

ABSTRACT

ERIN KAYAJIAN: *Regimenting Gender Under Trujillo and Duvalier: Female Spiritual Repression and Recovery.* (Under the direction of Professor Smith McKoy)

On the island of Hispaniola, the terror and brutality caused by two dictators had devastating and resonating effects on the people, culture, education and land that still reverberates today. Even though one of the countries of the island seems to have recovered through trade and tourism, i.e. the Dominican Republic, the country of Haiti continues to struggle and be haunted by its tragic past; a past that was engulfed in tyranny and oppression. Though many people witnessed these horrific atrocities, the revelation of the exact specifics and circumstances concerning the victims has been thwarted by an attempt to conceal them. In a way, this campaign has been successful; when there is discussion of the great genocides in history- the Holocaust, the Slave Trade- the awareness of the Duvalier and Trujillo regimes remains largely vacant. This is stunning considering the lives which were taken under both these men. Why were these men able to manipulate and oppress so many for so long? A lot of the reason entails the auras that surrounded these dictators, auras which differed greatly. Trujillo used his military stronghold to brutalize both countries of Hispaniola, whereas Duvalier used his ominous spiritual practices to do so to the Haitian people. Yet, the key facet which links the two men is how both engaged in personality cults and genocide to oppress and dominate, which has been fairly documented. What have not been are women's roles and experiences during this time. They are the most incomplete, yet there is much said that the greatest atrocities were committed against them. It is only through literature that we

are able to be exposed to the reality of these eras and in particular the suffering of women. Here, I will exemplify how these women suffered and endured these atrocities, for we really have only confirmed, written recordings and lauding of the experiences and bravery of men who resisted. I will explore the more obscure effects of the regimes, such as the oppression it caused for women in personal relationships and within themselves. The struggle for women to recover and regain their spiritual identity is a common facet between the novels I will discuss. Thus, through three samples of historical fiction, readers are able to discover how women were able to resist and recover from the horrors of these experiences, as well as recover of their own personal spirit.