

**Banana Culture:
The Cultivation of Border Literature in
Central America**

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of my thesis is to demonstrate how Central American authors Carmen Lyra and Ernesto Cardenal successfully exemplify ‘border literature’ in their fictional texts, as defined by Walter Mignolo. Incorporating a national sentiment of opposition to the foreign banana industry and especially the United Fruit Company, which controlled the region for most of the twentieth century, these two authors of the Global South responded to the dominant discourse of the Global North through their literature. I intend to express the relationship between the global banana industry and ‘border thinking’ found within Lyra’s *Bananos y hombres* and Cardenal’s *La hora 0*, which are reactions to the increasing globalizing influences in Central America.

In the first chapter, I will introduce the idea of ‘colonial difference’ and how the world has been divided into regions of the Global North and Global South, representing a divide between as a result of the overarching dominance of a Western or Global North ideology throughout the world. In the second chapter, I will provide a brief history of the banana and the Central American banana industry as it developed under the United Fruit Company. In the third chapter, I will provide background into the life of Costa Rican author Carmen Lyra, analyzing her work *Bananos y hombres* and demonstrating how the text is an example of ‘border literature’. The fourth chapter will mimic the third, introducing Nicaraguan author Ernesto Cardenal and analyzing his work *La hora 0* as an example of border literature, in comparison with Carmen Lyra. The fifth and final chapter will discuss the significance of border thinking in a globalizing world, detailing the relationship between the world system and the consequent response of border thinking.

CHAPTER I. A GLOBAL NORTH- SOUTH DICHOTOMY

The global processes which led to the creation of the banana industry and the overwhelming presence of foreign industry in Central America adheres to the imaginary of a core-periphery framework that consequently subalternizes the nations of Central America under the prevailing discourse of the West, perpetuated since Spanish colonialism. With their economic endeavors, foreign investors from the Global North consequently transmit their culture and dominant frameworks, ultimately allowing their unfamiliar values, norms and expectations to infiltrate into the culture of the host-nation. Understood in this context, the two twentieth century works of fiction I have chosen to analyze, *Bananos y hombres* by Carmen Lyra (1931) and *La hora 0* by Ernesto Cardenal (1960), are successful examples of border thinking, published in a world of what is now-called globalization and authored by Central Americans who grew up in nations where cultural and economic imperialism infiltrated their daily lives and consequently shaped their ideas.

The term 'border thinking' is introduced by Walter D. Mignolo in his book *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2008), where he defines it as the "recognition of the colonial difference from subaltern perspectives" (6), where the "perspective of the subaltern" simultaneously absorbs and displaces hegemonic forms of knowledge (12). According to Mignolo, border thinking works toward the restitution of 'the colonial difference', which is the classification of the planet into the modern/colonial imaginary by implementing the 'coloniality of power' (13). Beginning in the fifteenth century and expanding into the current stage of globalization, 'colonial difference' describes a modern, colonial world that established a framework for knowledge, based on the distinction between the origin and the various interpretations of knowledge found around the globe. In other words, the world became divided

into two established ways of being and knowing, one from “above” and one from “below”, one from a position of power at the center of the world system, and one from the “underside of modernity”, the colonized other. This creation of a modern/colonial world system, dividing the global into North and South, has consequently shaped distinctive imaginaries of the ideological regions, creating a border between the ways of being and knowing in the marginalized Global South and the prevailing Global North. Border thinking utilizes the ideological border that separates the Global North from the Global South, locating itself at the edges of dominant Northern perspective while still operating within the constructed framework of the Global North so as to not be completely obscured or forgotten. An individual considered a ‘border thinker’ must hold a unique perspective, negotiating their distinctive position between the dominant Global North and the subalternized Global South in order to find a new and different way of thinking, being and knowing. Lyra and Cardenal may both be considered ‘border thinkers’ in the sense that they occupy an uncommon position on the ideological border between North and South, one which incorporates their past experiences with the Global North as well as their native knowledge of the Global South, allowing them to develop a unique perspective inclusive of and shaped by both ideological structures.

The colonial framework that shapes the planetary world system ‘subalternizes’ other kinds of knowledge that exist outside of the dominant way of knowing, established by Western society and accepted throughout the world. However, new forms of subaltern reason and knowledge, known as border thinking, attempt to bring to the foreground that which was subalternized or obscured during the long process of colonization of the world, drastically revolutionizing this process. The phenomenon of border thinking is a structure that emerges out of an assumed global division, where there exists at least two different languages and two

different ways of reasoning or interpreting the world; essentially two radically different modes of being and knowing¹. Within this separation, the marginal or allegedly inferior way of being and knowing of non-Western cultures is subordinated by the dominant discourse constructed by Western thought, referred to as ‘the colonial difference’²; however, border thinking represents the subordinated term of the division, bringing forward an atypical perspective of the suppressed, which uniquely incorporates and battles against the ‘master term’ in order to create a new and unprecedented point of view (Michaelson 49-50). Border thinking, therefore, is a new reality constructed by individuals in peripheral cultures, marginalized by the dominant discourse of the core Western cultures, who encompass their position of subalterity while also including elements of core ideology to criticize and contest the accepted world system functioning below a Global North/Western framework.

Mignolo argues that ‘colonial difference’ has been articulated around the omnipresent idea of ‘Occidentalism’, which is the cultural understanding of America as an extension or continuation of Europe, as opposed to an inferior colony ruled by European powers, namely Latin America (*Local Histories* 13). According to Mignolo, colonial difference was rearticulated around the history of capitalism and imperial conflicts, both consequences of, “the overarching discourse of Occidentalism” that constructs a dominant imaginary of the world order established by Western perspective (*Local Histories* 24). With this, Mignolo situates the consequences of the world system in a way that is similar to the one defined by Immanuel Wallerstein in “The

¹ Critics of Mignolo claim that in order for a world dichotomy to exist, there must also be a common origin; therefore, the use of ‘dichotomy’ inherently undermines Mignolo’s argument that the knowledges of the Global North and South exist and developed independently (Michaelson 49-50).

² Alcoff critiques ‘colonial difference’, questioning the metaphysical nature of the difference as either absolute or relative; essentially a distinct origin versus a dependent relation to the development of Eurocentrism (87-88).

Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis” (1974): “(the world system) is the only kind of social system, which we define quite simply as a unit with a single division of labor and multiple cultural systems” (390). The resultant division of labor, conceptualized by Wallerstein, leads to the formation of two interdependent zones, the core and the periphery, between which there is a structured hierarchy of power.

Geographically and culturally different, the periphery is comprised of developing nations that focus primarily on labor-intensive production, while developed and advanced nations form the core and emphasize capital-intensive production. Capital-intensive production requires a high level of investment in expensive equipment and machinery but a low level of labor; labor-intensive production is more frequent in developing nations because it depends on a larger labor force and minimal investment in expensive equipment. According to Wallerstein, neither zone can exist without the other, illuminating an interdependence vital to each zone’s survival (Goldfrank 168).

Comparable to the global core-periphery division explained by Wallerstein, the separation of the globe into North and South is not rooted in geographic location, but rather is formulated around an ideological concept that emphasizes the economic, political and social dependency of nations deemed as ‘developing’ and subaltern on ‘developed’, modern nations (Levander 1). According to Western academics, the Global South is comprised of developing nations, while developed nations are located in the ideological Global North and provide the dominant discourse for the entire globe (Mignolo, *Local Histories* 166). Mignolo argues that the Global South, either underdeveloped or emerging nations, acts as the provider of natural resources to the Global North; however, he also argues that it is a region where local forces are ‘delinking’ from the previous framework of colonial power, forging alternative futures for their nations by

disconnecting from their histories of colonialism and foreign dominance (*Local Histories* 184). Consequently, this ‘delinking’ leads to the establishment of new ways of thinking, being and knowing in the Global South, forged by individuals who comprehend the imperial discourse of the Global North and utilize it to foreground the voice of suppressed populations in the Global South, establishing an unparalleled and innovative perspective with which to view the world³.

There exists an extensive history of North American involvement in the politics, economy and social order of Latin America. Modern Western perspective regards Latin American nations as “developing” countries that rely on the “developed” nations to structure their political systems or provide jobs as a way to facilitate economic and social development, similar to Wallerstein’s argument of the core and the periphery division (Goldfrank 164). In his book *Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial: Rethinking North-South Relations*, geographer David Slater affirms the traditional relationship between developed nations of the dominant West (Global North) and non-Western developing nations (Global South), stating that modern interpretation “grounds a primary identity for the West and a secondary identity for the non-Western other; ‘the West’ has been constructed as a model and measure of social progress for the world as a whole” (8-10). Through this affirmation of an established Western and non-Western global dichotomy, Slater is defending the West’s own position of superiority over nations considered peripheral, inherently cast outside of a recognized dominant Western world order.

A paper published in *World Development* (2010) by Machiko Nissanke and Erik Thorbecke, discusses the consequences of globalization in Latin America, detailing both positive

³ Although recognizing the flaws in Mignolo’s argument, namely the ambivalent concepts of truth and identity defined by Mignolo, critic Linda Alcoff acknowledges that Mignolo’s ideas create “the potential to provide a more rigorous, less circular and flawed, approach to judgment” and are “moving us away from the transcendental, imperial, universal formulation of the project of epistemology” (Alcoff 97).

and negative results of the processes that link the Global North and South. The paper, titled “Globalization, Poverty and Inequality in Latin America”, defines globalization as:

Greater economic integration manifested through increased openness via numerous transmission mechanisms such as trade and investment liberalization; movements of capital, labor migration across borders and within countries; the nature of technological change and diffusion of knowledge and technology; the worldwide information flows; and institutional environments. (797-798)

Nissanke’s study displays a popularly supported view of globalization that maintains an overall positive impact in all nations involved in global trade, regardless of cultural or political identity, or location in the ideological Global South (798). A contrasting perspective argues the negative consequences of this globalizing relationship, maintaining that the outcome can be substantially problematic, affecting more than solely economic interests of the involved nations. Maintaining that globalizing processes provide grounds for more than just the interconnection of nations’ economies, the concluding paragraph of Wallerstein’s *The Modern World-System I* (1974) articulates a changing world order in an era of globalization:

The mark of the modern world is the imagination of its profiteers and the counter-assertiveness of the oppressed. Exploitation and the refusal to accept exploitation as either inevitable or just constitute the continuing antinomy of the modern era, joined together in a dialectic, which has far from reached its climax in the twentieth century. (357)

With this, Wallerstein illuminates the role of globalization in the production of border thinking, arguing that one aspect of globalization is the meeting of two conflicting ways of being and knowing, one that dominates the world order and the other that is suppressed by it. The perspective of those located in the Global South is not obscured or accepted as inferior in the globalized world system, which although controlled by the Global North, generates an opposing discourse of the South that may be foregrounded due to its contradictory relationship with Northern/Western perspective.

Academics maintaining a Global North perspective tend to view globalization as a recent phenomenon, emerging in 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall or the massacre in China's Tiananmen Square, events resulting from advancements of new media and technologies. Characteristic of a globalizing world, increasing networks of media and information technologies between dispersed groups of people advanced participatory democracy around the world, allowing the disenfranchised to easily organize or share information and ideas. The increasing prevalence of television and communication technology worldwide played a crucial role in the fall of the Berlin Wall as well as in the student revolts in Tiananmen Square, connecting people and empowering them with information that resulted in discontent with their current realities⁴. However for those in Central America, situated in the Global South, globalization began with Christopher Columbus' arrival to what is now known as America in 1492, and is considered just another name for colonialism and imperialism⁵.

Mignolo, among other critics, argues that globalization, characterized by the emergence of

⁴ Literature functions in a similar sense, providing a connection between the experiences, ideas and knowledges of diverse groups; this sharing of information among readers of literature may ultimately empower and inspire their collective or related action.

⁵ Although similar, colonialism, an active process of creating colonies under a dominant power, may be distinguished from imperialism, which is considered an idea driving the practice of expansion and dominance over another.

modernity and the modern/colonial world order, began in the sixteenth century with the colonization and civilization of the Americas by European powers, and is therefore intricately woven into the processes of colonialism and imperialism (“The Many Faces” 722-723). Asserting coloniality to be the darker, hidden side of modernity that is many times forgotten, Mignolo strives to narrate the history of modernity from the perspective of coloniality, instead of the accepted, dominant point of view from modernity itself (“The Many Faces” 723).

With his defense of the subaltern perspective of coloniality, or the Global South, Mignolo upholds that “it is also possible to tell stories from different beginnings”, stressing that the perspective of those in the Global South developed inherently different from those in the Global North, due to their distinctive narrated histories that incorporate different events and ideas, and consequently led to a divergence in ways of knowing and understanding (“The Many Faces” 722). Mignolo criticizes the division created by the modern/colonial world system that asserts a dominant term over a subordinate term, arguing for the convergence of two individual viewpoints that, despite having different origins, are both equally reasonable and possible. His argument is supported by the concept of border thinking, demonstrated by particular authors from the Global South that generate border literature in a way that uniquely foregrounds their previously subordinated narratives that conflicted with conventional narratives of the Global North:

Macro-narratives from the perspective of coloniality are not the counterpart of world or universal history, but a radical departure from such global projects; they are neither revisionist narratives nor narratives that intend to tell a different truth, but rather narratives geared toward the

search for a different logic. (*Local Histories* 22)

Maintaining the perspective of the Global South, globalization did not recently develop, but in fact provides a new label for the long-standing system supporting the processes of oppression and exploitation, originally established with the Spanish conquest and colonization of the Americas, which determined a powerful economic and social structure that would cause detriment to the region and its inhabitants for the next 500 years. According to Mignolo in *The Idea of Latin America*, ‘America’ as we know it today from the perspective of the Global South was “an *invention* forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the Western world view and institutions” into the New World (*Idea* 2). The understood discovery of America is a narrative constructed by the European perspective; however, the obscured perspective of indigenous groups opposes the idea of discovery, as they had existed in continental America before Europeans depicted it on their maps or included it in their world imaginary. Mignolo asserts that ‘discovery’ and ‘invention’ are more than just two different interpretations of the same historic events, but that they belong to two distinctive paradigms or two ways of being and knowing, one constructed by the Global North and the other by the Global South (*Idea* 2-3).

Related to Wallerstein’s previously discussed argument that the core cannot exist without the periphery, Mignolo upholds that an interdependent relationship exists between modernity and coloniality as well, stating that the advances of modernity outside of Europe rely on a colonial matrix of power, characterized by an imbedded logic that “enforces control, domination and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone” (*Idea* 6). Mignolo clearly distinguishes between colonialism and coloniality: the first referring to specific periods in history of imperial domination, while the latter signifies the

logical structure of colonial domination underlying Global North/core nations' control over the economy and politics of Global South/peripheral nations (*Idea 7*). This distinction makes evident the change that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, due to advancing technologies as well as economic and political restructuring that allowed for a new, less obvious method of 'colonizing' peripheral nations, reflected in the presence of Global North military bases, political influences and capitalist industry, such as the United Fruit Company, in Global South nations (*Idea 7-8*). The wealth generated through this relationship that involved the exploitation of labor and the appropriation of lands in the Global South, comparable to that in past colonial economies, directly benefitted the dominant powers and protected them under the pretense of capitalist interests (*Idea 61*).

The division between the Global North and Global South, and the collision of their two distinctive ways of being and knowing, is exemplified by the phenomenon of border thinking, which incorporates both perspectives and knowledges in order to create a new, different alternative. Border thinking allows marginalized individuals located in the Global South to audibly criticize the frameworks of colonialism and imperialism, both consequences of the Global North's dominance over non-Western cultures, by utilizing their individually unique location on the 'border' between North and South, core and periphery.

I.I LITERATURE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In their works of fiction, many twentieth century Latin American authors have criticized the presence of foreign business on their native soils. Carmen Lyra, Ernesto Cardenal, Álvaro Cepeda Samudio, Miguel Angel Asturias and Gabriel García Márquez among others are

celebrated for their works of fiction that relate the detrimental effects of the banana industry on the communities of Latin American nations christened ‘banana republics’. The Oxford English Dictionary cites 1935 as the first year the term ‘banana republic’ came into use, largely as a result of the perceived growing dependence of Latin American nations on the United Fruit Company (UFCO) and the United States (Chapman 107). In his book *Bananas: How the UFCO Shaped the World* (2007), author Peter Chapman explores the relationship between the U.S. and the Latin American ‘banana republics’, noting:

Banana republics became characterized as places of inhuman wars and dictatorships; but now the term implicitly disparaged their inhabitants for succumbing. Conversely the protagonists came out of it rather well. Commentary from the US, if made at all, came from a position of assumed superiority. (108)

As Chapman articulates, the term ‘banana republic’ quickly came to denote an offensive impression of the political, cultural and social realm of Latin American nations. The title became applicable to nations that did not even produce bananas in great commercial quantity, such as Nicaragua (6). Considered an extremely offensive and impertinent label for Latin Americans today, the pejorative term represents an attitude perpetuated since the colonial period in the region, seeing that the nations were colonized republics under the rule of the Spanish Crown until the mid nineteenth century. The modern interpretation of the term obscures the participation of outside influences in the relationship established between government corruption and the banana industry, namely North American enterprises such as the United Fruit Company.

The term 'banana republic', referring to the economic dependence of Latin America on U.S. investment in the banana industry, epitomizes the Global North-South division described by Mignolo. Describing United Fruit banana plantations as similar to 'vast feudal estates' or factory towns, Chapman provides images of the labor camps and rows of bunkhouses that were juxtaposed with the decadently constructed company areas for the *gringo* businessmen (103). United Fruit's creation of plantation towns, which mimicked past colonial-like settlements, reestablished a hierarchy of power in Central America established during the years of colonial rule. Existing beneath a laborer-employer relationship, this power structure facilitated a normalized control over the native populations by the Company, especially since the UFCO provided native workers jobs that were not available before. United Fruit acted as employer to local workers, supplying decent incomes and livelihoods despite the harsh working conditions, creating a situation where it was normal for the *gringos* to be superior over the native Central American way of being and knowing.

In the following chapter, I will provide an overview of the history of the banana as well as the origins of the banana industry in Central America in order to demonstrate how the United Fruit Company provided grounds for particular authors of the Global South to critically respond to the dominant presence of the Global North in their culture.

CHAPTER II. WHERE DID THE BANANA COME FROM?

The history of the banana can be traced back thousands of years to the humid tropical regions of Southern Asia, although its exact origins are not clear (May 3). Referenced in ancient Hindu, Chinese, Greek and Roman literature and utilized in the ancient arts, bananas were venerated by prehistoric cultures as more than just nutritious fruit, as demonstrated by their elevated position in all aspects of life. Most likely, the fruit was brought west through migration and early trade, where it was then introduced into Egypt and Africa. After becoming an established crop and food source among Africans, the banana was brought by Spanish and Portuguese explorers to the Madeira and Canary Islands in the fifteenth century, where colonization was driven by the search for sugar, an immensely sought-after crop at the time (Carney 36). As the demand for sugar increased, so did the demand for laborers to cultivate the crop, resulting in the enslavement of many Africans. The importation of African laborers to the islands coincided with the arrival of bananas to the Atlantic, as the longstanding dietary preference among Africans also provided a basic and nutritious food staple to the hardworking laborers (Carney 36-37). Ironically, this early record of the banana revolved around a similar hierarchy of power and core-periphery dichotomy, connected to the slavery and colonialism of Spain and Portugal, as it did again when the fruit later became associated with economic imperialism in Central America.

Old chronicles written by Spanish explorers contain passages describing the discovery of *plátanos* upon their arrival to the New World tropics as early as 1504. The first variety of banana exported to North America, the Gros Michel, is not native to the Americas and is thought to have been brought to the New World by a French Botanist, Francois Pouat, around 1836.

Friar Tomas de Berlanga, the bishop of Panama as well as the officially recognized discoverer of

the Galapagos Islands, is credited with the first plantings of true fruit types of bananas in the Americas in 1516 (May 2-4).

Although the banana appears to have been widely unknown throughout Western Europe and North America in the early 19th century, the formation and development of the banana trade only a few decades later created high demand for the exotic fruit among international populations. The first bananas were brought to the United States in the early 1800's by local sea captains upon their journeys home from the tropics of Central and South America. Described by author Stacy May as "a cargo of strange yellow fruit" in her book *The United Fruit Company in Latin America (1958)*, the banana had still not earned its place on the tables of North Americans (4). However, that began to change in 1885 with the formation of the Boston Fruit Company. Spearheaded by Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker and Andrew Preston, along with nine other colleagues, the men established the independent fruit agency and shipped bananas from Jamaica to the Northeast United States. Later on, the Company expanded its supply throughout the Caribbean by reaching out to Cuba as well as Santo Domingo (May 5-6).

As the Boston Fruit Company found success in one region of the United States, a fellow North American was seeking the same in the Southern States. Minor C. Keith, born in 1848 to an affluent family from Brooklyn, New York, owned the Tropical Trading and Transport Company, the Colombia Land Company as well as the Snyder Banana Company. Based out of Costa Rica, Keith was shipping bananas through his companies from Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Nicaragua directly to New Orleans (May 5-6).

Minor C. Keith's relationship with Costa Rica began in 1871, when he first traveled to Puerto Limón to aid in the construction of a transnational railroad operated under his uncle, Henry Meiggs. A famous American railway builder, Meiggs was hired by the new president of

Costa Rica, General Tomás Guardia, to build a railroad that would connect Costa Ricans with the rest of the world and break the cycle of oligarchy, hoping to establish democracy and promote progress in the small nation (Bucheli, *Bananas and Business* 45-46). Meiggs signed a contract with the Costa Rican government, allowing three years for the completion of a railway covering one hundred miles from the western mountain town of Alajuela to the Caribbean province of Limón. Overwhelmed with a second railway under construction in Peru, Meiggs passed the Costa Rican project onto his nephews, Henry and Minor Keith. Minor was responsible for the workforce in Limón, hiring natives as well as selling them items from the company store including basic provisions, clothing and machetes essential for combating the dense jungle. An intelligent and resourceful Keith discovered that a cheap source of food would come from planting banana trees alongside the newly established tracks, which he could then sell to his workers for a profit. Most of Meiggs' railway laborers died while working in Limón due to difficult working conditions and an abundance of diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. Although accurate records were not kept, it is estimated that over four thousand lives were lost in the construction of the first twenty-five miles of the Costa Rican railroad (Bucheli, *Bananas and Business* 46).

Despite the death of both his uncle Meiggs and his brother Henry in 1874, Minor Keith remained with the project, managing the company store as well as his crew of workers, while allowing other contractors to come in and build sections of the railroad. Quickly, it became evident to Keith that the construction of the railway was not worth the extensive damages and costs it brought, as the low numbers of passengers made the venture extremely unprofitable. By the end of the 1870's, the allotted money for railway construction had run out and no contractors remained to complete the task (Bucheli, *Bananas and Business* 46-47). President Guardia

approached Keith with a one million dollar grant in hopes of resuming and finally completing the railroad. Realizing that the railroad required freight to survive, Keith happily regained control of the construction and finished the railway in 1890. Luckily, Keith had continued developing his banana plantations alongside the tracks for almost 20 years and, seeing the success of fellow North Americans Captain Lorenzo Baker and Andrew Preston, he decided to use the Costa Rican train to export shipments of his bananas.

For both Keith and the Boston Fruit Company, business grew rapidly as the banana became more and more popular in an increasingly industrialized North America. Before 1899, over 100 firms in the United States were involved in the trade; however as demand grew, the smallest and least efficient companies fell out of the competition. When about only 22 firms remained in the business, a deal was struck that would change the world of banana trading forever. Minor Keith was attempting to further expand his business when his bank, Hoadley and Company, went bankrupt in 1899, leaving Keith in a \$1.5 million debt. The Boston Fruit-Fruit Dispatch Company, a variation of the original company that had been established to promote expansion, reached out to Keith and made arrangements for a portion of Keith's fruit trade to be taken over and managed by the company. At the time, the two companies controlled seventy-five percent of the banana market in the United States.

Keith's company and the Boston Fruit Company served entirely different regions of the U.S., the South and Northeast respectively, and therefore were technically not in direct competition with one another. According to Stacy May, the inevitable merger between the noncompeting companies was "not meant to eliminate competition" but instead focused on the "obvious and logical reasons" for consolidation into a single entity, such as the need for a more constant and reliable flow of fruit as well as a production base expansion in order to dissuade the

negative effects from local disasters on the plantations. The merged companies established the first of modern multinationals, the United Fruit Company, on March 30, 1899, setting the template for modern capitalism in Latin America (6).

The United Fruit Company is infamous today for its controversial involvement in the Latin American banana industry. Although acknowledged throughout Latin America by various nicknames, such as *La Frutera*, *El Yunay* and *la Compañía*, the name most revealing of United Fruit's true character is *El Pulpo*, which translated to English means octopus. Designated by the many workers and communities affected by the UFCO, the term *El Pulpo* is a metaphor for the widespread reach and impact the Company had in Latin America, similar to how an octopus can spread its influence with its many tentacles (Chapman 7, 107). At its height during the early twentieth century, United Fruit's presence extended from Central to South America and the Caribbean, and was especially prominent in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador and Jamaica, turning nations into 'banana republics' (Chapman 49).

In the following chapter, I will analyze *Bananos y hombres*, a fictional text by author and political activist Carmen Lyra, which specifically highlights the consequences of foreign-owned banana plantations, like those of United Fruit, on the inhabitants of Costa Rica and other 'banana republics'. I will demonstrate how this work of fiction defends the national sovereignty of Costa Rica from the imperial power of North American industry, manifested in the United Fruit Company, and how it successfully exemplifies 'border thinking' in its narrative, acting as a subalternized perspective that both incorporates and condemns the modern world system and dominant discourse constructed by the Western/Global North perspective. I will further contextualize my argument by taking into consideration the historical, economic, political and social circumstances surrounding the publication of the text as well as in the life of the author.

CHAPTER III. BORDER LITERATURE IN *BANANOS Y HOMBRES*

Published in 1931, *Bananos y hombres* was written by Costa Rican author, María Isabel Carvajal Quesada, under the literary pseudonym Carmen Lyra. Born in San José in 1887, Lyra grew up in a nation developing under the burdens of colonialism and political instability. Founded as a Spanish colony in the sixteenth century, Costa Rica developed as an agrarian society dependent on its exports to the European market. Following its independence from Spain in 1821, the nation had to overcome numerous problems involving the establishment of regular trade routes to Europe and the transportation of goods from inland plantations to seaside ports. The first elected head of state, Juan Mora Fernández, instituted land reforms and progressive economic policies in 1825, which created an elite class of coffee barons that dominated Costa Rica's political system. Profiting from increasing coffee exports and defeating an attempted invasion by North American militarist and self-proclaimed president of Nicaragua William Walker, Costa Rica entered into an era of peaceful democracy that commenced in 1869 with the presidential elections considered to be the first honest in the nation's history. However, a succession of authoritarian leaders continued to threaten Costa Rica's political, economic and social development. Although militarism gave way to more peaceful transitions of power, various presidents still sought to prolong their rule, attempting to amend the national Constitution or dismiss uncooperative legislatures that opposed their administrations. President Tomás Guardia Gutiérrez, a military politician who governed Costa Rica from 1870 until his death in 1882, oversaw the beginnings of the banana industry and promoted economic

development in the nation through export trade, the construction of a national railway as well as the employment of North American Minor Keith⁶.

During this time, bananas and trains came to symbolize modernity among Costa Ricans, foreshadowing their future importance in the nation. The emerging banana business relied on the railway for transportation to the seaports, while the new railroad required bananas as freight to cover its costly construction, forming a symbiotic relationship between the nation and the new industry (May 9). Close ties between the national government and Minor Keith also grew as the two forces oversaw the development of the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica. Charles D. Kepner, author of *The Banana Empire*, a 1935 case study investigating the economic imperialism of the UFCO, reveals the mutually beneficial aspects of this relationship. Costa Rica, among other Central American nations, benefitted from free transportation of national mail and government-sponsored travel on UFCO constructed-railroads, as well as access to and use of Company facilities by the national government. In return, the Costa Rican government provided numerous tax exemptions, reductions or removal of import duties on all Company materials and various land concessions to the UFCO, the first of which financed the construction of the Costa Rican national railroad in 1870 (209-214). Although giving the Company priority and access to raw building materials retrieved from native lands, these concessions also supplied Costa Rica with a way to finance national development programs that benefitted the growing society. As the UFCO continued to build their growing industry, the Costa Rican government became more and more dependent on the Company, requiring their financial assistance and investment in various matters in order to retain their level of progress and prosperity. This dependency was abused by

⁶ See Chapter 2; Minor Keith was responsible for many developments in Costa Rica.

the Company, which maintained their dominance in the nation through a system of bribery and intimidation.

Kepner exposes such methods used to influence government officials, including Company propaganda that encouraged land concessions, promising relief from a depressed economy, redistribution of land for agrarian colonies and a flourishing tourism industry. The Company used propaganda to relay its discontent with the nation as well, many times presenting the government with an ultimatum, threatening to remove the lucrative business if their demands were not accepted (221-225). A free enterprise operating under capitalist ideals, the United Fruit Company took advantage of the situation in Central America where the national governments were open to foreign investment as a way to improve their economic and social conditions. However, instead of achieving their desired result of an improved standard of living, this give-and-take relationship between the Company and the 'banana republic' government created oppressive conditions for Central Americans. While both strove to maximize individual profits from the relationship, the Company's ambition disregarded the well-being of Central American populations, displacing indigenous communities, destroying acres of valuable land and exploiting native workers who labored under inhumane conditions (Chapman 105, 195).

The United Fruit Company in Central America functioned under little or no government regulation, paying minimal taxes, reducing laborers' wages and rights by eliminating workers' unions as well as privatizing state-owned assets, such as the ceded plantation lands and the national railroad. These and similar measures allowed the UFCO to exploit Central American nations using capitalist principles to ground their arguments, claiming a popular argument that capitalism brings economic success and social improvement to the all involved. However, the fundamental human rights of workers were attacked in this case, as laborers are turned into

machine-like, ignorant creatures. This relationship also led to the exploitation of the Central American populations as decreasing government involvement removed them from their nation's economic sphere and obscured the regulation of workers' rights. As previously discussed in this chapter, the relationship between the Liberal United Fruit Company and Costa Rica allowed the UFCO to have full control of the Central American banana industry, removing the native governments from the process and benefitting from the exploitative measures used to increase profits, such as low wages and reduced or nonexistent tariffs.

In Costa Rica, the United Fruit Company dominated the small nation's economy while also securing support from the central government by providing financial incentives as well as beneficial conditions for the government administration. The close relationship between the Company and the conservative government resulted in widespread unrest among Costa Ricans, especially plantation workers and small native growers who had been bought out by United Fruit. Carmen Lyra, like Ernesto Cardenal and other Latin American authors, utilized literature to represent this unrest and anguish caused by the foreign company's lack of respect for the sovereignty of Central American nations and their local populations.

III.I The Life and Literature of Carmen Lyra

In 1917, President Federico Tinoco Granados established a repressive military dictatorship in Costa Rica after seizing power from President Alfredo González in a coup d'état. Austerity measures taken by the González administration against large enterprises such as United Fruit, including a progressive taxation based on income level and increased government involvement in the economy, were revoked under the rule of President Tinoco, winning support

from the upper classes and the UFCO, despite his tyrannical practices and injustices against the lower, working classes (Rankin 90-92).

Extensively involved in national politics, Carmen Lyra held strong personal convictions against the Tinoco administration, which influenced her action as a crucial figure in the organization of women schoolteachers that burned down the headquarters of the official state newspaper, *La Información*, in 1919. This incident, among numerous other strikes and revolts, helped to overtake the dictatorship of President Tinoco that same year and reestablished a pluralist political system in Costa Rica (Bucheli, “Good Dictator” 17). Identifying with the ideals of the Communist Party, Lyra is credited with translating the *Communist Manifesto* into Spanish in 1920. She also helped to establish the official Communist Party of Costa Rica in 1931, which contested the recent worker-related tribulations overwhelming the nation, including economic hardships from the 1929 worldwide financial crisis and the Great Banana Strike of 1934, which I will later discuss in more detail (González 73). Opposing capitalist ideals and the United Fruit Company, the Communist Party advocated transferring the control of production and distribution back into the hands of workers’ unions, and negated the presence of fascist or authoritarian governments that had been governing Costa Rica for decades (Bucheli, “Good Dictator”17).

Lyra’s first novel *En una silla de ruedas* (*In a Wheelchair*, 1918) is viewed as a paramount example of *literatura costarricense*, by employing popular Costa Rican speech to portray local tradition and working-class experiences through the perspective of a paralyzed boy who grows up to become a successful artist in San José. Some critics include Lyra in the popular *costumbrismo* movement within Latin American literature, characterized by realist representations of local everyday life, customs and speech, due to her incorporation of popular

Costa Rican language in her stories. Lyra is most notably recognized in Costa Rica and abroad for her collection of children's stories and folklore in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, published in 1920 (González 73). Although finding lasting success in children's literature, Lyra's writing style was greatly influenced by her continued political activism, becoming more founded on political and social injustices within Costa Rica. Lyra's efforts to improve socio-economic conditions in her country are especially evident in the publication of *Bananos y hombres* (1931), a text written during Lyra's avid participation in the Costa Rican banana workers' strikes during the 1920's and 1930's. Lyra utilizes detailed realistic depictions in *Bananos y hombres* to suggest that the inescapable forces of the surrounding environment and social conditions shape human character (González 80).

Many critics consider Lyra to be either a Realist or Naturalist author, both literary movements which occurred almost simultaneously in Latin America. Although an outgrowth of Realism, Naturalism acts as a negation to Realism, depicting a believable, everyday reality in order to expose the underlying forces responsible for its characters' actions. In his book *The Spanish American Short Story* (1980), Seymour Menton explains that Naturalist authors,

Looked upon man as an aggregate of atoms whose actions were determined exclusively by animalistic needs, overwhelmed by the weight of heredity and environment; rejected picturesque themes located in pleasant settings; the protagonist, transformed into a *bête humaine*, lived in the worst conditions. (87)

Upholding that Naturalist authors utilize an objective, almost scientific and distant tone to describe and analyze the harsh realities of life, favoring themes such as alcoholism, prostitution, adultery and the misery of the masses, Menton explains:

Naturalists chose sordid themes to prove their theory; by exposing human degradation, were advocating a greater understanding of the problems and of the conditions responsible for this degradation. (87-88)

Lyra employs techniques similar to the Naturalism described by Menton to reveal the dark severities endured by various groups, including *peones*, women and children, living on Costa Rican banana plantations, showing their conditions to be a direct result of the overarching influences of Global North capitalism and authoritative governments. However, unlike Naturalist texts, which embrace objectivism and avoid emotional or opinionated attachment to the text, Lyra immediately establishes a strong voice of opposition to the foreign banana industry in Central America, making her work more inclined towards a Realist text.

Bananos y hombres is divided into four sections entitled, ‘Estefanía’, ‘Nochebuena’, ‘Niños’ and ‘Río Arriba’, respectively. Providing a short introduction to the four sections, Lyra defines the theme of her work: “Pongo primero BANANOS que HOMBRES porque en las fincas de banano, la fruta ocupa el primer lugar, o más bien el único”, emphasizing the indomitable structure that places bananas in a higher position than men on the banana plantations of Central America (Lyra 371). Through this small foreword, Lyra introduces her own opinions and sentiments about the harsh realities of foreign banana plantations in her country, establishing a tone of resistance that will frame the rest of her work.

III.II *Las olvidadas, Mujeres en la plantación bananera*

Expounding upon the bitter reality of being a woman on a banana plantation, the first section in her novel *Bananos y hombres*, entitled “Estefanía R.,” commences with the description of an old, wooden cross, buried and forgotten in the sand of a Costa Rican seashore. In fading paint, the name Estefanía R. is written upon the cross. The narrator ponders the life behind the name, prompting a procession of imaginary, faceless women boasting withered bodies, dirty hair and sunburned faces, characteristic of those living on plantations. Creating an anonymous character, Lyra intends to demonstrate that Estefanía R. could be anyone, and at the same time be “una de las tantas mujeres que han pasado por las fincas de banano” (374). She becomes an every-woman, inclusive of all who suffer a life within the boundaries of a banana plantation. Detailing the life of the anonymous woman, Lyra focuses on the rampant sexual violence taking place on banana plantations, as well as an overwhelming conviction that values women as solely sexual objects for men. Emphasizing the infrequency of females on plantations, Lyra writes, “En una ocasión se metió a vivir con un hondureño y se fue con él a una finca en donde solo admitían hombres solos. La muchacha era la única mujer que allí había” (372). When brought to the plantation by means outside of her control, the woman is objectified and desired to a point where it is implied that she will be sexually assaulted by the myriad of unhappy, over-worked men. Although not explicit, the indication in this statement is that the exploitative conditions on banana plantations lead to other social ills, such as sexual violence, as the plantation laborers must work under extremely difficult circumstances in a world created and dominated by United Fruit’s foreign ideologies.

In a globalizing world, women are many times forgotten, marginalized and exploited as a result of economic integration and cultural hegemony. According to a study published in the

Journal of International Development in 2006, globalization has led to trends over the past 40 years that suggest increased opportunities for women worldwide to participate in paid labor activities (Seguino and Grown 1084). However, these trends obscure the difference between voluntary participation in the labor force and the so-called ‘added worker effect’, which signifies the distress felt by women to seek waged work due to both falling household incomes and male wages (Seguino and Grown 1084). Also, women have been essentially forced into labor-intensive export manufacturing positions, due to transnational corporations’ preference for female workers since they are perceived as better suited to the type of work and also more docile and less likely to challenge the management (Bergeron 987-988). This ‘crowding’ into certain labor areas has further limited women’s opportunities, both explicitly and implicitly restricting their access to more skill-oriented jobs that would be more profitable (Seguino and Grown 1084).

The global barriers like these confronted by women are relatable to the strife encountered on a local level in Lyra’s work, illuminating an interconnection between globalizing forces and what is occurring on banana plantations. Portraying a tension between the global force of the United Fruit Company and the local force of native Costa Ricans, Lyra establishes the disconnected, unharmonious relationship that exists between global and local influences in the region, as manifested on banana plantations. Lyra’s simple narration of a woman’s life on a Central American banana plantation exemplifies ‘border thinking’ by addressing the detrimental consequences that globalization has on the subordinated economy and culture of the host-nation. By focusing on the lives of marginalized and exploited groups, namely plantation laborers and women, Lyra tells a realistic story that has long been obscured by the capitalistic processes of production and consumption, as well as the historical colonial discourse in Central American

nations. The colonial framework and the banana industry were both consequences of foreign intrusion into the economy, politics and cultural lives of Central Americans. Therefore, Lyra's discussion of the social ills created by the foreign banana companies is contingent upon the evident tension between global and local forces. As previously discussed, border thinking both absorbs and challenges the hegemonic form of thinking, which is only possible when two distinctive perspectives collide at the 'border' between the Global North and South. It is at this border where Lyra makes her voice heard and develops her unique perspective of 'border thinker,' remaining within the boundaries constructed by the dominant North while creating a new possibility or a new way of being and knowing that reflects the point of view of the marginalized South.

In this section of her novel, Lyra describes the experience of the unnamed woman and her fatherless, three year-old daughter at the train station as they wait for a mule-pulled cart to bring them to a nearby hospital:

Se fue a buscar acomodo con otros pasajeros en unos de los
carros-plataformas, que sirven para el transporte de la fruta.
Se sentó con su hijita entre un montón de sacos y cajones.
(374)

Reinforcing the conviction that began her novel, that a human life is far less important or valuable on a plantation than is the survival of the precious fruit, this scene reiterates the image of the banana's superiority to human life. Lyra depicts the woman and her daughter seated amongst cargoes of bananas because it is the only way for them to travel out of the plantation, since the available transportation in the area is for banana distribution, not for traveling inhabitants. This scene could also be a metaphor for the advantage that capitalist discourse

retains in developing nations, a framework identifiable on a global scale. The Western ideal and capitalist structure, symbolized here by bananas, dominates other discourses and ways of thinking in non-Western or Global South nations, symbolized by the woman and little girl. Similar to how the woman is subordinated by the importance of bananas, the non-dominant discourses of the Global South are subalternized by the overwhelming presence of foreign capitalism and Western thought.

Globalization has facilitated increasing international trade, where a network of imports and exports allows for commodities to be mass produced and distributed to far-away populations. Although distant nations are connected through trade, the process further removes consumers from the factors of production by concealing the human labor forces responsible for producing many primary goods. In his book *Capital: Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx refers to this process as ‘commodity fetishism’:

Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer’s labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange. In other words, the labour of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labour of society, only by means of the relations, which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things. (321)

According to Marx, the capitalist process of trading commodities in the market transforms human interactions to be perceived as solely economic relations between objects, consequently masking the true human relations of production between the worker and the capitalist, allowing consumers to overlook the conditions in which many of their imported goods are produced. Repeating the image of the wooden cross at the end of the section “Estefanía R.,” Lyra relates this removal from the process of fetishization to the situation of the nameless woman, who remains forgotten and concealed by the global processes that maintain a cycle of suppression and exploitation, similar to the marginalized working-classes in developing nations.

The marginalization of vulnerable populations, such as the women Lyra describes in this first section, results from the processes of globalization and the spread of Western capitalism. According to Mignolo, the overarching Western or Global North discourse that has come to dominate the world system is interconnected with the histories of capitalism and imperial conflict. Capitalism and related processes, like commodity fetishism, encompass a Global North perspective, further obscuring the non-Western populations that identify with a perspective outside of the dominant as capitalism infiltrates the world system. Bringing a Global North framework and ideology into dissimilar cultures, capitalism further marginalizes populations of the Global South and subordinates their previous ways of being and knowing as inferior to the Western point of view.

Noam Chomsky argues that although capitalism brings the concept of freedom to nations that provides a significant improvement from previous conditions of colonialism and imperialism, the framework of Western capitalism sets new and different limitations, especially on non-Western nations located in the Global South (Wilkin 26). In his work, Chomsky sought to expose how historical structures of dominance, imperialism and oppression were integral to

the development and desire for capitalist democracy in Global South nations (Wilkin 27).

Capitalism offers developing nations a chance to enter into the modern or developed world by increasing wealth and improving social and political conditions. However, the desire for capitalism is the result of Northern frameworks that have infiltrated the histories of regions in the Global South through the processes of colonialism as well as economic and political interference.

In an over-simplification of the capitalist relationship, there are positive sides to the development of capitalist industry in the Global South, such as the United Fruit Company providing jobs and livelihoods to many locals⁷; however, the negative consequences are equally palpable, as non-Western nations become culturally dominated by the Global North, perpetuating a hierarchy of power and dominance over the marginalized ‘other’. Critics of capitalism and globalization disagree with supporters that a desired equality of opportunity between nations is feasible, arguing instead that the changes seen so far around the world have only been beneficial to wealthy classes and have worsened the socio-economic disparities in developing nations with the increasing interconnectedness of the world (Centeno 146-147).

In the first section, “Estefanía R.,” Lyra agrees with critics of globalization, condemning the infiltration of Global North ideological frameworks, such as capitalism, as well as the imposition of Western/modern ideology into the cultures of the Global South. Lyra’s perspective upholds that the few positive benefits of foreign investment evident in Costa Rica do not outweigh the hardships and marginalization experienced by the local culture.

⁷ Positive effects of globalization are often measured through economic development, highlighting statistical data such as rising stock prices, national per capita incomes, GDP/GNP among others that demonstrate positive trends; however, many times the humanistic aspect is ignored when measuring the consequences of a globalizing world, indicated through the (relative) well-being of people and nature around the globe (Cavanagh 21-23).

III.III *Nochebuena, la noche de lluvia*

In the second section, “Nochebuena”, Lyra emphasizes the prevalence of disparity on banana plantations, writing, “En las fincas de banano se le guardan más consideraciones a una mata de banano que a un peón” (374), signifying again that a single bunch of bananas occupies the dominant position over the lives of plantation workers. In “Nochebuena”, Lyra challenges the appalling environment and conditions endured by plantation workers by contrasting their lives with the ornate Christmas Eve celebration of those occupying superior positions, namely Company businessmen. The Christmas holiday began as a religious celebration of the Christian faith, commemorating the life of Jesus Christ; however, the holiday has become commercialized and associated with excessive consumerism, especially in the United States, as a direct construct of capitalist ideals that dominate the society.

Although nature is a central theme throughout Lyra’s work, her emphasis on the connection between man and nature is extremely evident in “Nochebuena”. The description of an incessant rainfall is used as a backdrop throughout the segment, commencing with three days of rain without interruption; “Hace tres días llueve sin cesar” (375). The section continues to develop around the image of rain, displayed in phrases such as “sigue lloviendo” (375-376) and “no deja de llover” (378). Particularly focusing on the duration and changelessness of the rainfall, Lyra parallels this unchanging situation to the plantation workers who remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and exploitation. The local inhabitants, employed by a foreign company, are engaged in an unending cycle of foreign dominance, entertaining low wages, harsh working conditions and minimal opportunities, yet never obtaining economic independence.

One of the results of such harsh conditions is the excessive use of alcohol among workers on plantations, which Lyra uncovers in her characters. The workers look for a way to numb the

harsh, monotonous reality of life on *la finca*, characterized by long work days, poor diets, undesirable living conditions and the resulting adverse health effects: “En su faena tienen que recorrer kilómetros; llevan guaro contrabando y beben” (375). Even though the native workers economically benefit from this North-South relationship with the banana company, the detrimental effects seen in their everyday lives from this foreign invader, such as alcoholism and maltreatment, are much more extensive, substantially affecting and altering their society and culture. Lyra writes, “La propaganda antialcohólica es algo sin sentido en esos lugares... Sin el guaro, qué vida más aburrida sería la de los peones” (376), expressing the workers’ adjustment from their previous way of life in order to accommodate the rules set forth by the foreign banana company, an entity which infiltrated into their native space and created its own culture within a preexisting one.

In this section, Lyra refers to the foreign banana company exploiting the native populations as the “United Banana Co.,” a fictional North American company headquartered in New York City, directly criticizing the existent United Fruit Company. The fictional reproduction of the Company allows Lyra to illuminate disturbing truths about the UFCO, such as horrific working conditions, through an objective reality that depicts the daily lives of fictional workers and their families, avoiding direct criticism of the Costa Rican government’s close ally, something that may have resulted in immediate retributions against her⁸. Emphasizing the foreign influence and impact of the North American company on the Central American region, Lyra includes English fragments within the section of likely phrases heard on a North American-owned plantation, such as “*mil racimos slight heavy full*” and “*una fiesta en el Amusement Hall*” (375, 378). These inclusions could either disparage the *gringo* usage of the native Spanish

⁸ As previously discussed, Central American governments allied with the UFCO to create mutually beneficial conditions.

language on plantations, ridiculing their lack of fluency and accent, or could address the infiltration of English words into the everyday speech of Spanish-speaking plantation laborers, signifying a loss of culture through a partial demise of their native language.

In addition to the use of English as well as the prevalent social and economic disparities on plantations, the section “Nochebuena” depicts the infiltration of the company’s foreign culture through the way in which Company officers celebrate their Christmas Eve. Resulting from the various global influences in the colonization of the New World, the North and South developed different religious ideals and their role in social, cultural and political life⁹. Spanish conquistadors, who established colonies in the New World during the sixteenth century, emphasized the importance of religion to their newly founded colonies, as Christianity was the official religion of the Spanish Crown, creating the predominantly conservative Catholic perspective in Latin America (Jenkins). However, the industrialization and secularization of North America, more specifically the United States, greatly affected the manner in which Christmas was celebrated in comparison to Latin America. U.S. society tends to view Christmas Day as the climax of the holiday season, characterized today by Western ideals of consumerism and accumulation. Contrastingly, Latin American culture revolves around the celebration of *Nochebuena* or Christmas Eve, characterized by happy festivities that commemorate the love, generosity and solidarity of the local communities (Montaño). Noting that the holiday *Nochebuena* denotes distinctive associations in North American culture as opposed to Central American tradition, Lyra describes North American holiday practices as unfamiliar and humorous:

⁹ According to Walter Mignolo, “Christianity became, with the ‘discovery of America’, the first global design of the modern/colonial system and, consequently the anchor of Occidentalism and the coloniality of power” (*Local Histories* 21).

Los altos empleados de la ‘United Banana Co.’ que viven en Limón...también celebran su Nochebuena. Han adornado sus casas confortables con graciosas coronas de muérdago y han plantado arbolitos de Navidad con muchas luces y frutas fantásticas de vidrio. (378)

Juxtaposing crucial differences in cultural traditions, Lyra also contrasts a society of wealthy, foreign landowners against the lifestyles of native plantation workers. The North American celebration of Christmas emphasizes the excess of wealth that individuals use to buy luxury goods, as well as the values of accumulation and material wealth. However, this celebration is undermined as the wealth and commodities were acquired by an outside force that exploited a hard-working group of less fortunate people. Lyra writes of a native child that receives lavish Christmas gifts from his parents, whose employment by the ‘United Banana Co.’ allowed them to provide better circumstances for their son. However, Lyra writes, “al contemplar el fruto de su amor encantado con aquellos juguetes comprados con el dinero que la ‘United Banana Co.’, dieron como premio a su venalidad” (379), stressing that their acquisition of wealth results directly from the corrupt and abusive exploits of the capitalist Company. This fragment also suggests the cultural differences in the celebration of *Nochebuena* and Christmas, implying that the holiday perpetuates a North American value of material wealth instead of the traditional emotionally-rewarding practices.

Lyra’s description of the “United Banana Co.” and its involvement in the Central American region depicts a true reality of foreign investment. As evident in Lyra’s *Bananos y hombres*, many underdeveloped nations are located in the Global South and have become dominated by businesses of the Global North, resulting from the world dichotomy of the modern,

colonial world that has allowed for the domineering Western perspective to subordinate those with dissimilar knowledges, those located on the outside or on the border of the Global North.

III.IV *Niños, los más vulnerables*

In the third section “Niños”, Lyra addresses unpleasant issues and realities plaguing plantation life among the most vulnerable population, children. Detailing the lives of various children, Lyra chooses to focus especially on the presence of malnutrition, disability and extreme poverty of plantation workers and their families. To introduce the section, Lyra ironically writes, “Dicen unas grandes autoridades médicas a quienes la United Fruit Co. ha consultado, con el fin de hacer propaganda a su artículo, que el banano es un gran alimento para los niños” (Lyra 380). The irony of this phrase lies in the existence of North American propaganda that promotes bananas as a healthy, necessary addition to children’s diets. This propaganda, however, directly obscures the damaging effects that banana production has on the culture and people in banana republics, and especially on children.

Propaganda is produced to spread ideas, facts or allegations that deliberately further an institution or a cause, or that intentionally damage an opposing cause (Merriam-Webster). The UFCO extensively utilized propaganda to promote their products, commoditizing both the fruit as well as the image of the banana in the United States. With images such as *Miss Chiquita Banana*, along with the songs and advertisement jingles crafted around her, the Company successfully concealed the true reality of the banana industry and ensured high demand among their consumers (Chapman 119).

Edward Bernays, ‘the Father of Public Relations’ and author of the book *Propaganda* (1928), was hired by the UFCO during World War II to help improve the Company’s deteriorating public image (Chapman 115). In his book *Propaganda*, Bernays discusses the idea of the ‘group mind’, or the mainstream population, which does not think independently; however, the impulses, emotions and habits of the masses can be harnessed and manipulated by the use of propaganda. Using this mentality, Bernays commenced an era of ‘repositioning’ for the Company, in which they transformed their image to convey respectability and good values among their most important consumers, the United States’ populations (Chapman 115-117). To accomplish this, the UFCO sent world maps and coloring books to schools in the United States for children’s geography lessons, established a ‘home economics department’ in the U.S. that provided material for mothers such as booklets that suggested “new tempting ways to serve bananas” and promoted the now-common combination of sliced banana in breakfast cereal. The UFCO reached out to radio stations, creating a program called “Radio Bound for Banana Land”, as well as infiltrating their advertisements into magazines by publishing short stories that constructed an exotic, favorable image of life on Central American banana plantations (Chapman 113-114).

Propaganda diffused by the United Fruit Company greatly transformed the way in which United States’ culture consumed the constructed image of the banana; however, it simultaneously adjusted the manner in which banana-producing nations perceived it. Lyra expresses the dichotomy between these perceptions stating:

Los que conocen el valor de los alimentos, han descubierto que el
banano es una gran cosa...pero las gentes que trabajan en las fincas de
banano dicen que es malo. Bueno, hacen la ironía sin saberlo. En cambio

en los Estados Unidos...por lo tanto sabe aprovechar honradamente lo que a los demás ha costado sudor y fatiga, comen todos los bananos que les ofrece la *United Fruit Co.* (383)

The Company trained the United States to embrace the banana as essential, constructing its presence as both an agricultural and cultural commodity. In “Niños”, Lyra criticizes how the infiltration of propaganda into the United States ‘orientalized’ the lands in which bananas were produced:

En revistas, pintan a los trópicos, las tierras en donde se cultiva el banano, como el paraíso terrenal, grabados de niños sonrientes y sanos, o de graciosos chiquillos que comen banano. (383)

Developed by author and philosopher Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, the term ‘orientalism’ refers to a ‘style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinctions made between the “Orient” and the “Occident”’, an artificial boundary that determined the concept of ‘them’ and ‘us’ (2-3). This signifies that there exists an accepted distinction between the East and the West, which individuals in the West use in order to reify or justify their place within their own society as well as in the larger world. The “Orient” became characterized as underdeveloped lands which were exoticized by those living in the Occident, meaning that they constructed their own images of what Orientals were and were not while at the same time constructing their own Western identities. In this sense, ‘orientalizing’ suggests a constructed representation of a nation or a culture which in reality does not accurately portray the true realities of the nation or culture.

Carmen Miranda, a Brazilian singer and dancer popular in North America during the 1940's and 1950's, epitomizes the process of 'orientalism'. Her portrayal of Latin American culture allowed for specific cultural elements to become popularized and 'fetishized' in the United States, consequently obscuring the true, harsh reality of the regions where bananas were produced. Miranda found fame on Broadway as well as in Hollywood films, most recognizable for her role in *The Gang's All Here* as well as her distinctive fruit-decorated hats. She was seen by North Americans as personifying Central American culture; however, the stereotypical image she portrayed resulted in criticism from Central Americans who rejected Miranda for giving in to the commercialization of North America, feeling that she had become too "Americanized" (Roberts 5,13). Central Americans denounced the foreign modification and consumption of their culture, demonstrating a tension between global and local forces as well as a refusal to lose their cultural identity to outside influences. The local discourse of Central American culture collided with the global discourse shaped by a Western perspective, that of the Global North which promotes capitalist ideals, consequently jeopardizing the preservation of the native way of being and knowing as a Western ideology became more influential and prevalent with their control and expansion of the banana industry.

Feigned advertisements like those created and utilized by the United Fruit Company portrayed Central America under an 'oriental' gaze, creating an illusion among North Americans by reifying their preconceived images of the region as desirable and exotic, when in reality, Central America was poverty stricken and dominated by imperial authorities. The process of commodity fetishism demonstrates the efficacy of propaganda in the marginalization and obstruction of an unwanted element in capitalism, removing the processes of labor and subsequently the importance of the 'other' in the dominant Western world of the consumer.

Contrasting a positive opinion felt in North America, the Company's propaganda fostered a growing mistrust and dislike of foreign business among the inhabitants of Central America as they watched the product of their hard work be consumed in mass quantities by a culture that was not their own. In *The Banana Empire* (1958), Kepner quotes Dr. García Monge, the well-known editor of *El Repertorio Americano*, the political magazine in which Lyra published *Bananos y hombres*:

It is not due to the fact that it is an American concern, but to its monopolistic character; we do not want the United Fruit Company to leave, but to do business without a new contract. There should be free exportation – with some export tax. (343)

Monge clearly articulates that the region is grateful to the Northern industry for providing jobs and wealth to the Central American nations; however, he clarifies that the dominant nature of the Company will not be accepted, indicating that the nations, although developing, are not overly reliant on the presence of foreign business or Western involvement in their political and social spheres, and would rather be without the banana company than to be under imperial control of a Western power.

Like Monge, Lyra upholds that the Global South is not depending upon the business or intervention of the Global North, challenging the long established framework of a modern-colonial dichotomy. However, concluding the section of her novel *Bananos y hombres* called “Niños” with a popular slogan during the North American banana craze, Lyra provides both English and Spanish versions to clearly demonstrate the powerful influence of the Global North already present in Central America: “For growing children bananas and milk are a nourishing

luncheon” (383). It is difficult to ignore the irony in the passage. Here, Lyra contrasts the situation of relatively privileged children in the U.S. to children growing up precariously on banana plantations, directly criticizing the foreign company for providing false impressions of life in ‘banana republics’ as being comparable to life in North America. As Lyra illustrates, malnutrition was the leading cause of death and disability among children on banana plantations (Jimenez 39).

In “Niños”, Lyra chooses to detail the lives of various children who, like the woman Estefanía R. from the first section, act as characters representative of all children suffering from the effects of the banana industry, namely economic and cultural exploitation. Lyra opens with the story of Ramón and Julián, two boys who share the same mother but are estranged from their respective fathers, one being Nicaraguan and the other Chinese¹⁰. Relating the life of Anselmo, Lyra writes: “Quizás sea el oficio lo que ha dado al niño esa cara de tonto o de bestia de carga que tiene” (381), indicating that the boy’s face does not reflect childhood happiness or optimism, but instead resembles a dumb workhorse, made dull by the exhausting, monotonous work on the plantation where he must labor in order to survive. Martín, an eight year old boy abandoned by his mother, has not received any type of education on the plantation. His father’s newest mistress encourages his education by washing laundry for one of the *peones* in exchange for lessons in reading and writing, hoping that the children “(no) se queden burros como ella, que ni leer sabe” (381). Similarly, Natalia’s mother wishes for her daughter to be educated as well; however, this proves impossible as the family is reassigned to a distant region to help clear the land for more banana plantings: “los chiquillos se tendrán que quedar animales como ella que no sabe ni una letra; si, animales entre esas soledades” (382). With the movement of the family

¹⁰ The railroad construction and development of banana plantations brought migrant workers from China as well as the West Indies into Central America. (Bethell 212)

from one plantation to another, Lyra implies that the children, like their parents and even grandparents, cannot escape the overbearing cycle of poverty and limited opportunity, and so will remain to be undereducated, banana plantations laborers.

Making reference in this section to the unchanging cycle of illiteracy and poor education found among generations on banana plantations, Lyra further indicates through the failure of her characters that the future holds no hope for change. The cyclical nature of life on a plantation becomes evident as Lyra describes parents abandoning or neglecting their children, who in turn become more likely to do the same. Issues such as these are not limited to Central American banana plantations, but are found throughout nations all over the world, where economic and social conditions place intense strains on parents, escalating the likelihood of parental neglect, abuse and abandonment.

The World Health Organization (WHO), among other organizations, has performed numerous studies on the rates of child abuse and neglect in developing nations, finding that physical abuse is much more prevalent in developing countries. Although it is difficult to compare child abuse across cultures due to dissimilar cultural norms, the major determinants found among regions with high child abuse rates were poor economic status of the family as well as low education levels of parents (Akmatov 3-5). The processes of globalization increase the frequency of these conditions as more companies become international, exporting low-paying, unskilled jobs to underdeveloped areas that have a large labor force. These global processes separate local people from their culture, disconnecting them from originally national lands and industries from which they subsisted before the arrival of foreign influences.

Lyra maintains the important connection between man and earth in the section “Niños” by comparing and contrasting nature with the entity of the banana company.

De la otra ribera gritan, hace poco un tiburón aserró la
pierna a una muchachita; A saber si en muchas de ellas (las
estrellas) hay paludismo, culebras venenosas, tiburones y
fincas de banano. (382)

Lyra portrays the Company acting as a predator, like a shark or venomous snake, dangerous to those who cross its path. The young girl, who was attacked by a shark while bathing in the river, can be viewed as a metaphor to the Central American nations that were victimized by foreign industry. By referencing the sky and the stars, Lyra creates a familiarity between all places in the world where evil occurs, projecting a local struggle onto a global scale, allowing her message to be universally relatable.

III.V *An unnatural product*

The fourth section, “Río Arriba”, encompasses the overall sentiment of Lyra’s work, stated in the opening sentence: “En las zonas bananeras tiene más valor un racimo de bananos que un hombre” (383). Here she evokes the sentence she used to begin her novel. On banana plantations, workers and their families are dehumanized by the horrific conditions under which they live and work, surrendering to the constructed supremacy of the fruit that they cultivate. With advances in modernization and globalization, this dehumanization becomes more apparent as laborers monotonously and ceaselessly produce, more closely resembling machines than actual human beings. The idea of dehumanization is realized through the formation of cultural and political structures, which dictate the way populations behave and think within a society. Physical manifestations of these structures are employed by state governments, as exertions of

violence over the body are used to bring about an adherence to a unified system of political control in a nation. Examples in contemporary society include various laws and regulations such as the death penalty, the mandatory educational system as well as the use of propaganda to promote particular ideas of what is and is not acceptable in a society. Using incentive and punishment to teach individuals to behave under the constructed system, government use of these practices ultimately results in the manipulation of public will in order to produce passive, unquestioning populations that generate fewer overall conflicts for the society's governing power.

Lyra depicts a similar manipulation of public thought by a dominating force when she describes a plantation worker who has just been injured:

Este hombre se ha golpeado terriblemente el pecho y una pierna al cargar bananos en un lanchón de la finca. Cuando se golpeó nadie le hizo caso, y después el dueño de la finca no tuvo tiempo de ocuparse del asunto. ¿Acaso los hombres enfermos cuentan en las fincas de banano? (386)

The lack of compassion felt for the worker by his superior is a direct result of the desensitization to the personal strife of these people, mainly because the Company values their productivity above their individual goals, values and beliefs. Lyra again exemplifies the inhuman, monotonous life of a *peón* and the changelessness of their harsh reality with the life of Pancho Sandino. A fictional boat mechanic, Pancho “lleva turistas por los Caños de Tortuguero, ni siquiera levanta la cabeza al oír las exclamaciones de estos ante la maravilla del espectáculo. Hace veinte años está viendo la misma cosa” (385). Pancho, like many of Lyra's characters, represents the innumerable, nameless workers who become so accustomed to performing the

same actions day after day, that their bodies begin to function like machines, without thought or emotion. The mechanization of work is a result of industrialization and increased production, altering the focus of life to revolve around work, consumption and accumulation; the gains of a capitalist society. Without realizing it, the processes of industrialization and globalization have resulted in a docility among world populations, which has been accepted and even expected among many societies as a shift towards a ‘live to work’ mindset becomes increasingly apparent in countries such as the United States and especially China, where individuals work for too many hours until they physically exhaust themselves.

III.VI *La compañía que parecía un Salvador*

In the short epilogue after the four primary sections, entitled “El peón que parecía un santo”, Lyra describes the life of a worker who arrives at a plantation and becomes a figure of whom everybody is fond: “todo el mundo en la finca lo quería y le tenía confianza y en los cinco meses que pasó allí nadie lo vio borracho ni pelear con ninguno” (387). The *peón* educates the workers’ as well as the officers’ children, teaches the local people to capture birds and other small animals by using traps, and offers countless other interesting stories and remedies for the innumerable distresses faced on banana plantations. However, the virtuous reputation of the *peón* becomes tarnished when it is discovered that he killed a Company police officer, knocking him unconscious before slitting his throat. Although at first the *peón* seems like a saintly figure, brought to *la finca* to better the dreary lives of the others, Lyra’s intention is to illustrate the reality that not everything is what it appears to be. Like the *peón*, the United Fruit Company first appeared beneficial to the host-nation and its inhabitants, providing jobs and wealth creation to

the struggling economy. However, before long, as in the story of the *peón*, the true colors of the Company are presented to its enthralled admirers, revealing the detrimental effects it brings upon the economy and culture of the native region.

Lyra directs attention to the vastness of the world created by the United Fruit Company, operating as a distinct entity that is impenetrable by the surrounding culture of the Central American nation. Displaying that the Company creates a world which operates under its own laws and regulations, Lyra writes, “y apenas los otros le hacían frente los llevaban al cepo (porque ha de saberse que aún cuando los cepos son prohibidos por la ley, todavía se usan en los poblados de esas regiones bananeras)” (387). Disregarding the existing nationwide laws and asserting their dominance under a capitalist framework, the foreign company created a situation in which it had cultural superiority and dominion in the host-nation, threatening the sovereignty of Costa Rica. The UFCO acted as a tumor within the native landscape, an entity vainly trying to appear ‘natural’ in a region where it was not indigenous, ultimately expanding its imposition and control outwards into the native world in which it first intruded.

Costa Rica, and almost all of Central America, developed under an agriculturally-dependent framework. The banana industry significantly connected Costa Rica with the global market, attracting the investment of foreign companies and supporting the nation with revenue from growing exports. However, the banana, a natural commodity, became central to Costa Rica’s economic, political and social development only under the control of an unnatural, foreign enterprise in the region, the UFCO. Lyra’s critical analysis of banana plantations as the source of discontent, found in working-class strife and national injustices, perpetuates the importance of the banana in Costa Rica, regarding it as a central theme in the nation’s economic, political and social reforms.

III.VII SIGNIFICANCE

Lyra's *Bananos y hombres* depicts the stunning, detailed realities of life on foreign-operated banana plantations in Central America. Lyra's political fervor is a driving force behind her novel as her Communist convictions in favor of improved workers' rights and localized production were endangered by both President Tinoco and the UFCO. The first person in Costa Rica to openly challenge the 'Yankee imperialism' of the Company, Lyra began a trend later followed by other Costa Rican authors, including Carlos Luis Fallas, Joaquín Gutiérrez and Fabían Dobles, that continued to decry the horrid conditions on foreign-run banana plantations as well as the disparities created by the cooperation between authoritative governments and the foreign enterprise that came to dominate the economic and social spheres of Central America (González 73). In return for financial and public support from the Costa Rican government, the Company maintained an oppressive system in the nation with little or no social reform that permitted the dictator to remain in power. Recognizing this dependency between President Tinoco's dictatorship and the United Fruit Company, Lyra may have anticipated that the elimination of the UFCO would result in the abolition of the tyrannical government as well. In her article, "Costa Rican Identity and the Stories of Carmen Lyra", Ann González discusses Lyra's connection to the national identity of Costa Ricans, one strongly equated with the proletariat and peasant classes (González 74). By focusing on the marginalized and vulnerable populations in her writing, Lyra repositions these groups from the periphery into mainstream culture. She minimizes the disparity between poor and wealthy, those on the outskirts of society and those located in the center, by connecting the distinct groups through literature.

Lyra's incorporation of marginalized populations into the dominant framework of the Global North exemplifies Mignolo's idea of 'border thinking' as a consequence of the 'colonial

difference'. The process of colonization inherently suppresses local or alternative ways of thinking and perceiving, imposing a dominant world view on the populations being colonized and 'civilized' by Western powers. Border thinking is the response of a particular group within the suppressed, subordinate populations to these hegemonic structures and discourses that have come to dominate global interactions. In *Bananos y hombres*, Lyra successfully responds to the imposed structure of foreign influence and the United Fruit Company, by relating the discourse of periphery populations, plantations laborers and the working-class, with the dialogue of dominant mainstream forces in Costa Rica, the educated and upper-class audiences. Lyra is able to occupy this position due to her past experiences and interactions with the Global North discourse, especially through her education and years traveling abroad. She relates those experiences with her natively-developed perspective, acquired through her life in Costa Rica as well as her active participation alongside marginalized groups, such as plantation workers struggling to improve wages and conditions.

The literature authored by Lyra, among other Latin American authors who illuminate the ills of foreign business and capitalist Liberalism in the region, is incredibly important in the development of Costa Rica. Reaffirming popular national sentiment during the early twentieth century in Costa Rica, Lyra focuses on the specific worker-related issues plaguing the nation's banana plantations, repeatedly emphasizing that the foreign intrusion of the United Fruit Company is responsible for the social, political and economic distresses afflicting the local populations. Publishing the novel in 1931, at the beginning of the working-class struggle against the foreign company, Lyra prefigured the culmination of a growing national unrest in Costa Rica, as well as the unrest throughout the rest of Latin America. *Bananos y hombres* was published in the Costa Rican cultural magazine, *Repertorio Americano*, issued between 1919 and 1958 by

author Joaquín García Monge in the capitol of San José. The magazine behaved as a significant forum of discussion for prominent Latin American intellectuals during the time, including pieces by authors who promoted the ideals of democracy, reform and equality among populations. It was also one of the only magazines where Lyra, who openly criticized the local government and identified with the Communist Party, could publish her precarious article (Paniagua 184-187).

III.VIII COSTA RICA AFTER *BANANOS Y HOMBRES*

After the downfall of President Tinoco in 1919, the United Fruit Company faced relatively mild nationalist opposition from various Costa Rican politicians and especially from the working-class of plantation laborers. During the years of the Great Depression, an economically-strained Costa Rica, governed by President Cleto González Víquez, confronted larger problems dealing with their declining exports in both coffee and bananas. Responding to its own economic hardships, the Company reduced production on Costa Rican plantations to curtail their expenses (*Good Dictator* 17-18). The resulting economic despair led to protests by landowners and elite groups against the monopolistic power of the UFCO, creating a strange, although short, alliance between the elite and agrarian classes in the nation. The Costa Rican government also opposed the Company's policies to cutback, writing a report that stated the UFCO had ceased to respect their original contracts (*Good Dictator* 18).

The nation's political and economic unrest culminated in the Great Banana Strike of 1934, led by Costa Rican author and activist Carlos Luis Fallas, in which Carmen Lyra also participated. The strike of over ten thousand banana workers in Limón brought production to a

halt on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica for more than a month and forced the Company to enter into negotiations with the laborers. Although gaining improved working and living conditions as well as grants for small growers to utilize sections of Company land, the workers' strike failed to compel the Company to increase wages. Fearing the United Fruit Company would remove their business from Costa Rica, especially during a time of heightening economic crisis, the government, heavily reliant on the financial benefits from the UFCO, did not push for more amendments to the Company workers' contract (Rankin 79-81).

During the 1930's and 1940's, the UFCO mainly entertained nationalist opposition from Costa Rica's Communist Party, primarily due to their opposing attitudes towards workers' rights (*Good Dictator* 18). However, the Costa Rican Civil War in 1948 resulted in vast social and political reforms introduced by the newly inaugurated President José María Figueres Ferrer who, supported by elite landowners, commenced a new pro-business environment in Costa Rica (Rankin 113-114). Prosecuted and forced into exile, Communists were removed as a threat to the nation as well as to the Company, which had since recovered from the Depression, reviving their Costa Rican banana exports to maintain a monopolistic power in the nation (*Good Dictator* 18). Among the exiled Communists was Carmen Lyra, who, although a widely known and celebrated author, was marked by the Costa Rican government as a threat due to her intense political involvement and proclivity towards reform that opposed the national government. Lyra was exiled to Mexico, where she died a year later in 1949. Among Costa Rican audiences and critics, Lyra's works were positively received, particularly because she accurately captured popular perception within the nation and perpetuated the established Costa Rican cultural identity (González 74, 79). Her legacy in Costa Rica survived, mainly through her famous

children's literature, and in 1976 she was unanimously awarded the title of *Benemérita*, or icon, of National Culture by the Costa Rican legislature (Jimenez 6).

The 1950's and 1960's showed substantial changes in the international banana market, including decreased consumption in the United States, which greatly influenced the relationship between the Company and Costa Rica. In 1959, the same year that Fidel Castro triumphed in the Cuban Revolution, Costa Rica passed a new legislation that impelled the United Fruit Company to significantly increase the wages paid to workers. The UFCO publicly acknowledged their need to adapt to the changing political and social environment in Central America, fearful of a growing unrest and a future nationalistic opposition in the region. After merging with AMF Corporations in 1970 to form the giant food conglomerate United Brands, the UFCO divested most of its plantations in Central America, transferring them to either local growers or governments.

The 1973 worldwide oil crisis resulting from the Arab oil embargo had a terrible effect on the already poverty-stricken 'banana republics', who still relied heavily on their agricultural exports of bananas and coffee. Pressured by the oil crisis, Costa Rica and four other Central American nations (Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia and Panama) created UPEB in 1974, the Banana Export Countries Union, a banana export cartel modeled after OPEC. The primary goals of UPEB included increased taxation on banana exports by multinational corporations, controlled supply of bananas to directly control international prices, as well as modifications to land and tax concessions granted to multinationals by previous local governments.

Continuing on this adamant path against foreign dominance, Costa Rica's government passed another law in 1974 that nullified previous contracts signed with multinational corporations, including the United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit. Although the fruit

companies protested these changes, discontinuing their shipments and threatening layoffs as well as export strikes, an unexpected lack of support from the United States' government forced them to eventually accept the Central American nation's new conditions. Dubbed the "Banana War" of 1974, Costa Rica among other Central American nations triumphed over the multinational corporations, and resumed a more domestic-oriented banana production and distribution under the newly established laws protecting workers' rights and the autonomy of the host-nations.

CHAPTER IV. A HISTORY OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

As in the previous section, the following chapter will provide a brief historical background of Nicaragua, describing how the initially established colonial framework influenced the development and contributed to the instability experienced throughout much of the political, economic and social history of the Central American nation. I will demonstrate how the poem *La hora cero*, composed by active political reformist and renowned Nicaraguan author Ernesto Cardenal, encompasses ‘border thinking’ by incorporating a national sentiment of opposition to the overbearing control of the Somoza regime acting in cooperation with the interests of the United Fruit Company in mid-twentieth century Nicaragua.

Comparable to Carmen Lyra’s situation in Costa Rica, Ernesto Cardenal was brought up in a nation afflicted by poverty, political instability and foreign domination, propagated by the colonial framework established in the sixteenth century when the region became a Spanish settlement. Known as the ‘banana republic’ that never produced many bananas, Nicaragua was home to numerous United Fruit-operated banana plantations that were smaller and less successful than many other nations’ in Central America. However, the political upheaval that ensued in Nicaragua for the better part of the twentieth century was a direct result of the banana industry monopolized by United Fruit as well as the imperialistic intervention of the United States to protect its enterprise.

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Spanish crown established the Kingdom of Guatemala as part of the viceroyalty of New Spain, including what later became the nations of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize and the Mexican state of Chiapas (Skidmore 357). Control over the economic and political spheres of New Spain were divided between an elite class of Spanish-born bureaucrats and the powerful creole merchant class, a

group of people born in the Americas but of direct Spanish descent (Skidmore 359). The establishment of a lucrative export agriculture industry in the region, controlled by powerful elite groups, furthered the dichotomy between wealthy creole classes and the poor native population. Profiting under colonial protectionism and resisting new competition, this powerful group of creole landowners became known as the conservative party and were closely aligned with the Catholic Church. Conversely, their liberal counterparts consisted of small-scale farmers and emerging professional classes who supported economic development, the abolition of slavery and restrictions on clerical power (Skidmore 360). This divide between the Central American political elite, into liberal and conservative factions, resulted in violent conflict that further fragmented the region and its populations, preventing economic and social development within the provinces (Skidmore 360).

Spanish control in Central America was threatened in the early 1800's by internal upheaval throughout the entire region for national independence. Growing resentment towards the privileged Spanish-born elite was especially evident among the creole classes, resulting in local movements against Spanish rule in Central America as early as 1811 (Merrill). After proclaiming independence from Spain, the former Kingdom of Guatemala formed the United Provinces of Central America in 1823, consisting of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, declaring autonomy from the Mexican Empire as well (Skidmore 359). The Central America confederation was dissolved in 1838, and each of the states was declared to be sovereign (Skidmore 361). Soon after, British and North American interests in Nicaragua were attracted by the nation's possibility to function as a transoceanic route across Central America. Overwhelmed by an aggressive British presence, Nicaragua at first welcomed United States' involvement as an offset to the British, signing a treaty in 1849 supported by both

conservatives and liberals that granted the United States exclusive rights to a transit route across the country. The resulting conflict between Britain and the U.S. was resolved through the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in 1850, without consulting the Nicaraguan government, stating that neither nation could claim exclusive control over the region. Britain remained in control of the Caribbean trading ports, while the United States owned many private businesses along the transoceanic route (Merrill).

Continued unrest between the liberal and conservative parties in Nicaragua resulted in further United States intervention in the region. In 1855, a group of liberals, exiled two years before under General Fruto Chamorro's conservative government, invited the North American filibuster William Walker, who had previously invaded Mexico, in hopes that he would help defeat the conservative regime in return for generous earnings and land grants. However, Walker had his own intentions, betraying the deal made with Nicaraguans to declare himself President of the country, re-establishing slavery as legal and maintaining English as the national language (Walker xxii-xxiii). Known among Nicaraguans as the National War, the struggle to expel Walker and his troops lasted until 1857, utilizing the combined efforts of the British and other Central American nations, especially Costa Rica, in the defeat and ultimate execution of the North American militarist. Although destructive, the National War resulted in relative cooperation between Nicaragua's liberal and conservative parties, demonstrated in the attempted bipartisan presidency in 1858 between liberal General Máximo Jérez and conservative Tomás Martínez; however, Martínez was ultimately named President, serving until 1867 and beginning a conservative rule that would last until 1893. The small period of relative peace ended in April 1893 when General José Santos Zelaya led a liberal revolution comprised of both liberal and conservative supporters against the Martínez dictatorship, marking the beginning of a national

Liberal movement in Nicaragua (Vanden 23-24). Proving successful for liberals, Zelaya overthrew the conservative administration and was made President, establishing a new constitution that incorporated liberal ideals (Merrill).

Zelaya established a ruthless dictatorship for sixteen years, establishing strong nationalistic sentiment among Nicaraguans and improving the nation's economy by increasing foreign investment, especially in the coffee and banana industries. However, the presence of United States companies in Nicaragua grew so that by the early 1900's, the U.S. corporations controlled almost all of the production and distribution of coffee, bananas, gold and lumber. Zelaya's regime became increasingly repressive, losing him support among natives as well as abroad. In 1909, the United States Marines were stationed in Nicaragua to allegedly protect North American interests in the region, but were also responsible for encouraging local conservative rebel groups to form opposition to President Zelaya, propagating the cycle of conflict and violence in the nation. The United States Marines maintained a contingent in Nicaragua until 1925 in support of the conservative party, acting as a visible reminder of the extensive foreign influence in the nation's political and economic spheres and fostering a widespread anti-interventionist sentiment among Nicaraguans (Vanden 24-25). In the late 1920's, fearing a rebellion from the growing liberal organization headed by Juan Bautista Sacasa, the United States returned to mediate a peace agreement between the two parties, supervising elections in Nicaragua that resulted in the appointment of Adolfo Díaz to his second term as President (Anderson 174). General José María Moncada, the leader of the liberal rebel groups, agreed to sign a treaty with conservatives, the Pact of Espino Negro, which extended the presence of U.S. Marines in Nicaragua until after the 1928 elections in order to ensure peace

throughout the country. However, many groups opposed the new treaty, including the liberal rebel groups headed by Augusto César Sandino (Anderson 174-175).

Born in 1895 in Niquinohomo, Nicaragua, Augusto Sandino was the illegitimate son of a relatively wealthy landowner of Spanish descent and an indigenous woman who worked for the Sandino family (Vanden 25). The mistreatment and discrimination experienced by Sandino and his mother during his childhood established the beginnings of his revolutionary perspective, recognizing the divisive and prejudiced class system among Nicaraguans. Growing up amid an ongoing battle between conservative and liberal parties as well as the prolonged United States Marine intervention, Sandino developed a strong sense of Nicaraguan nationalism and an opposition to North American intervention (Vanden 25-26). Forced to flee Nicaragua in 1921 after assaulting the son of a prominent conservative party member, Sandino found work on a United Fruit banana plantation in Guatemala before ultimately landing in Mexico where he witnessed the concluding phases of the Mexican Revolution, including the organized workers movement and the widespread involvement of the United States in the nation. Returning to Nicaragua in 1926, amidst violent conflict resulting from President Díaz' re-election, Sandino joined forces with the liberal party that had become associated with a strong nationalistic sentiment, eventually forming his own liberal faction to participate in the effort (Vanden 26-27).

Sandino received overwhelming support from lower-classes, including peasants, miners, artisans, workers and indigenous groups who identified with his ideals; however, upper-class liberals openly resisted his leadership due to his lower-class affiliation and occupation as a miner, leading to his refusal to sign the Pact of Espino Negro constructed by elite leaders of both political parties. Distrusting the bourgeois leaders who allowed and encouraged U.S. intervention, Sandino identified his forces as the Army for the Defense of Nicaraguan

Sovereignty (EDSN), later staging independent guerilla campaigns against both the conservative administration as well as the United States forces (Merrill). In response to Sandino forces causing significant violence and conflict on the nation's Caribbean coast, the United States developed the Nicaraguan National Guard in order to contain internal violence. During this time and into the early 1930's, Nicaragua witnessed the growing power of the Somoza family, a dynasty that would dominate the political world of Nicaragua for the next four decades (Merrill).

Anastasio Somoza García, the nephew of President Sacasa, newly elected in 1932, was appointed chief director of the Nicaraguan National Guard, recently turned over to the Nicaraguan government after the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Somoza, therefore, received support from the United States government, establishing strong connections with influential individuals even though he had supported the liberal revolt in 1926. Conflict between Somoza and revolutionary liberal Sandino ensued after Sandino called for the dissolution of the National Guard due to its ties to the United States. Somoza called for the assassination of the liberal leader and ruthlessly destroyed Sandino liberal forces and supporters in less than a month following Sandino's death (Merrill). As the power of President Sacasa's administration diminished, Somoza combined the National Guard and the Liberal Party, consolidating control in order to win the presidential election in 1936 and form a military dictatorship in Nicaragua.

Somoza established a powerful and influential dictatorship in the nation by controlling a huge majority of the Nicaraguan economy, using the National Guard to enforce his rule, as well as his approval of North American intervention and support from the U.S. government (Merrill). Delegating official positions to family members and close friends, Somoza expanded his power and ensured cooperation among influential actors within Nicaragua. During World War II, Somoza's power increased due to heavy dependence and support from the United States, who

put revenue into Nicaragua's struggling economy and provided military aid once again to the government. Over ninety percent of Nicaragua's exports were going directly into the United States, creating a system of economic and political dependence very similar to the situation in Costa Rica and other Central American nations (Merrill). By the end of World War II, Somoza had amassed a great deal of both power and wealth, accumulating over US\$60 million in fortune; however, widespread opposition was beginning to surface among Nicaraguans and also in the United States against the tremendous power of the Somoza family. Despite the intense repression and violent military tactics used throughout the Somoza dynasty, intermittent periods of popular opposition surfaced between the 1930's and 1950's, continuing the revolutionary ideals of Sandino and attempting to reintegrate the Sandinista movement (Vanden 30-31). The assassination of Somoza García in 1956 by a young Nicaraguan poet, Rigoberto López Pérez, spurred popular action and demonstrated the Conservative's gradual loss of political control, evident in the outbreak of guerilla action across the nation. Inspired by the recent revolutions in neighboring countries around the 1950's, such as in Mexico and Cuba, Nicaraguans pursued political change through rural guerrilla warfare, an original idea of Sandino, and the country saw a new generation of Sandinistas emerge (Vanden 33-36). Emerging during this time as the prominent militant opposition group, the National Unity of Popular Action (UNAP) organized a conspiracy in April 1954 to overthrow the government of President Somoza and seize power themselves. Although long and carefully planned out, the conspiracy ultimately failed as a postponed attack was discovered by Somoza, who immediately retaliated against his opposition by torturing or killing anyone found to be connected to the coup.

IV.I ERNESTO CARDENAL AND *LA HORA CERO*

Born in Granada, Nicaragua in 1925 to an upper-class family, Ernesto Cardenal studied literature for much of his life, eventually becoming one of the most popular and renowned Nicaraguan poets within Generation '40, a collection of Latin American authors characterized by their strong revolutionary voice fighting against the “power”, or dominant forces, as well as their predominant use of epigrammatic writings (Torre 46). In addition to Cardenal, the literary group of Generation '40 included authors such as Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, Carlos Martínez Rivas, and Claribel Alegría. Traveling abroad to attend both the University of Mexico and Columbia University in New York, Cardenal returned to Nicaragua and participated in an unsuccessful revolt against President Anastasio Somoza García's authoritarian regime in April 1954. Influenced by this liberal revolt and his previous encounters with the Mexican Revolution while abroad, Cardenal began writing the poems that would eventually comprise *La hora cero*, formally published in 1960 (Torre 51).

Cardenal left Nicaragua for a second time to enter into the Catholic priesthood in the United States, where he studied under the poet-priest Thomas Merton, a mystic thinker widely recognized for his contributions to spiritual exploration and social justice in the 1960's and 1970's. Shortly after his ordination as a Catholic priest in 1965, Cardenal founded a Christian, mainly peasant community in the Solentiname Islands, an archipelago located near the southern end of Lake Nicaragua, where he encouraged the development of cooperative living spaces among inhabitants and promoted a political poetry movement among the farmers (Torre 46).

Regarded in Latin America as an ‘enduring poet’, Cardenal addressed the pressing political and social concerns felt throughout Nicaragua as well as Latin America during the mid-twentieth century (Gibbons 649). Widely recognized for his active participation and

collaboration with the Sandinista National Liberation Front, formally organized in 1961, Cardenal supported the fight to overthrow the dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua (Torre 46). Establishing a close relationship between poetry and politics, Cardenal's early collection of work, *Epigramas (1961)*, reacting to the destructive forces present in Nicaragua, namely the corruption and violence of the Somoza dictatorship, provided a spirit of resistance to the oppressed populations in the nation (Gibbons 649). Having been imprisoned once before by the Nicaraguan National Guard after the publication of a poem, Cardenal recognized the need to circulate his writings in secret, calling upon friends to publish his work in neighboring countries, including Mexico, Cuba, Guatemala and Chile. Considered to embody the voice of a national consensus as well as Sandinista ideals, Cardenal's poetry can be viewed as a positive expression of support, in favor of justice, compassion and above all, revolution; however, many also perceive his poetry as a voice of reaction and opposition, against the injustices, suffering, capitalist ideals and oppression prevalent in Nicaragua and Latin America (Gibbons 650). Expressing individual reaction and ideals by using a tone of opposition, Cardenal juxtaposes his own voice with the voice of popular sentiment, symbolized by a tone of endorsement and support, mixing his own beliefs into the ideals of the national opinion (Gibbons 650).

Mimicking Lyra's use of Realism in *Bananos y hombres*, Cardenal accurately depicts historical events in his poetry, challenges the existing social, political and economic structures in Nicaragua established beneath United States industry and intervention. Identifying with a Nicaraguan nationalist struggle for liberation from the Somoza dictatorship, Cardenal writes with a revolutionary voice calling his audience to action against the injustices that surround them. Functioning as 'symbolic action' against despotism and a perpetuated framework of colonialism, which could not otherwise be effectively confronted by 'real' action, Cardenal utilizes poetry to

address and make real the political and social pressures, which distort and damage the lives of Nicaraguans (Gibbons 649-651).

Consisting of four cantos, *La hora cero* begins with a brief introduction that establishes the tone of life in Central America under the rule of dictatorships. In the first canto, Cardenal provides a description of economic exploitation in ‘banana republics’ by North American industry, such as the United Fruit Company, in cooperation with the political interests of authoritarian governments; the second canto recounts the life of Augusto César Sandino and his resistance to U.S. domination, unveiling Sandino as the epic hero of the poem; the poem’s third canto, entitled “Abril”, describes the 1954 revolution against the Somoza regime, in which Cardenal participated, explicitly portraying Nicaraguan President Somoza as callous and threatening to the sovereignty of the nation (Pring-Mill xvii).

Cardenal successfully documents the reality surrounding Nicaragua during this era of conflict in *La hora cero*, using literary elements including the juxtaposition of English and Spanish phrases, repetition to emphasize and evolve central ideas, allusions to the powerful connection between man and nature, and also a revolutionary tone that provokes the reader to recognize and act upon a widespread, unwavering revolutionary sentiment established among the Nicaraguan population (Dawes 75-77).

Although depicting historical events in his poetry, Cardenal chooses a narrative style that allows him to explore alternative techniques to convey the story of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, such as the inclusion of third-person narratives and selected verses from a song (Dawes 75). Aware of the U.S. influence in the upbringing of President Somoza, who spoke fluent English and had a deep understanding of North American culture, Cardenal exposes this background by ridiculing the President as an instrument or puppet used by the United States government to

control Nicaragua. Cardenal intentionally utilizes English whenever Somoza speaks in the poem, “Sandino is a bandido, a bandolero” (76), “I was in a Concierto” (80), signifying Somoza’s close relationship to the United States through his decision to speak English as opposed to his native Spanish. After Somoza affirms in English that his approved assassination of Sandino was “for the good of Nicaragua”, Cardenal writes: “William Walker dijo cuando lo iban a matar: ‘El Presidente de Nicaragua es nicaragüense’” (81). Referencing the before-mentioned figure of William Walker, a North American militarist who tried to impose himself as president of Nicaragua in 1855, Cardenal undermines Somoza’s identity as Nicaraguan and challenges his regime by confirming the detrimental effects caused by his administration. Here, Cardenal stresses that even the president of a nation may not be a true national unless they hold the nation’s well-being in a higher regard than their own, which Somoza did not. This scene especially emphasizes the global influences present in Nicaragua, particularly in the national politics. Cardenal criticizes with his inclusion of English the overwhelming dominance of North American industry and intervention in all aspects of life in Nicaragua, not solely the economic sphere.

Similar to the juxtaposition of Spanish and English, Cardenal’s use of repetition in *La hora cero* calls attention to powerful ideas, forcing the audience to step back and examine the verses in more detail. When including English within the poem, Cardenal follows the English verse with a translation into Spanish, even though the minimal inclusion of English is easily comprehensible by most non-English speakers. Here, there is less of a focus on clarification between the two languages, and instead a larger emphasis on the substantiation of an idea embodied in the verse. Cardenal repeatedly includes the phrases “Sandino nunca tuvo propiedades; y no era ni militar ni politico” (75) in order to defend the actions of Sandino as

necessary, contrasting the working-class, nationalist Sandinistas to the intrusive foreign United Fruit Company and the dominant reign of Somoza. Cardenal undermines the activities of the United Fruit Company with the repetition of the verse, “para que no haya banano barato y para que haya banano barato” (73). Although seemingly contradictory, this statement claims that the United Fruit Company created conditions that intentionally raised the price of bananas worldwide, which consequently lowered the selling prices stipulated to plantation laborers and local growers. Referencing similar conditions in *La hora cero*, Cardenal provides criticism in the following verse towards the overarching framework of capitalism that fuels the ideals of wealth accumulation and consumption : “El banano es dejado podrir en las plantaciones, o ser echado en el mar; para que no haya banano barato, o para comprar banano barato” (73).

A central theme in Carmen Lyra’s *Bananos y hombres*, the connection between man and nature is also established as critical in Cardenal’s poem. The Nicaraguan revolution of the lower, working classes consisted of mainly peasants, artisans, miners, laborers and indigenous people, all groups that work closely with the land in order to make a living. Recognizing this connection between the revolutionaries and elements of nature, Cardenal describes the 1954 April Revolution in terms of the changing seasons:

En abril, los campos están secos. Es el mes de las quemas,
del calor, del viento caliente. En mayo llegan las primeras
lluvias. En mayo florecen los malinches en las calles de
Managua. Pero abril en Nicaragua es el mes de la muerte.
En abril los mataron. (82)

A direct analogy to the horrendous killings and torture that resulted from the failed revolution against President Somoza in April 1954, in this verse Cardenal compares the Sandinistas to

flowers that bloom in the springtime aided by a nourishing rain; however, the flowers die when faced with adversities such as heat and wind, implying that the revolutionary spirit may be defeated by its opposition, namely the Somoza regime.

The seasonality of nature creates a cyclical time, which Cardenal parallels to the unchanging political and economic situation in Nicaragua, resulting from U.S. intervention and the presence of multinational corporations that establish a dominant discourse of Western thought. Also comparable to the inevitable cycle of seasons each year is the tumultuous history of Nicaragua, which began with the earliest conflicts between conservatives and liberals in the sixteenth century and endured for the next four hundred years as a constant struggle between class powers and ideological beliefs. Cardenal focuses on this cyclicity of events as he discusses the concepts of rebirth and immortality, comparing the Nicaraguan nationalist revolution to the rebirth of nature: “El héroe nace cuando muere y la hierba verde renace de los carbones” (86). Comparing how the grass is reborn from its coals, this verse signifies that the ideals of the revolution transcend the death of crucial leaders like Sandino, as supporters carry with them and pass along teachings and beliefs to new generations. In turn, subsequent generations will carry on the revolution notwithstanding the difficulties they will encounter, analogous to the grasslands that flourish after they have been burned. With recurrent metaphors of rebirth and perseverance in nature, Cardenal emphasizes a deeply rooted connection between the revolution and nature in the Nicaraguan people’s undying struggle for change throughout history.

Constructing an idea of necessity around the revolutionary actions of Sandino and his followers, Cardenal writes, “Sandino no tenía cara de soldado, sino de poeta convertido en soldado por necesidad” (77). This verse emphasizes the innocence and reluctance among

Sandinistas to carry out military revolts, claiming that the revolutionaries were inherently poets and peasants, lacking the skills of a true soldier but embodying the necessary strength of spirit.

Further detailing the relationships between Sandinista forces, Cardenal writes:

Tenían jerarquía militar pero todos eran iguales; más bien
como una comunidad que como un ejército y más unidos
por amor que por disciplina militar. (76)

Adhering to the ideals of Sandino, guerrilla troops maintained equality among all supporters, so as to avoid implication with a political or militaristic movement, fighting instead alongside one another to achieve the common goal of freedom from oppression and imperialism. Personally sympathetic and closely aligned with the Sandinista fight, Cardenal expresses his own voice about the revolution, reiterating the fears of many revolutionaries: “Nunca creía que saldría vivo de esta guerra, pero siempre he creído que era necesaria” (77). Again, Cardenal stresses that the Nicaraguan workers of lower-classes were required to revolt in response to the tyrannical, repressive actions taken against them by the bourgeois classes dominated by elitist and United States’ interests, despite the possibility of death and defeat. Cardenal writes, “Cuando muere un héroe no se muere: sino que ese héroe renace en una Nación” (83), once again referencing the rebirth and continuation of revolutionary ideals. This verse also calls the audience to action, emphasizing that the possibility of resolution to this long-time conflict lies in the hand of a newly emerging nation of Nicaraguans, who encompass the ideals and beliefs reborn from the first generations of revolutionaries.

Equivalent to Lyra, Cardenal occupies a unique location on the border between the divergent discourse of the ideological Global North and South, owing to his background of advanced education and travel abroad that allowed him to experience and further comprehend a

culture and way of being contrasting his native perspective formulated in Nicaragua. This unique perspective allowed Cardenal to discuss the struggle of Nicaraguan revolutionaries of the working-class in a way that foregrounded their previously subaltern narrative, incorporating the marginal into the hegemonic perspective in hopes to ultimately displace the dominant Global North. Cardenal's strong association with the Nicaraguan revolution and the working-classes connects his own personal convictions with the widespread unrest and opposition to the authoritarian government and corruption in the nation during that time. Manifest especially in the peasant and working-class was the opposition to foreign intervention and dominance, which Cardenal, like Lyra, chose to condemn through a critique of the United Fruit Company and the United States in *La hora cero*. Exemplifying 'border literature', Cardenal relocates the struggle of the revolutionaries and peasant populations in Nicaraguan from the marginal to the center or mainstream. This repositioning allows Cardenal to make their strife relevant through incorporating it into literature that may be shared and read by distinct groups, consequently minimizing the disparity between wealthy and poor, marginal and core, North and South.

IV.II THE END OF A DYNASTY

Formally organized in 1961, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was launched by a group of student activists in the early 1950's, continuing to grow in popularity until it was able to support small-scale opposition initiatives against the Somoza dictatorship throughout the 1970's. However, the success of the FSLN was immediately countered with increased repression, censorship and violence from Somoza's administration, causing greater unrest and condemnation of the Somoza regime among national and international populations.

The United States, acting under the supervision of President Jimmy Carter, enforced a conditional U.S. military assistance in Nicaragua dependent upon vast improvements in the nation's human rights; however, the U.S. eventually pulled all support from Nicaragua in 1978 due to widespread abuses of human rights in the nation. Consequently, Nicaragua's economy suffered from a decline in foreign investment, resulting in soaring unemployment rates and a growing national opposition to the dictatorship, especially concentrated within the Sandinista Front (Merrill). Uniting other opposition groups, the FSLN was better prepared in 1979 as it launched its final offensive against Somoza and the National Guard in the Sandinista Revolution, gaining control of most of the country less than a month later. The Puntarenas Pact, a contract made by the five-member junta of the new Nicaraguan government, called for the institution of a mixed economy, political pluralism and a nonpartisan foreign policy, as well as a cease-fire between the National Guard and the FSLN (Merrill). The Sandinista Revolution resulted in over 50,000 deaths and 150,000 exiled Nicaraguans. Although the group endeavored to bring economic development and relative peace to the nation, outside pressures caused the FSLN to respond to opposition with oppressive tactics, similar to those used against them for so many years. The United States harbored a mistrust of the FSLN, aiding in the formation of Contra groups that created constant conflict and resistance to the Sandinistas. By 1981, much of Nicaragua was once again dissenting towards the newly established, despotic administration of the FSLN.

The cycle of violent conflict that has plagued Nicaragua for hundreds of years was further advanced by the presence of foreign capitalist institutions, such as the United Fruit Company, as well as U.S. military intervention during the twentieth century. Unlike Costa Rica, which experienced relatively peaceful transitions of power with limited violence and a more prevalent

democratic sentiment, Nicaragua constantly battled authoritarian dictatorships as well as internal dissonance between political parties, violent revolutions and guerrilla warfare. Consequently, Nicaragua was trapped in an unending cycle of poverty, corruption and oppression, while Costa Rica thrived from a growing banana industry and improving social conditions for much of the twentieth century¹¹. Although their political situations represent two extremes, Nicaragua and Costa Rica are similar in the sense that the United Fruit Company and the United States dominated the economic and political spheres of both countries for decades, upholding a form of neo-colonialism throughout the majority of the twentieth century under the pretense of economic development and capitalist industry¹².

¹¹ Owing to its small size and racial/cultural homogeneous society, Costa Rica remains a unique example of democracy and economic development in Central America, considered by many economists and political scientists as exceptional in comparison to neighboring countries, such as Nicaragua (Skidmore 371-373).

¹² Many who support globalization look at statistical evidence to demonstrate the positive effects between global trade and relative growth around the world; shrinking disparities between nations' life expectancies and basic welfare measures in the past 50 years are examples of such data that support favorable views of globalization (Centeno 156-159).

CHAPTER V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Today, the four major companies that dominate the global banana market are Chiquita, Dole, Del Monte and the Ecuadorian company Noboa. The United Fruit Company disbanded in the late 1970's after many allegations of illegal activity in Central America and minimal penalized offenses, led CEO Eli Black to commit suicide for fear of imprisonment and public reprimand. The Company merged in 1970 to become United Brands, eventually changing its name to Chiquita, reconstructing it away from the negative image associated with United Fruit (Chapman 187). Bananas have become an essential part of the North American diet, ranking as the fourth major food consumed worldwide after rice, wheat and milk. However, bananas have grown to be an even more essential part of North American culture. The United Fruit Company spearheaded the commercialization of the banana when it “took the fruit out of the jungle and turned a natural product into a commodity” to be consumed by people in far-away cultures (Chapman 17-23). Although the banana's commercialization has created enormous amounts of success for the companies in the banana trade, it has also brought the downfall of the very fruit it needs to survive.

In his book *Bananas: How the UFCO Shaped the World*, Peter Chapman notes, “Contrary to its appearance as a primitive thing of nature, the banana we know is nothing of the kind; United Fruit created it” (19). Currently, there is a widespread demise of the banana mainly due to the methods used to cultivate it. Bananas plants do not produce seeds, but rather are grown from cuttings taken from the corm, which is a large rhizome that grows beneath the ground around the base of the original plant. The corm in turn produces numerous growing points that can be cut off and transplanted to grow new banana plants, meaning that banana plants cannot be grown without new cuttings produced from new, healthy plants. Therefore, the

future production depends on the current well being of banana cultivation. Large, commercial banana plantations cultivate the fruit without time off, in order to maximize profits, which consequently strips the land and soils of essential nutrients that guarantee healthy, successful crops. Cavendish, the most common type of banana eaten and purchased by North Americans, is extremely prone to disease and especially vulnerable because of its unnatural evolution. Instead, its growth has been shaped and controlled by the banana industry, which determines the size and shape of the banana and also modifies the seeds to make them edible (Chapman 22-23). These characteristics continue to keep demand high and guarantee immediate profits for the capitalist companies, even though it is not a sustainable form of cultivation.

Pesticides and other chemicals used to protect the short-term health of banana plants have been disputed since the introduction of the 'Bordeaux Mixture' in the early twentieth century (Chapman 105). Invented in response to the rampant Panama Disease, a microbe that had been killing acres of banana plants, the Mixture was used extensively throughout Central American plantations despite experts' warnings against overuse and consequent health effects. Ironically, the laborers that distributed the Mixture amongst plantations were named *veneneros*, translated to mean 'poisoners' (Chapman 105).

Before the use of the Bordeaux Mixture, United Fruit's response to disease and mass destruction on their plantations was retreat, resulting in disastrous effects on the local populations. Uprooting plantation towns and even whole communities, destroying railroad tracks, bridges and any other materials used during production, United Fruit only took with them what was valuable to the Company and left little behind for the laborers who were now without jobs or livelihoods (Chapman 105). Instead of researching how to prevent disease or how to support laborers and communities if disease did destroy plantation regions, which would be

costly, the Company avoided expenses by moving to new regions where lands were more suitable for cultivation, regarding Central America as a sort of infinite, blank canvas on which they could pursue their capitalist gains. Although responsible for the destruction of the lands, communities and livelihoods of the Central Americans, the United Fruit Company evaded responsibility for the problems they created and continued to create throughout the region (Chapman 105).

The poisoning, disease and eventual downfall of the banana is representative of a similar path taken by the United Fruit Company in Central America during the twentieth century, as it “poisoned” and disrupted the economic, political and social order in the region. More than a North American banana company, United Fruit embodied the spirit of Western capitalism and a Global North ideology, acting as a self-professed savior or civilizing agent to the underdeveloped Global South by “taking capitalism into areas as yet unconquered” (Chapman 191).

The literature of Central American authors Carmen Lyra and Ernesto Cardenal challenges the perspective conveyed by United Fruit, a perspective of the Global North that considered the peripheral nations of Central America, located in the ideological Global South, to function under a framework of dependency upon the core nations of the North. However, Lyra and Cardenal, reflecting Mignolo’s idea of ‘border thinking’, argue that the so-labeled ‘periphery’ can indeed exist successfully without interference from the Global North in their economic, political and social spheres. This perceived need for interdependence is a consequence of the modern/colonial world system that divided the world into terms such as North-South, West-Occident and core-periphery, and established the superiority and dominant discourse of the Global North over the allegedly inferior cultures and ways of knowing in the Global South. This world system ultimately perpetuates a framework of coloniality, an idea conceptualized by Mignolo, which

upholds that a rational structure exists to explain the colonial domination of the West and consequently subalternizes the nations of the Global South.

Border thinking inherently challenges Immanuel Wallerstein's claim that the world system results in a global division of labor and the formation of two interdependent zones, the core and the periphery. This, in turn, lends to the construction of the imaginary of Global North and South around the ideological concept that emphasizes economic, political and social dependency of the periphery on the core. As previously mentioned, Mignolo upholds that the Global South is a region where local forces are 'delinking' from the previously established framework of colonialism, and are instead constructing alternative perspectives among their communities that incorporate the subordinated discourse of the periphery into the dominant core discourse, evident in the emergent genre of border literature.

One of the first authors in Central America to openly criticize the presence of North American capitalist industry in her native country, Carmen Lyra set the stage for other writers of the Global South to condemn the imperialism of the North, both cultural and economic, manifested in the actions of the United Fruit Company during the twentieth century. Evident within twentieth century Latin American literature, authors disparaged the United Fruit Company for its dominant, intrusive presence in the region. Among the most well-known authors include Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's *La UFCO* (1950), followed by Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad/One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias' 'Banana Trilogy' (1967). Border literature functions in the sense that authors occupying a unique position on the 'border', comprehending both discourses of the North and South, have the ability to construct a new reality in their literary works, establishing a space where it is possible to eliminate existing ideological structures and imagine a different

possibility of what the world could be like. In this way, the creative author and ‘border thinker’ are reflecting a current reality and simultaneously altering it in order to expose an alternative reality or framework more desirable than what is real.

The global processes that led to the creation of the banana industry and the overwhelming presence of foreign industry in Central America adhere to the imaginary of a core-periphery framework that similarly produced border literature in subalternized nations of Central America. The banana industry, which significantly connected Central America to the world market, and the emergence of border thinking within literature of the Global South are both consequences of the increasing globalizing influences in the region. Border thinking only emerges after the confrontation and subsequent interaction between two distinctive ways of being and knowing, an encounter facilitated and expedited by globalization, characterized by the increasingly unimpeded international flow of information, goods, people and culture.

Although globalizing forces can be related to the historical frameworks of coloniality, subalterity and exploitation of supposedly inferior nations, marginalized by the dominant discourse of the West/Global North, globalization also provided the grounds for the construction of new realities and new ways of being and knowing, which challenge the long-established understanding of the world system. As the subaltern perspective of the Global South collides with the opposing, dominant Global North, it acts as a rupture in the construction of the modern/colonial world system. The traumatic images depicted by Lyra in *Bananos y hombres* and Cardenal in *La hora cero*, similarly rupture the dominant perspective of the Global North by revealing the true, hash reality of the ‘dark side’ of modernity, the colonial side that has been obscured through the global acceptance of Western ideology driving the imaginary of the world system.

Ironically, bananas connected Central America to the international market and opened the region to global influences; later, bananas provided context for the voiced discontent among suppressed populations of the Global South, conveyed by authors who chose to confront the global discourse of the North through the worker-related tribulations and economic, political and social domination by the North American banana company, United Fruit. Perhaps without the banana plantations or the United Fruit Company there would have been no discontent in Central America for authors such as Carmen Lyra or Ernesto Cardenal to challenge, suggesting a dependency between the emergence of border thinking and the world system that it inherently challenges. However, even though the modern/colonial world system created a world of inequality, dominance and exploitation, it also provided a means for those located in the Global South to voice their discontent against the current system and dominant Western thought, offering a solution to the very problems created hundreds of years ago by the division of the globe into North and South.

Representing a space of struggle and contestation against the increasing globalization of the world, border literature is extremely important in the development of an alternative perspective that could drastically improve the future of the world. Currently in an era of emerging post-nationalism and cultural homogeneity due to the advancing interdependency and interconnectedness between the world's nations, many cultures feel threatened by globalizing forces as their previous, traditional cultural identities and ways of knowing are disappearing or becoming obscured by the widespread proliferation of dominant, Western ideas such as capitalism. Studying abroad in Costa Rica, I observed firsthand the continued inequality and exploitation of banana plantation workers in the province of Limón; however, four hours away in the Central Valley, locals I interacted with did not acknowledge the socio-economic disparities in

their nation, demonstrating a disconnect between local populations' realities. My time abroad allowed me to experience a discourse contradicting the one I had been accustomed to growing up in the United States. Sympathizing with a culture so distinct from my own, I was encouraged to try and understand how this population viewed other cultures, such as the United States, and how they viewed their own, from a perspective of the Global South. Led to question the structures and ideologies that determined my own actions, also responsible for the existence of massive social and economic inequalities throughout the world, my newfound awareness established a doubt that capitalism and globalization were the best options in our changing world order.

Ironically, the day I defended my thesis, against individuals that regard globalization and capitalism as positive and beneficial, a factory building near Dhaka, Bangladesh collapsed, killing over five hundred laborers. Recognized as one of the worst accidents in the history of the garment industry, the clothing produced by native workers in the Dhaka factory were owned by predominantly North American brands, who sell the clothing in the U.S. and Canada for extremely low prices. This current, troubling example of the horrifying consequences of capitalist driven interests in a rapidly globalizing world demonstrates that, despite the numerical data and statistics that many stand by to defend these processes, there still exists an inherent problem in the structure that allows some to live luxuriously at the expense of the well-being, and in this case the lives, of others. Examples like the Dhaka factory and the plantations I saw in Costa Rica, more frequent than many like to imagine, demonstrate the urgent necessity of border thinking in our changing world system, which can consequently provide hope for a different and improved future through the proliferation of unprecedented ideas, perspectives and alternatives throughout the world.

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