Minnesota, on the first day of Spanish class. It is Marion who first phrases it poetically, "From the beginning, I was drawn to you. It was like putting a face on love" (242). Camila begins to ponder if this was the reason she has struggled with her own capacity to love, because she had always assumed it would be a man that would inspire those feelings. This assumption of heterosexuality is discussed by Adrienne Rich: "The lie of compulsory female heterosexuality today afflicts not just feminist scholarship, but every profession (...) every relationship or conversation over which it hovers (...) The lie keeps numberless women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality into a prescribed script because they cannot look beyond the parameters of the acceptable" (244). In a strongly traditional and patriarchal society like the Dominican Republic, Camila was repressed by societal and familial expectations, as well as her own "parameters of the acceptable" as Rich phrases it, so much that her desire for Marion could not overcome these obstacles.

Camila's brother Pedro, also working at the university, soon suspects that she is involved with someone and even follows her at night to discover where she goes. Her secret is finally revealed when her brother follows her and barges in, only to discover her in the arms of Marion, rather than some mysterious man (244-5, 251). Even after Camila returns to her family in Cuba and Marion follows her there, Pedro warns the family that she is a bad influence, but does not reveal the true nature of Camila and Marion's relationship (109). Throughout Camila's life, she struggles with her feelings toward Marion as they ebb and flow in and out of each others lives, at

times missing her tremendously and at others trying to move on with her life (73-83). Later in life, Camila recognizes the importance of Marion in her life yet still does not accept a future with her: “Marion already played the best part, the glorious first love forever preserved in her memory. But Marion has outlived her role [...] A woman who no longer commands Camila’s imagination, but who takes over everything else” (83). She also has a few relationships with men along the way, in the case of Major Scott Andrews when the family briefly lived in Washington D.C. and later in Cuba with a sculptor, Domingo. When considering Major Scott’s proposal, she sees “the future everyone expects of her. She will live in a house [...] She will bear children [...] She will kiss her husband [...] Already she feels bored with this version of what is coming” (205). Throughout her life, she fights against her own desires and tries to justify it to herself, such as when she first met Domingo in Cuba. “What do I do about Domingo? Isn’t he proof that her feelings for Marion were an anomaly?” (161) and yet when she takes that final intimate step with him, “she does not want him to see the cloud of doubt that is descending upon her [...] She is revolted by his big hands [...] when everytime he touches her she cringes” (166). Even in her retirement, free of parents’ judgements and more sure of herself, Camila still chooses a life without Marion (77) and finally admits that something was missing, “She used to blame herself: she was not committed enough to Marion. Now she suspects she was not committed enough to living in this country [...] It is a mystery how the heart gets free. And perhaps there is a kind of quiet courage to waiting until it does” (35). Camila found her true passion at last, not in a person, but in the education of those in Cuba, a struggling country not unlike her own homeland. Alvarez discusses her own struggles with balancing her work with her personal life, in delaying her writing for the sake of following expectations: “Get married while you’re still young and pretty (...) That is what they said. You can always write, as if writing

were some automatic skill you could pick up when you wanted. As if you did not have to give your whole life over to it (...) With each marriage, I put aside my writing” (J. Alvarez, Something to Declare: Essays<sup>11</sup> 142) and later “I had never been successful at picking a lover with whom I could be both a wife and a writer” (J. Alvarez, Essays 144). In the novel, both Salomé and Camila struggle with balancing roles and fully committing to their work while maintaining personal connections, which is perhaps based on their own letters and history as well as Alvarez’s experiences as a woman and writer.

Although this next quote is used in reference to Camila’s earlier relationship with Major Scott Andrews and the choices people make when in love, it is equally applicable to the resolution of her life in the U.S. and her rebirth in Cuba, “better the heart that chooses, she thinks, than the heart that keeps itself aloof, safely, in indecision” (201). She has finally made her choice in life, to move on from romantic desires and devote herself to freedom and literacy, thereby completing her mother’s mission and making it her own. Some people find passion in their personal relationships, while others focus their lives on their public contributions and accomplishments. In this exploration of Camila, we can see that she truly found and accepted herself in her role as educator and daughter, rather than in the more intimate roles in her life. She finally resolves Salomé’s original question, “What is a patria?” when she explains, “It was wrong to think there was an answer in the first place [...] There are no answers [...] It’s continuing to struggle to create the country we dream of that makes a patria out of the land under our feet. That much I learned from my mother” (350).

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<sup>11</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as J. Alvarez, Essays in citations

This struggle to create identity and country is evident not only throughout the fictionalized lives of Salomé and Camila, but also in Alvarez's choice to use memories and fiction to honor these women as historical actors, by telling their story and giving them a voice. Fictional historical novels can help to fill the void between the pages of history and the imagined daily lives of the women therein. Both history and fiction can be considered to be a constructed view of life. History is limited to basic facts which can be expanded and proven by documentation, while fiction allows for an imagination of the world they lived in, a fleshing out of the possible experiences and sentiment behind the poetry and writings. Ricoeur's discussion of the limitations of "historical representation" are summarized by Pellauer, when he asks us to consider two possibilities: "Have the available cultural forms of representation become so exhausted they no longer work? Are there events that by their very nature resist representation, even while they cry out for it?" (Pellauer 119) The absence of women's names and experiences within the historical record does create a certain resistance, a difficulty in representing their activism since we can only imagine their motivations. We must extend the definition of activism to include new activities and methods so their voices can be heard and their contributions recognized. In my opinion, it is not that the current forms of representation do not entirely work (such as established historical accounts), but rather that there are ways to expand this knowledge to new audiences and gain a fuller understanding of all the things that could have influenced that history. In exploring the lives of Salomé and Camila through fiction, their fictionalized voices create a new representation of not only themselves, but other women who struggle to balance the roles and expectations in their lives. This expansion of Salomé and Camila's experiences and stories to a broader group of women is a concrete example of the genealogical and coalitional connections discussed by Stone earlier in this chapter. Their story can become our story, it can

inspire us to speak up and use whatever resources we have to fight for a better life for ourselves and others. Activism can “make change happen” as Blackburn defines it (Blackburn 5), and can even set the stage for change, which is exemplified in the lives of Salomé and Camila as portrayed by Alvarez in this novel.

#### **4 FROM POLITICAL CONCIIOUSNESS TO MOBILIZATION IN JULIA ALVAREZ'S IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES AND ÁNGELA HERNÁNDEZ'S CHARAMICOS**

While the last chapter discussed how literature and education can be forms of activism, the protagonists examined in this chapter mobilize and join revolutionary and political movements, that is they “organize and encourage people to act in a concerted way in order to bring about a particular political objective” (Oxford Dictionaries). This mobilization, demonstrated in these novels in the forms of organizing opposition groups, participating in protests, building bombs, storing arms, etc. is active and political by its very nature. However, the Dominican women in these novels are “politically mobilizable for certain purposes at certain times, but without aspiring to leadership or power” as Gail W. Lapidus discusses in reference to Soviet women’s activism (90). In Lapidus’ study of the different types of mobilization and participation of women in the Soviet Union during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many parallels can be drawn to the Dominican situation, such as living under authoritarian governments, changing roles of women and finding ways to participate politically in their society. The Dominican women activists within these novels were fighting against oppressive governments, not to take control themselves or lead the country, but for specific goals such as change in the leadership of their country and a more egalitarian system. Julia Alvarez’s novel In the Time of the Butterflies fictionalizes the lives of perhaps the most famous of Dominican women activists, the Mirabal sisters and their struggle against Trujillo. Charamicos, by Ángela Hernández, uses fictional characters to explore more recent women’s activism during the Balaguer years. While the stories occur in different time periods and under different leaders, comparisons can also be made between not only the female protagonists but also the leaders they oppose, Dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, who controlled the country from 1930-1961, and Dr. Joaquín

Balaguer, who managed to overcome his ties to the Trujillo regime and rule as President from 1966-1978 and 1986-1996 (Moya Pons, History, 357, 391-444). Both Alvarez and Hernández expand on the established history and myths of their country, to show women as a “people with agency”, as Scott phrases it (“Experience”, 31). Further, regarding Scott’s discussion of women’s history, these novels demonstrate her concept of connecting “the personal with the political, for the lived experience of women is seen as leading directly to resistance to oppression” (“Experience”, 31). By fictionalizing the lives of women activists during the Trujillo and Balaguer eras, the authors create a space for their daily lives and experiences within their growing activism and mobilization, which we will explore in this chapter.

While In the Time of the Butterflies has received extensive critical attention, it is the quintessential example of how literature deepens our understanding of Dominican women’s political activism. Alvarez’s novel explores the lives of the Mirabal sisters and how ordinary women join in the fight for political change, and become such a threat to the patriarchal political system that they are killed. Elizabeth Manley discusses the problematic situation for women during the Trujillo era in her dissertation, especially how their rights and roles were curtailed and controlled by the regime. She quotes a family friend of the Mirabals, Ángel Concepción Lajara as saying that: “the reason Trujillo took such drastic action was because [Minerva] Mirabal was “the only woman that he could not bend into submission and make his own”” (Manley 24). Alvarez also shows this escalation when an uncle comes to visit the Mirabal sisters and relays a statement directly from Trujillo that “my only two problems are the damn church and the Mirabal sisters” (281). This lack of submission on the part of the Mirabals is in direct conflict with Trujillo’s strong emphasis on masculinity and virility throughout his reign. While the Mirabals are not directly mentioned, an article by Lauren Derby presents a view into his



relationships with the women in his life, as both a family man and seducer of innocents. Charamicos is set during a more recent, controversial period and has received scant critical attention, with the exception of book reviews and author interviews published in the Dominican Republic. It provides an interesting comparison to Alvarez's work, in terms of setting, style, audience, and the writers' subject position in or outside of the Dominican Republic. With respect to setting, state crimes against their own citizenry, widespread corruption and political repression are all hallmarks of both the Trujillo and Balaguer regimes, yet the recent nature and continued influence of Balaguer into the 2000s have delayed the investigation and analysis of his offenses. In one of Balaguer's own books, Memorias de un Cortesano de la "Era de Trujillo", he leaves a blank page in place of the true story concerning the case of Orlando Martínez Howley, a journalist who spoke out against Balaguer and was murdered in 1975. His poetic explanation of this omission "*Callada, como una tumba cuyo secreto a voces se levantara, acusador, cuando el tiempo permita levantar la losa bajo la cual permanece yacente la verdad*" and his desire to hide the details (which have yet to be released) until after his own death are appalling (Balaguer 333). How was Balaguer able to put his obstruction of justice (at the very least) in writing and yet face no consequences and be able to evade/circumvent proper investigations? While the actual shooters were found guilty at trial in 2000, they were released in 2002 and those behind the act were never revealed (MacKinnon 187; Ortiz; PFC/IFEX). Writing about both eras, still so present in many Dominicans' memories, requires sensitivity and bravery, since both victims and oppressors may still be living, not to mention everyone touched indirectly by the tragedies. Still, the Balaguer period is much more controversial and recent.

Published interviews with the authors can also help us to understand their influences and determination to tell these important stories. Ángela Hernández states in an interview with Zaida

Corniel for the Dominican newspaper *Diario Libre*, “*Y poco se ha escrito sobre la historia, porque nuestra historia parece una ficción*” (Corniel). This powerful statement, “our history appears to be a fiction,” is especially applicable for not only Charamicos, but also in relation to the theme of this thesis, in that Dominican women writers are using fiction to fill in gaps in the history of their country. A clear connection between history and fiction lies in the authors’ choices to write fictional novels based on or inspired by real Dominican women activists whose stories are missing or minimized in the history of the D.R. With little actual historical documentation surviving about these women, there is ample room for the development of an expanded social history, a strategy described by Scott earlier in the historical chapter of this thesis. However, we can also see the blurry line between history and fiction in recorded Dominican history, which was written and shaped by the victors and oppressors, such as the official stories released by the regimes and the texts used to construct the notion of *Dominicanidad*. There is a long history of Latin American and Dominican leaders, such as Trujillo and Balaguer, using literature, poetry, and other academic and cultural devices to further their propaganda and “rewrite the history of the nation” (Journal of the Research Group on Socialism and Democracy Online 3). Recent works such as Divergent Dictions by Néstor E. Rodríguez and Desde La Orilla by Silvio Torres-Saillant et al are reexamining the dominant version of *Dominicanidad* in relation to ethnic identity even as women authors previously mentioned in this thesis are exploring the hidden roles of women and their contributions to Dominican history. When Julia Alvarez was visiting the D.R. and beginning her research on the Mirabal sisters, she tells us that “I wanted to understand the living, breathing women who had faced all the difficult challenges and choices of those terrible years. I believed that only by making them real, alive, could I make them mean anything to the rest of us” (J. Alvarez, Essays

203). Fiction allowed these women to come to life, to tell their stories and bring them to new audiences who could discover inspiration and find courage in their own lives. In returning to Scott, the establishment of “women as historical actors” requires this fictional examination of the specific social experiences that women such as the Mirabals bring to the historical record (Gender 25). Through fiction, we can better understand their place in history.

A brief discussion of the characters within each novel and their relationship to history may provide a context for interpreting their experiences and literary portrayal. Again, I return to the preliminary questions from my introductory chapter as I analyze these novels: 1) how the works revise or expand on the traditional interpretation of political activism 2) how the works honor women historical actors, giving them a voice and 3) what the works reveal about the gendered nature of political activism. In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez explores the lives of real-life Dominican women activists and many of the novel’s other characters and events can be found in the pages of history as well. She tells the story of the Mirabal sisters in stages that include: childhood experiences, the excitement of growing up, the loss of innocence that comes with adulthood and awareness of the dangerous times they were living in, and finally taking action against injustice and oppression. Alvarez herself explains in the postscript, “So what you will find here are the Mirabals of my creation, made up but, I hope, true to the spirit of the real Mirabals” (324). While this is clearly a work of fiction, it also works as a bridge to the history of their country, since it is possible to research their stories and major life events. Patria Mirabal de González, Minerva Mirabal de Tavárez, and María Teresa “Mate” Mirabal de Guzmán fought against Trujillo and lost their lives on November 25, 1960. Their sister, Bélgica Adela “Dedé” Mirabal de Fernandez, survived to tell their stories and was actually interviewed by Julia Alvarez in her preparation for writing this novel. The personal feelings and motivations

explored in this novel may be fictional, but it is equally important to remember that these characters are based on real women who lived and died in their fight for freedom from oppression. The novel begins during their childhood, but focuses more on their young adult years as they become more actively involved against the Trujillo regime. All four of the sisters share their voices in the novel, as each chapter is written from their different viewpoints and their journeys to activism take various paths. The use of diary entries to further the story, especially from Mate during her time at school and again in prison, also gives us a glimpse into their experiences, hopes and dreams, pains and disappointments. (J. Alvarez, Butterflies; Moya Pons, History)

Charamicos, by Ángela Hernández, takes a different approach to women's role in Dominican history. This novel tells of the lives of two young fictional women at university, Trinidad and Ercira, far from their rural origins and learning about life, love, science and revolution. Most chapters are written from Trinidad's point of view, as she becomes more involved in university life and political activism, while others are told from an unnamed 3<sup>rd</sup> person who is observing both Ercira's home life prior to her university years and her experiences and political meetings at college. Since these characters and most of the others mentioned in the novel are fictional creations, it is more difficult to connect their experiences to specific historical events and activists. However, even without direct references to historical figures, this view of history still portrays the difficulties of growing up during the Balaguer years and the risks inherent in speaking out against injustices and oppression. Since Dr. Joaquín Balaguer's period of rule was so recent and is still largely unanalyzed, it is understandably difficult to name those involved in the atrocities, even in a fictional setting, since court cases are still coming up today to investigate the violence that occurred in that era. At the present time, investigations into the

death of Colonel Francisco Alberto Caamaño Deño are ongoing, even on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death (R. Alvarez; Medina). It is very telling that Hernández started this novel in 1992, but stopped and waited to finish it because “*Ahora pienso que no tenía suficiente distancia del período a que hago alusión. Tuvo que morir Balaguer para que yo viera la reacción de tanta gente, que fue víctima del mismo Balaguer y que luego tuvo una reacción de sumisión a su figura*” (Corniel). There was potentially great risk in writing and publishing the novel while Balaguer was still alive and maintaining his political influence over the country. He was president until 1996, but was still a major presence in governmental and cultural arenas until his death in 2002. It is understandable that Hernández would also need sufficient time to examine her own feelings and experiences during Balaguer’s rule before being able to write about this era. Likewise, the Dominican people were still trying to process their own reactions after this fresh loss of such an imposing presence. Even today, there has also not been enough time or distance from that era to find justice for those who were killed or “disappeared”, as evidenced by the very recent trials and investigations. The novel’s setting is one that many Dominicans can identify with as they remember their times at the *Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo* (UASD) in the 1970s and the riots that occurred, while their children also grew up during Balaguer’s reign. Hopefully, as more crimes are investigated and perpetrators are punished, the fear will subside and more Dominicans will be able to write about their recent history, such as a recent dissertation by Ana S.Q. Liberato which discusses both the positive and negative views of Balaguer’s leadership, and a book published by Christian Krohn-Hansen that explores political and social development under Trujillo and Balaguer. In the case of Charamicos, the characters are used to symbolize those who did fight for freedom, especially those who fought against the regime, and to honor those who lost their lives. According to Corniel’s interview with the

author, the name of the primary narrator, Trinidad, was chosen to honor María Trinidad Sánchez, who was involved in the earlier struggles for Dominican independence, and the other main character, Ercira, was named after Sagrario Ercira Díaz Santiago, who was a student leader and activist killed during a police raid of the UASD campus in 1972. In a separate interview between Hernández and journalist Fernando Quiroz, it is mentioned that two of the male characters were also inspired by freedom fighters during the Balaguer era, Amaury German Aristy (for the character Aridio Hormelo) and Colonel Francisco Alberto Caamaño Deñó (for the character Hombre-Brújula). It is interesting that one of the few real-life names that the author uses in the novel is Balaguer, who appears not as a character, but more of an unseen threat, much like his ghost that still haunts the Dominican people. This use of fictionalized characters definitely conveys the difficulty of growing up under Balaguer's regime; however it also makes it more difficult for readers to draw direct connections between the people and events in Charamicos and their historical counterpoints. (R. Alvarez; Corniel; Hernández; Kershaw; Medina; Quiroz; Sanchez)

In keeping with the trajectory of my thesis, we will first examine how these two works, In the Time of the Butterflies and Charamicos, revise or expand on the traditional interpretation of political activism. Through these novels, we can see the development of each character's consciousness and how mobilization grows out of that process of discovery. The concept of *concientización*, or awareness, as discussed by bell hooks, is a process of self-discovery and "self-recovery", which is inherent in these characters' struggles and paths to activism (31). According to hooks "there is the shared longing for personal transformation, for the remaking and reconstituting of ourselves so that we can be radical" (32). Becoming "radical" involves personal growth, social change, striving for liberty from oppressors, a resistance to domination,

and trying to become whole, all of which are applicable to the novels analyzed in this chapter (30-32). The works show how each character develops her own identity and remakes herself into an activist who fights against oppression and injustice.

For the Mirabal sisters in Julia Alvarez's novel, their path to activism started with Minerva. Long before she became known as "*Mariposa*", her eyes were opened to the reality of Trujillo's regime when a schoolmate told Minerva about her family's involvement in the movement against Trujillo and the brutal consequences. The author perfectly shows that shift of realization, that loss of innocence when a child realizes not everything is perfect and that the world can be a scary place. After her friend and schoolmate Sinita starts telling Minerva "the secret of Trujillo", Minerva wonders: "Trujillo was doing bad things? It was as if I just heard Jesus had slapped a baby... That can't be true" (17). This shocking revelation was the beginning of Minerva's journey from questioning the regime to outright rebellion. She began going to secret meetings while still in high school and when one of her acquaintances is arrested and her sister Mate's diary could link them to the group, Minerva insists the diary must be buried. She tells Mate that "sometimes you have to do something wrong for a higher good" (43). This statement, while seemingly referring to the violation of privacy by reading Mate's diary, is also applicable to Minerva's personal development in the reshaping of her identity from an innocent young woman to one who realizes that sometimes negative, even violent actions, may be necessary to ensure a better future for their country.

Through Minerva's early involvement and political acquaintances, her sisters also became more aware of the true situation within their country and became more involved in the fight for freedom. María Teresa (Mate), the youngest sister, learned of Minerva's growing activism while they were away at school, and later when staying with Minerva while studying at

the university. She became known as *Mariposa #2* when she became involved in the smuggling of arms and other deliveries for the cause, as well as making bombs, which all started with a late night delivery that awoke her both from her sleep and to her new life of activism (141-5). Patria, who married young, was inspired to become involved when the violence hit close to home.

While attending a mountainside church retreat, their solitude was interrupted on the fourteenth of June by gunfire and shelling as soldiers were chasing a group of young rebels. After seeing a boy (the same age as her son) shot in the back, Patria could no longer stand by without fighting (159-164). She and others from her church changed their group name and mission to focus on spreading not only the word of God, but also inspire the peasants to support those fighting against the regime and “organize a powerful national underground” (164). Later when the church group and Minerva’s group joined forces, it would be named the “Fourteenth of June” movement in honor of those who had died fighting for freedom (167). Dedé struggled with her marriage and with her decision about whether or not to join the movement her sisters had started. Her fears were actualized the next week when the homes of the conspirators were raided and her sister’s husbands were arrested (178-193). “It was then she realized that after all her indecisiveness, she had never really had a choice. Whether she joined their underground or not, her fate was bound up with the fates of her sisters. She would suffer whatever they suffered. If they died, she would not want to go on living without them” (193). Yet sadly, Dedé must go on without her sisters and live on to tell their stories, which in itself is a kind of activism, to share their sacrifices with the world and inspire others to action.

Aside from these familial connections and personal motivations, the women in these novels, both In the Time of the Butterflies and Charamicos, attended school and pursued an education as another avenue towards remaking themselves and becoming politically active. In



returning to the theme of *awareness*, hooks states that “We must envision the university as a central site for revolutionary struggle, a site where we can begin to work to educate for critical consciousness, where we can have a pedagogy of liberation” (31). In the Dominican context under Trujillo and Balaguer, one might ask how one could find “critical consciousness” within a country where even a single hint of dissention could threaten your life? And yet, some of the women in these novels did just that, Minerva, Mate, Trinidad and Ercira found their voices and chose activism, while at university and beyond. Trujillo and Balaguer both understood the importance of the written word and how freedom of thought could threaten their rule. As published authors, these men knew the power of propaganda and the need to control dissention in order to maintain control. During both regimes, UASD and other institutions were closely scrutinized for the rise of opposition groups and the university was even closed at times<sup>12</sup>. In Alvarez’s novel, Trujillo tells Minerva that “The university is no place for a woman these days... It’s full of communists and agitators, who want to bring down the government” (99). As they continue their discussion, she rebuffs his advances and leaves with her family when a sudden downpour creates confusion at the party. However, her ties to a known rebel bring her to his attention, where they clash again. In the end, she is allowed to attend law school at the university, but is denied the opportunity to practice law when she graduates (99-115, 137-8). Where Minerva’s university study should have granted her freedom, it was used as yet another tool of control by Trujillo. University life is a large part of Charamicos and the setting for Trinidad’s growth into activism and self-realization. While the outside threat of Balaguer is

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Manley discusses the political environment within the educational system (both at UASD and the *Colegio Immaculada Concepción*) during Trujillo’s reign in her discussion of Minerva Mirabal on pages 21-26, and 188-205, and later in the growth of anti-Trujillo student groups such as *Juventud Democrática* on pages 171-181. The university was also an important place of resistance during Balaguer’s *doce años*, as discussed on pages 327-330 and 380-388.

discussed at times, Trinidad's university experiences revolve around her classes, friends and student organizations. Professors are portrayed as being involved in the resistance and supportive of their actions, even to the point of allowing students to use campus facilities and lab chemicals to create an explosive stink bomb (97-99). For Trinidad especially, the university is a nurturing ground for her personal growth and activism, a true connection between the personal and political aspects of her life.

In Charamicos, Trinidad and Ercira discover the political potential within themselves as they attend classes and eventually participate in student revolutionary groups. Trinidad begins by telling us about her move to the capital, Santo Domingo, and how much her life has been changed by the events in the novel, as she participated in “*la transformación del mundo*” (7). Fernando, a tutor and friend, tries to convince her to become involved with the Engineering students association, which leads to meeting Ercira and becoming involved with *Frauer (Frente Antiimperialista Unidos por el Estudio y la Revolución)*, a political student group tied to a larger revolutionary group *Estrella Roja* (46). They also discuss the sacrifices of those who fought against Balaguer, such as Amin Abel Hasbún, a real-life student activist who was murdered in 1970 and inspired a student group that was still active at UASD until recently, the *Frente Estudiantil de Liberación Amin Abel*. (Hernández 12; Morris) Trinidad realizes what an opportunity it is that the universities have been opened to all, as part of the *Movimiento Renovador*, which removed Trujillo supporters and gave the general citizenry the opportunity to study, and for Trinidad, to learn more about herself and meet new people, such as Ercira and others (15-17). As part of this process of *concientización*, we can look at Trinidad's growth as she becomes more involved in their student groups and gains confidence in her own abilities. At the beginning, Trinidad was paralyzed when she tried to give a speech in public. She is soon

elected to be on the university commission of *Frauer*, which is a major responsibility. She works to learn more about her country and its struggles, how the student groups are connected to larger national movements, and she even makes vocabulary and to-do lists to better understand related terminology. Finally, with the support of her friends, Trinidad is able to successfully deliver a speech to her colleagues, inspired by the actions and words of Mamá Tingó (a real-life Dominican activist discussed in my historical chapter), and Ho Chi Ming, a Vietnamese leader. She finds confidence in herself even as she is becoming more involved politically, which resembles the process described by hooks of “remaking and reconstituting of ourselves so that we can be radical” (Hernández 37-39, 45-47, 52; Hooks 32). Later, when she is visiting with an old friend from her hometown, she realizes how much she has changed in such a short time, how far her current life is from the one she left behind, saying that “*al final íbamos alejándonos como si el mero hecho de usar palabras nuevas nos convirtiera en dos seres extraños y de temer*” (53-54). Even when questioning herself and the risks involved, Trinidad understands the depth and importance of what they are doing, that “*esta suma de calor, de idea, de fe... nos hará olvidar la vulnerabilidad. Pero, ¿fe en qué? Fe en el verbo, fe en la acción*” (84). Having faith in the movement and knowing the meaning and importance behind their actions helps Trinidad to gain courage and have faith in herself as well. Through this faith in action, she can believe that their struggles and challenges may bring change and cause a revolution, and even change the world.

Ercira Sánchez is a more difficult character to analyze since we never hear from her directly; our only knowledge of her comes from Trinidad’s viewpoint and that of an unknown 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. She serves as an inspiration to Trinidad and others, yet always seems to be apart from the story, even isolated from Trinidad at times. Perhaps her opaque character is used by Hernández as a symbol of all the women activists who participated and mobilized for their

country, but whose names and stories have been lost to history. If she cannot be easily categorized or defined by others, she can better symbolize the many women who resisted oppression during this era in varied ways. The chapters about her rural upbringing show her difficult childhood and how she was willing to sacrifice herself for others. In an early example, when her stepfather Agramonte is abusing her mother and younger brother, Ercira jumps into the fight and bites Agramonte until he bleeds and throws her across the room (31). Later, Ercira speaks freely in a television interview against Balaguer, saying “*Eso lo afirman los cuerpos represivos del Estado, de los que te haces eco, porque según la lógica despótica del Presidente hay que demoler la Universidad, único lugar de este país en que al crimen se le llama crimen y a la demagogia, demagogia; al mercurial y al asesino se les nombra como tales...*” (49). This outspoken statement shows yet another example of her bravado and fearlessness when it comes to standing up for her beliefs. Later in the novel, Ercira ends up in jail as a result of her political activism and Trinidad has to sneak in with a prison ministry group to be able to visit her (253-275). Interestingly, after she is released from prison and becomes well-known for her global human rights activism, the character of Balaguer recognizes her importance to the people and mentions her in a public speech: “*Ercira Sánchez no debe ser tocada ni con un pétalo de una rosa por ningún incontrolable de la derecha ni tampoco de la extrema izquierda*” (347). This may refer to the “uncontrollable” groups that punished those who spoke out against Balaguer or just that she was beyond their control, too popular to touch. With the evolution of Ercira’s activism, the author can explore the duality of her actions, how in one instance she is opposing the government, and in another moment held up as an example by the very person she spoke out against. Much of the activism portrayed in both Charamicos and In the Time of the Butterflies can be considered controversial given that these women were actively plotting and speaking

against their leaders and governments, a punishable offense in many countries, and perhaps they would even be labeled as “domestic terrorists” in more current times. However, the novels portray their actions against the backdrop of the brutal nature of these oppressive regimes, which paints a more positive picture of these women activists as those who bravely fought for freedom, rather than painting them as agitators and troublemakers.

In the next section, I discuss how the works honor women historical actors by giving them a voice. Julia Alvarez makes it a point in the postscript to explain how the Mirabal sisters have been lost to myth and legend, that their actions have become god-like and “impossible for us, ordinary men and women” (324). In my view, the author brings the “Mariposa” myth down to earth by showing how these women could have felt about their experiences, how mobilization was just one small part of their daily lives full of going to school, working on household chores, caring for children, and fulfilling all the roles to those around them. When Minerva returned from prison, she felt the stress of the constant pressure to meet everyone’s expectations, “if they had only known how frail was their iron-will heroine” (259). The choice to show the vulnerabilities of these women is an important one, because it humanizes them and makes them more accessible to readers. In removing them from their pedestal and showing that they are regular women who feel happiness and anger, sadness and frustration, the author is showing that these women were real, not myths, and that ordinary people can do amazing things. Their political movement was formed at home, amongst the daily minutia of life, as Patria notes: “it was on this very Formica table that you could still see the egg stains from my family’s breakfast that the bombs were made” (167). The author describes the small and large moments of their lives, how they struggle with their decisions and how it will affect their families, how very human and normal these women actually were. Scott’s discussion of agency and experience is

evident in this section, as the activism of these women grows out of their daily, “lived experiences”, a juxtaposition of the “personal” and “political” as they hide armaments in the backyard and make bombs at the kitchen table (Scott, “Experience”, 31).

This struggle for identity and normality is evident not only as the Butterflies live their lives, but also in the ones left behind, such as Minou (Minerva’s daughter) who argues with her aunt Dedé that “I’m my own person. I’m tired of being the daughter of a legend” (65). This journey to find one’s identity, especially when having a famous mother, is one that harkens to my previous chapter regarding Camila Henríquez, as well as the Jungian mother-daughter relationship (J. Alvarez, Salomé; Hirsch 209). This complicated path to discovering oneself while still honoring those who came before you is a difficult one and is not confined to only these stories. How many women are identified as “the sister of” or “the daughter of”, even though they are so much more than that title? Dedé also struggles to find her own individuality, that she is more than just “the one who survived to tell the story” (J. Alvarez, Butterflies 321). Like Camila, she is a “guardian of memory”; she is preserving and remembering the past to honor her sisters and their country’s struggle for freedom (J. Alvarez, Salomé 43). In both of Alvarez’s novels discussed here, both individual and collective memory are used to tell their stories. When discussing Ricoeur’s development of collective memory, Pellauer states that “we can always ask whose memory it is... It is my memory, your memory, her memory, our memory, their memory” (Pellauer 112). Individual memories are imagined by the author for each character, but the creation of a collective memory is also evident, as Dedé and Camila speak for all of their memories, not just their own. Dedé not only shares her memories and experiences, but those of her sisters as well, as she contributes to the creation of collective memory. Beyond that, Alvarez includes her own memories and interpretations of their complex history. These

memories do not only belong to the characters or even the author, but Dominicans overall, as these stories remind them of their own personal experiences and struggles for freedom and independence, and even their own memories of Trujillo and the Butterflies.

The memories of Dominicans and their time under Balaguer are even more recent, so author Ángela Hernández uses her novel, Charamicos, to share her vision of that era and honor those who lost their lives. However, rather than focusing on actual activists and events, this novel relies much more on the imagined experiences of women and how they could have actively participated and mobilized politically during their time at university during the 1970s. In returning to Pellauer, the explanation of the difference between memory and imagination is applicable for this novel:

It is easy to confound the two in that they both appeal to the idea of an image, to an image of the past in the case of what we remember or what historians produce... Memory and imagination are distinguishable in terms of both their operative intentionality and the object they intend. In both cases their object is something absent, but in the case of memory it is not absent in the sense of being unreal or feigned, but rather as 'having been'... The intended object of memory, in other words, is... the past. (Pellauer 110)

Drawing on memories and real events does place some burdens on an author, because their vision may not match the experiences of those who lived through that past. However, imagination can allow for unbelievable scenarios that seem to diminish the history it was inspired by. It is important for authors of historical fiction to find that fine line so that they can use memories to inspire and their imagined experiences to fill in the historical absences. In the case of Charamicos, it is truly a work of the author's imagination, since the characters are not real and the events are created to tell a story within the world of the novel. However, it was inspired by memory and the past, by real activists who led student protests and opposed the Balaguer government, and who were imprisoned, "disappeared", or lost their lives for speaking out. Interestingly, when I first mentioned the setting of Charamicos to a Dominican friend, she

immediately remembered hearing stories of Sagrario Ercira Díaz Santiago, who was killed during protests at UASD, when her parents were university students. Later, when further research showed that Hernández actually named the Ercira character after Díaz Santiago, the layered nuances that this book contains became more evident, especially how it can reach different audiences in varied ways. It may be understood in one way by a complete outsider with no knowledge of the Dominican Republic, yet also have very different significance for a Dominican who actually lived through that era. Even within the novel's fictional world, real activists from throughout the history of the D.R. are named and honored, from more recent activists such as Amin Abel Hasbún, Mamá Tingó, Manolo Tavárez Justo, and the Mirabal sisters, to the original ones, such as Fray Bartolome de Las Casas and Juan Pablo Duarte (Hernández 12-14, 52-53, 281-283). It seems that Hernández's intended audience was more insular, specifically educated Dominicans on the island, since her book is written in Spanish and only locally available. In comparison, Alvarez acknowledges in her postscript that while her use of English may cause her stories to be inaccessible to some Dominicans, it also brings a broader consideration of their suffering to North American readers (324).

These works also reveal the gendered nature of political activism through the use of literature. Writing novels such as In the Time of the Butterflies and Charamicos allows the authors to reimagine their country's dark history, elaborate on the lives of these women activists, and bring them to life through fiction. Julia Alvarez states in her postscript, "a novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart" (324). While not a historical document in the strictest sense of the word, I believe that her novel does expand history to include the imagined experiences and motivations of these women, their social history as Scott calls it (Gender, 21). Through these novels, we can see that the characters are not only



developing their political activism, but also becoming aware and sometimes confronting the gendered expectations of their time periods. These works serve as a starting point for further discovery, for bringing historical figures such as the Mirabal sisters and Sagrario Ercira Díaz Santiago to a wider audience and inspiring readers to look further and make changes in their own lives. The title of Charamicos alludes to this beginning, how activism can start from a tiny spark, from one small event or idea. Hernández explains the meaning of the word “*Charamicos*” as “*ramas leñosas finas, que son buenas para iniciar el fuego, pero no para sostenerlo*” (Quiroz). The actions of Trinidad and Ercira are only the start of a movement, even as novels such as Charamicos and In the Time of the Butterflies are the beginning of a new history, a new understanding that encompasses women activists and inspires future women. In Alvarez’s work, Dedé tells her friend why it is so important to recount her sisters’ experiences, “after the fighting was over and we were a broken people... that’s when I opened my doors, and instead of listening, I started talking. We had lost hope, and we needed a story to understand what had happened to us” (313). Oral history, through storytellers and wise women, has been around for much longer than written history, yet is somewhat undervalued even to this day. Historical fiction, to me, is an expansion of the oral tradition, a way of explaining events and losses, joys and failures, and all of the multiplicities that make up human experience and history. The story of the Mirabals belongs to everyone, Alvarez explains: “I come from an oral culture, where the stories are part of how people are woven together” (Steinberg).

While gender roles and expectations within these two novels are not emphasized as much as Alvarez’s other novel included in this thesis, In the Name of Salome, we can see how these women were both traditional and revolutionary, sometimes within the same scenario. Real life is made up of nuances and complicated motivations, so while these women may have been radical

in some areas of their lives, it is also possible that there were times of conciliation or acceptance of their situation. To set up this scene, I must first explain that Patria's husband was in jail at one prison, while Minerva and Mate's husbands had been moved to a different prison, so their visits were usually separate trips and days. Patria showed up to surprise her sisters and tell them that she would be going with them the next day: "I told him I wanted to see the boys tomorrow, and he gave me his permission. "Patria Mercedes!... You asked for his permission? What can he do from prison to stop you?" Patria gave me [Minerva] a quizzical look, as if the answer were obvious. "He could have said, no, you can't go"" (J. Alvarez, Butterflies, 286-7). In the same moment as supporting her sisters and visiting political prisoners, she still considers her husband's wishes. This dichotomy is evident in many places within the novel, such as when the women tolerate extramarital affairs as "things a man does", yet are unafraid to challenge a murderous dictator (92).

Perhaps due to their gender, the Mirabal sisters' activism continued for a much longer time than a man would have been allowed to defy the regime. Any one of their activities could have resulted in an earlier exile or "disappearance", yet they opposed Trujillo for years with lesser repercussions than most. I do not mean to minimize their suffering while in prison or their sacrifices over the years, only to draw attention that others died or were exiled for less. Elizabeth Manley discusses a similar lenience in regards to women's activism during Trujillo's reign: "Women were also able to do tasks with less risk of being suspected... Even when caught, women were more likely to be released and allowed to return to their lives. Although this is not to say their lives were unencumbered by the regime as many were arrested, interrogated, and forced into exile" (Manley 178). As international sanctions and disapproval of Trujillo grew during the fall of 1960, the "Fourteenth of June" movement and others became more hopeful that

their plans might finally come to fruition (264). After the Mirabal sisters' return from prison, they were under constant observation from the SIM (Military Intelligence Service) and led relatively quiet lives, even as they were highly recognized and lauded by their countrymen. While no specific instigating event is mentioned in the novel, it seems like it was a desperate act by a man who knew that his days of controlling the country were numbered. On a dark, curvy mountain road on November 25, 1960, after visiting Leandro and Manolo at their prison, the car carrying Patria, Minerva, Mate and their driver, Rufino, was stopped by Trujillo's henchmen, also known as *calies*, and they were all killed. Their bodies were placed back in the car and it was pushed off of a cliff, so that it could be explained away as a "car accident" (303-307).

For Trinidad and Ercira, the differentiation of gender roles existed even within their political student group, when Ercira complained that only women members were expected to help serve food and set up the meal. Their leader explained that all jobs were equal, everyone must do their part, etc. but the situation was not resolved until a male friend, Andrickson, stepped up and volunteered to help serve the food (65). Attending university in the capital also gave Trinidad and Ercira a certain freedom from the expected gender roles back in their hometowns. Early in the novel, Ercira tells Trinidad the story of Nena, a young girl, smart enough to be an engineer, who ended up married to an older fisherman who forces himself on her. While not a humorous story, the girls laugh that their journey to Santo Domingo has saved them from that same fate (39-40). Perhaps it was an uncomfortable laughter, in the vein of "there but for the grace of God, go I", a reminder to appreciate the opportunities given to them. The university provided not only a place to learn about themselves and become more political, but also to explore new roles that would not have been possible in their rural towns. Trinidad also speaks about the expectation from her family that she would marry a childhood friend, Teobaldo, but as

she spends time at University, she begins to have feelings for Andrickson, a fellow activist (60-62, 79-80, 87-90). Ercira advises her to not fall in love or get married before completing her degree and also talks about avoiding an abusive relationship and domestic violence: “*no había que soportarle crueldades, que a eso se acostumbran muchas mujeres aguantadoras y luego les pasan a las hijas esa mala forma de vivir*” (129). While Ercira has personal experience with abuse in her own childhood home, this was also a common societal issue of the time.

Though set in different time periods and taking different approaches to the confluence between history and fiction, both Charamicos and In the Time of the Butterflies give us a new way to understand how these women characters mobilized and created change in their world. Whether based on real women, such as the Mirabals, or created out of the imagination of the author, many important lessons can be learned in these novels and hopefully serve as inspiration to their readers. Political activism is a process, influenced by both personal experiences and societal events, and this progression of mobilization and *concientización* is well-developed through the eyes of Patria, Dedé, Minerva, Mate, Trinidad and Ercira.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This thesis is an initial exploration into the importance of historical fiction and how these women authors contribute to a better understanding of their country's heroines and activists. As more historical novels are produced by Dominican writers, especially women writers, a literary canon can be developed to further demonstrate the important contributions by Dominican women activists and their historical impact. As Cixous states, "Women must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history" and these women authors achieve precisely that aim, bringing the women activists of the past to our world and their rightful place in history (257). Through the addition of these women into the history of the Dominican Republic, as well as the inclusion of their social history and experiences, a comprehensive view of how these women actively tried to create change within their country becomes clear. Can one portray the independence story of the Dominican Republic without including women such as María Trinidad Sánchez, Rosa Duarte, and Salomé Ureña de Henríquez who inspired those fighting for their own country? Or how long Trujillo might have ruled without the outrage caused by the Mirabal sisters' assassination? Even the actions of students, such as those portrayed in Charamicos, started a small flame that contributed to a larger outcry against the harsh practices of Balaguer and his regime. Throughout the many examples from the texts as well as supportive theories and framework, the initial questions in this study have been answered. The works revise or expand on the traditional interpretation of political activism by encompassing all of the women characters' experiences, both personal and public, so that the word "activism" can include writing, speaking, educating oneself and others, protesting, participating and mobilizing. The works also honor women historical actors by giving them a voice and bringing their stories to life through fiction and the imagination of their motivations and challenges. Finally, through their

interactions with gender expectations and roles, we can better understand what the works reveal about the gendered nature of political activism. We can also examine what is achieved in women's studies by the recovery of these women's agency through these novels. By promoting an expanded understanding of "activism", the activities of more women can be included and lauded in their struggle for equality and representation. Women such as Salomé, the Mirabal sisters, and Sagrario Ercira Díaz Santiago are only the tip of the iceberg, the beginning of trying to understand the women who contributed to the development of the Dominican Republic. Through the exploration of their lives through fiction, their voices can be recovered and the field of women's studies enhanced by the inclusion of these important women actors and our deeper understanding of their struggles and potential motivations. Recognizing all of the forms and methods of activism is crucial to our understanding of how deeply these women were involved in their communities and countries. All of their experiences are important, both personal and public, and these novels show the struggle to live in both worlds and embrace themselves as a whole rather than a divided persona, showing that one does not have to deny or hide parts of oneself. When Salomé states: "I am a woman as well as a poet" (177) in Alvarez's novel In the Name of Salomé, it is only one of many illustrations that show how these authors include the totality of these women's identities and contributions as part of their agency and activism.

My analysis of Julia Alvarez's novel, In the Name of Salomé, has shown the myriad of experiences of Salomé and Camila and how their lives affected the development of the Dominican Republic, in large and small ways. They challenged the expectations of society, that women were worth educating and that their voices should be heard; yet until Alvarez's novel, their writings were unknown to many non-Dominicans. Alvarez shows the true impact of Salomé's literary contributions at the very beginning of her novel, when Camila tells us that:

“Emily Dickinson is to the United States of America as Salomé Ureña is to the Dominican Republic” (3). Salomé is such an important figure for Dominicans and Alvarez’s novel brings her story out of the shadows and forgotten corners of history, by expanding her life story and making it accessible to the English-speaking world. Without this junction of history and fiction, we are missing vital information as to how women like Salomé and Camila could be brave enough to strive for not only a better life for themselves, but a better life for all of their fellow Dominicans, not to mention their contributions to poetry and feminist writing.

Likewise, by examining the development of the Mirabal sisters in Julia Alvarez’s In the Time of the Butterflies and how Ángela Hernández chooses to create the women and their world within Charamicos, we honor the mobilization and sacrifices of the historical women that these stories are based on or inspired by. As Dedé Mirabal recounts in an interview, when Minerva was asked by an uncle to consider her responsibility to her own children, she replied “What if my blood needs to be shed in order to save other orphans?” (Bedoya-Rose 45) This is the kind of activism that these women lived in their daily lives, which deserves not only a place in history but in our consciousness. Women like Minerva Mirabal and Sagrario Ercira Díaz Santiago died for their country and fellow Dominicans; the least we can do is share their stories so that other women will be inspired to take action against injustices in their own lives.

With regard to possible future research on this topic, there are many potential avenues to consider. The impact of religious involvement in the Dominican Republic, specifically the Roman Catholic Church, is a valid consideration since it has held such a strong role historically in the formation and development of the country, so much so that even their flag and motto demonstrates their love for “*Dios, Patria, Libertad*”. The patriarchal nature of both the church and country may have suppressed the remembrance of how Dominican religious women may

have contributed, although Emelio Betances does include the activism of nuns in his work on The Catholic Church and Power Politics in Latin America. While the women in our novels were taught in Catholic schools by nuns, it is the activism of priests who are the focus of these novels, such as Padre Erasmo Amir in Charamicos and Padre de Jesús López from In the Time of the Butterflies. The influence of other political ideologies and practices, such as *Caudillismo*, Fascism and Communism, is also evident throughout these novels and Dominican history in general, so the roles of women under and within these regimes could be another avenue of examination and future study.

It would also be very interesting to interview Dominican women who experienced the Trujillo and Balaguer periods to explore their memories of these historical activists and events and also to discuss their reactions to these novels. In a broad sense, I would consider how these women's voices have been represented by women writers from their own culture. This group would consist of Dominican women (known through personal contacts) who were children during Trujillo's reign and witnessed the protests and political upheaval through the 1960s and 1970s. These women were at college and working as teachers and engineers during these years and it would be beneficial to get a first-hand perspective of women's experiences during this volatile time for both political and women's rights issues, as well as their interpretations or familiarity with this literature. Also, by interviewing Dominican women who grew up in the Dominican Republic during these difficult periods and while these works were written, I hope that their insight and experiences will offer support to the importance of this growing field of Dominican historical fiction.

In returning to Joan W. Scott and her discussion of "her-story" and social history, the three novels examined within this thesis have successfully given voice to these women activists



and brought their stories to a wider audience. In paraphrasing Scott, these writers, these women authors, Julia Alvarez and Ángela Hernández, have achieved the goal of fitting “a new subject – women – into received historical categories, interpreting their actions in terms recognizable to political and social historians” and not only historians but everyday citizens as well through their use of fiction to imagine the experiences of these women activists (Scott, Gender, 19). The social history of these women characters, including all of their many experiences, hopes and disappointments, struggles and achievements, comes together to more fully develop the stories of their lives. Through these works, Salomé, Camila, Patria, Dedé, Minerva, Mate, Trinidad and Ercira and other activists like them have been heard; their voices and contributions to political activism in the Dominican Republic are silent no longer.

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