Sexual Abuse and Liberation in Nalo Hopkinson’s Midnight Robber and Angie Cruz’s Soledad

Meghan Davis
Undergraduate English Honors Thesis
Dr. Leah Rosenberg
Dr. Debra King
April 18, 2018
The Caribbean’s long history of sexual abuse survives in its contemporary culture. Social scientists have conducted numerous studies detailing the frequency of sexual abuse from Caribbean women’s experiences. They have found sexual abuse to be so frequent as to characterize it as endemic to the region. They have additionally found sexual abuse to be culturally censored, so that victims are often pressured to remain silent. Caribbean-diasporic female writers Nalo Hopkinson and Angie Cruz engage with the prevalence and silencing of sexual exploitation in their respective novels, *Midnight Robber* and *Soledad*. Though the novels’ horrific content—incestuous rape, impregnation, and childhood prostitution—appears extraordinary, it remains tragically ordinary within the cultural context of the Caribbean. While the authors hail from different areas of the Caribbean, the former from the anglophone and the latter the hispanophone, they address the subject similarly: their female protagonists are abused, silenced, and, atypically, *liberated* from their trauma when they explicitly speak about their abuse. Hopkinson and Cruz also share a formal approach, as both go beyond realism to provide their protagonists narrative spaces to disclose their trauma. Hopkinson writes within a science fiction tradition, and Cruz adopts elements of magical realism. Their protagonists’ rhetorical emancipation leads to an important rebirth of self and reconciling of strained mother-child relationships, which resulted from sexual abuse.

1. Sexual Abuse in the Caribbean

Power proves the fundamental cause for the pervasiveness of sexual abuse in the Caribbean. The region’s contemporary male dominance was established by Western colonization, exploitation, and is a legacy from patriarchal plantation economies. Thus, historical practices of hegemonic masculinity institutionalized violence in the Caribbean, as Western colonizers physically and sexually abused Caribbean women and children. However, the region’s
current patriarchal society continues to abide by the ‘rule of the father’—or rule of the man—and preserve the Caribbean man’s power over Caribbean women. This power includes sexual domination, for, “tightly woven into Caribbean constructions of masculinity and patriarchy are views about sex, sexual entitlement” (Jones 838). Consequently, the Caribbean’s culture of male dominance leads to sexual abuse.

Caribbean men abuse their inherited patriarchal power, especially, when sexually abusing children. Social research conceptualizes childhood sexual abuse as “rape, sexual intercourse with a pre-pubescent child, incest…and the intrusive sexualized touching of a child” (Jones 843). This type of sexual abuse specifically involves the “abuse of trust and power” and occurs most frequently in the Caribbean: social scientists found that “sexual intercourse with persons under the age of 16”—which is the legal age of consent in the Caribbean—“was the most prevalent type of abuse” (Pasura 8, 13). Due to hegemonic masculinity, power entitlement, and sexual entitlement, Caribbean men, then, possess the social power and believed right to sexually exploit those over whom they culturally dominate: women and children.

Due to the social inferiority of age and gender, girls are particularly and frequently victims of sexual abuse and cultural censorship. As Caribbean women and children, particularly girls, are “considered to be people with little or no power” in their patriarchal society, they must remain silent about their abuse “in order to establish their own legitimacy” (Jeremiah 55). Their exploitation is neither disclosed publicly, within the community, nor privately, within the home. Ramifications of patriarchal actions and attitudes contribute to the victims’ silence, notably shame and protection. Abusers extort silence from the abused by promoting shame, a common consequence of child sexual abuse, through explicit threats and condemnation (Feiring 337).
Victims further remain silent to spare their families from the shame of their abuse. In *The Persistence of Shame Following Sexual Abuse*, authors Candice Feiring and Lynn S. Taska report that “the public discovery of sexual abuse can be an intensely shameful experience for nonoffending parents and family members” (347). The abused, therefore, stay silent to protect their family honor and respect (Jeremiah 58). The endemic, chronic muteness that characterizes sexually exploited victims in the Caribbean constitutes a cultural censorship that “reflects how Caribbean women and children deal with the constant threat of violence to which they have always been historically vulnerable” (Jones 60); problematically, however, the cultural censorship offers the victims no healthy, successful alternative to heal from the trauma of sexual abuse.

2. Sexual Abuse and Liberation in *Midnight Robber*

The sexual abuse and silencing thereof found in the Caribbean’s past and present is represented in Nalo Hopkinson’s futuristic novel *Midnight Robber*. Set between two fictitious, Caribbean-colonized planets, Toussaint and New Half Way Tree, Hopkinson’s narrative explores the patriarchal causes of sexual abuse and the liberating power of verbal testimony. Her protagonist Tan-Tan Habib, a child from the “civilized”, technologically advanced Toussaint, suffers incestuous sexual abuse that mirrors the sexual abuse of Caribbean women and children, with her father, Antonio, the predator. Toussaint appears a societally progressive planet: its inhabitants have created a master, wireless communication network called Granny Nanny. Her omniscience and omnipresence serves to keep “people’s actions to one another respectful” (*Midnight Robber* 36). However, patriarchal attitudes continue to prevail this the Caribbean diaspora. The cuckold mayor of Cockpit County, Antonio kills the man with whom his wife, Ione, had been cheating. Notably, Antonio also engages in extramarital affairs, though the
expectation of fidelity applies only to the woman in the relationship. Overcome by toxic, patriarchal possessiveness, Antonio murders Quashee, Ione’s lover, with a poisoned sword. He is sentenced to prison, and Tan-Tan sneaks herself into the police car to be with her father, whom she loves dearly.

At the Toussaint prison, Tan-Tan is discovered, and she and Antonio are placed in a cell to wait for Ione to retrieve her daughter. Antonio, however, escapes the cell, kidnaps Tan-Tan, and transports them both the New Half-Way Tree, Toussaint’s planetary dimensional parallel. The people of Toussaint use New Half-Way as a prison colony, a place of exile for those too heinous to live amongst the “civilized” of Toussaint. Once exiled, though, return is impossible. Throughout the years on New Half-Way Tree, Antonio partakes in the Caribbean’s patriarchal practices of domination and sexual entitlement to sexually abuse his child. Tan-Tan endures rape, impregnation, and an abortion silently in order to protect her father from the harsh punishments of their settlement and herself from the wrath of Janisette, her father’s new wife.

Subscribing to the Caribbean’s cultural censorship regarding sexual abuse, Janisette actively and violently works to keep Tan-Tan silent about her exploitation. She recognizes the violation occurring within her household, but instead of stopping it, she blames and berates her step-daughter. Her actions align with those of non-offending Caribbean women cognizant of the abuse of other Caribbean women, where “the key role women were said to play [in facilitating abuse] was in denying or failing to act on abuse when they were aware of it” (Jones 841). Janisette’s own silence and central role in furthering Tan-Tan’s kills any opportunity for the latter to receive help. Consequently, then, Tan-Tan kills her father. Though an extreme solution, Antonio’s death serves as Tan-Tan’s only escape from his abuse, for she cannot use her voice, stifled by her and Janisette’s shame, to cry out for help.
However, Hopkinson utilizes the Caribbean tradition of Carnival and its character the Midnight Robber to empower her heroine and to facilitate Tan-Tan’s verbal expression of her incestuous sexual abuse. Carnival and the Midnight Robber both serve as a mode of expression for the Caribbean’s difficult history. Along with the setting of Carnival, the science-fiction genre of the novel offers Tan-Tan a narrative space, though imagined, in which to testify her pain. Once freed from her traumatic past, she reconciles her hostile feelings toward her son, the product of her father’s final rape.

Antonio’s patriarchal attitudes result in his sexually abusing Tan-Tan, but they also establish the foundational power relations of their nonsexual relationship before the abuse begins: ownership. In a patriarchal society, men control productive resources—namely women and property, thereby equating women to property (Sultana 9). Antonio engages with this ideology when his daughter is born. He refers to Tan-Tan, when staring at her in long periods of wonder, as the “beautiful thing he had made” (Midnight Robber 13). He made. As Antonio asserts responsibility for Tan-Tan’s existence, he exercises possession over that existence. He immediately refers to her as “my Tan-Tan” (Midnight Robber 13). With the possessive pronoun “my”, Antonio claims ownership of his biological property, a word which is later used to describe Tan-Tan (Midnight Robber 47). Before escaping to New Half-Way Tree, while still in the pod on Toussaint, he tells her, “Whatever happen, you is my little girl,” reasserting his sense of ownership, again, through his repeated use of the word “my” (Midnight Robber 75). Entering the unknown, Antonio brings his familiar: the same possessive pronoun, the same patriarchal perspective.

Once the two pass through the dimension veil and enter New Half-Way Tree, the disgraced mayor cements his ownership over his seven-year-old daughter in the new world. He
says, “You is all that leave to me now” (*Midnight Robber* 76). Essentially, Tan-Tan is all that Antonio owns on New Half-Way Tree. His distorted sense of possession carries over into their new distorted reality. On Tan-Tan’s ninth birthday, Antonio gifts her his wedding band, a symbolic, inappropriate act; and he surrounds the act with a sentence that culminates his patriarchal ownership, a precursor to his first act of sexual abuse. He expresses, “I gave up everything to come here so we could be together, Tan-Tan; my wife, my home, everything” (*Midnight Robber* 139). The gifting of the wedding ring contracts Tan-Tan to replace all of Antonio’s lost property back on Toussaint. His saying her name before wife, home, and everything likewise associates her now with the role of those things. The meaning of “my” has expanded. She is his new wife, new home, new property. His *everything*. He completely owns her.

The sentiment, however, reveals how Antonio’s subscription to Caribbean patriarchal attitudes twists their reality. Antonio paints his words with sacrifice—“I gave up everything to come here”—when he realistically did not choose to give up anything. Rather, he was sentenced to surrender his mayoral position, his possessions, and his freedom after he killed Quashee. His exercise of female ownership over his wife led him to imprisonment. Therefore, displaced without the possibility of return, Tan-Tan actually gave up everything for him. Only a child, she lost her mother, her home, her own possessions and freedom, and, principally, her entire planet in a forced exile with her father. Before entering the pod that delivers the two to New Half-Way Tree, Antonio says, “We going to a next Toussaint, one we can’t come back from” (*Midnight Robber* 72). “We going” translates to “I’m taking you”, and Antonio believes he has the right to take his daughter because of his patriarchal belief of female possession.
Patriarchal ownership turns into patriarchal sexual entitlement as Antonio’s words of possession turn into action when he rapes Tan-Tan the night of her ninth birthday. Hopkinson writes, “He took her face in his two hands and kissed her on the mouth. Let me show you something special” (Midnight Robber 139). Hopkinson prefaces this first rape scene with strong action language: Antonio takes Tan-Tan; he shows her; he lays her on the bed. The initiative Antonio displays in his abuse proves a characteristic not only of patriarchal sexual entitlement, but specifically incestuous sexual abuse. In a Caribbean study on the sexual victimization of children, authors Adele D. Jones and Ena Trotman Jemmott found that “fathers who commit incest often do so in the belief that…the ‘right’ to initiate is bestowed on them by virtue of the fact that they are heads of households” (Jones 840). Antonio claims his daughter’s body because it is his daughter’s body—a body he made, a body left to him, a body that is his everything.

Despite Antonio’s promise to stop, the abuse continues for years. He continues to exploit Tan-Tan’s vulnerabilities: her biological relationship to him, her gender, and, most importantly, her age. Hopkinson only describes two rape scenes in the novel, one on Tan-Tan’s ninth birthday and the other on her sixteenth, but she includes other scenes that reveal the frequency and longevity of Antonio’s sexual abuse. For instance, Tan-Tan, at fourteen, conceives a consequence of her incestuous abuse. Hopkinson reveals this fact in a flashback Tan-Tan has when, at fifteen, she visits the doctor of her settlement. Tan-Tan had aborted the child, a traumatic procedure she recalls after reading an “Abortifacients” label in the doctor’s operation room. Janisette had violently questioned her about the baby’s father, for she (though perhaps not completely) believes it to be Melonhead, a neighborhood boy and Tan-Tan’s best friend. Antonio stops intrusively sexual abusing Tan-Tan after her pregnancy and abortion, though he “still stroked [her] from time to time with too-familiar touches” (Midnight Robber 149). Thus,
Hopkinson makes clear that Antonio sexually abuses Tan-Tan throughout most her childhood and early teenage years, though she only describes two rapes in detail.

The second rape explicitly described in the novel happens the day before Tan-Tan’s sixteenth birthday, the day before the age of legal consent in the Caribbean. Angered at his daughter for speaking to Melonhead, Antonio begins to beat her legs with his belt. The physical abuse soon turns into sexual abuse as Antonio, once again, forces himself on his daughter. He grunts, “Is man you want? I go show you what man could do for you!” (*Midnight Robber* 168). Antonio continues to abuse Tan-Tan under the belief that he still has the right: I go show—I initiate; I *can* initiate. The fact that Antonio initiates rape the day before her sixteenth birthday is important, as on her sixteenth birthday “she would be old enough to set out on her own”, for she would be a “full adult” (*Midnight Robber* 150, 163). However, she is still a “pickney”, a child, and can neither consent to nor object to her father’s actions, so long as he remains the head of the household (though, of course, she would object regardless). Therefore, the only way for Tan-Tan to escape the abuse is to kill Antonio, which she does with her knife, as he “raised up to shove into” her again (*Midnight Robber* 168). Antonio, however, leaves her pregnant and traditionally, circumstantially voiceless.

Tan-Tan, like victims of sexual abuse in the Caribbean, employs silence to cope with her exploitation. After the first rape on her ninth birthday, she remains quiet because “shame clogged her mouth when she tried to call out…for help” (*Midnight Robber* 140). Like shame experienced by sexual abuse victims in the Caribbean, Tan-Tan’s shame came from threats to remain silent from her abuser, though softened with fatherly affection: “We won’t even tell Janisette, all right, or she go be mad at we” (*Midnight Robber* 140). The “we” in Antonio’s threat equates Tan-Tan as part of the problem. He therefore suggests that Janisette would be angry at them both, the
abuser and the abused (the latter of which Janisette eventually is). His threat also holds Tan-Tan responsible for his actions. Similar to twisting the reason for their exile to New Half-Way Tree as self-proclaimed fatherly sacrifice, Antonio twists his sexual abuse as an expression of fatherly love, prompted by her simple existence: “You see how I love you, girl? See what you make me do?” (Midnight Robber 141). As Antonio makes Tan-Tan feel shameful and responsible for her role in the rape, her silence to protect her from public shame and her father’s honor, then, becomes the only solution. Therefore, “Pressed down with shame, Tan-Tan clamped her lips together” (Midnight Robber 279).

Tan-Tan remains silent privately in her home by not disclosing her abuse to Janisette (who encourages her silence), but she also remains silent publicly by not disclosing her abuse to Melonhead (nor anyone else within her community). Near the end of the novel, Tan-Tan, after exile from her town of Junjuh to escape the mandatory death sentence for murdering her father, and after exile from the Daddy Tree where creatures called “douen” took her in, reunites with Melonhead in the town of Sweet Pone. She is very pregnant and very silent about the reality of her abuse. Melonhead admits that all in Junjuh knew that Antonio beat her; Tan-Tan quickly denies that the abuse escalated any further. “She wove half-truths, trying frantically to keep her own story straight” (Midnight Robber 302). She tells Melonhead that she killed her father because she thought he was going to kill her with his belt, careful to say “nothing about the rape” (Midnight Robber 302). Tan-Tan is forced to weave a new tale about her abuse because shame has caused her to remain silent about the real one.

In denying her sexual abuse, Tan-Tan also denies her child. Melonhead continues to lightly ask her about the physical abuse she endured after noticing her pregnant belly. He prefaces his question with a plea for Tan-Tan’s understanding, then asks if Antonio fathered the
baby. Angered by the accuracy of his query, Tan-Tan impedes the progression of questioning with a straightforward silence about the topic: “I can’t talk about it, don’t ask me” (*Midnight Robber* 307). She does not engage with Melonhead, with the trauma of her abuse, or with the product of her abuse, and explicitly informs him that she cannot, will not, talk about it. As a result, the rest of their conversation, and her relationship with her child, is “shaped by the silence she insisted on” (*Midnight Robber* 309). Even though Melonhead, an even-tempered, compassionate boy whose temperament stands in complete opposition to Antonio’s serves no threat to Tan-Tan, she cannot reveal her truth to him.

Tan-Tan contributes to the Caribbean culture of silence surrounding sexual abuse, specifically incestuous sexual abuse in childhood, because in the psyche of a victim “traumatic events are initially experienced in a cultural context (even when endured alone)” (Bal 41). Therefore, though Tan-Tan is not on Toussaint, or even Earth, she processes her trauma similarly to her culturally-Caribbean contemporaries. As she denies her abusive history, she denies the origins of her child, the history of its being. This causes her to hate the baby. She calls it a brute, a monster, and she tries to abort it, as she had done once before. Without speaking about her abuse and her child, she cannot free herself from the trauma. The experience, like her child physically, remains a negative part of her; and so she still has “Antonio’s duppy self, haunting and hunting her from within” (*Midnight Robber* 261).

Tan-Tan is only truly able to escape the trauma of her incestuous sexual abuse, even after the death of her father, when she articulates her exploitation in speech. Caribbean Carnival and its character of the Midnight Robber facilitate Tan-Tan’s testimony of abuse. Hopkinson uses the Kairos of Carnival and the Midnight Robber to protest Tan-Tan’s injustices, as both serve as celebrations of protest against the region’s history of oppression. Traditionally, wealthy and
presumably white citizens of the Caribbean marked the early days of Carnival with lavish European masquerade balls (Alamillo 104). However, the festival changed after slave emancipation: the celebration became more public, unrestricted, and frequent (Scher 10). Carnival, or a “protestival” as activist John Jacob calls it, claims unheralded conditions of the Caribbean’s past and present (St. John 422); and, as Hopkinson states, it is “a way to…overturn the accepted world order” (Turner). Tan-Tan, while at Carnival on New Half-Way Tree, at least individually overturns the accepted cultural order of silence surrounding sexual abuse by claiming her own censored past when waxing eloquently at a murderous Janisette, who has hunted her across New Half-Way Tree after Antonio’s death.

Tan-Tan testifies at Carnival as the Robber Queen, her female representation of the Midnight Robber. A character defined by bombast, the Midnight Robber recalls the emancipation tradition that is at the heart of Carnival (Honoré 130). Tan-Tan channels the spirit of the Midnight Robber throughout the novel, beginning, before her sexual abuse, in her childhood on Toussaint. The Midnight Robber character, as well as Tan-Tan’s feminized Robber Queen, aid her in difficult situations regarding her father. She dresses up as the feminized Robber Queen on the first day of Carnival in Toussaint—the day she witnesses her father kill Quashee in festival duel.

On New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan personifies the Robber Queen doll next to her bed as Antonio rapes her for the first time. She uses the Midnight Robber persona as a defense mechanism, for “nothing bad does ever happen to Tan-Tan the Robber Queen” (Midnight Robber 140). The Midnight Robber helps Tan-Tan to accept “Bad Daddy”, as she calls the abusive side of her father, because as the Robber Queen she believes herself free from harm. Additionally, when Antonio rapes her for speaking with Melonhead, Tan-Tan gets the idea of killing her father
with her knife from the Robber Queen doll, for the doll carries that weapon. And at the end of the novel, after suffering through an abortion, abuse, a second impregnation, the necessary murder of her father, and further exile with and from the douen creatures, the nine-month pregnant Tan-Tan finds strength from the unregulated, celebrated speech and brave spirit of the Midnight Robber to speak her truth.

Traditionally at Carnival, the Midnight Robber wields his famous weapon of linguistic mastery, termed “robber talk”, to conquer his opponent. Tan-Tan models her confessional revelation about her abuse after this mode of speech. She says, “I name Tan-Tan, a ‘T’ and a ‘AN’; I is the AN-acaona, Taino redeemer; the AN-nie Christmas, keel boat steamer; the Yaa As-AN-tewa; Ashanti warrior queen; the N-AN-ny, Maroon Granny” (Midnight Robber 320). Her “robber talk” closely resembles that of a Caribbean Midnight Robber from the 1950s, which starts, "My name is Ben Bow. B-E-N B-O-W stand for Ben Bow. B is for the brave deeds that I have done..." (Crowley 268). Tan-Tan, however, calls upon strong female Caribbean/African-descendent characters, thus reinforcing her own female and cultural strength. When Tan-Tan cruelly and plainly admits her abuse, Hopkinson writes the speech in italics, thereby still signifying the extempo-calypsonian rhythm of “robber talk”. Tan-Tan spits, “Is she father who fuck she. Yes, he inject Tan-Tan with he child” (Midnight Robber 323). With these words, at Carnival and through the Midnight Robber, Tan-Tan the Robber Queen removes herself from the Caribbean cultural censorship to which she previously subscribed by directly vocalizing her incestuous abuse.

Tan-Tan’s speech to Janisette about her abuse at Carnival on New Half-Way Tree liberates her from her traumatic past, thus healing and strengthening her for her approaching motherhood. Though Tan-Tan was able to testify after embodying the spirit of Carnival, its
character, and its rhetoric, she gives the speech as herself, not as a dressed-up character. The authenticity of Tan-Tan speech establishes her liberation as substantive, for after her delivery of speech and child she is able to accept her son. Though the Robber Queen persona, modeled after the Midnight Robber, gives Tan-Tan access to verbally express her abuse, the persona remains a crutch. When she receives her first Robber Queen costume as a little girl, she wears it as a mode of security: “Her hand touched her Robber Queen outfit. She put it on. It covered up some of her scared feelings” (Midnight Robber 53). Tan-Tan uses the Carnival outfit to protect herself from unwanted emotions caused by unwanted events (in this first instance, watching her father fight the man he ends up killing). The outfit, therefore, inhibits full expression of emotion, though it does offer Tan-Tan a sense of strength.

It is the removal of the Robber Queen costume, then, that makes Tan-Tan’s liberation truly substantive, for it forces her to testify as her true self—a self to whom her words give power. Before Tan-Tan delivers her speech, the cape of her outfit snags on Janisette’s tank, ripping it off her body, as the latter attacks her at Carnival; and as a result, “she was only Tan-Tan” (Midnight Robber 320). While she delivers her speech without garb to cover the feelings that scare her, she grows in self-confidence because it is her self; her truth, that she expresses. She resolves, “They were going to hear her” (Midnight Robber 322). The italics emphasize Tan-Tan’s determination in verbally expressing her abuse, though the last word in the sentence, “her”, signifies who, truly, the audience will hear.

Tan-Tan accepts no aid in her speech, shushing Melonhead when he attempts to speak on her behalf: “This story had to sing as her own soul, oui? Knife in hand she held up her arm to shush Melonhead” (Midnight Robber 324). In Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present, author Mieke Bal reveals that individual and cultural memory plays a central role in tying
together a historical past to a present cultural activity. In *Midnight Robber*, the historical past and present cultural activity is the prevalence of sexual abuse in the Caribbean. The individual and cultural memory that ties the past and present together is the silence surrounding sexual abuse. Communicating a traumatic experience, Bal says, liberates a victim from the predator’s harmful present cultural activity. She writes, “working through… traumatic memory involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else’s (the perpetrator’s) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one’s own. The act of bearing witness to this trauma facilitates this shift” (Bal 39). The fact that Tan-Tan bears witness to her trauma without her Midnight Robber costume or help from Melonhead makes her communication and resultant healing substantive, as she speaks as and for herself. She, Tan-Tan, reveals her incestuous sexual abuse and breaks the cycle of silence she mirrors from Caribbean culture.

After bearing witness to her own trauma, Tan-Tan’s personal liberation proves substantive as it changes the way she views her child (born, of course, of her father), for she experiences a rebirth of self in the birth of her child. After Tan-Tan’s cape is ripped off (which she used to hide her baby bump) and while she delivers her speech, she answers Janisette’s question about whose her baby is with confidence and acceptance. “Who’s? She’d carried the monster all this way. The damned pickney was hers” (*Midnight Robber* 321). She assumes parental responsibility for her unborn child after she bears witness to the horrific event that created it, thus healing herself enough to love the child. Her acceptance only grows after the baby is born immediately after her speech. Hopkinson writes, “He had Antonio’s face, but they were her features too, hers. Her son was not a monster” (*Midnight Robber* 328). With the last line, specifically, Tan-Tan truly accepts her son as a part of her and apart from her trauma—something she had not been able to do before her speech and would not have been able to do had
she not testified as “only Tan-Tan”—and thus creates a sincere, lasting liberation from silence and abuse.

Hopkinson’s writes the story of Tan-Tan’s abuse, silence, and liberation in the science fiction genre. The use of this imagination-centered genre shows how difficult the subject of sexual abuse is to articulate in reality—for to even approach the subject, Hopkinson creates an entirely new dimensional reality and colonizes two fictitious planets. As science fiction allows Hopkinson to create these fantastical new planets, it also allows her to successfully explore the trauma and liberation of sexual abuse. Science fiction explores the “what-if?” possibility in literature (Liedl 291); or as author Darko Suvin states in “On Cognitive Emotions and Topological Imagination”, science fiction provides the means to “redescribe the known world and open up new possibilities of intervening into it” (191). Hopkinson literally re-describes the known world by transplanting what is known—the Caribbean culture of sexual abuse and the silence surrounding it—into new planets. The Caribbean-diasporic colonizers of Toussaint and New-Half Way Tree bring the Caribbean’s patriarchal society structure with them in their galactic pilgrimage, and they propagate hegemonic masculinity, power entitlement, and sexual entitlement into their new worlds.

In a Caribbean-diaspora settled on Toussaint, the colonizers of the planet can, through the genre of science fiction, play out circumstances not possible in Earth’s contemporary reality. Tan-Tan’s character, specifically, answers a “what if” question afforded by science fiction: “What if a sexually abused child speaks about her abuse?” Hopkinson offers a successful response to the question she creates, as Tan-Tan verbally expresses her abuse and subsequently heals from the trauma. Science fiction as a genre affords the opportunity to pose and answer Hopkinson’s question because “[its] works are drawn from works of history but also enjoy the
opportunity to go beyond the limits of history” (Leidl 293). In Midnight Robber, “history” is the prevalence of sexual abuse in the Caribbean and the cultural censorship surrounding it. Tan-Tan goes beyond the limit of this history (censorship) by testifying her abuse.

As the societal power structures on Toussaint abide by patriarchal attitudes and beliefs, the planet serves as a science-fiction version of Earth. The main difference between the two planets, besides the former’s futuristic technology, is that Toussaint is entirely populated with descendants from Caribbean colonizers, rather than Earth’s expansive colonization by Western Europeans. In Vanishing bodies: ‘race’ and technology in Nalo Hopkinson’s Midnight robber, author Elizabeth Boyle writes that “New Half-Way Tree is the shadowy replica of…Toussaint” (183). Tan-Tan’s speech about her abuse occurs specifically on New Half-Way Tree, for as a planet even further removed, spatially and dimensionally, from Toussaint and Earth’s patriarchal structures, it is an appropriate location to answer Hopkinson’s posed “what if” question. Boyle quotes Hopkinson in her article, in which she says that “[s]peculative fiction is a great place to warp the mirror and thus impel the reader to view differently things” (185). New Half-Way Tree offers the reader an imaginative place to view “things”—the treatment of sexual abuse—differently—by talking about the violation instead of silencing the victim.

New Half-Way Tree, created by Hopkinson as a place to explore her “what if” question, allows Tan-Tan a place to deal with her sexual abuse through voice instead of silence. This proves an important purpose, as Tan-Tan only heals from her abuse after she speaks about it. At the very beginning of the novel in Toussaint, Tan-Tan’s house eshu, an online household servant, speaks to an unnamed character. It says, “But wait—you mean you never heard of New-Half Way Tree, the planet of the lost people…the ones who think the world must have something better for them, if them could only find which part it is?” (Midnight Robber 2). New Half-Way
Tree is therefore an attempt by Hopkinson to speculate what would happen if a victim of childhood sexual abuse found a world, planet, or reality that offers her something better, that offers her a place to heal. New Half-Way Tree also offers the reader an example of a place where healing from sexual abuse proves not only possible, but successful. The reader, then, views sexual abuse as a form of trauma that can be, to an extent, healed. Hopkinson goes to extreme literary lengths to create a narrative space for her protagonist to testify her abuse and heal herself, and she does so with the aid of the science fiction genre. The genre, then, is a necessary and an integral component to tell the story of Tan-Tan, to have Tan-Tan tell her story, and to offer the potential for healing for victims of sexual abuse.

3. Sexual Abuse and Liberation in Soledad

Angie Cruz’s novel Soledad, like Midnight Robber, explores the Caribbean’s endemic sexual abuse. Written amongst the varying perspectives of a Dominican family in New York’s Washington Heights, Cruz’s novel primarily engages with the sexual abuse of Soledad, the protagonist, and Olivia, her mother. Like Tan-Tan, Soledad and Olivia experience childhood sexual abuse that mirrors the abuse of Caribbean women; and both women are abused under the legal age of consent. Olivia, as a young girl in the Dominican Republic, travels to Puerto Plata from San Pedro in an escape from her patriarchal family. However, at only fifteen, she is conned into prostitution and endures repeated abuse and rape in order to financially take care of herself. She becomes pregnant, though remains ignorant of the father’s identity due to the regularity of relations she has with different men. Olivia falls for one of her Dominican lovers on the island, Manolo; though he, too, physically and sexually abuses her. In the beginning of their relationship, she tells Manolo that he is the father of her unborn child, though Olivia remains uncertain and Manolo unconvinced.
Manolo moves Olivia to the United States, where they enter a long-term, marriage-like relationship. However, Manolo continues physically and sexually abusing Olivia. The abuse escalates as Soledad, born in Washington Heights, does not resemble her “father”. His ego now bruised like Olivia’s skin, Manolo deals with his feelings of betrayal and concomitant patriarchal frustrations by sexually abusing Soledad—she, too, only a young girl. Olivia and her daughter both remain silent about their abuse at the hands of Manolo; further, Olivia remains silent about the entirety of her professional past. Soledad learns her silence from her mother, as Olivia learned silence from women in the Caribbean. As household tensions rise from secrecy, censorship, and continued abuse, Olivia, in a fit of exacerbated rage and refusal to be further abused, pushes Manolo out of their apartment window. He dies shortly thereafter, though the trauma of his abuse remains. Years later, both women remain committed to their censorship, which inhibits both of their healing from the trauma. Eventually, Olivia’s persistent suppression about her sexual abuse puts her in a coma-like state. She awakens only through Soledad’s discovery about the abuse of her past. However, it is only through Olivia’s spoken narrative about her abuse to her daughter at the end of the novel that Soledad is also healed.

The Caribbean’s societal and familial patriarchal attitudes lead to Olivia’s initial sexual abuse, for as she attempts to flee one form of subjugation, she unknowingly enters another. Olivia’s father plans to marry her off to Pelao, an older man, once she becomes old enough. Olivia narrates that “things” were getting hard for her family; “things” presumably relates to financial hardships, and the family seeks to escape their struggles by moving to the United States. Pelao lives in New York. Therefore, her family, namely her father, intends to financially and personally benefit from Olivia’s arranged marriage. He thusly treats her like property, as Antonio did Tan-Tan, in his attempt to control the course and whereabouts of her life. He
effectively arranges to sell her off like the productive resource to which he reduces her. Olivia flees San Pedro (her hometown), her father, and Pelao.

When Olivia reaches Puerto Plata, a city frequented by tourists for its beaches, a Swedish man promises her a profession in modeling; however, it is in Puerto Plata where Olivia encounters another form of sexual abuse: sex work. Olivia’s prostitution can be defined as sexual abuse because “the conception of transactional sexual abuse refers to the exchange of sex for material goods and money but it also involves the sexual abuse of a minor” (Pasura 19). Olivia is only fifteen when she becomes a sex worker, making her, like Tan-Tan, under the Caribbean’s legal consenting age. Additionally, the Swedish man is able to take advantage of her because the “patriarchy…shamelessly upholds women’s dependence on…man in all spheres of life” (Sultana 6). Olivia does not have a husband or father to rely on for financial support, and the Dominican’s patriarchal society requires her dependency on men for “all spheres of life”, including financial support. Therefore, in order to survive financially and establish her own societal legitimacy, Olivia must surrender to patriarchal sexual exploitation in order to be financially independent (though her income still depends on the payment of men), even directly from the Swedish man.

Manolo, likewise, employs the patriarchal attitude of sexual entitlement. Though he eventually moves Olivia from Puerto Plata to Washington Heights, he sexually abuses her both during and after her time as a sex worker. In Puerto Plata, Manolo buys Olivia for an entire week, unbeknownst to her, though she acknowledges that he acts “like he already possessed her” (Soledad 59). Manolo’s payment and the nature of Olivia’s work, along with his presubscribed Caribbean patriarchal attitude, gives him an ownership over Olivia’s body that he exploits. The night that Olivia tells Manolo she is pregnant, he rapes her, though under the guise of love. “Olivia went to bed with him. She didn’t want to make love that night. But he entered her
without asking” (*Soledad* 76). Like Antonio, Manolo takes advantage of Olivia’s “inferior” status due to gender and young age. Olivia’s sexual abuse in the Dominican Republic, specifically, “this first rape scene at fifteen years old, in girl-hood, becomes the central moment of subject formation and crucial to understanding”, because the shame, guilt, and secrecy of her abuse strains her future relationship with her daughter, Soledad, the product of her abuse in Puerto Plata (Francis 128).

Abused in the Caribbean, Olivia also participates in the cultural censorship regarding sexual exploitation, and she does so in an attempt to forget her trauma and shame. She employs silence starting the first week she gets to Puerto Plata. When asked by another young sex worker if she has a tongue, due to her keeping so quiet, Olivia quietly responds, “‘Sí, tengo lengua’, Olivia bleeped in such a low voice she touched her tongue to see if it was still there. It was the first time she had spoken in days” (*Soledad* 57). In her article “The Madwoman Speaks: Madness and Motherhood in Angie Cruz’s *Soledad*”, author Cristina Herrera writes that “Olivia’s attempt to forget or repress her sex worker experience is a common strategy used by trauma victims in order to spare themselves the painful act of remembering” (58). Olivia learns to cope with her abuse through silence, as does her female Caribbean contemporaries.

However, Cruz’s protagonist engages in an extreme form of suppression, for years after her abuse when the novel starts, Olivia, age 36, is physically unresponsive in a coma-like state. Cruz reveals her thoughts through italicized narration, available only to the reader, in which she expresses a desire to start over, to return to her life “before Manolo, before I became a mother to Soledad” (*Soledad* 10). Her yearn to go back to a life before Manolo, essentially before Puerto Plata, demonstrates an understandable want to restart her life before the prostitution-produced abuse; and her longing for the omission of motherhood arises from the difficult reality that
Soledad is a physical, biological reminder of that abuse. Olivia’s silence, then, proves detrimental to her physical and mental health, but also to her relationship with Soledad, as the two become consequently disconnected emotionally and literally.

The muted, repressed experiences of Olivia’s violated youth, in addition to stunting the formation of a healthy mother-daughter relationship, further hurt the formation of Soledad’s own individuality, self-growth, and self-acceptance—for Soledad, too, is the victim of abuse. Soledad’s abuse, carried out by her “father”, is also characterized by patriarchal entitlement, like Olivia’s abuse, and paternal entitlement, like Tan-Tan’s. Soledad recalls that when taking a nap as a young girl, Manolo snuck into her bed to molest her: “His fingers reached under my night gown tracing the rim of my cotton underwear following it all the way to the front” (Soledad 201). Though Manolo is not Soledad’s biological father—a fact Soledad realizes towards the end of the novel—his abuse generates the same trauma as incestuous abuse: “From the psychological point of view, it does not matter if the father and child are blood relatives. What matters is the relationship that exists by virtue of the adult’s parental power and the child’s dependency” (Herman 70). As the power held by males in the patriarchal Caribbean leads to the sexual exploitation of the most easily subjugated group—children—so does the power held by Manolo’s pseudo-father position within his Dominican family unit lead to the sexual exploitation of Soledad as a child.

Soledad’s abuse mirrors the pattern of child abuse that social scientists have found common in the Caribbean in which the father feels entitled initiate and abuse his children, especially his daughters. Manolo violates only Soledad, his dependent, rather than Flaca, her cousin, who is also napping in the room. In *The Prevalence and Seriousness of Incestuous Abuse: Stepfathers vs. Biological Fathers*, author Diana E. H. Russel writes, “One factor [of
abuse] may be that stepfathers, aware that they are not consanguinely related to their daughters, may feel less bound by the normative disapproval of incest” (Russel 20). Essentially, because a male with power is not directly related to his dependent, he does not fear the taboo of incest, as a blood-related father might.

Manolo rationalizes his abuse as un-incestuous, for he suspects that Soledad is not his child. Cruz writes, “Since the day she was born, he watched her, waited to find a trace of himself in her and the paler she became, her nose, the shape of her eyes, her fine straight hair, neither Olivia’s or his, Manolo lost faith in her” (Soledad 150). As his suspicion turns into truth, Manolo begins to distance himself from Soledad as a parent. He spits at Olivia, “Our daughter? She’s your daughter” (Soledad 144). Without biology to relate them, Manolo justifies his abuse as social scientists have found that step-fathers do. Without a blood relationship and with societal and familial power, Manolo feels entitled to Soledad’s body. He, the household patriarchal provider, supports Soledad (and her mother) financially. Before Soledad’s birth, he funded her mother’s move to the United States. He pays their rent in Washington Heights. He supports their livelihood. Though not a blood relation, Manolo owns Soledad because, essentially, he bought her. Like Antonio, Manolo believes he has the right to abuse Soledad not because she is his daughter, but because she is, simply, his.

The trans-generational abuse experienced by Olivia and Soledad by the same man leads to trans-generational, identical cultural silence, learned by daughter from her mother. While Olivia had never talked to her daughter about her history of sexual abuse, she had also never taught her about sex in general. Soledad realizes, while reading a magazine to entertain her comatose mother, “We’ve never talked about sex, or anything related to sex. Our sex conversation went something like…men only want one thing and if I know what’s good for me I
better not give up that thing or else my life is ruined” (*Soledad* 93). The only things that Soledad learns about sex from her mother is that if she engages in it, or is forced to engage in it, the act will ruin her life. In other words, “she must not give up that thing or else”. Therefore, Soledad must remain silent, traumatized, and unhealed. Soledad mirrors her mother’s behavior of silence—sleep—during her abuse. She pretends to be asleep, praying that Manolo will stop and that Flaca will not wake up. Like Olivia, she does not verbally express her abuse and is haunted by the memory into her adulthood.

Soledad, again like her mother, attempts to forget her abuse. Rather than falling into a comatose state, Soledad forces the pain of her abuse deep into her pillowcase in a violent form of silence. She says:

> For years I’ve stored memories in my mouth and blown them into the lips of the pillow covers when I went to bed. I trapped every word and picture inside. There have been times when the pillow cries in protest, its lumps move under my head and the memories seep into my dreams. When that happens I whisper them back harder than before, demanding they contain themselves, leave me alone. I push every painful feeling deep inside myself and try to ignore them as if they will disappear. (*Soledad* 198)

Though Soledad attempts to physically distance herself from her abuse by transferring her pain into another object and out of herself, she cannot truly escape from her trauma. This is because “the self is forever violated, and the trauma does not diminish with distance” (Mujcinovic 179). Soledad, like Olivia and Tan-Tan who physically carried the products of their abuse, cannot escape her own because it is a part of her very being. She even says, “I try to close my eyes, but my lids don’t protect me from seeing, my skin is touched with every secret I’ve saved” (*Soledad*
This realization reveals how both Soledad’s pretending to be asleep when Manolo entered her room and Olivia’s prolonged sleep throughout the novel cannot save them both from the trauma of their abuse. They must speak their abuse in order to be healed.

Oliva and Soledad, mother and daughter, cannot heal from their respective sexual childhood exploitation until and unless the other heals, which begins once Olivia’s abuse, the parent abuse, is articulated. While Olivia remains in her silent slumber, her sister Gorda tirelessly cleans her house in the hope of ridding any harmful lingering energy—specifically Manolo’s. Soledad assists her aunt and starts to purge Olivia’s closet of Manolo’s remaining items—for though he has been dead for many years, Gorda reasons that his spirit haunts Olivia and caused her prolonged sleep. While searching the closet, Soledad stumbles upon a journal belonging to her mother. Within the journal, Olivia had recorded and recounted in detail every man that she slept with as a prostitute in Puerto Plata. Soledad speaks aloud the words, descriptions specifically, that Olivia wrote about her abusers, which commences the initial acknowledging rhetoric between the mother and daughter.

Cruz uses elements of magical realism in Soledad to visually articulate Olivia’s horrific childhood sexual abuse within her written descriptions. The use of magical realism also plainly reveal to Soledad and the reader the truth and trauma of what Olivia endured. Cruz writes of the scene:

One by one, at a very slow pace, men with big fat stomachs, nasty teeth, hairy chests, balding heads, pigeon toes, smelly armpits, long beards, appear. And as if they have visited this apartment in the past, they sit down on the sofa, on the windowsill, on the floor, all naked, penises exposed con mucha confianza. They drape themselves on top of the dining room table, lean against the wall, lie on one
another as they wait. Like an old painting of bathers at a bathhouse, they assemble peacefully; there’s a sepia cast to them all. An ancient photograph, an old memory…and my father is also there. (Soledad 205)

When Soledad reads Olivia’s notebook containing their descriptions, all of the men that Olivia slept with in Puerto Plata fantastically appear in her apartment. They come to life before Soledad’s eyes, described explicitly and grotesquely, so that she experiences the full horror of their presence, just as her mother did. Gorda sees the men too, and she explains their appearance to Soledad as a product of the power of the latter’s mind: “I think that somehow you have trapped these men between your imagination and the physical world” (Soledad 206). Though Gorda attributes the conjuring of the men to the strength of Soledad’s imagination, their appearance in the novel actually arises from the literary technique of magical realism utilized by Cruz. Cruz employs this moment of magical realism to reveal to Soledad, and the reader, the full horror of Olivia’s childhood sexual abuse.

Magical realism is a technique used by Latin American authors that serves as social protest against the region’s violent history, much like Carnival (Mustanir 7). Thus, as author Mario Siskind writes in The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature, “One can read magical realism being presented as the moment of Latin American cultural emancipation”: emancipation from the consequences of Western colonization and exploitation (837). However, in Soledad magical realism represents the emancipation from the Caribbean’s culture of silence surrounding abuse. The technique involves describing an event serious in nature—in this instance, childhood sexual abuse—through an exaggerated circumstance or with unrealistic elements—like men appearing out of thin air, naked, in a living room (Munistar 7). Realistically, reading aloud a list of men’s descriptions from a twenty-year-old notebook would not cause the
descriptions to take on physical forms. However, Cruz’s magical-realistic writing of this moment in the novel forces Soledad to literally and visually confront the specifics of and specific players in her mother’s abuse.

The technique of magical realism also incorporates the use of “highly plain and simple language,” thereby more effectively portraying the “serious incidents” that authors use the technique to describe (Munistar 7). Cruz, too, writes the scene of the men’s magical arrival in simple language, as their appearance and actions within the room are stated very clearly: Soledad sees them; they are naked; they lounge around the room. Cruz leaves nothing in this scene to the imagination. She forces Soledad (and the reader) to distinctly visualize the men. Cruz’s implementation of magical realism’s highly simple language maximizes the technique’s effectiveness in portraying the serious incident of Olivia’s childhood abuse, for Soledad understands what happened to her mother immediately after seeing the men. She realizes that Olivia worked as a prostitute, experienced sexual abuse, and conceived Soledad by another man in Puerto Plata. She expresses, “Finally my mother’s secret is out. Now I know that there was a time when my mother was fifteen, before I was born, and at that time she was in Puerto Plata and somewhere between her leaving home and coming to New York my mother was pregnant with me” (Soledad 205). Cruz simple language in describing this magical-realistic scene leads Soledad to fully understand her mother’s past.

Cruz’s writing of Soledad’s confrontation with her mother’s abusers specifically with the technique of magical realism attests to how difficult a subject sexual abuse, especially childhood sexual abuse, is to express. In “Shifting the ‘Vantage Point’ to Women: Conceptualizing Magical Realism and Trauma”, authors Maria Takolander and Jo Langdon write that “theoretical understandings of trauma largely converge in proposing that traumatic experiences are...at times,
impossible to represent” (46). As magical realism, aided in its simple language, serves to express the inexpressible, Cruz’s implementation of the technique reveals that Olivia, as a victim, requires aid to describe her past. However, the mere requirement of a literary aid to articulate sexual abuse in the novel shows that verbal expression of sexual abuse is difficult to achieve in reality, in the Caribbean, and in Caribbean diasporas. As shame and protection of family stifle the narrative of sexual exploitation in the Caribbean, a modified diasporic reality in a fictional novel remains necessary to facilitate communication about sexual abuse. Magical realism makes this communication a possibility because it “creates a new and decolonized space for narrative” (Faris 103). Takolander and Langdon continue to write that “female-authored magical realist novels...[enact] a movement from the private to the public, from confinement to freedom” (Takolander 48). The confinement in Soledad is the silence on behalf of Olivia and Soledad regarding their sexual abuse, and the freedom is the ability, through the elements of magical realism in the novel, to express it.

From the journal’s written account and consequent magical-realistic display, Soledad realizes her “mother’s secret”: that Olivia, at the age of fifteen, worked as a prostitute in the Dominican and consequently became pregnant. With the discovery of her mother’s past abuse, relatable to her own, Soledad understands Olivia in a way that she could not before; and she finds the answer to the identity of her father—simply, that he is not Manolo. Connecting with the product of her abuse, her daughter, initiates Olivia’s mental, and importantly, physical liberation from the pain of her past: Soledad states, “The more I discover about her and the more time I spend with her, the freer she becomes” (Soledad 179). Though Olivia continues to remain mute, she starts to physically interact with Soledad and the rest of her family in Washington Heights, thereby initiating the early stages of mental and emotional restoration.
True liberation from their sexual exploitation ultimately occurs for Olivia and Soledad when, after travelling to Puerto Plata for a healing ritual, Olivia finally, and for the only time in the novel, speaks. Returned to the original location of Olivia’s abuse, Soledad attempts to fully revive her mother through a traditional cleansing ritual in which the sinking or resurfacing of photographs in a specific body of water denotes the future well-being of the individual pictured. Olivia’s picture floats, as her healing has already commenced; Soledad’s picture, however, sinks. The latter sexually abused victim, thus, takes the initiative to heal herself. She resolves, “I’m not going to let this story haunt me for the rest of my life” and jumps into the water to retrieve her photograph (Soledad 235). However, Soledad is pulled down under the water and surrenders to its depths.

When thus confronted with the imminent loss of her daughter, Olivia screams—her first sound. Soledad sees and hears her mother’s cry and, without explanation, washes up on shore. Therefore, the scream, the first voiced moment by Olivia, saves both women by breaking the Caribbean’s culture of silence in which she and Soledad participated. In “Love in the Age of Globalized Sex Work, Secrets, and Depression”, author Donette Francis writes, “Where Olivia was mute for the majority of the novel, this primal scream gives birth to her voice once again. She can now narrate what she had previously rendered unnarratable because of her own feelings of guilt and shame” (138). Holding each other on the shore in the Dominican Republic, Olivia expresses her past in spoken word, as Soledad describes, “I want to ask her so many questions. But before I even open my mouth, she speaks” (Soledad 237). The shared dialogue between Olivia and Soledad regarding her sexual childhood abuse heals both women, for it is the first and only time in the novel that they communicate with each other. Thus, shared speech
acknowledging abuse liberates mother and daughter from trans-generational trauma and cultural silence.

In Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* and Cruz’s *Soledad*, the sexually abused and exploited female characters Tan-Tan, Olivia, and Soledad are liberated from their and the Caribbean’s history of sexual abuse. They unsubscribe to the Caribbean’s oppressive culture of silence that surrounds abuse once their abuse is admitted in individual speech or shared dialogue. The protagonists verbal testimony and subsequent emancipation is made possible because of the novels’ genre and narrative mode: *Midnight Robber’s* science-fiction genre and *Soledad’s* elements of magical realism. Each woman experiences a rebirth of self after communicating their abuse, specifically with their children—or, in Soledad’s case, with her parent. Tan-Tan accepts her son, Olivia communicates with her daughter, and Soledad understands her mother and, thus, more of herself. For Tan-Tan and Olivia, the ability to accept and love their children, who are the products of rape (and incest) transforms the dehumanizing violence of sexual abuse into a viable future—a future in which the women, including Soledad, can, through speech, liberate themselves, accept themselves, and move forward.

Though their protagonists are fictional, Hopkinson and Cruz propose a procedure for healing from childhood sexual abuse—breaking the Caribbean’s cultural cycle of silence by voicing trauma—that proves effective for real-life victims of abuse. In the April 16, 2018 issue of *The New Yorker*, Pulitzer Prize winner Junot Diaz (author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*) published an article entitled “The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma”. Within this piece, Diaz, a Dominican man, recounts his own experience with childhood sexual abuse: he was raped at the age of eight. He, too, remained silent about his abuse throughout his childhood, teenage years, and the majority of his adult life. His silence effectively destroyed his
emotional, mental, and physical well-being. However, in admitting to and writing about his abuse, he professes that he “feels like…I’m being given a second chance at the light” (Diaz). The light, he explains, symbolizes a rebirth of self—a rebirth identical to that of Tan-Tan, Olivia, and Soledad.

Diaz’s account acknowledges that childhood sexual abuse in the Caribbean is not a gendered trauma: girls and boys experience abuse. Nearly two decades after the publications of Midnight Robber and Soledad, his article additionally corroborates the prevalence of sexual abuse in the Caribbean, as violation continues to affect both biological sexes. Diaz’s recent testimony and subsequent (though gradual) healing also illustrates the importance of Hopkinson and Cruz’s imagining a procedure for healing. Their novels, and Diaz’s article, offer real-life victims of sexual abuse a way, through words, to heal. The three Caribbean-diasporic authors offer their narratives to guide victims of childhood sexual abuse through their trauma towards the restoration of self, towards rebirth. Hopkinson, Cruz, and Diaz celebrate the voice of the sexually-abused victim; and if the victim cannot yet speak, their narratives offer solace in representing eventual, achievable healing. As Diaz encouragingly writes in supporting those still suffering from silence, “The words [are] here, where the whole world—and maybe you—might hear” (Diaz).
Works Cited

Alamillo, Jose. “Parading Ethnic Identities.” *Academia.edu*, www.academia.edu/13423601/Parading_Ethnic_Identities


