

BANANA [MIS]REPRESENTATIONS: A GENDERED HISTORY OF THE UNITED FRUIT
COMPANY AND *LAS MUJERES BANANERAS*

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on banana women's representations and how capitalism reinforces the patriarchal system in Honduras by utilizing three distinct yet interconnected discourses: The United Fruit Company, Honduran banana novels, and female banana union workers' testimonials. The Roosevelt Administration's Good Neighbor Policy (1933) with the collective help of the United Fruit Company and Hollywood presented Latin America and Latin American women stereotypically representing them as a sexualized and exotic persona in US mass media as observed through Carmen Miranda and shortly following, the creation of Miss Chiquita Banana. The three Honduran banana novels utilized in this thesis are: *Prisión verde* (1950), *Destacamento rojo* (1962) by Ramón Amaya Amador, and *Barro* (1951) by Pacas Navas Miralda, that act as a counter United Fruit and Hollywood discourse. I analyze that although the novels provide a strong anti-United Fruit sentiment, the authors are also under a patriarchal discourse through their stereotypical representations of their female characters. I explore the testimonials of unionized banana women who have begun to take back their history by pursuing direct political action against gender discrimination and workers' exploitation.

To my late father, Michael Bologna, whose endless support will always help me to
pursue my dreams.

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This thesis and my entire academic career would not have been possible without the unconditional love and support of the two most important women in my life. My mother and cheerleader, Maria Bologna, whose encouragement has helped me in every difficult and happy moment of my existence, and Monica Bologna, who constantly goes above and beyond the call of sisterhood.

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INTRODUCTION

I recall hearing my classmates' own rendition to the Chiquita Banana song on the playground when I was in elementary school. The children would start off with the first line of the United Fruit Company's famous jingle of the 1950s *I'm Chiquita Banana and I've come to say*, but the last stanza of the song would change to *throw your banana peel on the floor and watch your teacher go flying out the door*. Even though our rendition was slightly different from the original, nearly half a century later, my generation was still familiar with the infectious calypso-tune that had taken Americans' radios and television sets by storm.

Fast forward several years, and I was an undergraduate student enrolled in my first Latin American History course. Although I had heard of the United Fruit Company I was (at the time) unaware of its substantial domination in US foreign policy, propagandistic representation of women in US mass media, and the immense violation of workers' rights. This thesis draws a focus on Honduras, popularly known as the "original banana republic," with a specific aspect on gender studies and the representation of *mujeres bananeras*¹ or banana women, under the United Fruit Company.

It is important to investigate banana women's representation in order to better understand cultural imperialism, gender discrimination, and sexual exploitation that took place at the hands of the United Fruit Company, Chiquita Brands International today. Banana women have been stereotypically represented as naïve, exotic, and sexual objects and have distracted the US American public from the countless corruption that occurred (and occurs) on the banana plantations. Subsequently, the United Fruit Company reaffirmed women's traditional gender roles by portraying banana women as naively happy to serve a patriarchal and imperialist

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this thesis are mine.

transnational corporation. The [mis]representations of the *mujeres bananeras* is due to a patriarchal ideology that I argue is interconnected with imperialism and capitalism, and while this thesis focuses on past events it is still relevant today due to the fact that these discourses still take shape.

My methodology in this project is to analyze the different representations of *bananera* women using three distinct yet interwoven discourses: the United Fruit Company, Honduran banana novels, and female banana union workers' testimonials. The reason I have chosen these three discourses is to first investigate how the United Fruit Company represented Latin America and Latin American women by analyzing their collaboration with the US government and Hollywood through movies such as *The Gang's All Here* (1943), *The Three Caballeros* (1945), and their banana promoting documentary *Journey to Banana Land* (1950), that was shown in elementary schools. Moreover, Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases* (1989) allowed me a feminist perspective on the role of women in global politics and how they have been represented as cheap labor for a capitalist gain.

Along with Enloe's feminist outlook, Heidi Hartmann's article "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," affirms that capitalism creates gender hierarchies in the production process in order to sustain power by "playing workers off against each other," maintaining a male superiority in the labor market through the United Fruit Company's patriarchal and capitalist ideologies (139). Furthermore, the concept of patriarchy and capitalism as a mutual accommodation is illustrated throughout this thesis and is central in my research. I apply the Marxist and psychoanalytic concepts of patriarchy as defined by Judith Lorber and Hartmann. Marxist feminists explain patriarchy as "the structure and process of men's misogynist domination of women through violent control of their sexuality and childbearing" (Lorber 3).

Additionally, women's patriarchal domination by their husbands or male partners in their homes directly connects with the exploitation they face as oppressed workers at the *empacadoras*, or the banana packinghouses, an example of the "capitalistic marketplace" (Hartmann in Lorber 3). Marxist feminists have also connected patriarchy in all aspects of society in order to understand how "each form of men's exploitation of women supports and reinforces the others," in which men subordinate, dominate, oppress, and exploit women through hierarchical relations (3). Furthermore, I also utilize the psychoanalytic definition of patriarchy as the symbolic "rule of the father through gendered sexuality and the unconscious," which is frequently illustrated in the Honduran banana novels and dictated in banana women's testimonies (3).

By including Honduran literature, more specifically the three Honduran banana novels, *Prisión verde* (1950), *Destacamento rojo* (1962) by Ramón Amaya Amador and *Barro* (1951) by Paca Navas Miralda helps me understand how women were illustrated through the words of the Honduran *mestizo* authors. Through the plethora of characters, I was able to analyze if the authors were also "trapped" under a patriarchal discourse through their stereotypical depictions of women and how they maintain that there was exploitation on the banana plantations at the time of their publications.

Lastly, although doing extensive historical and literary research about the *bananera* women, this thesis would not be complete without testimonies from the women seeing how they have self-represented themselves through the following works: *Lo que hemos vivido: luchas de mujeres bananeras* (2003), and *Women Behind the Labels* (2000), as well as video interviews by unionized *bananera* women. I want to give women's voices their place since they were vocal participants in decisions that affected their lives as workers, and therefore are a part of history

that must also be represented. Moreover, by including testimonials in this project has not only brought a “personal touch” to my readers, but is a reminder that [mis]representation of women in the banana plantations is an ongoing struggle in Honduras (and throughout Latin America) today.

In further detail, Chapter I, “A Propaganda Discourse: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Representation of Women under the United Fruit Company,” explores the Roosevelt Administration’s “Good Neighbor Policy” (1933) in order to understand how the United Fruit Company had the power to reaffirm traditional women’s gender roles stereotypically representing Latin America and Latin American women as an exotic, naive, hip-swaying, friendly girl-next-door. My research concludes that within the US’ new “friendly” foreign policy, there existed an equally responsible web of allies: Hollywood and the United Fruit Company. These three key players worked together to replace a former militaristic approach with a newer cultural imperialist strategy. I draw a focus to popular “Latin American” cultural icons such as Carmen Miranda and Miss Chiquita Banana, as well as propagandistic Walt Disney Productions and promotional documentaries made by the United Fruit Company in the 1950s, during the time of the Cold War and the United Fruit Company’s threat of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala.

Chapter II, “Honduran Banana Workers’ History and Voices Through *la novela bananera*” draws a focus on women’s representation and an analysis of women under a patriarchal society through three Honduran banana novels: *Prisión verde* (1950) and *Destacamento rojo* (1962) by Ramón Amaya Amador, and *Barro* (1951) by Paca Navas Miralda. This chapter explores the depictions of the female characters in the novels (with a strong emphasis on the indigenous and Garífuna ethnic minorities), and examines to what point are women represented as leaders, political activists, and union members. I also argue that although

there is a strong anti-United Fruit Company discourse, Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda still embrace patriarchal values by implementing a dominant national discourse of white- superiority.

The final chapter entitled “Poder Bananero: Women’s Empowerment in Banana Labor Unions,” is a labor history of the *bananeras*² and the patriarchal ideologies at the packing plants, in their homes, and among their male colleagues. My analysis of *Lo que hemos vivido*, *Women Behind the Labels*, and the myriad amount of other video and oral interviews found on banana union websites, shows that by the *bananera* women telling their own stories and reclaiming their own history, has resulted in the reclamation of self-confident political leaders who are no longer invisible.

² The word *bananeras* refers to both women workers and banana plantations.

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CHAPTER I

A PROPAGANDA DISCOURSE: THE GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN UNDER THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY

At the Montevideo Conference in 1933, Cordell Hull³ stated, “The United States government is as much opposed as any other government to interference with the freedom, the sovereignty, or other internal affairs or processes of the governments of other nations,” and further affirmed that “no government need fear any intervention on the part of the United States under the Roosevelt administration” (Hull in Wood 118-119). Later that same year, Roosevelt would swear off US military intervention in Latin America at the seventh congress of the Pan-American movement⁴ and proclaimed a “Good Neighbor Policy” toward his friends in Latin America during his inaugural address (Chasteen 238). What followed was a replacement of military intervention to an array of cultural imperialism led by the US government and its corporate “good neighbor” allies, the United Fruit Company and Hollywood Studios. This team of three collectively promoted Latin America as the provocative and exotic female archetype. In this chapter, I argue that the Good Neighbor Policy was indeed a cultural imperialistic strategy in order for the Roosevelt administration to guarantee US control in Latin America along with two equal actors and participants: the United Fruit Company and Hollywood, utilizing propaganda in the media and stereotypically representing the role of the Latin American woman as an exotic and naïve persona.

³ Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Secretary of State (Wood 9).

⁴ The idea of denouncing U.S. aggressive interventionism was not new in 1933 but had begun its discourse in the 1920s with President Hoover (Chasteen 238).

Cultural imperialism and the connection between the Roosevelt administration, Hollywood, and the United Fruit Company (UFCO)⁵ can be explained by Herbert Schiller's definition of cultural imperialism in his work *Communication and Cultural Domination* (1976):

The concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system. The public media are the foremost example of operating enterprises that are used in the penetrative process. For penetration on a significant scale the media themselves must be captured by the dominating/penetrating power. This occurs largely through the commercialization of broadcasting (Schiller 9-10).

Moreover, Cynthia Enloe affirms that the Good Neighbor Policy was not simply a governmental campaign to replace a militaristic and imperialistic approach within US-Latin America foreign policy. Rather, the foreign policy had many Hollywood helpers as well as the ever-expanding UFCO that had great influence in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras eager to jump aboard the bandwagon (Enloe 125). As a result, following the declaration of the Good Neighbor Policy, Roosevelt created the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs within the Motion Picture Section of the State Department to fulfill the Good Neighbor Policy's purpose in presenting "the truth about the American way," replacing a militaristic approach with a friendly and more cooperative Pan-American policy (Black in Piedra 1).

⁵ Throughout this thesis the United Fruit Company will be referred to its acronym, UFCO, or "United Fruit".

The Good Neighbor Policy was more than just a “friendly” attitude and promoted US self-interest. In actuality, the US’ new political approach was a way to deal with the rising challenge of Latin American nationalism and assured stability in Central America⁶ (Rosenberg 136-137). Influential expansion in Central America was due to the fact that nations in which United Fruit held political leverage and tremendous foreign investments insured controlled stability in this region (136-137).

Fejes further elaborates that the Good Neighbor Policy also acted as a means to deal with the US economic crisis in the 1930s but shy away from the historical force and unilateral intervention,⁷ as a “transformation of the methods of control and dominance,” providing a more cooperative diplomatic strategy (6). Conversely, Soluri states that the Good Neighbor Policy sought to neutralize German influence,⁸ in Latin America as well as guaranteed the US access to “strategic raw materials,” such as banana land in Central America (Soluri 164).

A new and important component of the Good Neighbor Policy was the creation of new cultural relations policies, a radical change from past US practices (72). Prior to the Good Neighbor Policy, the US government had “too little, if any, interest or effort in the promotion or dissemination of cultural products, practices, or ideas overseas,” and did very little to promote any type of cultural exchange between Latin America and the United States⁹ (72). Hence, “Latin

⁶ Emily Rosenberg articulates that United Fruit held great political leverage and tremendous foreign investments in Latin America especially in Central America (136).

⁷ Between 1880-1930, the United States had colonized or invaded the following places: Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Nicaragua (Enloe 124).

⁸ Due to the Nazi cultural and economic threat, anti-United States sentiment was growing and the Roosevelt Administration was concerned with Nazi propaganda in Latin America, although this was only one reason why the Good Neighbor Policy had been created and was not the sole reason for the US foreign policy (Fejes 76).

⁹ Fejes further illustrates that the promotion for any cultural activity such as the arts, music, and the media had exclusively been sponsored by “private individuals, foundations, educational institutions...state governments and private interests” (Fejes 72, 77).

Americans [although they recognized US economic power], looked to Europe as the source of cultural values and models...while the popular image of Latin America fared no better in the United States” (73).

Within the early formation of the Good Neighbor Policy, the US government began to examine what were the advantages that cultural diplomacy could offer. Could these advantages help promote US lawmakers’ own self-interests? By 1935, the administration had prompted a focus on cultural education exchanges in Latin America offering scholarships and fellowships for Latin American students to study in the United States (74). Nevertheless, cultural programs were not abundant in the US until the war in 1940 when the first educational exchange occurred (74). Rosenberg further argues that U.S. official effort to spread “the Gospel of Americanism”¹⁰ was illustrated by the government as informative and “a vast enterprise in salesmanship...to preach the gospel of democracy” (Creel in Rosenberg 79). Furthermore, in addition to the creation of fellowships, lecturers were sent around the world to preach tours promoting American patriotism. Likewise, free English classes were sponsored by the government in Latin America that used “the technique of language to sell an ideological message,” key examples of the wise father figure teaching Latin America how to be his obedient *democratic* child (Rosenberg 81).

The US foreign policy fostered Latin American dependency with the help of the United Fruit Company. José Piedra explains: “Since very early [in the twentieth century] Hollywood, particularly M.G.M., Twentieth-Century Fox, and the Disney Studio, collaborated with the United Fruit Company in putting the finishing touches...on the American way to the rest of the Americas” (Piedra 3). In addition to Hollywood as one of United Fruits’ allies, the United Fruit Company also had associates in other means of communication when it became the first

¹⁰ George Creel, director of the Committee on Public Information referred to the United States’ cultural expansion as “the Gospel of Americanism” (Rosenberg 79).

company sponsor to sign with NBC shortwave¹¹ producing “institutional announcements...sponsored strictly in the interest of good will...where [United Fruit] does business and has extensive investments,” in Central America (United Fruit in Fejes 117). Within five years following NBC shortwave, United Fruit had hired Hollywood Studios to create propaganda to fulfill the promises of the Good Neighbor Policy upholding “U.S ideological, erotic, and commercial interests” (Piedra 5). A key example of Walt Disney Studio’s contribution to the Good Neighbor Policy and the stereotypical representation of Latin American women is the 1945 Disney film *The Three Caballeros*.¹²

A new foreign policy had been born (not solely to win over Latin America during WWII), but to promote peace and progress within the nations of the hemisphere “with an understanding and appreciation of both the diversity and similarity among the cultures of the Americas” (75). Subsequently, Hollywood directors had formed alliances with politicians in Washington¹³ and promoted Latin America as the friendly and exotic “girl-next-door” through the samba-dancing, hip-swinging, vivacious woman in the tutti-frutti hat; Miss Carmen Miranda.

Carmen Miranda

¹¹ A daily fifteen-minute evening news broadcast in Spanish that began in November 1939 but did not air until December 1, 1939 on NBC’s International Division (Fejes 116-117).

¹² The film was also introduced to a Latin American Audience as *Los Tres Caballeros* (Disney).

¹³ Enloe explains that Darryl Zanuck, President of Twentieth Century Fox, had many “cultivated friendships” with politicians interested in overcoming barriers of anti-Semitic elements in films during the 1940s (125).



Fig. 1. Carmen Miranda in the scene entitled “The lady in the tutti-frutti hat” from the movie *The Gang’s All Here* (1943). Hollywood executives and UFCO members pushed for the stereotypical banana costume and setting, an example of the corporate coalition of the Good Neighbor Policy.

A prime example of Hollywood propaganda is the symbolism of singer and actress Maria do Carmo Miranda da Cunha, or as a US audience referred to her as Carmen Miranda or the “Brazilian Bombshell,” although she was born in Lisbon in 1909 (Soluri 162). As a child, Miranda moved to Brazil and became a sensation on Rio de Janeiro’s radios and popular nightclubs¹⁴ (162). In 1939, Broadway producer Lee Schubert witnessed one of Miranda’s live performances and offered her a contract in New York. One year later, Miranda had shifted from Broadway to Hollywood becoming US audience’s exotic, playfully naïve, and friendly face of Latin America, becoming the key representative Latin image of the Good Neighbor Policy (Enloe 125).

Miranda’s films depicted her as a symbol for all of Latin America: an exotic, flirtatious, and friendly place where no uncomfortable cultural differences existed, or as Enloe further illustrates, “exotic, yet mildly amusing” (127). Miranda became the friendly entrance in “understanding” Latin America through her exotic accent, her seductive calypso and samba

¹⁴ By 1939 Carmen Miranda had recorded over 300 singles, appeared in four Brazilian films, and was even referred to as Brazil’s national institution (Enloe 125).

rhythms, her Hollywood movies (where a myriad amount of banana props dominated the musical sets), and lastly, Miranda's signature fruit-filled headwear based loosely on styles worn by Afro-Brazilian women in Bahia¹⁵ (Soluri 164).

Although some of Miranda's performances did have a plethora of sexual tensions and innuendos (such as the "Tutti-Frutti Hat" scene in *The Gang's All Here*), Soluri explains "the light-skinned Miranda brought a nonthreatening form of tropical exoticism to the North American stage and screen" (Soluri 164). Miranda's "color-blindness" perhaps derived from the fact that she was not a native to Latin America¹⁶ but was a middle-class European that represented Afro-Brazilian samba and mimicked poor black women who sold fruit in Bahia. Therefore, Miranda could not have been a threat to the "moral standard of the era," and became the Latin American popular cultural icon of the United States (Porben, Soluri 164). Moreover, Miranda had crowned the nickname "the white queen of samba," fabricating a new identity not solely of Brazil but representing all Latin America, "helping to erase black [and indigenous] heritage in Latin America, something that had invariably been viewed as negative...crystallizing a frequent stereotype that had been associated with the tropics" (Glik 2379). In her career in the United States, Carmen Miranda made a total of 14 films in Hollywood from 1940-1953 and sold more than 10 million records around the world becoming the highest paid female artist in the United States at the time¹⁷ (Glik 2380).

American Twentieth Century Fox's *The Gang's All Here* (1943) starring Carmen Miranda is an example of Hollywood and the United Fruit Company's participation in the Good

¹⁵ Salvador de Bahía, or commonly known as Bahía, were "the black slums of Brazil," where Samba was popularly played, and where poor black women would sell fruit (Porben).

¹⁶ Carmen Miranda never gave up her Portuguese Passport (Porben).

¹⁷ According to the Internal Revenues Service, Carmen Miranda received more than \$200,000 (IRS in Glik 2380).

Neighbor Policy. One of Miranda's several banana movies, *The Gang's All Here*, represents exoticism and eroticism on the set of a banana plantation directly linking Carmen Miranda to the banana as shown in Figure 1. The final scene entitled, "The Lady in the Tutti Frutti Hat," begins with upper class Americans in a theatre dining on linen-cloth tables in their formal evening attire, smiling as small monkeys climb and play in a plethora of banana plants. The camera focuses on a monkey eating a banana and the curtains open where the audience sees many beautiful exotic women in Miranda-like turbans with ruffled yellow mini-skirts lying sensually on the floor next to banana plants as if they are waiting to be picked off themselves. After responding to a man's whistle, the female chorus rushes to the edge of the stage smiling and waving to their American audience, like a good neighbor should (*The Gang's All Here*). Suddenly Carmen Miranda appears wearing a bundle of bananas on her head standing in a banana cart that is being pulled by oxen and shirtless men and begins to sing in a thick Latin accent the theme song of the night.

Miranda sings,

...I hope that everyone is glad to see, the lady in the tutti-frutti hat...the gentlemen they want to make me say sí-sí, but I don't tell them that, I tell them yes sir-ee, and maybe that's why they come for dates to me, the lady in the tutti-frutti hat (*The Gang's All Here*).

By the time of the film's production, Carmen Miranda had nearly lost her accent, but Hollywood pushed her to continue with that image for the American public (Porben). Within these few lines I argue that cultural imperialism has already taken place. Miranda implies that she chooses to speak in English in the United States and refuses to speak in her native tongue, demonstrating US linguistic imperialism that will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Following her song, Miranda's female chorus surrounds her carrying banana xylophones that Carmen happily plays. Afterwards, the chorus is pictured holding giant bananas between their legs and at the end, run back to their banana land smiling and waving goodbye to the audience and lay back down next to the banana plants. Finally, the movie ends with an explosion of bananas leading up to the sky from Miranda's tutti-frutti hat (*The Gang's All Here*).

This scene is undeniably sexualizing the Latin American woman. The fact that the women are holding giant bananas between their legs draws on erotic and wild stereotypes of the primitive jungle woman in the banana plantations and with a clear sexual connotation. While the *civilized* white American male audience is portrayed dining in elegant suits, the *barbaric* Latin American woman fulfills her role in serving the men through her lively entertainment and sexuality.

Hollywood had successfully reinvented the North American image of not solely Brazil, but of all Latin America through Carmen Miranda (Glik 2380). Mónica Sol Glik explains that the Good Neighbor Policy and their Hollywood helpers had transmitted Latin America to the US public providing the medium for the United Fruit Company's advertising and mass media creation of *Miss Chiquita Banana*, a Carmen Miranda inspired character in 1944 (Glik 2380).



Fig. 2. Miss Chiquita Banana in her original television commercial in 1944. The background portrays the “Great White Fleet,” the famous United Fruit Company banana ship as well as white American men in fancy suits, similar to the scene in *The Gang’s All Here*.

Chiquita Banana

As Soluri illustrates, “Miss Chiquita was born on the airwaves,” during United Fruit’s nationwide radio campaign creating an immense expansion in the banana market in 1944 (161). Miss Chiquita, originally a half-woman, half-banana cartoon character created by Dick Brown was developed during the time of Carmen Miranda’s immense popularity (Glik 2380). Mirroring Miranda’s tutti-frutti hat, long flowing skirt, exotic personality, and her famous calypso jingles, a propagandistic icon from a major US Corporation had been born.

Like Miranda to Hollywood, Miss Chiquita was to the United Fruit Company. As previously illustrated, Miranda was Hollywood’s “friendly neighbor” ambassador, the flirtatious Latina dominating the movie screens with her tutti-frutti hat. At the same time, United Fruit was the largest grower and marketer of bananas in Latin America and like Hollywood, made its contribution to the “Good Neighbor culture” through its key marketing strategy for US consumers via their exotic Latin American banana woman (Soluri 128). United Fruit knew that their direct customers (those who did the weekly grocery shopping) were women: specifically

mothers and housewives who wanted to feed their families healthy and nutritional foods. Enloe describes United Fruit's success in gaining a brand-name loyalty was by creating a "fantasized market woman," on the television, radio, and marketplace (129).

The United Fruit's approach to cultural imperialism can be directly promoted through its domination and penetration in the media in regards to women's representation. To begin with, Chiquita Banana's commercials were another way for United Fruit to impose hegemony and reaffirm the role of women. In her debut commercial, Miss Chiquita steps off a boat onto a red carpet with a welcome banner (in English) while several photographers take her picture just as Carmen had done so in 1939 (pictured in Figure 2). Although viewers understand that Chiquita is from Latin America,¹⁸ like Carmen Miranda, she embraces English, the dominant language of the United States, and sings her famous jingle in the language of her audience. Meanwhile never forgetting to also hold on to her "exotic ways," Chiquita sways her Latinized "hips" from side to side while serving a table of wealthy-dressed men different types of banana entrees, in a similar manner as Miranda's *The Gang's All Here*. Keeping her main customer in mind, Miss Chiquita makes certain to mention the nutritious value of bananas, especially for babies: "Bananas are a solid food that doctors now include in babies diets, and since they are so good for babies, I think we all should try it...sí sí sí sí," and ends with her signature wink (Chiquita Banana). Miss Chiquita's stance in her jingle reaffirms women's roles as mothers in the kitchen, explaining that good and responsible American mothers should feed their children this healthy golden product, and now serves as the market mother for all women who wish to listen to the doctor's orders.

¹⁸ United Fruit never specifies Chiquita's country of origin, making the assumption that all of Latin America has an identical culture.



Fig 3. Chiquita Banana’s signature pose: Hands on “hips” with her signature wink.



Fig. 4. Photograph from “Chiquita Banana and the Cannibal.”

Besides her role as the golden idol for American mothers, Miss Chiquita additionally serves as the bridge to civilization in another one of her famous commercials, “Chiquita Banana and the Cannibal.” The commercial begins with a dark monkey-like masculine figure (United Fruit’s portrayal of the savage), in a cloth covering and bow tie as he prepares his meal for the evening; a white man in a large black pot over a campfire, with banana plants, tribal masks, and a straw hut in the background. As the dark cannibalistic barbarian adds spices to his “soup,” in strolls Chiquita Banana with a different jingle:

“I’m Chiquita Banana and I’ve come to say, that you really shouldn’t treat a fellow man this way, if you like to be refined and civilized, your eating habits ought to be revised.” Miss

Chiquita then teaches the savage how to make banana scallops¹⁹, a more *civilized* meal and an invention of the United Fruit Company. As Chiquita dictates the recipe, the camera focuses on a white woman's manicured hands as she prepares the dish, making sure never to touch the actual banana but only the peel in a *refined* manner, distancing herself from a primitive manner. By the end of the commercial, the savage is so grateful to Chiquita for showing him the *correct* culture he happily sings (while holding the banana with a fork): "I'd like to say that banana scallops taste like very cultured eating, so won't you join me please old fellow, for this time I am treating," and the white man replies, "Oh yes, yes, yes!" By the end of the commercial, the savage now eats bananas with western utensils and not his hands transforming himself from a barbaric creature to a civilized man, thanks to Chiquita Banana, the friendly hip-swaying ambassador of the Good Neighbor Policy (Chiquita Banana and the Cannibals). In relation to Carmen Miranda films and Miss Chiquita commercials, Walt Disney Studios also depicts Latin America as a Carmen-like stereotype in *The Three Caballeros* (1945).

Walt Disney's *The Three Caballeros* (1945)

As previously stated, one main purpose of the Good Neighbor Policy (according to the US government), was to help promote the similarities between the United States and Latin America to create a better understanding between the two regions (117). Piedra affirms that *The Three Caballeros* was geared to "innocent parents of children," to further spread the worldwide interest of Uncle Sam as the dominant patriarch. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart further explain imperialist ideology in Disney as the following: "The child in the Disney comic [and films] is really a mask for adult anxieties; he is an adult self-image," confirming the prevalent

¹⁹ Bananas coated and fried in cornflakes (Chiquita Banana and the Cannibals).

cultural imperialism that takes place in *The Three Caballeros*” (Kunzie in Dorfman and Mattelart 22).

Although there is no definite plot but rather a myriad amount of propaganda, *The Three Caballeros* begins when Donald Duck receives a birthday package from his Latin American friends. The package contains three gifts from “his friends in Latin America,” who want to introduce Donald to their homelands (The Three Caballeros). Every gift Donald opens takes viewers on an exotic trip to different regions and countries of Latin America.

The very first scene in the Disney film begins when Donald opens his first present from his friends south of the border. Out pops a camera and film scroll that takes Donald and the audience to the South Pole where one sees a plethora of happy penguins enjoying their day at the frozen beach (The Three Caballeros). The audience is then introduced to Pablo, the penguin that yearns for something more, something tropical, far away from the cold. After several attempts to depart from the South Pole, he finally is successful and after a long journey up South America, he reaches the Galapagos Islands²⁰ (The Three Caballeros). Instantly, Pablo grabs a ripened golden banana from the banana plant, squeezes the peel and gulps it down with instant satisfaction. Following his agenda-pushing snack, Pablo takes a nice long afternoon siesta on a hammock becoming “A bird in paradise...the happiest penguin in the world,” in his tropical vacationland (The Three Caballeros). This scene depicts Latin Americans as lazy beings who simply eat bananas and rest under palm trees without a care in the world. The scene fails to portray any of the harsh realities connected to bananas, and portrays banana land as a carefree sunny utopia. Piedra further affirms that Donald provides Pablo with a “technical opportunity to discover him...a U.S. culture,” United Fruit (Piedra 14). The introduction to Pablo’s discovery of

²⁰ Ecuador was and presently is also a banana hub of the United Fruit Company (now Chiquita Brands International).

the banana provides a perfect leeway for the following scene where the audience is presented with an exotic Carmen-like character.



Fig. 5. Aurora Miranda with Donald, Panchito, and José Carioca in *The Three Caballeros*.

Donald's second gift introduces Brazilian parrot José Carioca.²¹ Carioca takes Donald to his hometown Bahia, Brazil, Miranda's city of fame. The first female actress thus far in the film stars Aurora Miranda, Carmen Miranda's sister who plays the role of a singing and dancing cookie vendor Yaya (The Three Caballeros). Before Aurora Miranda is drawn into focus, the film portrays her shadowy figure where viewers see a tall slender woman in a ruffled skirt with a tray of food on her head demonstrating her Carmen-like character shaking her hips to the beat of the music. Dorfman and Mattelart articulate that Disney could always "fall back upon eternal coquetry" (37). In other words, many of Disney's female characters were depicted as flirtatious in a constant state to the "Hollywood actress stereotype," hence in the case of *The Three Caballeros*, the Carmen-like representation in the film (38). As the rhythm of her song picks up, Donald and Carioca follow her in a love-like trance where many men from Bahia, and the

²¹ Disney's José (Pepe) Carioca is Donald Duck's elegant, conservative, and charming Brazilian parrot friend who was first introduced to a US audience in *Saludos Amigos* in 1942. Carioca also serves as "Donald's visiting ticket" to many different locations in Latin America (Glik 2376, translation Bologna)

buildings themselves suddenly appear and begin to dance. Glik adds, “Donald cannot take it anymore. He loses complete control...and the scene is an uncontrollable sensuality” (Glik 3).

Aurora, nor any of the people in this scene, authentically presents the people of Bahia, as the majority of the population was Afro-Brazilian as formerly stated. Once again, contributors of the Good Neighbor Policy misrepresented the Latin American woman to only fit their tight exotic but not *too* exotic mold. Suddenly, many Carmen-like women appear and “run-off” with the men while Aurora is left alone feeling jealous. In order to make herself feel wanted she grabs the last man who is paying attention to her (Donald Duck), and kisses him “dazzled by the hope of finding at last a true man...leaving her only *raison d’etre* to become a sexual object” (The Three Caballeros, Dorfman and Mattelart 39). The end of the scene illustrates that in order for Yaya (Aurora) to feel valued as a woman, she must be the sexual center of attention for the men. Once the men leave with her friends, Aurora is left upset, jealous, and incomplete. That is, until the last man standing (Donald Duck), presents her with a bouquet of flowers and she suddenly feels *whole* again.

Donald’s final package takes him, José Carioca, and the audience to Mexico, and an eventual tour on a flying zarape with Panchito, the sombrero-wearing Mexican rooster.²² Donald receives a piñata for his birthday and when he finally breaks it open, a fiesta of Mexican items explodes: guitars, bulls, zarapes, sombreros, pottery, etc. The three birds take a ride on a magic zarape to reach different states throughout Mexico (The Three Caballeros). Donald, José Carioca, and Panchito reach a small rural village in Patzcuaro where the inhabitants are dancing

²² Disney’s Mexican rooster that was portrayed as a wild but friendly masculine mariachi-like character who constantly fires his shotgun to the sky.

the traditional *Jarabe Tapatio*²³, or more popularly known in English as the Mexican Hat Dance. Here the men and women appear a bit more mestizo than the dancers in the Bahia scene, but with an indigenous finesse as the audience can detect by their clothing. The women wear long skirts, braided hair, and *rebosos*²⁴ to cover their heads, while the men wear sombreros, ponchos, and white cotton pants. Their homes and village looks very provincial, but appear happy and carefree dancing in the dirt together fulfilling the stereotype of the “happy and simple Indian” in accordance to the end of the “Chiquita Banana and the Cannibals” commercial. The three birds and the magic *zarape* next fly to Acapulco. Panchito hands Donald a telescope and says, “Take the telescope and have a look at what you might call the hot stuff,” where Donald sees the beach full of sunbathing women while screaming, “Hot stuff,” and dives down to see them playing along with the Mexican women’s “sodomasochistic game,” (The Three Caballeros, Piedra 16). The women happily wave and coquettishly smile saying “*Qué simpático Donald, ándale patito, ven*²⁵” laughing and playfully flirting with the “wolf in duck’s clothing,” until Carioca and Panchito scoop him back onto the magic *zarape* (Panchito in The Three Caballeros).

The final scene is Mexico City at night where “even the sky is full of romance,” where female heads of star-flowers sing the love song, “You Belong to my Heart” (The Three Caballeros). Donald is eventually kissed by a plethora of floating lips, and flies through the starry night until he lands on banana leaves scattered at his feet reminding the viewers of Carmen Miranda and a less obvious message from the United Fruit Company (The Three Caballeros).

The remaining scene is quite psychedelic with Donald’s friends jumping out of flowers shooting

²³ According to *La compañía de danza folklórica Mexicana de Chicago* or the Mexican Folkloric Dance Company of Chicago, el jarabe tapatío was born during the Mexican Revolution as a “form of national unity,” and is known today as the “national folk dance of Mexico” (Compañía de danza folklórica Mexicana de Chicago).

²⁴ Mexican shawls.

²⁵ “How nice, Donald! Dare-ducky, come on!” (The Three Caballeros).

guns into the air screaming and then switching back to “You Belong to my Heart,” followed by images of women in bathing suits and on boogie boards jumping into the sky. The women in bathing suits then create a flower figure with their bodies while lying on the ground imitating Miranda’s *Lady in the Tutti Frutti Hat* scene, reaffirming the role of women in this film as sexual and exotic waiting to be discovered by Donald Duck, the imperialist patriarch (*The Three Caballeros*, *The Gang’s All Here*).

As mentioned previously, Hollywood and United Fruit worked hand-in-hand pursuing their common interests through films such as *The Three Caballeros*. The final piece of analysis will be an example of one of the many promotional films from the United Fruit Company, *Journey to Banana Land* (1950) that was utilized to promote a neoliberal agenda and United’s own representation of Central America.

Journey to Banana Land

The United Fruit Company’s *Journey to Banana Land* (1950) was a promotional twenty-minute film produced by the William J. Ganz Company and the Institute of Visual Training. This documentary tells the story of bananas “the modern treasure,” as they make their way from the tropics of Central America to Americans’ breakfast tables (Prelinger Collection Internet Archive, *Journey to Banana Land*). The journey has a travelogue-like feel by beginning with a boat leaving the United States setting sail for an unspecified area in the Central American Caribbean. A map then shows the viewers “banana land” that was made up by the following countries: Mexico, all Central American countries, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Jamaica (*Journey to Banana Land*). The journey takes a pit stop in a typical banana city,²⁶ emphasizing the quaintness feel of the Spanish American buildings and streets. The camera focuses on a

²⁶ This particular city was Guatemala City, but the film emphasized that all banana lands (and people) in Central American Caribbean cities were comparable to one another.

woman carrying a basket full of food on her head. The male narrator explains, “It is not unusual to see women with baskets on their heads off doing the family marketing” (Journey to Banana Land). Drawing the depiction of Latin American women with “baskets on their heads” emphasizes to the American audience that women like Chiquita Banana really exist, and therefore is an accurate representation of women in Latin America, although in reality is an artificial injection in Latin American culture created by the United Fruit Company.

The next scene focuses on light skinned mestiza women in western pastel dresses and high heels walking out of church. The narrator draws similarities to American women stating: “People who live in the city dress very much like the people in our own southern states. There are many churches...they speak Spanish of course...the people are very polite,” reaffirming the friendly characteristics of US neighbors south of the border like Carmen and Miss Chiquita. Before traveling to the banana plantation, the narrator draws attention to more indigenous-looking women filling their homemade jars with water from the watering hole and placing them a top their heads “just as their ancestors have done for hundreds of years,” explaining that although they look different from Americans, “So you see the foods they eat are like those in our own country” (Journey to Banana Land).

Finally, the viewer’s reach banana land, the highlands where the exotic *Indians* inhabit. The narrator describes the indigenous people as “primitive, old fashioned,” and unlike Americans, “They believe in doing things as their fathers did...some of the Indians cannot even speak the language of the neighboring tribes,” while the men are seen pulling ox carts and women hand picking coffee and cocoa beans with their children (Journey to Banana Land). The narrator acts as the US patriarchal voice implying US superiority especially in terms of modern technology where he illustrates the great and modern differences of United Fruit owned

plantations that utilized service canals and railways. Moreover, the narrator points out that the Spanish Conquistadors “merely took things from Central America,” while the United Fruit company has helped these people by bringing “Twentieth century living,” and “great purchasing power” to the tropical jungle wilderness of Central America (*Journey to Banana Land*).

An important question to ask is who was the intended audience for *Journey to Banana Land*? According to Prelinger Archives, the film was presented to elementary schoolchildren in the United States as an “agricultural food and production educational documentary” that provided “factual” historical information about banana production under the United Fruit Company (Prelinger Archives and *Journey to Banana Land*). *Journey to Banana* reinforces a gendered hierarchy through the establishment and portrayal of “settled agriculture” and “private property” emphasizing that through capitalism “human society emerged from the primitive” and became civilized (Hartmann 138). Moreover, the United Fruit Company expressed between the lines that these poor and backwards people *needed* the United Fruit Company in order to improve their economy and modernity, or in other words the United Fruit Company was the father figure for an innocent child-like barbaric culture.

Before leaving the viewers in awe of the modernity within United Fruit Company’s banana plantations, the historical background of the development, spread, and cultivation of the banana is described. According to *Journey to Banana Land*, men usually work in teams of three to cut off the bunch from the plant, and are picked up by male truck drivers who wrap the bananas in soft protective padding with happy and light instrumental music in the background. As the cheerful music continues, other male workers are shown washing the banana bunches “with great care” (*Journey to Banana Land*).

During the film of the banana process, the only Latin American women who were shown in the film were the dressed-up urban women and the indigenous women with baskets on their heads. It is not until the film reaches US grocery stores where women (mothers) are directly linked to the banana. As Enloe previously articulated, United Fruit's marketing strategy targeted middle-class American housewives and their children. In *Journey to Banana Land*, a housewife is seen browsing the produce section when her young daughter spots the bananas. Although the golden fruit catches her eye, she points to the image on the "special banded packages," that contains the tutti-frutti image, of Miss Chiquita Banana. The following scene illustrates the housewife cutting up banana slices without *barbarically* touching the actual banana with her manicured nails, drawing a *déjà vu* sensation to the female cooking instructor in Miss Chiquita commercials.

Throughout the banana plantation scenes in *Journey to Banana Land*, not one Central American woman is ever filmed or mentioned. One cannot help but ask where are the women? Why would the United Fruit Company not want the women to be a part of the promotional film? Why would they not show their role in the banana lands? This is due to the fact that the United Fruit Company wished to idealize the view of banana plantations, as Disney had done so with Pablo the penguin in *The Three Caballeros*. Furthermore, the deceiving view of the banana plantations provided in *Journey to Banana Land* was a method to hide the horrible working conditions that were so prevalent in the banana lands.

The feminization of Latin America in the discourse of Hollywood (especially through Twentieth Century Fox and Disney) and the United Fruit Company, demonstrates patriarchal values of the culture industry that equates political control to sexual domination. The fact that Carmen Miranda, Miss Chiquita Banana, and Yaya (Aurora Miranda) are portrayed to the US

public in an exotic and seductive image is a way for the US audience to sexually consume and dominate Latin American women and the entire Latin American region. Moreover, the images presented by Hollywood of the seductive yet domesticated women provides the opportunity for US audience to consume this wild but tamable creature for their own desires pointing to exploitation as a patriarchal value, an underlying imperialist discourse.

In the next chapters, readers will observe women's roles in banana plantations through the eyes of two Honduran authors Ramón Amaya Amador, and Paca Navas de Miralda, distinctly different to the propaganda promoted by the United Fruit Company in the United States. I will analyze Honduran women's representations in three banana novels, a counter-discourse to the narrative offered by Hollywood and UFCO films: *Prisión verde* (1950), *Destacamento Rojo* (1962), and *Barro* (1951). As one will observe, the next chapter does not illustrate United Fruit's sunny picture of male workers with no woman workers in sight, nor illustrate real-life Miss Chiquitas sunbathing near the banana plants, but will draw a focus on violence and violation under a capitalist policy.

CHAPTER II

HONDURAN BANANA WORKERS' HISTORY AND VOICES THROUGH *LA NOVELA BANANERA*

The second chapter of this thesis will focus primarily on the history of the United Fruit Company through a Central American narrative, *la novela bananera*, or the banana novel. By drawing a focus on Honduras, I will analyze the representation and role of women under a patriarchal society in the following Honduran banana novels: *Prisión verde* (Guatemala 1950), and *Destacamento rojo* (Mexico 1962), by Ramón Amaya Amador, and *Barro* (Guatemala 1951), by Paca Navas Miralda. I decided to utilize these three Honduran banana novels for several reasons. First, I am interested in the Honduran Banana Workers' Strike of 1954 and how the workers' struggle was depicted through literature prior to Amaya Amador's *Prisión Verde* and Navas Miralda's *Barro*, as well as after the strike in *Destacamento Rojo* through Amaya Amador, a former Marxist banana worker. Furthermore, the year of the Honduran Workers' Strike was the same year of the CIA overthrow of Guatemala's President Jacobo Árbenz (1950-1954), whose land reform act directly threatened the United Fruit Company's monopolization of land. The situation in Guatemala is mentioned throughout *Destacamento Rojo* as wanted revolutionaries flee Honduras and return to inform their compatriots about their neighbors' injustices, while Honduran soldiers attempt to recruit indigenous people of the interior to fight against the "evil communists"²⁷ in Guatemala. Secondly, all three novels emphasize a type of unity as characters link corruption and injustices from the United Fruit Company to other Central American nations such as Guatemala and Nicaragua, emphasizing a united Central America, with a similar goal in mind: Revolt against North American imperialism and improve banana

²⁷ In this case, supporters of Árbenz, and other opponents of the United Fruit Company.

workers' rights. Furthermore, Amaya Amador's *Destacamento rojo*, is a continuation of *Prisión verde* with several of the same characters including Catuca Pardo, a woman who began as a victim in *Prisión verde*, but emerged as a vital leader in the workers' struggle in *Destacamento rojo*.

Although every novel includes female characters, I am interested in how Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda represent the women, especially in regards to the indigenous and Garífuna female characters. During the publications of all three banana novels, thousands of women worked in and around the banana camps cooking meals, raising children, gathering the water for the day, alongside the high probabilities of rape, conquest, and domestic violence within the plantations. Therefore, I believe it is crucial to examine Latin American women's representation in banana novels and to analyze the similarities and differences of the female characters in *Prisión verde*, *Destacamento rojo*, and *Barro*. I will analyze how and if female resistance against patriarchal oppression is evident in the novels drawing focus to patriarchal oppression from the male Honduran workers, as well as the imperialist and patriarchal oppression from the United Fruit Company.

Furthermore, I shall explore the depictions regarding banana women²⁸ through the following questions: How are women represented in banana novels? Do those "on the bottom" articulate the exploitation of the oppressed, or do Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda present a dominant *mestizo* national discourse and interpretation by implementing patriarchal values in the novels? Do these novels act as a counter-UFCO and Hollywood discourse?

²⁸ When I use the term "banana women," I do not solely imply women who work at the banana plantations, but all the women who are in some way connected directly or indirectly to banana land such as wives, mistresses, daughters, and cooks of banana workers.

Ultimately, it is important to note that US American foreign policy had greatly shifted during the time of these publications. While the Good Neighbor Policy (1933) undoubtedly pursued a power agenda, Roosevelt's foreign policy had cultivated a relationship more on mutual concept and collaboration with US interests building alliances (based on US self-interest) with many Latin American countries. Following WWII, the Cold War (beginning from 1944 or 1945 to 1948 or 1949) was a freezing moment of international relations (Bethell and Roxborough 168). Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough articulate: "The attack on labour and the Left, especially the Communist Left, was, in this sense, clearly overdetermined...the last years of the forties led to the complete abandonment of any reformist project," and became an ideology of the past (187, 188).

Banana Novels

Before moving forward to the analyses of the three banana novels in this thesis, it is important to first understand what the key elements of banana novels. According to Valeria Grinberg Pla and Werner Mackenbach a banana novel is a "political, social, and economic phenomenon that has brought attention to sociopolitical literary writing...intending to break a traditional oligarchic formation of a nation-state and foreign domination by the United States on dependent Central American countries" (Grinberg Pla and Mackenbach 376). Moreover, the banana novel has been considered to be a "literary sub-genre in the canon of literary criticism and historiography of Latin and Central America from the first half of the Twentieth Century" (376). It is to say, that these political novels utilize social realism to incorporate actual events, such as in this case, injustices and oppression of banana workers in the northern Honduran Caribbean coast and the events leading and following the Banana Workers' Strike of 1954,

illustrated by underprivileged and lower-class fictional characters in order to create a sociopolitical scene (376).

Additionally, Grinberg Pla and Mackenbach confirm that banana novels have a clear anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist theme “questioning the traditional oligarch model of the formation of a nation state and the construction of a national identity from the perspective of the popular class” [peasants] forming a popular classic national identity (379). Therefore, many banana novels attempt to speak for the excluded social and ethnic classes whom historically, have not been permitted or able to speak of the injustices they face in United Fruit Company banana plantations (386).

Conversely, as shall further be explained, banana novels harbor limitations in their writing due to the fact that educated *mestizo/a* authors write and create the stories.²⁹ Grinberg Pla and Mackenbach explain this as an “aesthetic-literary expression of the mestizo nation,” illustrating that although the lives’ of the characters are not far from reality in regards to violence, exploitation, and corruption, the books are not written from “those at the bottom” (378).

The novels by Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda occur within a patriarchal society that is the domination and control of the United Fruit Company. The United Fruit Company, a capitalist banana empire, was indeed a patriarchy through its use of hegemony and exploitation. In addition, the extensive gender discrimination including the raping and pillaging of banana women and the land by UFCO is a clear demonstration of a continuous imperialist and

²⁹ By classifying authors Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda as *mestizo* is due to the fact that many banana novel authors have traditionally identified themselves as people with a Hispanic heritage, and not as social and ethnic minorities such as the indigenous and Garífuna workers that are found and represented in the three novels.

patriarchal agenda. Therefore, I argue that imperialist and capitalist elements interconnect with the patriarchal order run by the United Fruit Company.

Prisión verde

Honduran writer Armando García articulates the revolutionary forefront of Amaya Amador's *Prisión verde*, or the *Green Prison*: “[*Prisión verde*] has been the most persecuted book in the country. For a long time it was an evidentiary exhibit for imprisonment. The old men of my town still lower their voices to the mere mention of its name. Many times it was buried in the solitude of the yards after the Coup d’etat” (García). Amaya Amador was the head of the Honduran Communist Party and an outspoken critic of US imperialism and the United Fruit Company's capitalist corruption focusing his novels on the assassinations and injustices of poor migrant and plantation workers in the North Coast of Honduras. Born in Olanchito, Yoro on April 29, 1916, Amaya Amador worked as a teacher and political organizer witnessing firsthand the “social and ecological transformations” by the export banana production with the creation of the Truxillo Railroad Company (Euraque 42). Following the arrival of the Standard Fruit Company, he worked for a short time on the banana plantations and later published radical articles in periodicals in La Ceiba (42). From his personal life to his novels, Amaya Amador utilized his own experience to denounce workers' exploitation creating political consciousness and framing his gallant protagonist Máximo Luján after himself. Amaya Amador also experienced the political repression of the Carías regime (1933-1948) in Guatemala where he wrote *Prisión verde* and other articles regarding Central American proletariats criticizing their governments' view of modernity at the cost of exploitation and struggle of the working class. He was an outspoken supporter of the Arévalo regime and helped establish a clandestine communist

party in Honduras (Euraque 43). The title of *Prisión verde* is Amaya Amador's metaphor to describe the "psychological and physical degradation of workers wrought by a production system rooted in social and economic inequities," surrounded by green banana leaves that provide them a minuscule income and years off of their lives (Soluri 129).

At the time of *Prisión verde*'s publication, the majority of the banana labor force in the Northern Coast was made up of men. However, it would be absurd not to include women within Central American banana history because they were double victims of oppression and conquest as workers and as women from the United Fruit Company and several of their male compatriots. What is more, *Prisión verde* argues that women have been victimized under capitalist oppression, dominating and violating a myriad number of the female characters, as one will momentarily observe.

Prisión verde takes place in the 1940s at the height of the banana enclave in the North Coast of Honduras. The United Fruit Company is gradually buying land from several Honduran men, feeding them broken promises while doing everything in their power to take *la Dolora*, Luncho López's land and a symbol of Honduras. Luncho, a landowner in northern Honduras refuses to sell his land, *la Dolora*, to *Mister Still*, a blonde *gringo* Fruit Company manager, who urges Luncho to sign the forms "for his country's progress," offering "American dollars," to the old man (17).³⁰ Luncho continues to sternly decline as the pen is shoved in front of his face until he angrily explodes: "To hell with the money!...I won't sell my land. This is the last time, *mister*. I will not sell! I will never sell...not even for all the gold in the world!" (17). Luncho illustrates to his friends Cantillano and Sierra the following of what *la Dolora* means to him using nature as

³⁰ According to John Charles Chasteen, whoever sold their land to the banana companies did profit at the beginning, but many like Luncho and Samayoa were left with "no job, no land, no education..." (188).

a metaphor: “I am like a tree. My roots have grown into this land. His [Mr. Still’s] money does not serve a purpose for me, for I have it, I take it out of this great land where I was born” (16).

Additionally, *la Dolora* in Spanish translates as “the suffering woman,” providing the reader with an allegoric depiction of the United Fruit Company taking the land as a man takes a suffering woman. Luncho’s friends already had sold their land and were regularly receiving money from the company, “not as vulgar agricultural workers, but as grand gentleman, who had fulfilled their life dreams just from the simple fact of selling their lands,” implying that in order to be a “gentleman”, one must turn away from his land and the value he holds towards nature, in exchange for modernity and civilization for his country run by corrupt American investors (19). Unlike Luncho’s friends (and other men in the novel), who had sold their land, allowing the company to slowly spread and take over acre by acre, Luncho could not give up his *Dolora* to the foreign men. The following day, Mr. Still and Estanio Párraga, UFCO’s Honduran lawyer, discuss how they will eventually take Luncho’s land even if he continues to be stubborn. Párraga suddenly begins to daydream about his commission while the two sip on coca colas served to them by a black³¹ office boy dressed completely in white (22). Míster Still assures Párraga that they will eventually get the land: “Don’t be afraid. Your interests [regarding Párraga’s commission] are completely guaranteed. Who would dare to contradict an issue with interest and relations to the United Fruit Company?” (22). This situation only confirms the United Fruit Company as the imperialist patriarch, and the readers will shortly observe what will happen when a worker tries to question the company. Although Luncho has repeatedly denied the company his land, the company will not stop until they trick Luncho into business forcing him to

³¹ Amaya Amador only refers to the office boy as “black” and does not go into detail explaining that he is most likely Garífuna. Further along, the reader will see a much stronger role for the Garífuna’s in Nava Miralda’s *Barro*, although they are constantly illustrated with racist stereotypes.

declare bankruptcy and give up his land. Luncho tries to save *la Dolora*, but in the end, she is raped and violated, left to the destruction of the United Fruit Company seen solely as a profitable object for the corporation. In the end, *la Dolora* is conquered by the coca cola drinking colonizer.

Next, I will discuss the representation of women in *Prisión verde* to explain how according to this novel imperialist and capitalist exploitation interconnect with patriarchal oppression. To elaborate, the power and corruption of the United Fruit Company utilized Honduran delegates to obtain their goals as Amaya Amador depicts in *Prisión verde*. The taking of *la Dolora* and the immense violations against women occurred under the patriarchal society developed³² by the United Fruit Company and its obedient accomplices: the Honduran bourgeoisie. The Honduran workers in high-ranked positions such as Cápitan Benítez³³, and Párraga, a Honduran UFCO lawyer, excitingly await their commission from *la Dolora*. As Amaya Amador argues, these men have become more like UFCO than to their country's roots, destroying the land or exploiting others in return for capital. Men like Cantillano, Sierra, and Martín Samayoa³⁴ sell their land for a "cheap buck," and by the end are left feeling displaced, until Máximo Luján³⁵ publicly denounces the exploitation and is seen as the voice of social consciousness.

Apart from the symbolism of *la Dolora*, the female characters in *Prisión verde* are portrayed as property, violated and oppressed victims, single mothers, cooks, prostitutes, and

³² It is not to say that the United Fruit Company was the first patriarchal society, but explaining that this is their position in the context of *Prisión verde*.

³³ A Honduran UFCO boss who is *gringotized* to the fullest.

³⁴ A former *poquitero* who sells his land to the company, finds himself drunk and broken and has no other choice but to work sprinkling venom in the plantations.

³⁵ Due to Luján's Marxist beliefs and fiery spirit, it is inferred that in reality, he is the voice of Amaya Amador.

survivors. Furthermore, women like Juana are left with no choice but to engage in one or several of these roles in order to survive the poverty of the prison. Mr. Jones, a gringo UFCO boss takes an interest and claims to have fallen in love with Juana, a married banana woman and compatriot of Luján's revolutionary group. Juana rejects Mr. Jones a myriad amount of times and as a consequence, Capitán Benítez offers his advice in his purposefully grammatically incorrect Spanish to demonstrate he's one of *them*³⁶: "It pointless. Juana no accept. She say husband. Me offer her money. She pig-headed. Therefore, I to say to Mister Jones, if he to wants to fuck her, first remove the husband. Husband is bother" (Amaya Amador 77). Consequently, Mr. Jones sends Benítez and Mr. Foxter (another Gringo boss) to kill Juana's husband in order for their comrade to have regular sex with Juana for money and a job offer in the plantations, branding her as his property and conquest. Juana never finds out who killed her husband and uses the money to help Catuca Pardo's son, an offspring of rape (208). This scene further presents the UFCO as an imperialist and patriarchal company through the extensive sexual exploitation and domination under Mr. Jones and Capitán Benítez and raises a counter UFCO and Hollywood discourse.

Catuca Pardo is one of the most interesting characters of both Amaya Amador's works. She is first introduced in *Prisión verde* as the daughter of Lucio, a banana worker, and Plácida, a cook whom she helps prepare the meals starting at the crack of dawn. Catuca is described as "a young woman with an aquiline features, and a pleasant presence, especially when she smiled and her dimples would show. She was skinny, attractive, and sensual..." (43). She is depicted in *Prisión verde* as a young flirtatious woman obsessed with Marcos Palomo, a semi-womanizer

³⁶ Capitán Benítez speaks in a strong American accent to the Americans and the Honduran workers, emphasizing his self-transformation and his allegiance to the company.

and banana worker, but is raped by *el gringo prieto*,³⁷ Capitán Benítez. Like Mister Still, Benítez tries to bribe Catuca with material items: “I am the almighty Benítez, a trustworthy man of mister Fox and Mister Jones...you will have everything if you’re with me: silk, crepes, fine shoes, bracelets, gold rings, nannies,” and continues with his purposefully broken Spanish, “I to get lots of dollars” (97). Like Lucho, Catuca resists, screams, and insults him, but she is no match for the “almighty” Benítez, and he rapes her, takes her virginity, and impregnates her.

Amaya Amador argues that the destruction and raping of women and the land, a woman herself, is link to capitalist oppression from UFCO and represents a much more recent conquest of the Americas. Capitán Benítez reaffirms his “right” to dominate due to his position and his rank in the company: “You will be my woman...it is my right ...I am captain!” (96). Once Juana diagnoses Catucas’ pregnancy, Catuca thinks of the dishonor it will bring on her family and that she has forever lost Marcos who was now “under the power of the repulsive captain” (156). Her father Lucio notices her growing belly and begins to beat Catuca. Her mother tries to intervene and Lucio hits her several times as he refers to his daughter as a *puta* (whore), blaming Catuca for her sexuality, another characteristic of patriarchal behavior. Máximo intervenes informing him that she was raped and to stop hitting her because she is a victim (157). Like many women before her, Catuca is left to raise and care for the child on her own. Although Catuca was not the first woman who was raped and “abandoned with a child on the way,” by UFCO bosses, Benítez was not a *gringo*, but a *gringotized* Honduran (156). Therefore although Benítez symbolizes imperialism and colonization through “his right” to conquer Catuca, he is also a symbol for complicity with UFCO and within the patriarchal and capitalist system.

³⁷ Nicknamed the “dark gringo” by the other banana workers as a joke to point out that he is not a gringo. The workers are laughing and making fun of Capitán Benítez for speaking in a grammatically wrong Spanish to them (Amaya Amador 63).

The final character that will be discussed in *Prisión verde* is Soledad, also known as *la India*, or the Indian. Although Amaya Amador has sincerely depicted (to the best of his ability), the capitalist exploitation of both men and women around the green prison, he stereotypically portrays Soledad as an indigenous woman through the eyes of mestizo men. To begin, Soledad (Sole), Luján's lover, is the female Xicaque³⁸ character from the occidental mountain valley that "spoke little and worked a lot, like all of her brave but forgotten race" (82). Sole is physically described as a woman with "the blackest of Indian eyes...a strange attraction although the color of her skin was copper and her facial lines presented exaggerated curves like her fleshy lips...a recently domesticated tigress...a brutal Indian" (86). Sole had migrated to the banana camps in search for work "with many men-young and old prowling at her every move, but they retreated due to her jungle-like character" (82). Although thus far, Sole is illustrated as a raw and wild woman, she is also represented as a submissive and foolish woman to Luján who tells her that her little head is full of fantasies. She responds: "I know, it's because I'm so foolish...I love you Máximo, you have done so much for this poor Indian...if it weren't for you and the men who are so good to me, I would not be here" (87, 88). In agreement, Grinberg Pla and Mackenbach explain that Soledad's indigenous exoticism personifies with several characteristics of the "eternal feminine" including weak, obedient, and mysterious (Grinberg Pla and Mackenbach 391).

Although like the other female characters portrayed as victims conquered by men in an imperialist and patriarchal society, the narrator himself objectifies Soledad when referring to her as "Máximo Luján's woman," and drawing forth stereotypes of the passive, exotic, and mysterious indigenous woman: "She was a mix of a flower and thorns, a bite and a kiss" (Amaya

³⁸ Indigenous. She is said that her blood is predominantly from them.

Amador 86). Grinberg Pla and Mackenbach further argue that due to the fact Sole is an indigenous woman, “the perspective to seduce and to own her has the attractiveness to dominate—like the former conquistadors” (392). Readers can observe the descriptions of nature linked to Soledad, a woman of the land: “Oh Máximo! Your savannah is not even the shadow of my mountain...it is cold all of the time and when the sun rises, there are tons of birds chirping and singing...Oh Máximo, you don’t know the voice of the mountains,” and Máximo responds, “It’s true Sole. I don’t know this voice” (Amaya Amador 89). Soledad continues passionately expressing her love for the mountains and the animals to Máximo when the narrator states, “This was the first time that the Indian had talked to him [Máximo] with so much expertise,” insinuating that the only topic that Soledad was able to speak about without sounding foolish was nature (89).

Ultimately, although the narrator is never identified, one can affirm that he is a heterosexual *mestizo* man by the objectified way he describes Soledad and the other banana women. Near the end of the novel, the narrator describes Marcos as becoming “more handsome and irresistible,” and asks “why would he go and sleep with dirty women and stinking of sweat and lard, when he can visit the terrific city women who are perfumed and fashionable...” (223). Although this is partly satirical in the sense that by Marcos becoming a mole, he has turned into a Good Neighbor prop “like a cowboy in American films,” stereotyping Latin American women comparable to how they are represented in *Journey to Banana Land* (223, translation Bologna). Conversely, the fact that the narrator comments a myriad amount of times on Soledad and Catuca’s sex appeal, and thoroughly supports Luján’s and the workers’ fight, he and other male characters including Luján, cannot fully escape their branded views of women as they are also victims of a patriarchal society. Luján explains:

They have the same essence: oligarchy; they suffer the same disease: demagoguery, and they serve the same master: the Banana Companies... In politics we need something different than traditional *caudillismo*, different than cronyism, than the paternalism of personages. We need to translate the aspirations of the working masses into a political ideal, and we need to translate this ideal into a real workers' party, a real revolutionary party. We must not believe in idol-men. Our history is full of their promises (Amaya Amador 147, translation Bologna).

Luján's death does not stop the fire, but is a way for Amaya Amador to "wake up Honduras," to continue Luján's fight for justice in the green prison. In *Destacamento rojo* (1962), the reader will witness what happens when the workers' strike explodes and where women take more of a direct role.

Destacamento rojo

Destacamento rojo (1962), or *Red Detachment*, brings the Honduran Workers' strike of 1954 to literary life following the death of Máximo Luján in San Pedro Sula. Depicted as a "fictionalized chronicle," *Destacamento rojo* utilizes actual events that took place in Honduras from 1954-1957 (Becerra 9). According to Darío Euraque, the Honduran revolt in 1954 involved over 35,000-banana workers, "but also most of the laborers in the small factories of San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, and Tegucigalpa" (95). Furthermore, the modern Honduran Communist Party (PCH),³⁹ was founded in April 1954 with Amaya Amador as one of its leading intellectuals during the 1950s. Amaya Amador articulates that once the *Partido democrático revolucionario hondureño* (Honduran Revolutionary Democratic Party), or PDRH "became a victim of repression in 1953, most regional committees of the PDRH were transformed into Marxist study

³⁹ *El Partido Comunista de Honduras* (Euraque 95).

circles,” preparing to formally establish the (illegal) communist party, and eventually leading to the strike (96).

The banana strike of 1954 occurred during President Gálvez’s last year in office. Tensions in Honduras were increasing due to Guatemala’s President Árbenz’s promise to challenge the United Fruit Company and further confront the expropriation of land, causing a “red threat” to the United States. As Amaya Amador depicts, Árbenz’s direct left-wing criticism to the United Fruit Company and to the United States influencing labor tensions that spread across the Guatemalan-Honduran border. According to the U.S. Library of Congress, by the beginning of 1954, a major covert operation against Guatemala was in the works by the United States but with the cooperation from the Honduran government⁴⁰ (U.S. Library of Congress).

Amaya Amador affirms that his characters are “of meat and bone...and [his work] is rigorously historical in its essence” (Amaya Amador 11). Throughout *Destacamento rojo*, several members of the PCH such as revolutionary protagonist Rotundo García who seeks hiding in Guatemala after Capitán Colombo Madero⁴¹ allows him to escape and informs his party of US intervention in Guatemala. Similarly, Diego Lino, another revolutionary banana worker, shares what he witnessed while he was exiled to Guatemala: “The Communist Party [in Guatemala] was shining light on all of Central America. They talked about participation and that the democratic Hondurans were one with the working class and Guatemalan people...” (Amaya Amador 48, translation Bologna).

⁴⁰ According to the U.S. Library of Congress, the Honduran government began to cooperate due to the “concern over increased labor tensions in the banana-producing areas,” that the United Fruit Company predominantly blamed on Guatemala (U.S. Library of Congress).

⁴¹ A Honduran soldier for the United Fruit Company who instead of following orders to kill Rotundo, tells him to hide in Guatemala while people think he is dead. Due to his long-term service to the company, he is seen as a traitor to the workers throughout the majority of the story (Amaya Amador 53, 122).

Unlike *Prisión verde*, participation of the workers' strike is not solely comprised of men, but women's participation is crucial as they take more direct action within the Honduran Communist Party. In addition, the female characters in *Destacamento rojo* are given more flexible roles within the political party and some are even depicted as heroes during crucial events leading up to and during the strike rather than solely being depicted as mothers, daughters, cooks, and/or other sexual and exotic objects as was demonstrated throughout *Prisión verde*.

Carmen Linares, a fellow *camarada* and T-shirt factory worker was fourteen during the massacre of Máximo Luján and other revolutionaries in the banana plantation (Amaya Amador 39). Although she was not a banana worker, the corrupt and violent events of the United Fruit Company had shaped her revolutionary feelings throughout her adult life. Rotundo García had been planning a costly trip from San Pedro Sula to La Ceiba with some of his comrades including Ricardo but were worried about the finances when Carmen put down the newspaper and handed them the ring from her fingers and placed it on the table: "Pawn this ring. It's gold. It will give you the 10 *lempiras*. It was my father's...Now Camilo will be able to go to La Ceiba" (Amaya Amador 183, translation Bologna). Carmen's spontaneous help had made it possible for the men to depart and buy other necessities for the trip while Carmen returned to reading her newspaper (184). Although Carmen was not accompanying her fellow comrades, as a result they were able to acquire more revolutionaries because of Carmen's generosity "for the party" (184). Moreover, unlike *Prisión verde*, Amaya Amador portrays women who are literate and curious to know the events that are occurring outside of San Pedro Sula, such as the events that were boiling in Guatemala and other neighboring cities.

In *Prisión verde*, Catuca Pardo was raped and impregnated by Capitán Benítez, beaten by her father, witnessed his murder at the account of UFCO, and ended with a potential romantic interest in Martín Samayoa. In *Destacamento rojo*, the readers see that Samayoa and Catuca are still romantic partners whom together have several sons including Catuca's first child Tivicho who Samayoa has taken as his own son, while Catuca continues to cook for the workers. The narrator illustrates a day in her life: "It's lunch hour in the plantations. The workers are eating in the shade under the banana leaves. Here at camp, the women sweat in their humid kitchens, with hot ovens, and walls and roofs made of zinc..." (56). Catuca is described as continuously working but has matured and has "remained thin and nice" as she articulates, "[I am] working and working so that others can get fat," and begins to tell Diego, a member of their party what had happened when he fled temporarily to Guatemala (56, 57).

Catuca describes to Diego in detail that Rotundo had brought many revolutionary books for Martín, Tomás, Tivicho, Lucito, Lolita, and for her to read, study, and prepare for that night's meeting. The six plus Rotundo began to discuss and read together when the "Comanche"⁴² entered the house with three armed soldiers (57). Certain they would all go to jail, the Comanche exclaimed, "Aha! This is how I wanted to find you all," as Rotundo tried to explain that it was a spiritual session "calling on spirits but you chased them away" (58). The Comanche questions who the spirits are while the group names and describes the spirits to him and the soldiers, calling them out by first name begging them to come back and "answer" their questions. Catuca continues telling Diego, "Then, the idea occurred to me to start shaking as if I had a demon inside my body," pretending to be the spirit's medium while Rotundo and the others continued asking her questions as she responded, "Tell him [the Comanche] that for all the people that he's

⁴² A derogatory name for the military bosses in the banana camps.

killed, I am paying for it in Hell and if he doesn't light seven candles that form a cross during the next six days he will regret it," continuing to convulse (59). Catuca is left laughing hysterically with Diego telling him that the Comanche left immediately to buy the first six candles (59). Therefore, if it were not for Catuca's performance, the soldiers and the Comanche would have incarcerated the main leaders of the strike and possibly made an example out of them like they had with Luján and his followers. Catuca was not only heroic in saving her friends, but like Carmen, was a key element in furthering the strike that eventually would open the way for full unionization in Honduras in 1955 (Euraque 97). With Catuca's performance, she plays to the stereotypes about women for her and the workers' advantage. Josefina Ludmer explains Catuca's actions as using the tricks of the "weak" to defy authority while avoiding direct confrontation (Ludmer 4-5). In other words, Catuca momentarily changes (or acts) as a "weaker" and more "traditional" woman (as Comanche perceives her), in order to protect the political cause of her and her comrades.

Although Amaya Amador had illustrated the hardships of the cooks (who were all female), it was not until *Destacamento rojo* where the women themselves confront the United Fruit Company. Amaya Amador seems to have changed his view of women as solely passive to participants in the workers' strike.⁴³ As formerly stated, the workers' strike did not only involve banana workers but involved a plethora of the working class, both male and female. The UFCO boss angrily articulates:

The miners in El Mochito have launched onto the strike...In San Pedro Sula they have stopped working in eight factories and who knows how many handymen [have stopped].

⁴³ The following chapter will bring to light several *bananeras* who were crucial in the success of the Workers' Strike of 1954, similar to some of the female characters in *Destacamento rojo*.

In Tela and Puerto Cortés industrial workers have united with the strikers in the Yunay⁴⁴! (214-215).

The (female) cooks, like the rest of their proletariat compatriots, had walked off the job and out of the kitchens causing uproar amongst the gringo workers. Likewise, when one of the bosses commanded his employee to call Puerto Cortés with his orders for the superintendents a female telephone dispatcher would not contact any of the overseers and replied in Spanish: “I’m sorry sir, without the Strike Committee’s authorization, I cannot communicate your messages” (214). The boss, dumbfounded began screaming “Has everyone become crazy in this country?... The men who are in this strike are like the hurricanes of this tropical ardent” (215). In this statement, the UFCO boss disregards the women’s roles of the strike, although momentarily ago he had lost all composure due to the fact that the cooks were gone, and the female phone dispatcher would not forward his message. The UFCO boss will not admit that women in the different working sectors have also risen up against a patriarchal system, and he assumes that the men *forced* the women to revolt. The manager does not believe that women could be main political participants in the workers’ struggles due to their weakness and blames the men since they could be the only ones responsible (according to him) for a strike. In reality, if it was not for women like Carmen and Catuca, the hurricane would not have even begun to spin.

Although women like Carmen and Catuca were portrayed in a more diversified and revolutionary light, Amaya Amador eroticizes indigenous (Juana) and mulatta/black women (Cora) that I argue is an ethnic prejudice. Cora was portrayed as the seductress *morena*.⁴⁵ To demonstrate, Cora is illustrated as the following: “A *morena* woman...with blonde hair and

⁴⁴ “Mamita Yunay,” or simply “Yunay,” was another way for workers to refer to the United Fruit Company.

⁴⁵ Dark eyes, darker skin and hair.

black roots...with fine lips that look like a heart and voluptuous granite petals. Her shaved pencil eyebrows that make her eyes appear more enigmatic..." (112). Conversely, although Cora is described as "Paco's woman," or the exotic woman in *Destacamento rojo*, Amaya Amador also depicts her as a symbol of capitalism. Although Paco was primarily involved with the workers' collective and revolutionary ideals, Cora only cares about her own self-interest urging her husband to take a job in the city and forget the revolution: "You are a good person Paco, too good, and you could be a great man if you stop thinking about everyone else and you focus on yourself, your child, and your wife if you stop being so foolish" (270). Paco tries to talk to her about his compatriots and the working class but Cora interrupts and utilizes her sex appeal by wrapping her arms around him and nuzzling his head as she sits on his lap:

Words, my beloved, pompous words to stupefy the common people...It would be a different story if you moved your way up, if you had a political office, if you ran for Congress, like our liberal friends⁴⁶...you'll stop being a labor worker, and will become an esteemed man in the high society and your lady will be able to present herself like a queen without embarrassment! (271).

Cora's yearn to transform herself and hyper-adapt from a *morena* to a white woman far away from collective thought is explained in Quince Duncan's theory of *negrofobia*. Duncan explains that in this tendency, a naturalist position is adopted in terms of race as a fatal determinant of society. Duncan explains that characters of color (such as Cora), experience "a love for the white folk...and hate themselves and reject everything that is black" (Duncan 513, translation Bologna). *Destacamento rojo* came prior to Duncan's theory, but is on par when explaining the general position all authors: "The [literary] work is fiction but it comes from the

⁴⁶ Insinuating the members of the Honduran Revolutionary Democratic Party.

author's experience and constructs a particular relation that he has with nature and with society (Duncan 508). As readers perceive the indigenous perspective of nature with the descriptions and value of land, one can further affirm how Amaya Amador's Marxist background solidifies his argument against capitalism criticizing Cora's individualistic mentality.

Amaya Amador intertwines his capitalist critique with a plethora of his characters in *Destacamento rojo*. Cora is an example of the capitalist system yearning to get ahead while others fall behind, Amaya Amador also draws a critical focus on the Honduran soldiers illustrating them as ignorant and puppets of the Yunai. During Rotundo and his comrades' trip into the mountains, they see two men dressed in khaki pants and hiking boots who seek volunteers to help stop the communist uprising. Assuming that Rotundo and his men are uneducated men from the mountain areas, they ask if any of them know what a communist is. Rotundo pretends to be baffled while the men in khaki pants explain:

“It's better that you don't know this word, and hopefully you will never hear it in your land. The communists are representatives of the demons in Guatemala. They are atheists! They burn churches! They hang priests! They lack Christian morals! A woman is served to him for however long he wants to enjoy her, and if she won't let them fuck her, they kill her!” (137).

Conversely, Amaya Amador also draws criticism on the male workers themselves. Although without doubt, women were much more involved with the real workers' strike of 1954 then is depicted in *Destacamento rojo*. Women would not only “distract” UFCO workers as Catuca did with her performance, but would act as informants between the workers'. However, gender hierarchy still existed among many men during the time of the strike.⁴⁷ Although women

⁴⁷ I will further elaborate that although less than during the workers' strike, gender hierarchy is still in existence and is a continuing struggle within the *bananera* communities in Honduras and all of Central America.

participated in political meetings and some characters such as Catuca read Marxist books, several men were shocked at the fact that women were well versed in poetry such as Mirtha Loreto, a *bananera* in the novel. The narrator first describes Mirtha as such: “Tovico’s woman has gotten to be a bit fat due to her second approach in motherhood,” immediately categorizing her into a traditional woman’s role (300). The community was celebrating at a dance held in their town and Mirtha Loreto had overheard Manolo (a worker), and his friends reciting their favorite poetry by Honduran poets Juan Ramón Molina, Pompeyo del Valle, and Jacobo Cárcamo, as well as other Latin American poets such as Pablo Neruda (302). Mirtha begins to take part in the conversation sharing her own literary interpretations and debates with a worker how he could criticize and call Neruda’s works “propagandistic,” and proves her point extensively leaving the men stunned (302).

The scene with Mirtha challenges the idea that women do not understand or know Latin American Literature. The fact that the workers are shocked that Mirtha can discuss literature is a direct critique that Amaya Amador gives to these male characters illustrating a patriarchal stereotype shared by the workers. As a result, the male compatriots still have many stereotypes to break under a patriarchal and capitalistic society led by the United Fruit Company with cooperation and participation from the Honduran government and its recruiters, self-interested peoples like Cora, as well as superiority from the male working class. In the same manner, Amaya Amador through the voice of Rotundo directly addresses the revolutionaries asking them: “How are we going to transform society into sacred men who are unable to transform themselves?” (397). Although by the end of *Destacamento rojo*, the workers have staged a successful strike, Amaya Amador affirms that for workers to successfully confront corruption

and injustices from the United Fruit Company, they must first confront male workers' treatment of women within their own communities.

Barro

The last banana novel that will be analyzed in this chapter is Paca Navas Miralda's *Barro* (1951). Unlike Amaya Amador, Paca Navas Miralda never worked in the banana plantations but would witness the exploitation of workers where she lived and worked in Honduras. Navas Miralda and her husband Arturo Miralda⁴⁸ wrote the majority of their works in La Ceiba and Atlántida⁴⁹, both United Fruit Company hubs that provided Navas Miralda the inspiration to write and later publish *Barro* (Amaya 18).

Navas Miralda's *Barro* brings readers to the Northern coast of Honduras⁵⁰ with a focus on two emigrant families, Remigio and Leandro Hernández (originally from Yocón), and the Rosales family (from the small town of Manto), made up of the parents Venancio and Chana, as well as their daughters Carmela and Lucía. Navas Miralda illustrated the families' Honduran emigration experience moving from the inlands to the coast in order to search for work and riches, but face a gruesome reality when they come face to face with the dangers of the banana lands including malaria, sun exposure, poisonous snakes, as well as other injustices and corruption enabled by the United Fruit Company.

Unlike Amaya Amador's novels, *Barro* is written with a different perspective especially with the inclusion of the Garífuna people presenting the novel with an ethnic and more varied group of characters. However, although the inclusion of the Garífunas could have been seen as

⁴⁸ A well respected Honduran journalist and writer (Miralda).

⁴⁹ The main thresholds of the Standard Fruit Company (Amaya 18).

⁵⁰ La Ceiba.

revolutionary at the time of the publication, Navas Miralda depicts the Garífuna people in a stereotypical, and at times racist view. Before analyzing Navas Miralda's depiction of the Garífunas, it is crucial to further elaborate on the Honduran national discourse on the Garífunas.

To illustrate, Jorge Alberto Amaya describes the Garífunas as a “newer black Honduran ethnic group,” and are “one of the two groups of African descent in the country” (3).⁵¹ However, by the 19th Century, Amaya explains that a national discourse had arisen in Honduras in terms of consolidating all ethnic groups in order to form a “homogeneous nation,” a political project that attempted to exclude and disguise the indigenous and black representations of the nation to form a “civilized nation,” following the footsteps of the United States and Europe, or in other words attempting to *whiten* the Honduran society (Amaya 5).

Although Paca Navas Miralda has included Garífuna characters into *Barro*, they are for the most part seen as secondary characters depicting a myriad amount of stereotypes such as drunks, dancers, witch doctors, black magic sorcerers, animal-like,⁵² as well as other types of superstitious and barbaric peoples. To expand, Navas Miralda proves Amaya's arguments as the Garífuna characters are depicted as uncivilized and backwards people:

There are some tribes more civilized than others, like the ones from Puerto de Trujillo and La Ceiba... This race, although now many know how to read and

⁵¹ Additionally, the Garífunas do not only live in Honduras, but also call Belize, Guatemala, and Nicaragua their homes, inhabiting the Caribbean areas of Central America and at the time were slaves (Amaya 3). Historically, the Garífunas arrived to Saint Vincent Island in the Lesser Antilles beginning in 1635 and eventually mixed with the Carob Indians where they first formed the name *Garínagus* (2). During the 18th century, the Garífunas were under the leadership of Joseph Satuyé, protecting his community from the British and French seizing of the island, and by 1797 they were deported to Roatán, populating the Honduran Atlantic coast and extending their inhabitation to other Central American countries previously mentioned (Amaya 3). According to Amaya, today the Garífunas represent 4% of the Honduran population remaining one of the “most conserved African heritages in all of Latin America” (Amaya 3, translation Bologna).

⁵² Garífuna women are illustrated as people who “reproduce like rats” (Navas Miralda 45).

write at an elementary level, thanks to the diffusion in some sectors, contributed by ancestral influences releasing a number of witchcraft and black magic practices...like the savage tribes of Africa and Oceania (Navas Miralda 52).

There exists a large number racist descriptions described by the narrator in *Barro*. Many of the characters depict non-*mestizaje* Hondurans as daily practitioners of black magic. Carmela, the oldest daughter of the Rosales family becomes intrigued with Mena, *el Salvadoreño*,⁵³ a character famous for being a womanizer and someone who uses black magic to help him obtain anything he wants, in this case, Carmela.

Carmela is described as an educated girl “from a good caste,” but “like all women of any category, they are decent until their clock strikes,” insinuating that the women’s honor will become *tainted* once they are in the presence of a seductive male (96). The narrator and the Rosales family also believe that Mena has put a magic spell on Carmela and therefore “the poor girl has fallen in love,” in consequence to the “herbs and potions” that have been given to her “and other Christians against their will” (97). By this dialogue, the reader not only views racist stereotypes involving witchcraft, but also sees the reaffirmation of how “a good Christian girl,” is supposed to act according to the dominant and white society. Therefore, the narrator argues that since Carmela is an obedient and religious woman (following in the footsteps of her mother⁵⁴), the only explanation is to blame a marginalized ethnic group because Carmela, or for that matter, all women are “innocent” and are only “led astray” because of evil nonwhite witches. By the end of the novel, Carmela returns back to the communities’ social norms and “reclaims herself as a good Christian,” by marrying Remigio Hernández, a man well more than

⁵³ The Salvadoran man.

⁵⁴ Chana is described in the novel as “a very religious and profound selfless mother” (223, translation Bologna).

twice her age. The couple decides to leave the North Coast, and once and for all depart from the *barbaric* region of Honduras, restoring her honor and returning to the interior (269).

Navas Miralda does not solely portray an ethnic minority of men in *Barro*, but also includes a secondary female Garífuna character in the novel. Rita, also referred to as *la negra*⁵⁵ in the novel is the cook (along with her son Isidro), for the Hernández family. Although there is not much information on Rita, one can infer that she is a single mother considered by her fellow “colored country men,” to be “one of the most magnificent in the community” (248). According to the narrator, the most important value for Rita was “that she learned how to work and get money by the way of the whites” (248). Amaya explains that in some cases along with mestizo authors such as Navas Miralda, some Garífunas even accept how they are represented because they classify themselves as such (Amaya 5). Moreover, although Rita’s son is furthering his education, it is thanks to her *patrones*⁵⁶, that Rita’s son can modernize through western schooling (248).

Navas Miralads also pokes fun at the way the male workers portray women. An example is when several of the workers are gathered around with Roque who articulate their “ideal women’s” tempting qualities: “[Their] form to lower their long and dense eyelashes...their askance looks...and dressed so luxurious...refined and beautiful...and then switch to us in these sandy devil lands, sweating and sweating...and the others used to this” (119). Later on, the male workers are together drinking liquor at night and discussing the corruptions committed by the Fruit Company when they ask Leonidas Mercado, a fellow banana worker to sing along with one of the guitar players. He sings⁵⁷:

⁵⁵ The black woman.

⁵⁶ Male employers.

⁵⁷ The song lyrics are also my own translation.

Night after night
 I go to your house
 Under the moon,
 Under the moon...
 Oh man I find
 Prowling my heart
 My mulata⁵⁸
 She's my fortune
 She's my fortune...
 Once knowing that at a time
 My mulata
 If anyone met her
 On the road of illusion
 Although you wouldn't want this
 I would never forgive you
 I would kill him, kill him
 Without mercy
 I swear my love
 That man is a traitor
 I want, I want
 The woman, the woman (125).

All the enthused men applaud and smash their glasses together in agreement with the subjugation of women as property and the “justified” violence in this ballad according to the men. Mercado repeats the word “my” in his song, declaring that the woman is his “fortune,” and it is his duty as a patriarch to protect her since she is too weak to defend herself. Mercado’s *machista* songs like the United Fruit Company connect women and the banana lands as their property and fortune, objectifying them as their own capitalist gain. Although not direct like Amaya Amador, through the songs and descriptions of women, Navas Miralda also presents the need for the men in the banana lands to change in order to create a united working class which includes women not as sexual objects of property, but as comrades who along with their male counterparts, oppose UFCO domination and imperialism.

⁵⁸ The actual word in the song is *trigueña*, which can signify olive-skinned girl, mulata, or dark girl.

Although Navas Miralda's novels provides the readers with many racist problematic stereotypes, it is important to elaborate that she also includes a clear attack on imperialism, criticizing the United Fruit Company, the US government, and her own Honduran government. One of the workers describes the daily life of a banana worker on the North Coast: "It is man's worst enemy, you would think that one wouldn't be able to live there...it gets everyone, most of the workers..." (124). Moreover, instead of only blaming the corporation, the workers (through Navas Miralda), explain that in the end it is the fault of the government for UFCO's exploitation and criminalizing activities: "No one is at fault except the governments...for their own convenience or personal calculations," as has been explained in the friendly "win-win" alliance of the government and the United Fruit Company through the creation of the Good Neighbor Policy.

Lastly, although Navas Miralda may not have intended to draw critique on a patriarchal society but rather imperialism, I argue that the oppression of the workers especially in regards to the treatment of women, is an interconnectedness of hegemony and imperialism under a patriarchal society. To expand, many of the men throughout *Barro* (as well as in *Prisión verde* and *Destacamento rojo*) are depicted as drunks objectifying women as their property and *right to conquer*: "The Fruit Company jobs continued in its habitual course...So many lives had disappeared...so many heads of the household and responsibilities...so much dependence due to the pernicious effects of the alcohol," (130). Most of the men are depicted drinking as a way to forget and provides them with a temporary illusion to exacerbate stress of their daily lives created by UFCO.

Furthermore, Mr. Weit, the fictitious American Fruit Company boss is also an example of a patriarch who imposes his leadership style through the use of hegemony⁵⁹ among the masses. “His serene characteristics...who executed a certain moral dominion over the workers of the zone...and was married to a beautiful Guatemalan woman...his conduct was passive, but with good intentions” (148). On the contrary, the narrator explains that Mr. Weit was the best and most experienced mediator for the company when any opportunity had arisen, “whose confidence was custodian for various decades” (148). Mr. Weit appears to listen to the workers’ demands before they decide to strike and in doing so, he provides them with some sense of respect, but at the end of the day he pledges his allegiance to the United Fruit Company.

In conclusion, *Prisión verde*, *Destacamento rojo*, and *Barro* evidently explain what is needed for progress in order to challenge the United Fruit Company focusing on workers’ strikes, [gender] unity, and revolutionary visionaries who can lead the struggle. In addition, the banana novels maintain that there was a great deal of sexual exploitation in the banana plantations by UFCO workers (Americans and Hondurans) and therefore is a counter Hollywood and UFCO discourse.

The stereotypical personification of women and ethnic groups⁶⁰ do not portray a clear depiction of the voice of the banana workers (especially the ethnic minorities), due to the fact that both Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda cling to dominant national discourse on race in regards to white superiority and therefore embrace patriarchal values in their own novels. Conversely, it is important to commend that the novels by Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda do bring attention to Honduran banana workers and bring forth a myriad amount of anti UFCO

⁵⁹ Chasteen defines hegemony as “a basic principle of social control, in which a ruling class dominates others ideologically, with a minimum of physical force, by making its dominance seem natural and inevitable...with some degree of negotiation” (333).

⁶⁰ Such as the mulattos, indigenous and Garífuna people.

discourse. In the next and final chapter, I will examine the testimonies by women that worked (and work) in the banana plantations. I will analyze if the voices of the *bananeras* contradict or reaffirm the representations provided in these novels.

CHAPTER III

PODER BANANERO: WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN BANANA LABOR UNIONS

*“La participación de las mujeres en las
diferentes luchas del sindicato ha sido
importante, pero hemos pasado
desapercibidas porque no hemos contado
nuestra historia...”*

-Trabajadora bananera, *COLSIBA*.

“Women’s participation in the different union
struggles has been important, but we have gone
unnoticed because we have not told our own history...”

-Female banana worker, *COLSIBA* (translation Bologna).

The last chapter in my thesis involves a myriad amount of testimonies and interviews from Honduran *bananeras* explaining how their roles (and roles of their domestic and global allies), have transformed the banana worker’s unions in all of Central America.⁶¹ My analysis of these testimonies demonstrates that they share a common ground, with the first *bananera* testimonials (provided in this thesis) from the mid-80s and the most recent from 2005. Although it is evident that not all *bananeras* are able to share their stories, the women who have been recorded share a common cause for workers’ and gender rights in the agricultural as well as domestic sector. Yet the shortcomings of the publications do not speak for all *bananeras* especially for the women who are not union members and therefore, harbor some limitations.

⁶¹ The female union workers in banana plantations in Honduras refer to themselves as “*bananeras*.”

I am describing and analyzing the way the banana women self-represented their situation in contrast with the ways they were represented both by the novels and the US cultural industry and am not claiming that there is a causal connection between the US imperial discourse and what was occurring at the banana plantations. I do argue that the testimonies of the *mujeres bananeras* confirm that banana women were not the exotic and naïve female persona but are strong, vocal women demanding validity in their own history raising a counter argument to Hollywood and UFCO discourse of the lady in the tutti frutti hat.

The past two chapters of this thesis analyzed the representation of the *bananeras* in several ways. As has been illustrated in Chapter 1, the US government, the United Fruit Company, and Hollywood Studios in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s portrayed banana women in a propagandistic, sexual, and exotic light as observed through Carmen Miranda, and thereafter with the creation of the marketing sensation, Miss Chiquita. Moreover, although the banana novels by Amaya Amador and Paca Navas Miralda in the second chapter helped to depict the injustices of fictional *bananeras*, these were not the true voices of the women on the plantations. Therefore, this final chapter looks at the women's testimonies in terms of their self-representation in contrast with the depictions presented by the United Fruit Company, Hollywood's cultural industry, and the *novelas bananeras*. I will analyze *bananera* testimonials from several books and booklets written, co-written, or with interviews by the banana unions: *Los que hemos vivido* (2003) by the *Coordinadora de Sindicatos Bananeros y Agroindustriales en Honduras* (Honduran Coordination of Agro-industrialization Banana Unions) (COSIBAH), and the *Asociación Servicios de Promoción Laboral* (Promotion and Labor Service Association),

(ASERPROLA). Secondly, *Women Behind the Labels*⁶² (2000), co-written by the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) and the Support Team International for Textileras (STITCH), as well as Dana Frank's book *Bananeras: Women Transforming the Banana Unions of Latin America* (2005) that includes interviews from women at COSIBAH, the *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros* (Latin American Coordination of Banana Unions) COLSIBA, and the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Tela Railroad Company* (Tela Railroad Workers' Union), SITRATERCO. In addition, I also include two video interviews of Honduran *bananeras* from COSIBAH and STITCH websites. These testimonies allow me to better understand the gender politics of Latin American labor in the banana sector and explore the timeline within Honduran women's workers unions.

Frank articulates that by the 1950s local worker's unions in Honduras had provided "long-term institutional stability", but it was not until the 1980s that "struggle and comradeship with individual men in the banana unions," led to the empowerment of women of all levels of their organization (Frank 6). Since 1985 banana workers have not only dedicated their struggle to class (as has been described by Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda in Chapter 2), but have argued that their politics also involve gender, "in which women's issues and union issues are inseparable and mutually reinforcing" (6).

Women Workers in the Banana Industry 1960s and 1970s

Although women had been cooks on the banana plantations for the male banana workers in the 1950s, it was not until the 1960s⁶³ when women first began working in the packinghouses, or *empacadoras* all located on the banana plantations (STITCH 13, Soluri 187). The

⁶² This booklet although co-written by MSN and STITCH includes a plethora of interviews from different banana and textile union workers.

⁶³ According to Soluri, United Fruit began using women in 1962 and Standard Fruit in 1967 (187).

empacadoras became the key component designed to “ensure greater quality control” that enabled Standard Fruit to export blemish-free bananas (187). Still today, the job consists of workers having to wash and cut up banana stems and carefully placing them into their 42-pound boxes (13). Soluri describes the process as such:

At one end of the plant, workers armed with sharp knives removed the hands of freshly harvested bananas from their stems and placed them in tanks filled with water. The bath served the dual purpose of cleaning the peels and cooling the temperature of the fruit prior to boxing. A gentle current carried the fruit to the other end of the long, rectangular tanks where another group of workers sorted the premium grade fruit⁶⁴ from both the second grade bananas with chemicals to prevent fungal rots before being weighed, stickered, and packed into boxes.

According to Soluri, the first female employees of United Fruit were hired based on family connections (187). In 1968, Esperanza Rivera Nájera was offered a job at the *empacadora* by her husband’s supervisor. She illustrates: “If you weren’t related to an employee, you were not able to get a job,” while other women at the plants were hired through their fathers and stepfathers (Rivera Nájera in Soluri 188).

The days at the *empacadoras* were long and strenuous. Aside from washing the bananas, women were required to select, weigh, sticker, and package the fruit. Many of the women workers were single mothers in their 20s and 30s such as 23 year old Esperanza, a mother of three children explains that her day would start at 4:00 in the morning: “We got up at 4:00...ate breakfast on the way to work... We started at 6:30 and we didn’t finish until 6:30 in the

⁶⁴ In this case, the premium grade fruit is the fruit that will be stickered and exported (Soluri 187).

evening⁶⁵... We had one half hour break at 11 in the morning” (Esperanza in Soluri 188).

Esperanza and other *bananeras* explained in the early years of the *empacadoras* that the struggle was not only during working hours but also at the home front. Mothers like Esperanza had to keep up with their “obligations” to the children by getting up at 3:00 in the morning to wash their clothes before a long day at the plant (188).

Marxist feminism explains Esperanza’s experience through the “double shift” notion. This branch of feminism believes that women are oppressed primarily due to capitalism, a system that divides gender in order to create a more dominant workforce, as previously mentioned in regards to the gender-assigned jobs at the packing plants (Hodge). Subsequently, the notion of the “double shift” is in reference to women like Esperanza who move constantly between paid labor at the *empacadoras* and unpaid work in the domestic sphere at their homes, but holds on to their identity as mothers while striving for independence within their families.

Along with the struggles at home and the exhausting workload, women on a daily basis had to deal with chemicals such as “dithane dip,” that prevented the bananas from rotting, as well as Thiabendazole prior to boxing up the fruit (199). Soluri confirms that during the 1960s and 70s, “there is no evidence that either the fruit companies or union officials provided packing plant workers with safety instructions and/or protective apparel such as gloves or masks,” that was confirmed by several *bananeras* (190).

As I have argued, banana novels such as *Prisión verde*, *Destacamento rojo*, and *Barro* did provide its readers with a respectable depiction of the injustices and events leading up to (and following) the Banana Worker’s Strike of 1954, but were not able to represent the *bananeras* as

⁶⁵ Some women in *Banana Cultures* explain that their shifts could be up to 16 hours with few breaks (Soluri 188).

true political leaders,⁶⁶ although they did exist during the time of the strike. Emilia Hernández is a key example of one of the first Honduran *bananera* political leaders in the 1950s. Hernández's son states that his mother would often recall her contribution in the 1954 Worker's Strike proudly stating: "I have done it for your children and someday the workers are going to be thankful for it," insinuating the lack of recognition and the gender inequality that continued to prevail in Honduras after the strike (Frank 76).

The women of COSIBA and ASERPROLA state in their book *Lo que hemos vivido* (2003), that by "some happy occasion" Hernández's name had not been forgotten. However, the union women verify, "History [in general] has made most banana women invisible," and present Hernández's contributions to the strike. Hernández, an illiterate 25-year-old fought against the United Fruit Company's oppression by offering to take on the dangerous role as a "runner" during the 1954 strike (7). This job required Hernández to evade checkpoints and walk enormous distances to bring news from one sector to another coining her the nickname *la rápida*, or the fast one (7). Although it was not until after Hernández's death, the women of ASEPROLA and COLSIBA publicly thanked her in their dedication page for her political contribution to the Workers' Strike, and she would no longer be a female leader that had nearly been forgotten⁶⁷ in history.

In addition to Emilia Hernández, Eugenia Molina Alfaro is another example of a leader who dedicated herself to the "service of the cause" during the 1954 strike (ASPEROLA). Molina

⁶⁶ Although Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda present several of the female characters with more layers than solely being represented as cooks or wives, they do not portray any of the female comrades as strong leaders such as Rotundo García in *Destacamento rojo*.

⁶⁷ Although I use the word "forgotten," there is also high probability that in a patriarchal society like Honduras in the 1960s, Hernández's achievements could have been purposefully left out to keep women out of the spotlight, behind the men, and in the background away from political issues.

Alfaro illustrates that throughout the 1954 strike, women served as runners passing through fields that were fully guarded by the police, but were rarely remembered throughout history (ASEPROLA). The important roles of women like Hernández and Molina Alfaro helped to sustain the spirit of the movement serving as a bridge of communication to the “outside world”. Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda did not depict any of their female characters in their novels in a similar light to Hernández or Molina Alfaro. It is thanks to labor unions such as ASERPROLA and COSIBA that have brought these heroic female figures back to life and out of the darkness.

Following the sixty-nine day workers’ strike of 1954, local Honduran majority male-labor unions provided long-term institutional stability after UFCO had agreed to “grant minor pay increases and scattered benefits” (22). According to Frank, labor unions were protected [to an extent] to hold “union activities and literal structures” organizing three connecting levels: individual unions, national-level federations (COSIBAH), as well as regional level unions like COLSIBA (4). Frank describes the slight pay increase and slim independence a “powerful Cold War compromise,” that would steadily continue for the next twenty years between “the Honduran government, the banana corporations, and the US State Department” (22). In agreement with Frank, Bethell and Roxborough articulate: “An independent feature of the postwar years was the emergence of organized labor as a major social and political actor in Latin America” (174). This alliance then recognized US-controlled labor unions (keeping Leftists and radicals out of the loop) due to the United States’ fear and spread of communism (22). Bethell and Roxborough affirm, “The United States was especially concerned about Communist penetration of the Latin American labour unions” (183).

In terms of women's representations in the unions, the 1960s and early 70s only involved a slim number of women in the unions who did not hold an officer position nor any type of power until "Left-affiliated men" took control of SITRATERCO from 1975-77 until being thrown out (24). Within these two years the Leftist men brought "a further level of democracy" creating new subsections where several women were elected (25). It was not until 1985 that women's work and participation was considered to be "a central part" of banana union's with the creation of the *Comité Femenil*, or Women's Committee (25). Furthermore, the women "welcomed aid from [allies in] Europe and the US," beginning dialogues on neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s until the biggest natural destruction to hit the Honduran banana plantations occurred in 1998: Hurricane Mitch (6). Hurricane Mitch devastated the plantations throughout the region and Chiquita tried to either "walk away" or required fewer workers than pre-Mitch, until signing a pledge to respect labor rights in 2001 (12).

Women Workers in the Banana Industry 1980s-Present Day

According to a STITCH pamphlet, although today Honduras is not a major banana export in comparison to other Latin American countries⁶⁸, bananas do make up a significant percentage of its national exports to the United States dominated by Chiquita, Dole, and Del Monte (STITCH 1). Hence, Honduras has coined the phrase the "original banana republic," because of United Fruit's massive influence in its economic development (STITCH and MSN 23). Due to the worker's strike of 1954, Honduran workers in the 1960s had entered the packing plants with union existence, labor law reforms, and collective bargaining contracts (COLSIBA and ASERPROLA).

⁶⁸ Ecuador, Costa Rica, Colombia, the Philippines, Panama, and Guatemala

These three companies control 2/3 of the world market and affirm that bananas are “the single most profitable item in US supermarkets” (STITCH 1). Furthermore, today there are nearly half a million *bananeras* living and working in Latin American packing plants doing the repetitive and tiresome jobs of washing, placing stickers, packing, and shipping the bananas to their foreign destinations (STITCH 1). Like their “foresisters” in the 60s and 70s, women are continuously obligated to meet higher goals of production leading them to injury and other psychological risks, sexual harassment, constant dampness, and social risks tied to poor and unstable salaries (STITCH 2).

In a similar case to the first *empacadora* workers of the 1960s, today most *bananeras* are between 20 and 40 years old,⁶⁹ and many are single mothers who have not been able to finish primary school⁷⁰ (STITCH 2). In Honduras, an average unionized banana worker receives \$7 a day while non-union workers receive \$4, although as STITCH explains, this depends on the season, since women can only pack and not harvest the bananas⁷¹ (STITCH 3). Frank further explains that the *bananeras* are not permitted to apply for higher paid and skilled trade jobs⁷² on the plantations because those positions are only offered to men. Conversely, the male workers are able to cut and wash the bananas alongside the women in the *empacadoras* (13). However, there are still jobs in the *empacadoras* that are still based on gender. Interestingly, women are only permitted to stick the brand-name labels onto each banana bunch, seeing the image of Chiquita Brands’ International fictitious and exotic banana woman *Miss Chiquita* hundreds of times a day and every day.

⁶⁹ Frank explains that companies like *Chiquita Brands* hire younger women because they are more likely able to stand on their feet for longer periods of time (16).

⁷⁰ According to STITCH, 35% of the women workers are illiterate (STITCH 2).

⁷¹ Harvesting the bananas is a job that is only offered to men (STITCH 3).

⁷² Frank explains these are jobs such as “tractor drivers, carpenters, or crop duster mechanics” (13).

Why is it that men are not permitted to place the sticky Chiquita labels on the bananas? How can this be a gender-based task? I believe that the main reason is not solely an issue regarding physical labor such as women “have a lighter touch,” and are less likely to bruise the bananas while hand placing the labels. Chiquita Brands International proudly boasts on their website: “Machines are just too rough and can bruise the delicate fruit so that’s why we still place our Blue Label on them by hand,” insinuating that the women are the delicate flowers behind the bananas (Chiquita). Furthermore, Chiquita Brands promotes a patriarchal ideology in that women must be the ones to stick the Miss Chiquita labels on the banana, a phallic symbol that should only be handled by the erotic Latin American woman, once again feminizing Latin America and depicting UFCO as the patriarch.

However, I believe the stickers are beyond an ideology of women as the more “fragile” and “erotic” gender. What I argue that is still taking place today are the ongoing effects and influences of the Good Neighbor Policy. The labels of Chiquita Brands International have been used as propaganda: “We've [Chiquita Brands] used the stickers to promote bananas for school lunches, celebrate major anniversaries, advertise our sponsorship of the Olympics in 1980, celebrate Miss Chiquita's 50th birthday, and feature our slogan “Quite Possibly, The World's Perfect Food®,” (Chiquita). Although the labels had appeared on the bananas since 1963, Chiquita, with the collaboration of Oscar Grillo, an Argentine artist, has transformed the half banana half woman into a woman, reflecting the image as Miss Chiquita as a real authentic Latin American woman (Chiquita). The following labels are just a few examples of Chiquita’s marketing images from the 1990s and to the present day. As one can see, Chiquita has commemorated their original banana woman from the 1950s for anniversaries as seen below, but

the only actual change that has been made is that today Miss Chiquita is of real flesh and bone, and no longer a banana.



50th Anniversary Commemorative



50th Anniversary Commemorative
(1944-1994)



Current Sticker⁷³

Miss Chiquita does not support the characteristics of a serious, hardworking *bananera*, but belittles women's worth and is an objectification of the Latin American banana woman situating herself as the entity of male attention. This attitude is then transferred to the real *bananeras* in the workplace and at home. Hartmann explains that prior to capitalism; a patriarchal system was established in which men controlled the labor of women within the family by using hierarchical techniques as a means to control (138). However, gender-based tasks (as illustrated in the *empacadoras*), emphasizes the capitalist role of Chiquita Brands International as another means to create hierarchies as a way to maintain their power and domination over the *bananeras*.

Iris Mungía, a member of COLSIBAH articulates the immense patriarchal ideology that occurs in the *empacadoras* in a video interview:

When the women are pregnant, the patron will fire them sometimes, and they will experience sexual assault. It's very precarious...in the recent years, they're hiring more masculine labor, and firing the female labor because they it seems that the company sees maternity as a cost to production (Mungía).

Apart from the managers, Guadalupe Martinez in *Women Behind the Labels* affirms gender discrimination also takes place from their own male colleagues who historically have

⁷³ All labels are provided from the Chiquita Brands International website.

dominated the workers' unions subjugating their female companions: "We have had to deal with a lot of discrimination. Often, the men either ignore us or work against us. There are still men who do not want women to become part of the union leadership" (*Women Behind the Labels* 39).

In their website, the women of ASERPROLA articulate that the problems with patriarchy as discrimination does not only stem from male colleagues or their bosses but is ingrained into the society as a whole. Therefore, they stress and educate others on gender theory in the unions and at annual conferences: "Since today's society is built generically and founded in the patriarchal system (which postulates the dominance of men over women), gender theory is proposed as a synthesizing perspective that seeks to articulate the various determinations of social subjects, men surrounded by generic women is not only universal but foundational" (ASERPROLA). Furthermore, the women emphasize the social constructs that have divided men and women in terms of gender identity: "Identity is the source of meaning and experience to people. Gender identity refers to the behavioral differences of men and women constructed from social and cultural patterns associated with gender," and dedicate to confront this issue within the workplace and at home (ASEPROLA).

Guadalupe Martinez, a long-term *bananera* worker who rose to leadership in the SITRATERCO union explains some of the men's patriarchal mentalities in *Women Behind the Labels*:

The men have this mentality that we can't do certain jobs. But what you see is that we often do the same work, out of necessity... We have sufficient ability, but the men don't want to recognize that. Our committee organizes mixed seminars, with both men and women. That's the only way to deal with machismo, which is a problem in Honduras. From the moment a baby boy is born, he is the man of the

house. From the moment a baby girl is born, she is the cook. In our gender and class workshops we talk about how men have to share in the domestic work” (39).

Although comparing to the 1960s, workers’ conditions in the *empacadoras* have improved, women are still working in extremely poor and dangerous labor conditions. Several of the *bananeras* explain that one of the worst parts of the job are the mandatory gloves they must wear during an “eight to fourteen hours a day” shift. Domitilia Hernández, a *bananera* explains: “Imagine wearing gloves all day...From 6:30 (a.m.) until 7 or 8 (p.m.) every day with gloves on,” in a region of Honduras that has constant temperatures between “95 and 105 degrees” Fahrenheit (14). Moreover, according to a 2001 study that was conducted by COLSIBA in seven Latin American countries, the top health problems in the packinghouses were due to “repetitive motion, injuries, chemical exposure, and skin diseases caused by both the chemicals and the water,” as well as high rates of rare cancers and miscarriages amongst the women workers (COLSIBA). COLSIBA’s survey explains the constant exposures to dangerous chemicals:

The women [in the banana zones] face the effects that banana production has on the environment: When they wash clothes, when they cook food, when they want to keep a garden or cultivate a small plot in areas near the plantation, in their reproductive lives when they or their partners are contaminated with agrochemicals that produce birth defects or malfunctions in their bodies (COLSIBA in Frank 17).

Women's Leadership and Participation

In Honduras, the local subsidiary of Chiquita Brands International is the Tela Railroad Company⁷⁴, “a reminder that the United Fruit Company once monopolized transportation as well as land” (Hernández 36). In result of the 1954 Workers' Strike, SITRATERCO⁷⁵ has become one of the oldest and strongest worker's unions in all of Central America. Conversely, male members had dominated SITRATERCO until the mid-1980s when a group of women set out to make a change demanding the incorporation of a women's committee and more female participation with contract negotiations, and were finally elected to executive positions within the union that is illustrated in *Women Behind the Labels* (36).

Women Behind the Labels (2000), is a booklet co-published by STITCH and the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) containing *bananera* testimonies of women union workers from Central America. Although all of these testimonies are indeed true stories of different women workers, the interviews in *Lo que hemos vivido* were chosen and translated by STITCH and MSN demonstrating the importance of collective action among *bananeras* and their supporters while also being in charge of what gets (or does not) get published. The *bananeras* in *Women Behind the Labels* are identified as “pioneer union organizers,” who either work for clothing labels and food brands⁷⁶ such as Chiquita Brands that have campaigned for better wages and working conditions, as well as justice, respect, and a better and more promising future for themselves and their children (ii).

Guadalupe Martinez is one of the female pioneers illustrated in *Women Behind the Labels*. Martinez is the current president of the central women's issues committee and shares in

⁷⁴ The Tela Railroad Company dates back to when Chiquita (United Fruit at the time), owned the railroad along with much of the land in Honduras during the time of the 1954 Workers' Strike.

⁷⁵ The union of Tela.

⁷⁶ I will draw focus solely on the testimonies of the *bananeras*.

an interview how the union participation changed her life. Martinez elaborates that she had grown up on the banana plantations selling lunches and snacks to the male workers (37). By the time Martinez was 17 she was washing and ironing for the company administrators and at 24 she began her work at the *empacadora*: “By that time I had three children⁷⁷... The father of my children was an alcoholic. He never helped me with anything in the house. He only worked to feed his addiction” (Martinez interview 37). Just as Martinez’s past female comrades, the situation at home was far from uncommon. When asked how Martinez became involved with the union she explains in her own words:

When I first started working, I didn’t know how to demand my rights. The boss unnerved me really easily. But the *compañeras* on the women’s committee helped me to understand unions, labor rights, and women’s issues. Being involved in the committee changed my life, not just at work but also at home (37-38).

In 1986, the 10 women made a survey for women workers finding out what their most important needs were. Based on the women’s answers, Martinez and her committee developed a project and received funding from the International Labor Organization (ILO), and “some European unions” (38). The money from the ILO allowed the women to create a schools supply store and with the profits they “carried out seminars with rank and file *compañeras*,” where they discussed class and gender, union participation, the banana industry, and frequent domestic problems that were occurring in the homes of the *bananeras* (38).

SITRATERCO was just the beginning for the *bananeras*. The creation of the women’s committee at SITRATERCO would be the first step of their journey to leadership. In 1994 the creation of COSIBAH carried “the reward for the women’s hard-fought battle,” providing them

⁷⁷ Today Martinez is a mother of five (37).

with a new space to further their independence and this time, drawing more male support and allegiance (38). The following year the women and men of COSIBAH would visit every unionized banana plantation in the country distributing pamphlets and holding workshops entitled “Talking About Difference,” and organizing women’s committees dedicated to labor conditions, health and safety, education, and women’s status in the unions (40). COSIBAH members, Nelson Nuñez and José “Chema” María Martínez are important male figures that help to promote women’s activism for COSIBAH and “bring women’s issues into the unions’ mainstream, helping to further promote union solidarity among all members (56, 57).

Testimonies of the *bananeras*

As formerly mentioned, *Lo que hemos vivido: luchas de mujeres bananeras* (2003) (What We Have Lived: Struggles of Banana Women) is a collection of Central American banana women’s testimonies. The idea of the book began at COLSIBA’s second Latin American banana women’s conference in San Pedro Sula, Honduras in May 2000. ASERPROLA and COLSIBA had proposed to collect autobiographies of banana workers with an immense number of enthused participants (Crespo in *Lo que hemos vivido* 5). According to COLSIBA and ASEPROLA the prime objective of the autobiographies was to “stimulate the women to write their own personal stories, which would be converted to a reflection process and a self-affirmation for women as people, as workers, and as leaders,” as well as to explain how the women have blossomed into “leaders of their communities” (COLSIBA 5, 6). Furthermore, *Lo que hemos vivido* expresses the need for women to talk about their struggles, affirming that the banana union movement should not merely be kept to themselves: “We see women workers forging their own path of self-realization, overcoming external and internal obstacles” (6). The authors further affirm, “It is necessary to publish our autobiographies in order for others to visualize our daily-life

experiences and struggles” (COLSIBA 5). The banana women have shared their stories, and provided public recognition about their strengths, struggles, and the development of the labor moment from a women’s perspective, and from this, have gained support, dignity, and self-respect. Antonia, is one of the Honduran *bananeras* who shares her poignant life story in *Lo que hemos vivido*⁷⁸, and describes how despite all odds against her, became a true leader in a workers’ union and in her own home.

Antonia was born in Caridad Aramecina to peasant parents in southern Honduras on December 31, 1964⁷⁹. When she was five years old, four of her brothers were assassinated in the mountains by the Salvadoran Army and consequently were forced to leave their home and head north for safety and job security. Similar to the characters in *Barro*, the “hope” of the banana lands would turn out to be a great myth to Antonia and her family⁸⁰. Antonia explains that she was a very intelligent girl and completed elementary school with very high grades, but had to dropout in order at age 14 in order to help her family sell bread and quesadillas on the banana plantations (68, 69).

With the help of her older sister, Antonia began working for the Tela Railroad Company at 19 and explains her innocence in her early years working for Tela:

I had my very first boyfriend when I was twenty years old. At that time, I didn’t know what it meant to have a boyfriend, I thought it just meant having a male friend come over to your house. We were together for four years...and had only kissed on the mouth (69).

⁷⁸ Antonia entitles her testimony as “*Que mis hijos no sufran lo que yo he sufrido*,” translated as “So my children don’t suffer like I have suffered” (67).

⁷⁹ Antonia had a total of 11 siblings, 4 sisters and 7 brothers (67).

⁸⁰ Antonia’s father by this time had already left her mother for another woman (76).

However, when Antonia was 24 years old she was raped by one of the managers: “My sister and I had so much faith in this man, we loved him like he was our own father, but he betrayed me and impregnated me,” a clear example of patriarchy as a form of domination through sexual violence (69). Thereafter, like Capitán Benítez in *Destacamento rojo*, the manager did not take responsibility and nine months later Antonia gave birth to a baby girl. Four years later Antonia became involved in the workers’ unions. She illustrates:

Once my daughter was 4 years old, I would see my friends’ who were affiliated with SITRATERCO participated in seminars, sessions, meetings, when I finally told a girlfriend of mine that I wanted to participate, and like that, I started my life as a union woman...I want to tell you that what I have accomplished with the help and support of COSIBAH has made me a popular educator today where I know how to defend myself, along with my rights (70).

Following Antonia’s participation in the workers’ unions she married a man whom she thought was her “true love,” but in the end he cheated on her impregnating another woman (69). Antonia states that during the separation she became even more involved in COSIBAH and became a “popular educator” leading seminars, educating her comrades on the laws of workers’ rights, as well as being the President of a collective women’s retail store (73). Antonia reflects about her decision to divorce her husband with an underlying reference to the “double shift” notion:

If I was with my husband, I would have never done any of these things because my free time away from my job was with my children or with him, and that’s why the separation hurt so much, but it also brought me pride and I don’t regret

it...My free time now is at my seminars, educating others, and with my children and my mother who are the most important beings in my life (73).

Along with Antonia, Iris Mungía, a *bananera* and member of COLSIBA shares her story of struggle and growth in the workers' union:

I started when I was 18 years old. I worked 23 years in the *empacadora* doing all the work that goes on there... all of the activities, I did that for 23 years and then left to be a union leader but I do know the job, I have the experience, and at the Latin American level in the banana plantations, there is a huge lack of respect for worker's rights. Principally, where a union doesn't exist... Sometimes they don't even pay us the full minimum wage (Mungía in COLSIBAH, translation Bologna).

However, Mungía is certain to illustrate her and her fellow union's workers achievements within COSIBAH and throughout Central America. She explains, "In Honduras, we have been strengthening women's labor union participation with support and empowerment...raising their self-esteem, and using gender-specific themes such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, mother's rights, for our agenda and with these themes, we have been able little by little to strengthen women's participation...Now there are women in the worker's unions and committees here in Honduras. This experience in Honduras is moving to all of Latin America" (Mungia, translation Bologna).

A Step to Victory

The *bananeras* have shared with the world their personal and local story, fighting against all odds to make their voices heard on the global scale. As a result, many of the women have become stronger and more empowered unionists ready to fight for justice. The Honduran

bananeras have voiced their history in their own countries in the case of COSIBAH, or in Latin America as described through COLSIBA, and lastly, among their myriad amount of international allies. The *bananeras* and allies of COLSIBA discuss one of their greatest achievements and victories with Chiquita Brands International. In 2001, Chiquita signed an agreement with COLSIBA and the International Union of Food Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), "pledging to respect labor rights on its plantations and those of its subcontractors," (STITCH 3, 4). This agreement was "hailed as a landmark step towards improving workers' lives and working conditions" and provides "a vital tool for protecting and advancing the banana unions⁸¹" (STITCH 4, Frank 64). The challenges facing *bananeras* is still undoubtedly a long and hard road, but this should not diminish what these women have accomplished and achieved, especially in the past thirty years. Gloria Garcia, a COSIBAH unionist who represented all Honduran banana workers at the *Global Meeting of Women Banana Workers* in Ecuador from February 23-26, 2012, discusses her role on camera at the *Global Meeting of Women Banana Workers* in 2012 with an infectious and confident smile:

We are here at a banana forum meeting with other women to evaluate, plan, and discuss our expectations of the job and to improve labor conditions for the male and female workers. We want women to further integrate into direct action within the labor unions in order for all women to have a further impact in order to help all women whom we represent (Garcia, translation Bologna).

The *bananeras* have taken back their history, pursued direct political action, stood up to gender discrimination, and in the process, have emerged as self-confident and vocal leaders.

⁸¹ 90% of unionized banana workers in Latin America work for Chiquita (Frank 63).

CONCLUSION

Knowing and understanding the history of the United Fruit Company and the modern-day struggles of the *bananeras* in companies such as Chiquita Brands International, can only help us become better and more responsible global consumers. As has been illustrated, the *bananeras* historically have been a cheap labor source for a capitalist system, but today are beginning to write their own history while fighting for workers' rights and gender equality. The US government's "diplomatic" Good Neighbor Policy along with its former friends at the United Fruit Company and in Hollywood had successfully and artificially stereotyped Latin America and Latin American women in US American culture and Americans' daily lives through the utilization of cultural imperialism as observed throughout US mass media.

The arrival of Carmen Miranda, the tutti-frutti ambassador to the United States only reaffirmed stereotypes of the Latin American woman that resulted from the Good Neighbor Policy. Miranda, who was exotic enough for the American audience with her hip-swaying samba moves, flirtatious accent, and signature wink, but not too foreign in terms of her white racial background, was the perfect medium of propaganda. Following Miranda, the United Fruit Company's Carmen-inspired character Chiquita Banana had begun to appear on American television screens in the 1950s, stereotyping Latin American women and targeting nuclear middle-class American mothers as their main audience.

During the time of Carmen Miranda and Chiquita Banana, most women as a whole were the major consumers of the golden yellow transnational product. The marketing of Miss Chiquita Banana has been illustrated in posters, cookbooks, television commercials, and documentaries, directly connecting American mothers to Chiquita bananas. The propaganda created by the United Fruit Company pushed its representation of the "dolloed up" and good American mother,

caring for the health and happiness of her children and husband through the consumption of bananas as depicted in a *Journey to Banana Land* (1950), the promotional and propagandistic travelogue banana documentary shown in US children's elementary schools.

My analysis shows that United Fruit had propagated to keep the role of women (both North and Latin American) as mothers, wives, and cooks in and outside of the banana plantations. As explained in Chapter I, United Fruit reaffirmed the traditional gender roles of women in terms of family, femininity, and sex appeal in their Chiquita Banana commercials'. Miss Chiquita acted as the "ideal" Latin American woman: a civilized, coquettish cook that could provide recipes for the families of her female neighbors up north. In addition, Walt Disney Studios imitated the "Miranda trend," utilizing Carmen-like characters in the propagandistic good neighbor film, *The Three Caballeros* (1945). Once again, films like *The Three Caballeros* and Twentieth Century Fox's *The Gang's All Here* (1943) represent the Latin American woman as an exotic and playful organism waiting to be picked off the plant and served to the men (or in Disney's case, a male duck).

A positive and important aspect of the three banana novels: *Prisión verde* (1950), *Destacamento rojo* (1962) by Ramón Amaya Amador and Paca Navas Miralda's *Barro* (1951) provide a strong criticism against the United Fruit Company and bring the workers' situation in Honduras to life. Conversely, it is without question that many of the characters reaffirm racial and gender stereotypes. By representing many of the female characters as weak and exotic, both Amaya Amador and Navas Miralda also embrace imperialist and patriarchal values through their racist depiction of the indigenous and Garífuna people. I suggest that this [mis]representation is due to the fact that both authors still cling to the dominant national discourse on race about white superiority, a patriarchal and imperialist value from the time of colonization in Latin America.

However, I must add that the authors' illustration of sexual and physical violence against women is not far from the reality, and do depict a plethora of *machista* characters who are from different walks of life such as banana workers, Honduran elites, and US American employees. The dominant and violent behaviors of these men can be traced back to the United Fruit Company, a patriarchal, imperialist, transnational corporation that has created gender-specific tasks prostrating women to sexual exploitation and subordination. Subsequently, important female characters portrayed in the novels such as Catuca Pardo and Carmen Linares, do justice to women's roles to some extent in the banana novels.

As I have argued, capitalism still reinforces the patriarchal system in Honduras through the extensive gender discrimination, hegemony, as well as economic and sexual exploitation that historically has been represented among the *bananeras* at United Fruit and modern day Chiquita Brands International. Moreover, imperialism and patriarchy have been able to undermine the *bananeras* from telling their own history until very recently. Patriarchy has historically kept women in the homes and out of the spotlight in order for them to fulfill their "womanly" duties in the household. Many of the "modern-day" *bananeras* articulated that they had been married or involved in romantic relationships and had been subjugated and oppressed by many of these same men. Although as some *bananeras* suggested, working in the *empacadoras* provided them with a financial independence leading them to feel more independent and possibly gain more control of their personal lives as the testimonies by Antonia, Gloria García, Guadalupe Martínez, and many other female workers indicate.

The importance of women testimonials such as those found in *Lo que hemos vivido*, and *Women Behind the Labels* is crucial in understanding *bananera* history. Although I have read a plethora of historical interpretations of the workers' strike, gender discrimination, and poor

working conditions, the actual words of the *bananeras* can only make their history that much more real as well as personal. These heroic women, whose own history has been dictated by multinational corporations, mestizo authors, and even (to some extent) their allies. Recently, the *mujeres bananeras* are reclaiming their voices and sharing their stories that have been historically subjugated and misrepresented by others.

Although there were an extensive number of published *bananera* interviews and video clips, these testimonies do not take into consideration women who were not members of a workers' union, as they have not personally published or co-published any type of booklet themselves with the help of allied supporters such as STITCH. Likewise, although the *bananera* testimonies that I researched all shared similar stories and interests, one cannot say that they speak for every *bananera* in the sector and are self-representations of the women.

The recent studies by Dana Frank as well as *bananera* allies draw a central focus on gender issues. Further researchers on *bananera* representation may wish to explore modern-day Chiquita Brands International and their continuous efforts to stereotype Latin American women such as in the case of Chiquita Brands' ongoing "national talent search," that handpicks a woman to be "the first lady of fruit," with a similar Carmen Miranda inspired costume (Chiquita). Chiquita Brands International states that Miss Chiquita honors her "duties" visiting schools to talk about nutrition while performing her role as the cheerful exotic Latina in the tutti frutti hat "entertaining people with the famous Chiquita jingle" (Chiquita). Miss Chiquita has also made appearances ringing the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange, another friendly neighbor of Chiquita. Additionally, one can further investigate the role played by music in exoticization and taming of Latin America. Hence, one can further argue and elaborate that the

ideals of the Good Neighbor Policy have not come to a halt, but have come to shape present-day corporate Chiquita Brands International.

The achievements of these determined women are without doubt indisputable, but there is still much work to be done among both producers and consumers. My goal in this project was to help inform the public of women's banana history as an ally, a concerned consumer, and a historian. The development of the *bananeras* into strong and informed leaders (at work and in their own homes) on global politics and neoliberal economics are now speaking out. Although their fight is far from over, the *bananeras* have gained national, regional, and international support and recognition and continue to fight against gender discrimination. I would like to conclude this thesis with a quote from the women at COSIBAH. The *bananeras* envision a deeper level of solidarity with their *compañeros* and will continue to pursue "gender equity not in numbers, but in participation and decision making." The *bananeras* have taken the first steps in reclaiming their history.

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