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The Banana as Icon: Orientalism, Violence, and the Problem of Memory in Fallas's Mamita Yunai, Reyes-Manzo's Photography and the Cultural Imagery

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the twentieth century the banana was transformed through capitalist production into a global commodity with profound consequences for the people of Latin America. This dissertation explores how the iconography of the banana created in the United States during the twentieth century contributed to the construction of an idea of Latin America as Other, and to the erasure of the exploitation, suffering and displacement of the people of Latin America. I examine this through the cultural imagery of the banana created in the United States; *Mamita Yunai*, a novel by the Costa Rican writer Carlos Luis Fallas published in 1941; and photographs of a Chiquita banana plantation in Puerto Armuelles, Panama, taken by the social documentary photographer Carlos Reyes-Manzo in 1990.

I have chosen to examine *Mamita Yunai* and Reyes-Manzo's photographs because they are cultural memory texts, from different historical times, that disrupt the grand narrative of the banana as icon by giving visibility to the silenced memories of the socio-economic realities of the banana plantation workers. *Mamita Yunai* denounces the exploitative practices and hegemonic interference in Latin America of the United Fruit Company (now known as Chiquita Brands). In the West, however, bananas represented exoticism, and Latin America and its people became identified with bananas and the exotic. I examine the construction of Latin America and its people as exotic, erotic and primitive through the iconography of the banana.

My research addressed the following questions: In what ways was the banana transformed through performative memory into a cultural icon embodying the idea of Latin Americans as the exotic, erotic and primitive Other? How was a collective identity for Latin America constructed through the iconography of the banana and

performative memory? How did the otherization of Latin Americans contribute to the construction of a collective identity in the United States? In what ways do *Mamita Yunai* and Reyes-Manzo's photographs of the banana plantation make visible silenced memories of suffering, oppression, exploitation and displacement? Can the banana plantation workers and the marginalized of Latin America speak through representations in cultural memory texts? As the most widely consumed fruit globally, the memory of the banana was conveyed and sustained by performance through its consumption and representation in cultural imagery (Connerton 1989, 4), while memories of the suffering and exploitation of the banana plantation workers were erased.

Social context

The banana as icon must be examined within the historical context of the violence of colonialism and imperialism in Latin America. In *Open Veins of Latin America* Eduardo Galeano provides a historical account and critique of five centuries of the plundering of the continent from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed, in an alternative narrative to the dominant history of Latin America. Galeano writes, 'Latin America is the region of open veins. Everything, from the discovery until our times, has always been transmuted into European - or later United States - capital' (Galeano 1973, 12). At the beginning of the twentieth century United Fruit became the largest U.S. monopoly in the banana industry gaining control of the social and political infrastructure of countries in Central America (Moberg 1997, 19). Galeano describes the social, political and economic transformation of countries through the capitalist production of bananas as the 'bananization' of Latin America (Galeano 1973, 122). The dominant classes and governments of Central America were complicit with

and supportive of U.S. imperialism (Galeano 1973, 126). The banana was transformed into a commodity of mass consumption through the displacement of indigenous communities, the appropriation of land, the destruction of the rainforest, and the control of railways and ports by United Fruit. The building of the railroads by United Fruit in the Limon area of Costa Rica cost the lives of thousands of migrant workers, and banana plantation workers laboured in conditions of exploitation and inhumanity 'scandalous even by the jaded standards of imperial history' (Moberg 1997, xvi). As a consequence, movements of popular resistance led by leaders such as Emiliano Zapata in Mexico (Galeano 1973, 136), and Augusto Sandino in Nicaragua (Galeano 1973, 124), fought against the economic exploitation of the people and the land. Meanwhile, in the United States the banana was transformed into an icon through its representation in popular culture embodying a representation of Latin America as Other, silencing the suffering and exploitation of banana plantation workers.

For my theoretical framework I turn to the postcolonial concepts of Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and to the theories on memory of Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Connerton. I draw on postcolonial theory since postcolonialism is concerned with giving visibility and agency to the disempowered and marginalized in society, and furthermore, 'claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being' (Young 2003, 2). The first chapter examines how the otherization of Latin America enabled the violence of imperialism, the second chapter looks at how this led to the silencing of memories of the people of Latin America, and the last chapter considers through Spivak's text, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, whether the banana plantation workers can be represented.

Theoretical framework

Edward Said's concepts on Orientalism and the construction of the Orient as Other are relevant to the construction of Latin America as an exotic, erotic and primitive Other. According to Said the people of the Orient were essentialized and objectified as Other through ideas that were created and embodied in the term Oriental which was 'sufficient to identify a specific body of information about the Orient' (Said 2003, 205). Similarly, I argue, Latin Americans were otherized through the word 'banana' which became a reference for a body of knowledge on Latin America. Moreover, Latin America was constructed as an opposite in the construction of a U.S. collective identity, just as the Orient was constructed as contrasting opposite for the West, 'the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (Said 2003, 1). Furthermore, perceptions of Latin America as Other were used to maintain unequal power relations between Latin America and the United States, 'the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society' (Said 2003, 332). I explore how the 'bananization' of Latin America was constructed as an ideological discourse in order to justify and mask U.S. imperialism, just as the construction of the Orient as Other was used to justify the violence of colonialism.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon critiques the violence of colonialism and imperialism as 'a process of domination, of exploitation, and of pillage' (Fanon 2001, 39). During the first half of the twentieth century United Fruit was the spearhead of U.S. imperialism in Central America (Galeano 1973, 123). Fanon describes how the violence of colonialism erases the cultural memory of colonized people, destroying the 'systems of reference of the economy, the customs of

dress and external life' (Fanon 2001, 31). In Central America the violence of capitalist working practices erased the historical and cultural past of the people and nations. Fanon argues that the violence of colonialism can only be confronted through violence (Fanon 2001, 48). In Central America the violence of the exploitation of banana plantation workers was challenged by trade unions and popular movements. Said describes Fanon's work as 'a response to theoretical elaborations produced by the culture of late Western capitalism' (Said 1994, 324). In other words, Fanon takes capitalist ideology and transforms it into a tool for liberation arguing that when people respond to violence they are not powerless, and that lack of power leads to the silencing of memory. *Mamita Yunai* and Reyes-Manzo's photographs, as cultural memory texts and representations of banana plantation workers create a space for the articulation of memory, however the question is, whose memory is represented?

In *Twilight Memories* Andreas Huyssen writes, 'All representation - whether in language, narrative, image, or recorded sound - is based on memory' and memory 'is itself based on representation' (Huyssen 1995, 2). Moreover, he argues, there will always be a gap between 'experiencing an event and remembering it in representation' (Huyssen 1995, 3). In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak problematizes representation arguing that the disempowered cannot speak through a narrative of representation, as any representation of the marginalized will be a narrative from the ideological point of view of the creator rather than from the perspective of those it claims to represent, 'the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow' (Spivak 1988, 280). I agree with Spivak that behind any representation is a set of ideological values, however the ability to read these is part of understanding any representation. Since representation is memory, narratives of the marginalized articulate and create memories of the

unseen. If, as Marita Sturken argues, cultural memory and history are entangled (Sturken 1997, 5), when representations of the marginalized are created they become the history of the invisible. Memory makes visible the unseen and is, therefore, empowering. *Mamita Yunai* and Reyes-Manzo's photographs are representations of the socio-economic realities of the plantations and the face of capitalist exploitation, and give visibility to the suffering and exploitation of the workers. Moreover, Spivak argues that in the West intellectual production or representation is complicit with the economic interests of the West (Spivak 1988, 271). The iconography of the banana created and reinforced perceptions about Latin Americans that were complicit with U.S. hegemonic economic and political interests erasing the identities and exploitation of Latin Americans. Any representation is constructed through a process of selection and, therefore, involves remembering and forgetting. However, representation creates memories, and when memories exist people can be heard and can become part of the official narrative.

In *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs argues that memories are socially constructed and maintained, 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories' (Halbwachs 1992, 38). The banana, as the most widely consumed fruit in the United States, was already part of collective memory when an iconography emerged in the 1920s. Paul Connerton argues that collective memories are transmitted and maintained by performance (Connerton 1989, 4), and the iconography, therefore, as popular culture and a carrier of memory, ensured that the banana remained identified with Latin America in the collective memory. Moreover, in *The Collective Memory* Halbwachs argues that as individuals our thoughts are influenced by ideas that exist in society which we absorb in an unconscious process through, for example, books, newspapers or conversations **(**Halbwachs 1980, 45). Halbwachs describes

these as 'social influences', though I would add that within these are embedded ideologies. According to Said, Orientalism was constructed as an ideological discourse through literature, even though 'often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent' (Said 2003, 27). I will explore how negative perceptions of Latin Americans were sustained and transmitted in collective memory by performance, contributing to the construction in the West of a collective identity of superiority. Connerton further argues that bodily practices 'provide a particularly effective system of mnemonics' (Connerton 1989, 102). I will look at how Carmen Miranda was a carrier of Bahian cultural memory, and how her cultural identity was appropriated by United Fruit and transferred to the banana-woman cartoon character 'Chiquita Banana', conflating bananas and people.

CHAPTER ONE

In what ways was the banana transformed through performative memory into a cultural icon embodying the idea of Latin Americans as the exotic, erotic and primitive Other?

When the banana was commodified at the beginning of the twentieth century, bananas and the people of Latin America were already associated with the exotic and primitive through their representation in illustrated newspaper reports in the nineteenth century (Soluri 2003, 50), and in school textbooks that created the idea that 'the fortunate natives of the tropics have nothing to do but roam the flowery glades and live on bananas' (Adams 1914, 21). Virginia Scott Jenkins argues that as the banana became the cheapest and most widely consumed fruit it lost its exotic image (Jenkins 2000, 15). However, although it may have lost its exoticism as a commodity, I would argue that from the beginning of the 1920s the link between exoticism, the banana, and the people of Latin America was reinforced through the increasing production of cultural imagery related to the banana.

During the 1920s and 30s the banana was transformed into a cultural icon through new technologies of reproduction and live performances of songs (Jenkins 2000, 163). One of the most popular at the time, 'Yes, We Have No Bananas!', which references periodic shortages caused by Panama disease (Koeppel 2008, 251), includes the exotic Other as the Greek greengrocer who ran out of bananas and whose imperfect English is reproduced in the song. At the same time, the banana symbolized the comical and ridiculous through visual representations in cartoons and illustrations of slipping on banana skins, and on its phallic connotations (Jenkins 2000, 158).

Numerous other representations were created in the West, too many to mention within this dissertation, but I would like to refer to Josephine Baker dancing at 'La Revue Nègre' in Paris in 1926 wearing a banana skirt (Jules-Rosette 2007, viii), as this touches on the issue of the conflation of bananas and people which I discuss later in relation to Carmen Miranda. Her performance as an African American when segregation existed in the United States would have reinforced existing negative perceptions about slavery and African Americans, conflating the exoticism of slavery and of the banana.

A discourse of the banana was created with its own language, concepts and ideology through terms such as 'to go bananas' to represent craziness and instability, and 'banana republics' to describe the countries of Central America as corrupt and inefficient. Woody Allen's film 'Bananas', an anti-Cuba propaganda film produced in 1970 embodies the concepts of craziness and corruption. For Said, language carries within it misconceptions and misrepresentations (Said 2003, 203), and quotes Friedrich Nietzsche who observes that truths 'after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are' (Nietzsche 1976, 47). According to Halbwachs, individual memory is shaped by collective influences, though we are unaware of this, as 'most social influences we obey usually remain unperceived'. (Halbwachs 1980, 45). In other words, when language and expressions become commonplace the memory of how they originated is erased.

In the following sections I examine how a discourse of Latin Americans as Other was constructed in the iconography of the banana focusing on the role of the singer and actor, Carmen Miranda, and the following marketing productions created

by the United Fruit Company: the *Chiquita Banana* commercial, the *Chiquita* label, and the educational film *Journey to Banana Land*.

Carmen Miranda

Described as the 'Brazilian Bombshell' in the U.S. popular press of 1940s, Carmen Miranda epitomised an exotic, primitive, and erotic Latin America (Soluri 2003, 62), and became part of the iconography of the banana through the 1943 Hollywood film, *The Gang's All Here*, and songs such as 'Bananas is My Business'. Born in Portugal, Miranda grew up in Brazil attending a Catholic convent school, but created an identity as actor and singer using the Bahian market woman's basket as an entertainment prop and including the samba in her repertoire (Soluri 2003, 62). In 1939 she was offered a contract to move to Broadway, and from there to Hollywood (Enloe 1989, 125), where she was used to represent the human face of Latin America as part of President Roosevelt's 1933 'Good Neighbor' policy (Enloe 1989, 127), in order to create a cultural memory of a benign United States and a friendly, exotic Latin America. Miranda was used as a contrasting image in the construction of a U.S. national identity; as Said writes, the 'construction of identity [...] involves establishing opposites and "others"' (Said 2003, 332). In her early Hollywood films such as 'Down Argentine Way', 'Weekend in Havana', 'That Night in Rio', Miranda played minor roles where her dance, dress and singing defined her as exotic, and her accent and broken English as comical and ridiculous. The films were located in an imagined and essentialized Latin America where cultural difference was erased. However, while publicly promoting a policy of 'friendly neighbour', the United States continued to pursue a policy of military intervention. As Said argues with reference to Orientalism, the 'bananization' of Latin America was a 'political doctrine' of aggressive domination

and control over Latin America, which elided Latin America's 'difference with its weakness' (Said 2003, 204); a weakness, I would argue, created by the U.S. military and economic interference in the region. It can be argued that Miranda, as the Hollywood face of Latin America, was complicit in the creation of a collective identity for Latin Americans that inferiorized them as the exotic, erotic and primitive Other, which erased their cultural identity and was used by the United States to justify the violence of U.S. imperialism.

Therefore, when Miranda appeared in *The Gang's All Here* she was already a cultural symbol embodying a collective identity of Latin America as the exotic Other. In 'The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat' scene Miranda becomes identified with the banana, another cultural symbol signifying the exotic (YouTube 3). Exoticism, eroticism and primitivism are represented through a musical set on a banana plantation staged in a Broadway nightclub. People and bananas are linked through the erotic symbolism of the chorus women and their interaction with the fruit; lying under banana plants in suggestive positions waiting to be taken just like the bananas growing 'naturally' on the plants, and then dancing with phallic life-size bananas as partners, an image reinforcing the association between bananas and people. No reference is made to the human cost of producing the fruit. Miranda's Tutti-Frutti hat, a marker of her identity, is transformed into a hat of infinite bananas reaching out to heaven in a biblical universe of bananas, ensuring that the subliminal association of Latin Americans with bananas is remembered in the U.S. collective consciousness.

Primitivism and exoticism are represented through images of contrasting opposites, sophisticated nightclubbers in dinner jackets and shirtless men leading an ox drawn cart. Miranda arrives sitting on top of a pile of bananas on the cart speaking in broken English. She was described in the popular press 'in terms of the physical, of

the body - wild, savage, and primitive, like an exotic animal' (Roberts 1993, 10). Said describes how people from the Orient were objectified and referred to, 'in terms of such genetic universals as [their] "primitive" state, [their] primary characteristics' (Said 2003, 120), thus inferiorizing them and erasing their cultural identity.

The film would have been seen in Latin America and would have had a psychological effect on Latin Americans' perception of themselves. 'In many regions of the subcontinent, the predominant, and often virtually exclusive type of cinema was what Hollywood exported' (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 232). Said writes on the psychological effect of the 'web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology' constructed by Orientalism (Said 2003, 27). Fanon, too, describes how the erasure of cultural memory creates an inferiority complex in people who find themselves 'face to face with the language of the civilizing nation' (Fanon 1986, 18). The ideology of 'bananization' was used to reinforce the superiority of the United States and to remind the people of Latin America of their inferiority and weakness, creating opposing collective identities.

A knowledge about Latin America was created through Miranda and bananas. Miranda was presented as the archetype of Latin American exoticism. Latin Americans were perceived as inferior and less threatening when seen as exotic, ridiculous, good at singing and dancing, and would have reinforced the idea that Latin America existed to serve the United States' interests. Already in 1912, 'President William H. Taft declared: "The whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority of race, it already is ours morally"' (Galeano 1973, 121). According to Said, knowledge and power went hand in hand, to 'have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it' (Said 2003, 32).

The banana and Carmen Miranda mirrored each other as carriers of memory. The banana as icon was a signifier and referent for a body of knowledge about Latin America, and similarly Miranda was a signifier and referent for stereotypes on Latin Americans. Halbwachs, disagreeing with Henri Bergson who opposes image and concept, argues that images and concepts are entangled in memories (Halbwachs 1992, 173). In other words, the banana and Carmen Miranda are symbols that embody ideological concepts. As Jenkins writes, bananas 'are also symbols of danger - spiders, snakes, and illegal immigrants - and of romance, of tropical adventure in the Caribbean', reinforcing stereotypes associating people with bananas through negative concepts (Jenkins 2000, 142).

Walter Benjamin wrote on the use of technologies of reproduction for propaganda purposes, referring in particular to fascism and communism, as effective carriers and transmitters of ideologies with their capacity to reach a massive audience (Benjamin 2002, 122). Hollywood films, as carriers and transmitters of memories, were an effective medium for diffusing propaganda. The relationship between Hollywood and the U.S. State Department is well documented, and while the films were produced to promote the 'Good Neighbor' policy, they created and transmitted memories of Latin Americans as Other which erased other memories of their cultural identities. As Marita Sturken argues, 'photographed, filmed, and videotaped images can embody and create memories; on the other hand, they have the capacity, through the power of their presence, to obliterate them' (Sturken 1997, 20).

Carmen Miranda as a carrier of exoticism, eroticism and primitivism transmitted collective memories of Latin Americans as Other through her bodily performances. Connerton stresses 'the mnemonic importance and persistence of what is incorporated' because it is 'not easily susceptible to critical scrutiny and evaluation'

by those who perform the practice (Connerton 1989, 102). It is not clear whether Miranda was aware of the wider implications of her performances exaggerating her Latinamericanness, but as Connerton argues, her bodily performances were a particularly effective way of transmitting memories since the symbolism of her performances was not questioned and therefore more easily perpetuated.

Chiquita Banana

United Fruit produced the one minute and a half long *Chiquita Banana* commercial in 1944 to promote bananas to the middle classes (YouTube 2). 'When bananas became the poor man's fruit, they disappeared from the dinner tables of the wealthy (Jenkins 2000, 143). United Fruit appropriated and transferred Carmen Miranda's image to the banana-woman, 'Chiquita Banana'. Miranda's Bahian market woman's hat, her dancing, singing, hand gestures, and classic wink at the end of her performances were reproduced in the banana-woman, transforming the fruit into an erotic female, and the real Carmen Miranda into a banana, effecting a conflation of Latin American people represented by Miranda, and bananas. The existence of the 'real' Carmen Miranda who embodied exoticism and eroticism added desirablity to the banana as an exotic product. Carmen Miranda's association with Hollywood added aura to her, and Carmen Miranda, in turn, added aura to the banana implying that by buying a banana you were also buying a bit of Hollywood, and when consuming a banana you were also consuming Hollywood. And at the same time, the iconography of the banana representing Latin Americans as Other was being culturally consumed.

The unequal power relationship between Latin America and the United States is presented through the contrasting opposites of the banana-woman and the men in suits. 'Chiquita Banana' is the female eroticised banana offering herself up for

consumption to men in dinner jackets representing power. Bananas lounging on the beach wearing sunglasses suggest indolence and the primitive. The refrigerator acts as a referent for middle class families who were beginning to acquire refrigerators in the 1940s (Jenkins 2000, 71). The image of bananas running away from a man trying to catch them to put them in the refrigerator is evocative of slavery in Africa, evoking a comparison with the colonization of Africa and U.S. imperialism in Latin America, and between slave plantations and banana plantations. Aviva Chomsky writes that in many ways 'labor relations on the United Fruit Company plantations mirrored those on slave plantations' (Chomsky 1996, 33). The calypso music song of the cartoon was played on the radio as often as 376 times a day (Jenkins 2000, 72), a memory that was imposed and transmitted in society by a technology of reproduction and became part of popular culture. United Fruit used new technologies of reproduction to reach a huge number of people. Capitalism works through advertising images and recorded sound to appeal to people's desires. As a carrier of Miranda's image, the *Chiquita Banana* film and song reinforced the otherization and 'bananization' of Latin America and its people through repetition.

Chiquita Banana, as part of popular culture, was the inspiration behind the 1966 song 'Juanita Banana' about a Mexican banana grower's daughter who becomes a successful opera singer in the United States. Today, 'Juanita Banana' is a term used to refer to Mexican cleaning women in the United States perpetuating the identification of Latin Americans with bananas. This demonstrates how the image of the banana continues to be used to objectify people, and symbolisms attached to the banana are transmitted through the performance of the banana as a carrier of cultural memory (Connerton 1989, 4).

Chiquita Label

Carmen Miranda's association with the banana is embodied in the *Chiquita* label where she is represented with her Tutti-Frutti hat, a carrier and transmitter of Bahian memories. The sticker on the banana acts as interface between banana production and consumption, erasing the exploitative conditions of production (Willis 1987, 593), and the consumer's only contact with the producer is through the image of a happy Latin American woman, conveying a message of fruit produced in ideal working conditions. However, although represented on the label, Miranda's memory has been dissociated and erased from the image. The label performs as a carrier of the memory of the association between bananas and people (Connerton 1989, 5).

Journey to Banana Land

The twenty minute film, *Journey to Banana Land,* documents the journey of bananas by ship from the plantations in Guatemala to the United States and represents the banana as a person that will travel to the United States, 'follow the banana right back to your home' (Mudhooks). 'Between 1955 and 1962, nearly 15 million pieces of banana literature were published by United Fruit for students' (Jenkins 2000, 70). In 'The Conquest of the Tropics' published in 1914 as a biography of the United Fruit Company, bananas were represented as people with a "yellow streak" fighting for their rights when the United States Senate attempted to impose a tax on them of five cents per bunch for entering the United States, 'Under attack it forgot that it was a meek and lowly immigrant with a "yellow streak," and when it donned its fighting garb millions of housewives, toilers, and consumers of all classes rallied to its defense' (Adams 1914, 334). The identification, therefore, between bananas and people was established early on in the commodification of the banana. The film

embodies a discourse of Latin America as the exotic and primitive Other; Latin America as the 'inferior' primitive and passive underdeveloped society, and the United States as the 'superior' creator of modern ships for transporting a regular supply of bananas to the United States. The imperialism of the United States in Central America was maintained through a discourse of 'bananization', and the purpose of the film was to sustain this discourse. As Said writes, 'representations have purposes', and operate, 'according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting' (Said 2003, 273).

The film focuses on the production of bananas in Guatemala and 'was in such demand in 1954 that the number of prints were increased from 214 to 314' (Jenkins 2000, 70). This was the same year that the government of Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown in a U.S. led coup, 'with troops trained and equipped for the purpose by the United States, and with support from U.S.-piloted F-47 bombers' (Galeano 1973, 127); and with the involvement of United Fruit. Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency at the time, 'had previously been on United Fruit's board of directors' (Galeano 1973, 128). In 1952 Arbenz implemented an agrarian reform law to redistribute unused land paying expropriated owners an indemnity in bonds, which by 1954 had benefited over 100,000 landless families, however much of the unused land was owned by United Fruit who 'was using a mere 8 percent of its land' (Galeano 1973, 127). This would suggest that the film was produced and widely distributed in order to create a cultural memory of Guatemala as the primitive Other and to supplant memories of the United States' involvement and even to justify it.The production of United Fruit's marketing literature seems to have run in parallel with an increase in U.S. military interventions in Central America.

The Fulton banana festival in the United States held for thirty years 'on concerns about communism in Latin America' (Jenkins 2000, 126), is a testimony to how the banana was used as a ideological weapon to fight communism, with the last one in 1992 as Latin America was by then associated with drugs rather than communism (Jenkins 2000, 140). The festival linked the youth of the United States and Latin America through cultural exchanges, constructing a memory of good relations between the two regions, and erasing the involvement of the United States in the military conflicts in Central America. At the same time bananas were used to transmit the ideology of the United States through the cultural exchanges and to reinforce the idea of Latin Americans as the exotic Other.

A continent once plundered by the Spaniards for its gold, the narrator of the film states 'today fast white steamships travel across the Caribbean with cargoes more valuable than pirates' gold' (Mudhooks), associating bananas with gold; and, in fact, they are also known as 'green gold'. The language of the film reveals the epistemological framework through which the United States saw Latin America, 'as an entity over whose destiny they believed themselves to have traditional entitlement' (Said 2003, 221). However, the film does not articulate that the United States would ensure that nothing stopped them from delivering their valuable cargoes even if it meant resorting to military intervention. In fact, President Taft had declared in 1912 that 'U.S. foreign policy "may well be made to include active intervention to secure for our merchandise and our capitalists opportunity for profitable investment"' (Galeano 1973, 121).

A dichotomous discourse of 'us' and 'them', the modern North and the primitive South, is represented through United Fruit's Great White Fleet, suggesting the purity of the enterprise and the superiority of the United States. The ships that

transported bananas one way to the United States were taking tourists to Central America to see the exotic countries for themselves as spectacles reinforcing their superiority, just as the Orient 'helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (Said 2003, 1). A U.S. collective identity as a superior nation was constructed through the ships. In contrast, the transport of the indigenous people is described as 'primitive, old fashioned', and the people as believing in doing things as their fathers did. In other words, they are too 'primitive' to be able to market the wealth of their land, whereas the United States has the modern technology to do so. The indigenous people 'are presented in the imagery of static, and neither as creatures with a potential in the process of being realized nor as history being made' (Said 2003, 321). Represented as a people without a past and without a future, the cultural memory of the people of Guatemala is erased, and is supplanted by a body of knowledge as the primitive, static Other, a discourse enabling the United States to exercise their power over them (Said 2003, 32).

The film, as a representation of banana production, erased memories of conflicts between United Fruit and plantation workers, and silenced the exploitation of workers and the displacement of indigenous communities from their lands, veiling U.S. imperialism in Latin America. Presented as factual information to a generation of schoolchildren, the film would have been received as a historical 'truth' about banana production and would have shaped their perceptions on the people of Latin America.

Therefore, the repetition of the cultural imagery of the banana sustained and transmitted perceptions and stereotypes of Latin Americans as the exotic, erotic and primitve Other in the U.S. collective memory (Connerton 1989, 72).The banana was constructed as a discourse, a knowledge, an ideology, just as Orientalism was (Said 2003, 3). Knowledge empowers, and just as Orientalism was created as a body of

information to empower the West and disempower the Orient, the banana was used to construct a body of knowledge about Latin America to disempower it, 'for "us" to deny autonomy to "it"' (Said 2003, 32). The banana as icon was constructed as the embodiment and representation of Latin America and its people as inferior in order to control the region politically, economically and intellectually. However as Said writes, the 'worst aspect of this essentializing stuff is that human suffering in all its density and pain is spiritied away'; memories of the socio-economic realities of the people of Latin America were erased.

In the second chapter I examine *Mamita Yunai* by Carlos Luis Fallas, the *Banana Boat Song*, and photographs of a banana plantation by Carlos Reyes-Manzo, as representations of the unseen memories of suffering, displacement and exploitation. These are narratives that contradict the representation and memory of Latin Americans as exotic, erotic and primitive, the seen memories embedded in the cultural imagery of the banana.

CHAPTER TWO

In what ways does Carlos Luis Fallas's Mamita Yunai make visible silenced memories of suffering, oppression, exploitation and displacement?

Carlos Luis Fallas emerged from United Fruit banana plantations at the age of twenty two to tell the story of the suffering, exploitation and displacement of the people of Central America in *Mamita Yunai*, dedicating the rest of his life to improving conditions for banana plantation workers through the trade unions and as a member of the Communist Party in Costa Rica. First published in the Communist party newspaper, 'El trabajo', as short stories and later as a novel (De Fonseca 1978, 20), Mamita Yunai acts as a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of the banana and the construction of Latin America as the primitive Other by the United Fruit Company, and represents the banana as an icon of violence. I explore how Fallas makes visible the suppressed cultural memory of the Talamancans, African Caribbeans, and the banana plantation workers. Furthermore, I examine how Fallas transforms Calero into a symbol representing all those who died on the plantations and how silenced memories are articulated through the theme of bones.

Fallas critiques U.S. imperialism and the violence of United Fruit through a counter-discourse on the concept of 'civilization', and uses 'gringo' and 'yanqui' to refer to people from the United States as Other. The term 'civilization' is used ironically to critique imperialism's pillage of the wealth of the South, for accumulation 'in distant centers of power' (Galeano 1973, 12). '¡Gloria a los rubios banqueros del Norte! ¡Paso a la Civilización!' (Fallas 1970,140). It was 'civilization' that annihilated the indigenous Talamancans who had managed to repel the Spaniards

five centuries earlier, 'Y ya los pobres indios no pudieron contener el avance de la "nueva civilización"' (Fallas 1970, 74). The terms 'gringo' and 'yanqui', as a language of resistance, embody a historical memory of liberation. No one could escape the 'gringo' or United Fruit who had occupied Central America. Nicaraguans were forced to flee their country which was fighting a war of liberation against U.S. imperialism, 'huyendo de la bota del *gringo*' only to 'caer nuevamente en las manos del gringo' on the banana plantations in Costa Rica (Fallas 1970, 165).

'Entró la locomotora y sacó millones y millones de frutas para los gringos' (Fallas 1970, 74). The railways, a symbol of modernity, were fundamental in the expansion of capitalism and colonialism, and represent the violence of the penetration of the land. Robert Young emphasises 'the role of capitalism as the determining motor of colonialism, and the material violence involved in the process of colonization' (Young 1995, 167). Fallas critiques the violence of modernity which transformed the land into bananas (Fallas 1970, 74), and United Fruit's capitalist practices in Central America; 'éstos levantaron sus rieles, destruyeron los puentes y, después de escupir con desprecio sobre la tierra exhausta, se marcharon triunfalmente hacia otras tierras de conquista' (Fallas 1970, 74). When land became affected by fungal disease, United Fruit destroyed the infrastructure they had put in place, including the railways, 'in order to prevent competitors from being able to renew production on a smaller scale' (Bourgois 1989, 8). 'Their first encounter was marked by violence' (Fanon 2001, 28); United Fruit's involvement in Central America was marked from the beginning by violence. United Fruit was established in 1899 through the merger of Minor Keith's railroad company, which had been contracted to lay a railroad in Costa Rica in the 1870s, and the Boston Fruit Company (Chiquita), and an estimated four thousand migrant workers died 'laying just the first twenty miles of track' (Moberg 1997, xvi).

United Fruit representing the United States started the 'process of domination, of exploitation and of pillage' (Fanon 2001, 39), and the railroads symbolize the start of the process of violence and silencing of memory in Central America.

Workers were also exploited through their spending power. 'Lo que valía cinco en las ciudades se pagaba a nueve en la Línea. ¡Jugoso negocio!' (Fallas 1970, 142). Often paid in coupons worth less if presented elsewhere (Chomsky 1996, 56), they were forced to spend their wages in United Fruit shops, known as 'commissaries'. Thomas McCann, a former United Fruit executive, documented how the commissaries generated a profit of $3 million on sales of $19 million in the 1950s (McCann 1976, 49).

When Panama disease struck in the mid 1910s more land became available for small farmers, and United Fruit took 'advantage of its laborers' desire for independence by delegating much of the actual production' to private and semiprivate farmers (Chomsky 1996, 59). United Fruit used this to their advantage to regulate the market by accepting fewer bananas from private farmers. 'En la última corta qu'hice puse ciento sesenta racimos en la plataforma … y me recibieron veintidós' (Fallas 1970, 111). A high proportion of small plot owners in Costa Rica were African Caribbeans who preferred to be independent banana planters, regarding wage labour as a continuation of slavery (Chomsky 1996, 45).

Fallas contextualises the historical memory of African Caribbeans in Central America within the history of slavery and dominant history. 'Huyeron en la jungla afrícana de los cazadores de esclavos; tiñeron con su sangre las argollas en las profundas bodegas de los barcos negreros' (Fallas 1970, 26). The violence of the discrimination and displacement of African Caribbean Costa Ricans is articulated through Chico, who explains that they were being forced to emigrate to Panama as

there was no work for them now that the plantations on the Atlantic coast were affected by fungal disease and United Fruit was moving to the Pacific coast, 'No hay trabajo, ni podemos cultivar la tierra, ni nos dejan ganarnos la vida en el Pacifico' (Fallas 1970, 21). They could not move to the Pacific coast, since they were not permitted to without identity cards, which were being denied to them (Fallas 1970, 21). 'Adonde irián a dejar sus huesos?' (Fallas 1970, 26), emphasises the importance of a burial ground as a marker of social and cultural identity. 'Pareciera que para los negros se ha detenido la rueda de la Historia: para ellos no floreció la Revolución Francesa, ni existió Lincoln, ni combatió Bolívar, ni se cubrió de gloria el negro Maceo' (Fallas 1970, 26). Fallas situates Antonio Maceo, the African Cuban revolutionary leader who fought against the Spaniards' invasion of Cuba in 1895 alongside statesmen in history, thus also situating banana workers within official history and raising their visibility. The violence of colonialism 'turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it' (Fanon 2001, 169), silencing their historical past and collective memories.

Fanon, in the discourse of colonization and decolonization, describes 'tabula rasa' as a total transformation, 'a whole structure being changed from the bottom up' (Fanon 2001, 27), a policy that U.S. imperialism implemented against the indigenous people of Costa Rica, the Talamancans, whose cultural memory and history were erased when United Fruit took over their land. The topography of their land, their trees, cemeteries, paths, signs, were destroyed and 'millones de metros cúbicos de robles y cedros y laureles y de todas clases de maderas buenas que se pudren de abono p'al banano' (Fallas 1970, 121). The topography of the land mapped their cultural memory, it provided the link with their ancestors and cultural heritage; a link that was destroyed when they were displaced from their lands by the railways and

banana plantations. 'In the colonies, the foreigner coming from another country imposed his rule by means of guns and machines' (Fanon 2001, 31), erasing indigenous peoples' cultural memories.

'Y ya los pobres indios no pudieron contener el avance de la "nueva civilización"' (Fallas 1970, 74). Fallas in a counter-colonial discourse describes the Talamancans as 'la Raza Heroica' who had not been conquered by the sword or the cross of the Spaniards, but were displaced and defeated by 'imperialistas yanquis, secundados por criollos serviles' (Fallas 1970, 73). U.S. imperialism and United Fruit were supported by the national governments, of Central America, as Galeano writes, 'Comic opera dictators watched over United Fruit's interests with knives between their teeth' (Galeano 1973, 124). 'Y ardieron sus palenques, se destruyeron sus sembrados y se revolcó la tierra en que dormían los huesos de sus bravos guerreros' (Fallas 1970, 74). The plantations were superimposed on the site of the Talamancans' villages, and planted on top of their cultural memories. The indigenous people of Latin America are given prominence in Galeano's historical account of the continent as the 'most exploited of the exploited' (Galeano 1973, 61). Galeano describes how otherization and violence are intricately connected, 'Expropriation of the Indians - usurpation of their lands and their labor - has gone hand in hand with racist attitudes' (Galeano 1973, 62). 'Y volvío el silencio al valle de Talamanca; pero un silencio de muerte. Se fueron los gringos y sus secuaces, pero no regresaron los indios' (Fallas 1970, 74). Although Fanon argues that for 'a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land' (Fanon 2001, 34), the land the colonizers give back will not be the same as it was before the colonizers' arrival, it will be a transformed land erased of its cultural heritage.

A number of critics have argued that Fallas's use of language to refer to African Caribbean and indigenous Costa Ricans in *Mamita Yunai* portrays them as Other (Mackenbach 2003, 132). However, I would argue, that as a working class person and someone who lived through the experience of working on the plantations, Fallas demonstrates empathy and solidarity with African Caribbean and indigenous Costa Ricans. United Fruit created the conditions for conflicts of race and used them to control and oppress the work force and to prevent collective organisation (Moberg 1997, xxviii). I would argue that by focusing on Fallas's portrayal of black and indigenous people, the violence of the oppression, exploitation and pillage of the United Fruit Company is silenced.

Calero

Calero represents all the people who died and disappeared on the banana plantations. Fallas articulates their memory and history through the theme of bones as embodying spirituality and cultural memories, and as a metaphor to link past and future generations. 'Huesos de nicas. Huesos de ticos. Huesos de negros. ¡Huesos de hermanos!' (Fallas 1970, 165). The plantations became burial grounds for displaced migrants from different countries and communities who moved from plantation to plantation according to the availability of work. Calero is crushed under a tree as he clears the land; the 'most dangerous and unpleasant work was new land work. This meant attacking an essentially virgin forest' (Chomsky 1996, 41). 'Hasta el clima nos van a cambiar botando la montañas' (Fallas 1970, 121). Fallas makes visionary reference to the link between the destruction of the rainforest and climate change, and the ecological violence of the commodification of the banana, linking past and future memories.

Fallas represents the memories of banana workers through Calero's song on the sea, defining their collective identity through displacement and suffering. 'El mar me dijo: son los desheredados de la tierra, son tus hermanos que sin pan ni abrigo van a morir entre mis ondas negras' (Fallas 1970, 180). The banana plantations are metaphorically compared to the sea where workers sank, disappeared and drowned without trace or memory. The sea and the plantations are represented as carriers of displaced people travelling aimlessly looking for food and shelter, and also as a dual site of death and burial. The banana with its curved shape evokes an image of a boat sailing on the sea. Migrant labour was a feature of banana plantations with the entire work force imported as it had been in earlier slave plantations (Chomsky 1996, 6). Through the metaphor of the sea Fallas represents the workers as displaced migrants looking for work for whom there was no alternative employment to the hazardous banana plantations. The workers were landless poor who relied on wage labour to survive and as unskilled workers were easily replaceable with other Central Americans and Caribbeans (Chomsky 1996, 1). The sea and banana plantations act as carriers of collective memories.

'Calero se quedó de abono de aquel bananal' (Fallas 1970, 17), emphasises the number of people who died on the plantations and were transformed into humus for bananas without leaving any trace or memory; while in the United States, the people of Latin America were transformed into bananas through the cultural imagery. Fallas represents bananas as created through the transformation of the blood and sweat of the workers into the flesh of the fruit. Bananas, therefore, embody the soul and soil of Latin America. Calero can be understood in heroic terms as sacrificing his life for bananas. Eating a banana, therefore, can be seen as a ritual performance embodying

Christian symbolism of the transformation of the body and blood and conveying memories of the violence of capitalism (Connerton 1989, 40).

'Y hasta tendría las mujeres hermosas que tanto deseó' (Fallas 1970, 180). Everyone working on the plantations had dreams, one of which was to get out and to fall in love (Fallas 1970, 140). But those who had worked on the plantations for many years no longer dreamed, 'Los linieros viejos ya no sueñan en nada, no piensan en nada. Sudan y tragan quinina' (Fallas 1970, 131). Fallas comments on capitalism's denial of dreams to workers. Transformed into 'lost shadows' (Fallas 1970, 172), they were mere cogs in capitalism's machinery, paid just enough to keep the machinery moving, but not enough to be able to escape. Calero was part of the machinery that built the railways and opened up a path for capitalism. Whether he existed or not, Calero became a memory representing the numbers and face of suffering.

'Su carne deshecha, convertida en pulpa dulce del rubio banano, sería acariciada por los ojos azules y por los labios pintados de las rubias mujeres del Norte' (Fallas 1970, 180). Calero is transformed into a banana and reincarnated as the symbol and carrier of the blood and sweat of the workers. Fanon describes the wealth of Europe as 'nourished with the blood of slaves' and coming directly from the 'soil and from the subsoil of that underdeveloped world' (Fanon 2001, 76). Fallas describes the production of bananas in the same way, as growing out of the blood of the workers in the soil of the plantations. When Calero is exported to the United States he is empowered as an agent of counter-imperialism, and transformed into the invading aggressor. But at the same time the dominant idea of the people of Latin America as Other is reinforced. Reincarnated as a commodity, Calero is consumed culturally and gastronomically as a dual erotic and exotic entity from the South by blonde women wearing lipstick. The women's blue eyes represent the gaze of power

of the North on the South as an object that can be acquired and consumed, evoking the iconography of the banana created for the eyes of the North, iconic advertising images produced to transform the banana into a desirable commodity. And if the banana, as a symbol of the exotic people of the South, could be desired and acquired, so could the territories of the South. Said argues that Orientalism embodies a discipline of 'the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories' (Said 2003, 123), and the 'bananization' of Latin America embodied the same principle of acquisition. Calero embodies a memory of the human effort of producing bananas. Fallas immortalizes Calero as a memory embedded in bananas representing every banana plantation worker.

Banana Boat Song

The *Banana Boat Song*, a traditional Jamaican song articulating the exploitation of banana workers, became popular after its inclusion in Harry Belafonte's 1956 album 'Calypso' (YouTube 1). 'Come Mr Tally Man, tally me banana / Daylight come and me wanna go home', are the voices of the banana dock workers who have been working all night loading bananas onto ships, pleading for the bananas they have loaded to be counted, implying that when their work is given recognition they will also be counted as persons. Valued as persons in terms of how many bunches of bananas they load, their identity is directly linked to the banana. Mr Tally Man represents the banana companies who found it more profitable to pay workers by the task rather than by the day (Chomsky 1996, 59). The song articulates the silenced memories of the violence of the exploitation of banana workers whose survival depended on how many bunches of banana were exported. After the attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York, the lyrics were transformed to, 'Air force come and

they flatten your home / Run Mr Taliban we know where you're hiding (9/11: Pop Culture and Remembrance). The *Daily Mail* of 12 October 2007, describing the song as a 'Jihad Calypso' reported that the lyrics were transformed to 'Hey Mr Taliban, Come bomb England' (Daily Mail 2007). Memories and ideologies are embedded in the lyrics of songs, and whoever appropriates the tune of a song and tranforms the lyrics, appropriates the ideology contained in the previous lyrics. The *Banana Boat Song* embodied the ideology of bananization and capitalism. This demonstrates how ideologies and stereotypes are transmitted in society without people being aware of it (Halbwachs 1980, 45).

In what ways do Carlos Reyes-Manzo's photographs make visible silenced memories of the suffering and exploitation of banana plantation workers?

'There is no word or image that is not haunted by history' (Cadava 1997, xvii). Writing on the links between memory, photography and history in Walter Benjamin's work, Eduardo Cadava argues that memory and photography are linked through their ability to repeat, reproduce and inscribe. Both are concerned with inscribing history, and history in turn, is an inscriber of memory and the past; 'historiography and photography are media of historical investigation' (Cadava 1997, xviii). Therefore, photographs are carriers of memory and history, and also producers of memories with their capacity for repetition and reproduction.

Carlos Reyes-Manzo's social documentary photographs of the Chiquita banana plantation in Puerto Armuelles, Panama, represent the plantation workers in the social and physical environment of the plantation, and within their historical struggle for

better working conditions. The photographs tell the story of the human involvement in the production of bananas, showing the immensity of the physical environment through the scale of the banana plants and the rough terrain, and the interconnection of the workers with the physical landscape of the plantations. Some aspects of the working conditions such as the heat of the tropics, the use of pesticides and number of hours worked are not visible but are evoked through the photographs. Bananas are produced for consumption in the West and reach us in perfect condition dissociated from their origins, and the photographs provide a cultural memory of the workers' social conditions. Although time has stopped in the images, they represent the working conditions of present day workers too, as the physical environment for growing bananas is the same and conditions for workers have not changed much either. The Fairtrade website informs us that the 'majority of banana plantation workers do not earn enough to live and support their families - some earn less than £1 a day' (The Fairtrade Foundation). Latin America continues to exist as a source of raw materials and foods for rich countries which 'profit more from consuming them than Latin America does from producing them' (Galeano 1973, 11).

Reyes-Manzo documented the banana plantations as part of a six year project for an exhibition to mark the 500th anniversary of the Spaniards' invasion of Latin America held at the Barbican Arts Centre in October 1992. In Chile 'La Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile' also agreed to hold the exhibition but withdrew the offer after receiving Reyes-Manzo's introduction situating the exhibition within a postcolonial context highlighting the socio-economic realities of the disempowered and excluded of the continent, and marking the anniversary in a spirit of resistance to the official commemorations proposed by Spain and the governments of Latin America (Jacobson 2002, 12). Reyes-Manzo situated the banana workers within the

historical memory of the pillage of the continent and the exploitation of its people as a labour force which began with the Spanish conquest. Writing with reference to the exploitation of the silver mines in Potosí, Bolivia, Galeano observes that in 'three centuries Potosí's Cerro Rico consumed eight million lives' (Galeano 1973, 50). The exhibition can be described as an attempt to represent 'spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them' (Fanon 2001, 28), as part of the process of decolonization.

I have chosen to analyse six photographs as representative of the body of work's focus on the banana plantation workers' social conditions and their historical struggle for improved working conditions. The workers' collective identity is articulated through the photograph of the memorial plaque marking the recognition of the banana workers' union by United Fruit on 13 November 1960 after a long strike (La Prensa 2007), linking them to previous generations of workers (Figure 1). The plaque, erected by them, is the workers' own representation of their collective struggle against exploitation. It represents the them as protagonists of their own history, and not as victims of United Fruit, counteracting the erasure of their cultural memories, and the representations of Latin Americans in the iconography of the banana. The recognition of the union and the workers' control of the plantation is part of the process of decolonization which involves 'a whole social structure being changed from bottom up' (Fanon 2001, 27). The plaque unites the community of workers through the trade union and their struggle for improved working conditions and social justice. The photograph has additional historical significance since in 2003 Chiquita sold the Armuelles plantation to the workers' cooperative 'Coosemupar', workers' strikes making the plantation unprofitable cited as the reason (Business Courier of Cincinnati 2003). However, although the cooperative is in control of production, it is

still dependent on Chiquita as its distributor. The photograph will ensure that the memories of the workers' struggles embodied in the plaque survive in history, since in a different political context the plaque could be removed or destroyed, while the photograph will continue to exist and perform as inscribed cultural memory (Connerton 1989, 73).

The photograph of a sign in the shadow of the plantation's administrative buildings stating, 'cada banano de calidad que empacamos en Armuelles engrandece la economia nacional y de nuestros trabajadores' (Figure 2), represents an opposing collective identity to the one articulated in the plaque. The banana is represented as a symbol of national identity through its production for export. The emphasis on the communal benefits of the banana as an export commodity erases any reference to the workers' struggle.

Wearing a traditional Panamanian hat and shirt stained with the sap of the banana plants (Figure 3), suggesting years of work on the plantation, the worker stands defiantly with his spade planted on the ground and machete on his hip challenging the viewer with his gaze. His rubber boots suggest the need for protection against the mud, spiders and snakes, while the bananas are protected in plastic to keep them intact for export to the United States.The banana plants evoke memories of the rainforest that existed before the land was cleared for the banana plantations. The banana leaves on the ground will be transformed into humus for the banana plants adding another layer on top of the layers of humus representing previous generations of people who worked on the plantations. And how many of them, like Calero, were transformed into humus?

The workers sitting on the back of a tractor appear to be resting (Figure 4), perhaps at the end of a shift and, again, gaze defiantly at the viewer holding their

working tools, a machete and long spade which embody cultural memories of their working environment and the dangers on the ground. Holding their machetes defiantly in the air, they reaffirm their readiness to fight for their rights. The bananas on the platform of the tractor waiting to be washed and packed for export can be imagined as a site of history and cultural memories.

The photograph of workers standing next to the banana stalk ends laid out on a cloth on the ground, as if guarding proof of their work, evokes the *Banana Boat Song* (Figure 5), and represents labour relations with Chiquita. Were they still paid according to task rather than by the hour? Recognition of the plantation workers' union is memorialised through the date on a worker's T-shirt.

Women work in the washing and packing of bananas (Figure 6), and are exposed to the pesticides added in the water at the final stage of production before the labels are added (Moberg 1997, 49). The Chiquita label embodies cultural memories of Carmen Miranda, a Brazilian woman born in Portugal, and of Bahian market women; and when the bananas are exported to the United States is a transmitter of memories of banana production. This photograph gives visibility to the role of women on the plantations, a memory that was excluded from Fallas's narrative in *Mamita Yunai*.

Conflicting memories are embodied in the photographs, creating a tension between the memories in the plaque commemorating the collective struggles of the workers, those in the sign on the benefits of banana exports for the nation, and those showing the social realities for the workers. United Fruit pursued a policy of erasure of their records on the plantations, rarely allowing researchers access to records that do exist (Chomsky 1996, 9), and these images provide a visual record of the working conditions on the banana plantations and a memory of the worker's historical struggle.

Roland Barthes writes that photography 'decrees notable whatever it photographs' (Barthes 1980, 34). In other words, a photograph declares that the memories and history represented within it are important.

CHAPTER THREE

Can the banana plantation workers and the marginalized of Latin America speak through representations in cultural memory texts?

Andreas Huyssen writes, 'The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory' (Huyssen 1995, 3). Huyssen argues that representations articulate the past and transform it into memory. Therefore representations of the marginalized transform their past into cultural memory. And if, as Marita Sturken argues, cultural memory and history are entangled, representations are also the history of the marginalized (Sturken 1997, 5).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak problematizes the representation of subaltern or disempowered people through the question, 'Can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak 1988, 294). Spivak draws on Antonio Gramsci's use of the term 'subaltern' to describe 'non-hegemonic groups or classes' and on the Subaltern Studies collective's use of the word (Morton 2007, 96). I would like to comment on the use of the term 'subaltern' as this relates to the subject of this dissertation on the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes through language and cultural imagery. The term 'subaltern', I would argue, takes away agency from the marginalized and silences them, since it embodies the idea that they should not speak without permission.The marginalized and oppressed in society do have a voice but it is not heard; and the question, therefore, is not just whether subaltern people can speak, but also whether they are heard.

Referring to Western intellectuals' representation of the marginalized, Spivak argues that the marginalized cannot speak because any representation will reflect the ideology of the creator. She critiques Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari for failing to

consider the question of ideology in their discussion on 'the relations between desire, power, and subjectivity' (Spivak 1988, 273). Fallas's and Reyes-Manzo's own cultural memories would have formed their political beliefs and acted as a platform for understanding the social conditions surrounding them and feeling empathy for the people they represented. Therefore, they were influenced by their ideological positions in the creation of their representations of the banana plantations. Fallas described himself as growing up in a proletarian family (Fallas 1970, 11), and represented banana workers politically as a trade union activist, as a member of the Communist party, and as part of the movement for national liberation in Costa Rica, 'la mayor parte de mi tiempo lo dedico a la lucha por la total liberación de mi pequeña patria' (Fallas 1970, 12). And as a writer, he represented their economic exploitation and suffering in *Mamita Yunai* through his personal memories.

Reyes-Manzo was introduced to the people on the banana plantation as a 'Chilean exile from Salvador Allende's Socialist government'. Establishing communication with the workers through similar political positions enabled him to dialogue with the workers and to explain why he wanted to document them. Therefore, the ideology of the creator of a representation can play a positive role in the construction of a representation. Moreover, ideology can be the motive for a representation. Fallas wrote *Mamita Yunai* because he believed in social justice and wanted to expose the capitalist practices of United Fruit. Carlos Reyes-Manzo situated the banana plantation workers within the wider context of social struggle for justice in the continent.

It is important to create representations since even if they are not seen immediately they might be seen one day. *Mamita Yunai* was unknown as a text until Pablo Neruda included Calero in his *Canto General*, an epic on the struggles of the

people of Latin America, 'pasó desapercibida por años, hasta que el soplo poderoso del gran poeta Pablo Neruda la echó a correr por el mundo' (Fallas 1970, 12). Neruda's representation of Calero contextualised banana plantation workers within the history of Latin America. 'De aquellas páginas vuelan tu risa y las canciones / entre los bananeros, en el barro sombrío, la lluvia y el sudor' (Neruda 1957, 529). Calero, whose life began as a memory, became part of collective memory through Neruda's re-presentation.

And the photographs of the workers on the Puerto Armuelles plantation were denied visibility because they critiqued the social and political historical context of colonialism. In her essay, Spivak agrees with Michel Foucault who suggests that giving visibility to the unseen not only means creating representations, but also addressing texts or representations that have been silenced by history and have not been allowed to have visibility (Spivak 1988, 285). There will be many other hidden or suppressed cultural memory texts that can emerge in the appropriate time and space.

The question remains whether marginalized people can speak through a representation, 'the slippage from rendering visible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual' (Spivak 1988, 285). Spivak argues that a gap exists between a representation and the voices of those who are being represented, and that the voices of the marginalized therefore cannot be heard. A gap, however, also exists between a representation and its reception by an audience. In other words, even if the marginalized represent themselves their voice can be misheard. The interpretation of a representation is determined not only by how it is constructed by the creator but also by how it is read by the audience, whose cultural codes or ideology will determine the reading of the representation. And this will shift according to the historical space and

time in which the representation is viewed or read. A representation is performative, existing as a representation when it is shown or read. As Connerton argues, 'images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past […] are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances' (Connerton 1989, 4). Representation, therefore, is created out of communication between the creator and the subject, and is transmitted as a memory through communication between the representation and the audience.

Said discusses the problem of memory and representation and questions whether 'there can be a true representation of anything' and whether 'all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer' (Said 2003, 272). Therefore, in order to understand a representation we have to ask which ideology is embedded within the representation, and what is the purpose of the representation? A representation can raise the voices of the marginalized in so far as it makes them visible but it will always be a representation mediated by the creator.

Spivak also argues that representations of the disempowered by the West are 'complicit with Western international economic interests' (Spivak 1988, 271). An obvious example is that of United Fruit who produced literature such as *Journey to Banana Land* which represented the people of Latin America as primitive and inferior reaffirming the United States' power and 'moral entitlement' to plunder Central America. Representations, as Said argues, are often misrepresentations (Said 2003, 272).

In *Open Veins of Latin America* Eduardo Galeano re-presents the dominant history of Latin America from the perspective of those who have been silenced in history. He makes visible memories of the violence which defined the history of the continent, and represents banana plantation workers within the historical context of

United Fruit's exploitative practices. Earlier this year when Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez presented U.S. President Barack Obama with a copy of Galeano's book, it became a bestseller, establishing the silenced voices and memories of the marginalized of Latin America in collective memory (BBC News 2009). This is why Galeano writes, 'All memory is subversive' (Galeano 1973, 308); representations since they are memories have the power to destabilise official history. Halbwachs describes collective memory as a 'current of continuous thought' kept alive by a group and transmitted from generation to generation (Halbwachs 1980, 80); and as long as memories are kept alive by a group they can challenge dominant history. Representations, I would argue, play a similar role, embodying memories and keeping them alive; and in the right historical space and time they have the power to establish a silenced memory in the collective memory.

CONCLUSION

I examined the construction of the banana as icon in the United States through cultural imagery embodying the idea of Latin Americans as Other, and how it contributed to the silencing of memories of the people of Latin America. The iconography of the banana created a cultural memory representing Latin Americans as inferior which provided the United States, as the superior power, with the moral authority to dominate Latin America, just as the Orient was constructed as an essentialized entity through Orientalism for domination by the West (Said 2003, 32).

Memories of Latin Americans as the exotic Other were created through films produced by Hollywood in the 1930s and 40s to promote President Roosevelt's 'Good Neighbor' policy. Carmen Miranda was used by Hollywood to represent Latin Americans as the exotic and comical Other, and became identified with bananas through the film, *The Gang's All Here*, reinforcing the association of Latin Americans with bananas. United Fruit, as the largest U.S. monopoly in the banana industry, appropriated Miranda's image for marketing purposes and transferred it to the Chiquita banana-woman perpetuating a memory of Latin Americans as Other through technologies of reproduction. United Fruit also produced large quantities of educational literature and films on the banana for distribution in schools, imposing on a generation of schoolchildren a memory of Latin Americans as primitive and inferior, and the idea that U.S. imperialism and the economic exploitation of Central America were therefore justified.

In Latin America, however, the banana was an icon representing a cultural memory of violence. The plantations were established through the displacement of indigenous communities from their lands erasing their cultural memories, and were

sustained through the violence of capitalism (Fanon 2001, 31). *Mamita Yunai* and Reyes-Manzo's photographs, as representations of banana plantations, render visible erased memories of the suffering and exploitation of the people of Latin America. At the same time the texts represent the people with agency as protagonists in history struggling against colonialism and imperialism.

I explored whether the voices of the marginalized can speak through a representation (Spivak 1988, 294). Although, as Spivak argues, representations reflect the ideology of the creator, representations as carriers and transmitters of memories, articulate the past. However, since erasure is part of the process of creating memories, it is important to to be aware that some memories are excluded in the process of representation (Huyssen 1995, 3).

The construction of the banana as icon reveals the complicity of human beings in the transmission of negative stereotypes through cultural memory. Unaware of the extent to which we absorb perceptions and attitudes existing in society (Halbwachs 1980, 45), when ideas and concepts are incorporated in language and culture we tend to accept them without questioning how they orginated. And while the original context is not known or erased, memories of the content and meaning are perpetuated and transmitted by performance, as the transmission of stereotypes on Latin Americans through the cultural imagery on the banana demonstrates (Connerton 1989, 4).

The event 'Go Bananas!' organised in March of this year by Fairtrade to promote ethically traded bananas illustrates this point. People dressed as bananas and gorillas were jumping up and down in front of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, encapsulating the association between bananas, people and exoticism. However, bananas do not grow in the natural habitat of gorillas (Jenkins 2000, 162),

demonstrating the extent to which perceptions and attitudes are embedded and reinforced within society. Although Fairtrade promotes ethical standards in the production of bananas, they appear not to have been aware of the symbolism and stereotypes created by associating gorillas, bananas and human beings. And symbolism creates memories that supplant and exclude other memories.

Further research related to the banana as icon could include a study on the effects of the discourse of the banana on the cultural memory of the concept of democracy in Latin America. The notion, for example, that the recent coup in Honduras was justified, as Honduras is only a 'banana republic', was part of the representation of the coup in the media. Research could also be undertaken on the ways in which the 'bananization' of Latin America has shaped and affected the collective identity of the people of Latin America, which I touched on in relation to how representations of Latin Americans as Other in Hollywood films created a cultural memory of their identity that affected them psychologically.

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