

IDENTITIES ON THE MOVE:
READING CONTEMPORARY US/CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S WRITING

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, *Identities on the Move: Reading Contemporary US/Caribbean Women's Writing*, addresses diverse manifestations of Latinas' subjectivity formation in North America and in the Spanish Caribbean. The close readings of contemporary feminist literature written by Dominican Americans Julia Álvarez, Nelly Rosario, Loída Maritza Pérez and Angie Cruz, Cuban American Cristina García and Puerto Rican American Esmeralda Santiago demonstrate the importance that self-mutilating strategies, the discourse of the body, and mother-daughter relationships as metaphor for the national good have on the formation of Latinas' identities. The negotiation of the hybrid self is also intrinsically related to topics such as the reconciliation of past and present through the motifs of the journey, language and memory in the writings of Julia Álvarez, Cristina García and Esmeralda Santiago, as well as through the connection of the migrant and the Diaspora experience exemplified in the work of Cristina García. In Julia Álvarez's historiographic metafiction the relationship between gender and nation is textualised by including women's voices within the national discourse. The readings of these works spring from postcolonial theories as well as from postmodern feminist discussions about fragmented subjectivity.

To my very special mothers Flora, Pat and Bev
and to my best friend Matt

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INTRODUCTION

RETHINKING THE DYNAMICS OF LATINA IDENTITY

This is how we make our lives meaningful, trying to tell ourselves in our heads the story of who we are

Julia Álvarez in Heredia (2000a)

“Made in the USA”: Racialising Latinas/os and Hispanics

This thesis focuses on Latinas’ processes of identity formation across transnational spaces which emerge from the work of contemporary feminist Cuban, Dominican and Puerto Rican women writers in the United States. I explore how “the practices of the self”, borrowing Frantz Fanon’s terminology (1967), interrelate at different levels moving from a specific microcosm (bodily self-perceptions, psychological manifestations and family relationships) to a wider macrocosm (the phenomenon of the nation) both of which intersect with a variety of other constructs such as race, class and gender, aspects that will be detailed below. I also analyse Latinas’ manifestations of subjectivity by assessing the extent to which migration and the Diaspora experience impact on, alter or extend the vision of belonging by Latinas living at the interstices of two worlds.

In order to carry out this analysis, I trace the development of Latinas’ women’s writing over the last two decades of the twentieth-century by examining the work of the now established writers Cuban American Cristina García, Puerto Rican American Esmeralda Santiago and Dominican American Julia Álvarez. To expand on the vision of Latinas’ hybrid identity and multipositionality, I also study works of fiction produced in the late nineties and in the twentieth-first century by Dominican Americans Nelly Rosario, Loída Maritza Pérez

and Angie Cruz.

My interest here lies in offering detailed readings of a corpus of texts which, although they have existed for over a decade, have not really received sustained and coherent critical attention. The writers and their works chosen for discussion do not define the literature of the US/Caribbean but, in general, they do reflect some of the main concerns of Latina writers in the present day. Despite the temporal and historical circumstances that moved these writers to migrate to the United States, as daughters of the Diaspora they share common preoccupations regarding the experiences of migration, exile and living in-between. A study of writers from several different islands points up the extent to which the Spanish Caribbean shares similarities through geography, culture, religion, history and language, even though Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic have different governmental policies.¹

My reasons for selecting only the works of Esmeralda Santiago and Cristina García from among the many Puerto Rican and Cuban American authors are based on what I perceive to be their representativeness in respect of the themes and motifs found in their novels, a striking commonality of those issues and concerns which are central to my analysis.

Although some of the writers, such as Julia Álvarez, have written in a variety of genres encompassing novels, poetry and critical essays, I have focused on the narrative genre because —and without underestimating the expressivity of other literary forms such as plays, short stories, and poems— I consider novels to be reflectors of a wider reality and producers of broader cultural values. As John Peck and Martin Coyle assert about the novel “it is, above all else, a form of literature which looks at people in society” (1993, 107).²

Since this study focuses on exploring the complex effects that colonial and

¹ Puerto Rico is a Free Associated State of the United States, Cuba is a Communist country and the Dominican Republic struggles for democracy.

² For a discussion of the implications of meaning of different literary forms see John Peck and Martin Coyle. eds. 1993. *Literary Terms and Criticism*, London: MacMillan, and M. Howard Abrams. 1993. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers: Cornell University, Sixth edition.

postcolonial historical discourses on gender and race have had upon processes of identity formation, the findings of feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism will provide the theoretical basis for the discussion of concepts like gender, culture, identity and belonging. Adopting an eclectic theoretical approach on the multiple issues of race, sexuality, age and economic status which avoids restrictiveness and offers a wider understanding from which to explore new spaces for Latinas' identity formation and self-definition, I will be able to draw various conclusions about the ways Latinas' perceive themselves from inside and outside the borders of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

The manifestation of plural identities and their representations are pivotal in the literature of many Spanish Caribbean women writers in the North American Diaspora. In her introduction to the Spanish translation of the memoir *When I was Puerto Rican* (1993) (*Cuando era puertorriqueña*, 1994), Esmeralda Santiago defines herself as a dynamic hybrid identity travelling across the Puerto Rican and North American cultures. She says that "[m]y being Puerto Rican includes my North-American life, my Spanglish [...] Both cultures have enriched each other and they have enriched me" (1994, xvii-xviii).

Given Latinas' hybridity and multipositionality their search for identity is one of self-expression at a personal level through appropriate cultural and linguistic codes that express as closely as possible their experiences of living at the interstices of both cultures. US/Caribbean women's awareness of belonging simultaneously somewhere and nowhere but to everywhere is also echoed in the words of Chicana writer Rosario Morales in her poem "I Am What I Am":

I am what I am I am Puerto Rican I am U.S. American I am New York
Manhattan and the Bronx [...] I am what I am and I'm naturalized Jewish-
American [...] I am what I am Take it or leave me alone (1986, 138-39)³

³ In the poem "Child of the Americas", Jewish Puerto Rican feminist poet Aurora Levis Morales, proudly asserts, as her mother Rosario Morales, her multicultural identity. The last two stanzas of her poem reflect precisely the many strands that converge to form her identity: "I am not african. Africa is in me, but I cannot

Conceiving identities as both multicultural and fluid is of particular importance when analysing US/Caribbean women's literature —and Latinas' in general— to avoid reducing their self-expression to a “search for their inner self”. Latinas already have an identity: the one that belongs to two places and journeys across transnational political, social and cultural spaces. Latinas' permeable selfhood is not unitary or defined by fixity, but as Homi K. Bhabha (1994) notes when referring to Diasporic identities, they are dialogic and characterised by hybridity, framed within an ever-changing movement of negotiation and in-betweenness. In *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings*, Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta insist on the fact that Latinas' manifestations of the self are not the search for an identity because they lack one; instead, their search must “be defined as a search for the expression or articulation of that identity, but not for [that] identity itself” (Ortega and Saporta 1989, 3). The idea of Latinas' negotiation of their hybridity should be then understood on three distinct levels: first, as an effort to reconcile their multiple subjectivities conditioned by the experience of being and/or becoming bicultural; second, it should be grasped in terms of searching for home and belonging; and third, it should be conceived as a search of form, that is, a medium of staging the complex self to the world. Néstor García Canclini's assertion that identities that live in hybrid cultures are placed within “shifting places” echoes appropriately the position of Latinas' subjectivities moving across transnational spaces. According to Canclini, within and across these locations “processes of national identity formation, geopolitical and geocultural boundary construction, and cultural flux are staged, contested, and potentially reformulated” (1995, 273).

Latinas' experience of living between more than one spatial locality is essentially related

return./I am not taina. Taíno is in me, but there is no way back./I am not european. Europe lives in me, but I have no home there./I am new. History made me. My first language was spanglish./I was born at the crossroads/and I am whole”. Aurora. L. Morales. 1986. “Child of the Americas”, Aurora L. Morales and Rosario Morales. 1986. *Getting Home Alive*, New York: Firebrand Books, 50.

to what James Clifford defines in his essay “Diasporas” as a condition of “travelling cultures” (1997). The backwards and forward movement across geographical and subjective contexts —the “p’aquí p’allá” phenomenon (Kevane and Heredia 2000, 2-3) — locates Latinas through the discourse of cultural multipositionalities. The processes of identity formation, therefore, cannot be reduced as pertaining to one or another cultural context, but as belonging to more than a single common reality. As Jonathan Culler suggests, “the ‘I’ is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed by and relates to others” (1981, 33). Latinas’ interaction with others within new cultural spaces develops into an expression of selfhood envisioned within a politicised discourse in the North American Diaspora, since this functions as both an amalgamating factor that unifies people and a source of personal creativity that separates individuals (Parry 1996, 87).

While many US/Spanish Caribbean women writers coincide in defining themselves as hybrids and refer to their dual identities by using ethnic terms such as Puerto Rican American, Cuban American, or Dominican American, a more complex dialogue arises as a result of their undergoing attempts at homogenisation in North America. As mentioned above, Esmeralda Santiago comprehends her Puertoricanness as a balanced bicultural entity formed by her Spanish Caribbean heritage and her life in North America; nevertheless, she expresses a certain ambivalence concerning the political classification of many Latin Americans in the United States by the more general and embracing terms of Latina and Hispanic. She adds that “[h]ere [United States] I am considered a Latina or a Hispanic [...] I really don’t know what it means” (1994, xvii-xviii).

The definition of the term Latina/o and its more political version, Hispanic, has been an area of concern for those scholars and sociologists who have been observing the “melting-

pot” phenomenon in North America.⁴ In his article “The Making of New Peoples”, Eduardo Mendieta states that, as a matter of fact, the term Hispanic has been racialised in the United States, blinding the country to those colours that are not black or white. Mendieta notes that ““Hispanic” or “Latino” is to be signified upon rather than to be the one who signifies” (2000, 47). This is the case because once they enter North American society Latinas/os undergo a rapid regime of racialisation and therefore do not blend in (Suárez-Oroco and Páez 2002, 3). Addressing the continuous impact on North America of a heterogeneous and growing Latino population, Chicana writer Cherríe Moraga points out in her essay “Art in América con Acento” that Latinos’ “strong cultural ties, economic disenfranchisement, racial visibility, and geographical proximity to Latin America discourages any facile assimilation into Anglo-American society” (2003, 103).

Racial and gender subjectivities are of primary importance in the formation of Spanish Caribbean women’s self-definition in the homeland and in the Diaspora since their identities are constantly transformed, questioned and renegotiated in different spaces by different social factors. In the United States, Latinas are subjected to racial discourses that construct “us” (Latinas) versus “them” (North Americans). Historically, Latinas/os’ identities have been discernible from one another by physical traits of the body and hair. In contrast to the Caribbean where racial and class classifications are based on degrees of skin pigmentation, in the United States these are inscribed within racial poles of whiteness and blackness. As Eduardo Mendieta indicates “[t]he United States thinks of itself as two nations, or a nation divided between two camps: white and black” (2000, 49). While in the Hispanic Caribbean Dominican, Cuban and Puerto Rican women (and men) are perceived within colour categories

⁴The melting pot or ethnic synthesis model maintains that all cultures melt down to a common denominator, which in the case of the United States has been Anglo-dominant and English speaking. The melting pot model works to eliminate ethnic distinction in the effort to develop a unified identity. See Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. 1970. *Beyond the Melting Pot: the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

such as *morenas*, *quemaitas*, *jabás*, *canas*, *colorás*, *trigueñas*, *indias claras* or *indias finas*, *morenas*, or *mulatas* (Howard 2001, 6-7), in the United States they are defined and classified according to racial discourses which correlate skin colour almost automatically with the ethnic categories of black Hispanics, Latinas or African Americans, classifications conditioned at the same time by class, economic worth and phenotypical features. Linda Martín Alcoff points directly to the racial discourses imposed upon Latinas when she says that:

Our identity is about culture and nationality, not race [...] But in the United States, cultural, national, ethnic, religions and other forms of identification are constantly subordinated to race. (2000, 34)

In the United States, Latinas enter complex racial dynamics based on genotypical —but socially constructed— classifications, and phenotypical and visibly racial kinships. Silvio Torres-Saillant's analysis on racial identity in his article "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity" could equally be applied to Latinas' position in North America in what he defines as "an inescapable social drama wherein whites set the normative standard" and where "race tends to outweigh all other elements of human identity" (2000, 1108). A direct consequence of these racial power relations has derived into the practice of *blanqueamiento*. Whitening the self —physically and psychologically— rewards the individual with class status and social position. Already present in the Spanish Caribbean, practitioners of whitening acquire a strong sense of identification within the Hispanic Diaspora in North America since, as in any predominantly white society, whitening means social inclusion, or in Joel Williamson's words, crossing "the race line and winning acceptance as white in the white world" (1980, 100).

In order to understand Latinas' processes of racialisation in North America, and the

categories of Hispanic and Latina/o ascribed to them, it is necessary to review the historical framework of colonial difference and colonial and imperial conflicts in the Spanish Caribbean.

Race, Gender, Literature and Identity in the Spanish Caribbean

In Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic the significant white presence, which also became the political ruling class during the periods of slavery, colonisation and imperialism, based its ideologies of power on social grading.⁵ The division of societies into multiracial hierarchies functioned as a focal device that maintained racial and class stratifications in place. It promoted the racial and national ideologies of the white elites, among which the *blanqueamiento* of the population was a priority. In Puerto Rico, for instance, the growing “browning” of the population that resulted from interracial relationships threatened to “Africanise” the islands and put at risk the prestigious positions and power of the governing white elites (Alleyne 2002, 120). Whilst whitening the self became the main strategy to fight against national “browning” or “blackening”, at the same time, whitening assured the rejection of African ancestry and thus, any possible associations with blackness.⁶

Puerto Rico’s historical circumstances permitted a strong assimilation of the white ideologies that has resulted in a degree of ethnic and racial homogeneity. In Puerto Rico, where the presence of a white population is significant in number if compared to the Dominican Republic or Cuba, whitening is unavoidable. The possibilities of *blanqueamiento* in Cuba or the Dominican Republic also had a great impact on society, however, unlike

⁵ For a detailed account on the relationships of power, race and gender in Spanish Caribbean literature see Claudette M Williams. 2003. *Charcoal and Cinnamon: The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

⁶ In his article entitled “Puerto Rico”, Mervyn C. Alleyne argues that, “[i]n Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, negroes are considered not to exist as a national category, the category being reserved for migrant Haitians in the case of the Dominican Republic and, ironically, for migrant Dominicans in the case of Puerto Rico”. Mervyn C. Alleyne. 2002. “Puerto Rico”, *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World*, Barbados: University of the West Indies Press: 114-51, 108.

Puerto Rico, the practice of whitening originated as a result of the white elites' fear of the rise of black people, and consequently their need to gain allies. In his analysis of race and ethnicity in the Dominican Republic, David Howard (2001) refers to the phenomenon of *blanqueamiento* during Rafael Leónidas Trujillo's dictatorship when Eurocentric and white supremacist views of Dominicaness were most emphasised. Trujillo's concept of *Dominicanidad* was based on the celebration of whiteness, Catholicism and Hispanic heritage. In fear of the 'Africanisation' of the Dominican Republic because of Haitians immigrants in the eastern part of the island, Trujillo led the massacre of over 15,000 Haitians living on the border of the Dominican Republic in 1937. He imported Europeans into the island to maintain and increase the white population and prohibited the practice of any African spiritual expression, particularly voodoo, since this was directly associated with Haitian religious practices. Although *blanqueamiento* was also common in Cuba, contrary to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, whiteness was not always the preferred status by the former.⁷

The externalisation of identity through physical features has also been a central factor in identity formation for Spanish Caribbean women (and men). Racial aesthetics, that is, judgements based on perceptions of beauty, such as physical traits and hair, have marked female sexuality and ascribed class status: good or straight hair and lighter features as opposed to full, voluptuous lips, swarthy skin, frizzy black hair, broad nose and protruding buttocks, determine acceptability in the elite classes.⁸ In Puerto Rico, for example, although

⁷ My focus on the enforcement of anti-black/anti-Haitian laws under Trujillo does not deny the legacy of antagonism that existed between the two societies back in the mid-nineteenth century.

⁸ Perspectives on the importance of having "good hair" in Puerto Rico are exemplified in Mervyn C. Alleyne's discussion: "[S]traight hair (or *pelo bueno*, good hair, as it is called) can virtually nullify dark skin (but not too dark skin), while light complexion may not have an equal effect in nullifying negroid-type hair (*pelo malo*, bad hair). The value of hair texture may be higher in Puerto Rico than in the United States. Even within the category of "good" hair, there are different levels of social value, in addition to aesthetic preference." Mervyn C. Alleyne. 2002. "Puerto Rico", *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World*, Barbados: University of the West Indies Press: 114-51, 139.

colour is based on the proportion of one's wealth and anyone accepted in the upper classes is considered non-Black regardless of physical appearance, Puerto Rican whitening racial identity presents "more instances of straight hair, thin noses and thin lips than are to be found in other Caribbean territories" (Alleyne 2002, 134).⁹

The internalisation of racial aesthetics and the value of whiteness over non-whiteness have been greatly influenced by the artistic and literary representations of *la mulata* and the black woman.¹⁰ The national literary production of the Spanish Caribbean during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had been almost exclusively signified by a masculine literary canon. The figure of *la mulata*, as part of the national project (the black woman was relegated from this representation until later in the twentieth century), made her appearance an important textual symbol of cultural differentiation and Spanish Caribbean national ideology during the *negrista* cultural movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Although poets, such as Puerto Rican Luis Palés Matos, tried to celebrate the black women as a metaphor of Puerto Rican national identity, given the sensual language used in their poems they only "succeeded in authenticating rather than in transforming a discourse that has been used historically to degrade the sexuality of the woman of African descent" (Williams 2000, 56). The inclusion of *la mulata* in the *negrista* poetry of Luis Palés Matos, Emilio Ballagas, Regino Pedroso, and Manuel del Cabral among others helped —contradictorily— to promote Eurocentric ideas of

⁹ This phenomenon is, of course, not peculiar to the Caribbean. For similar issues involving Afro-Caribbeans in Britain see Kobena Mercer. 1994. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

¹⁰ During the nineteenth century in Europe, the two scientific female images used to define the black icon or stereotype of the black female body were the "Hottentot Venus" (Sarah Bartmann) and the prostitute. In sexual iconography, the buttocks were the privilege focus of interest. "Hottentot Venus" signified animalistic and strong sexuality at the same time it suggested racial assumptions of a hideous sign of inferiority, directly associated with the black woman. For a detailed discussion on the story of Sarah Bartmann and European representations of the black female body, see Sander Gilman's article "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature", Louis H. Jr Gates ed. 1986. *"Race", Writing, and Difference*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 223-61; Also see Denean T Sharpley-Whiting. 1999. "Writing Sex, Writing Difference: Creating the Master Text on the Hottentot Venus", *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears and Primitive Narratives in French*, Durham: Duke University Press, 16-31.

white racial and sexual images of *la mulata* and the black woman. One illustrative example is Palés Matos' poem "Majestad Negra" ["Black Majesty"] in his collection *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (1937) [*Tomtom of Kinky Hair and Black Things*]:

Por la encendida calle antillana
Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba
—Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula—
Entre dos filas de negras caras.
Ante ella un congo—gongo y marca—
Ritma una conga bomba que bamba.

Culipandeando la Reina avanza,
Y de su inmensa grupa resbalan
Meneos cachondos que el gongo cuaja
En ríos de azúcar y de malza.
Prieto trapiche de sensual zafra,
El caderamen, masa con masa,
Exprime ritmos, suda que sangra,
Y la molienda culmina en danza.

Por la encendida calle antillana
Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba.
Flor de Tórtola, rosa de Uganda,
Por ti crepitan bombas y bámbulas;
Por ti en calendas desenfrenadas
Quema la Antilla su sangre ñáñiga.
Haití te ofrece sus calabazas;
Fogosos rones te da Jamaica;
Cuba te dice: ¡dale, mulata!
Y Puerto Rico: ¡melao, melamba!

¡Sús, mis cocolos de negras caras!
Tronad, tambores; vibrad maracas.
Por la encendida calle antillana
—Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula—
Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba.

[By the ignited Antillean street
Tembandumba of the Quimbamba goes.
Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula,
Between the rows of expensive blacks.
Before her the Congo—gongo and maraca,
Ritma one conga pump that bamba.

Swaying her hips the Queen advances,
And from her immense rump flow
Salacious movements the drums curdle
Into rivers of sugar and molasses.
Dark sugarmill of a sensuous harvest,
Her thighs, mass against mass,
Squeeze out rhythms, sweat till they bleed,
And the milling culminates in dance.

By the ignited Antillean street
Tembandumba of the Quimbamba goes.
Flower of Tortola, rose of Uganda,
By you pumps and bámbulas crepitan;
By you in calendas wild
Its blood burns the Antilla ñáñiga.
Haiti offers its pumpkins to you;
Furnaces rum gives Jamaica you;
Cuba says to you: dale, mulatta!
And Puerto Rico: melao, melamba!

Sús, my cocos of expensive blacks!
You roar, drums; you vibrate, maracas.
By the ignited Antillean street.
Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula,
Tembandumba of the Quimbamba goes]¹¹

Palés's representation of the black and mulatta body is one of sensuality, eroticism and demeaning stereotypes that see women through a male-oriented, sexist and racial gaze. He depicts the image of the black woman of African descent as the rumba dancer and as white male fantasy. Through musical rhythms and dance, the poet celebrates the black woman's eroticism and her sexual physiognomy equating her hip movements with a sugar mill churning out "rivers of sugar and molasses". The use of terms such as "haunches" and "rump" and the verb "*culipandeando*" vulgarise her sexuality and reduce her to a sensual animal. She is characterised by her *ancas*, *nalgas*, and *grupas*, or her uninhibited rump swaying and rhythmic hip-swinging (Jackson 1976, 43). Palés' poem is only one example of nineteenth-

¹¹ Luis Palés Matos's "Majestad Negra", *El Boricua: A Monthly Bilingual, Cultural Publication for Puerto Ricans*. http://www.elboricua.com/Poems_Pales_MajestadNegra.html. No translator named. Date of access 26/08/2005.

century Spanish Caribbean perceptions of *la mulata* filtered through the eyes of European stereotypes of women. Claudette Williams points out that:

So sensationalist a description of the hip-swaying *mulata*'s earth-shaking impact provides one example of the imaginative excesses to which their fascination with their sexuality led some nineteenth-century poets. (2000, 49)

La mulata was depicted as an animal with an uninhibited and unrepressed sexuality, "full of sensual jungle rhythm, oozing sex through animal eyes, sensual voice, and inviting flesh" that threatened the integrity of the dominant white cultural identity and its colonial relationships of power (Jackson 1976, 46). Although *la mulata* was often compared to the white woman because of her light skin and sensuality, she was still subjected to the legal disabilities that attributed to her the condition of black: "only the whiteness of flesh and texture of hair constitute her distinctions from her black female counterpart" (Sharpley-Whiting 1999, 44). *La mulata* was seen as a hybrid that crossed between purity and impurity, between civilisation and primitiveness, between black and white. Her miscegenated 'self' as neither black nor white, yet also white and black, compared her beauty to the white woman; however, her ancestry inscribed her with the savagery, ardent and lascivious stereotypes that identified black female sexuality (since her black blood justifies a permanent status within blackness).¹² The title of Palés's collection of poems *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* [*Tomtom of Kinky Hair and Black Things*] makes reference to this preoccupation with whiteness: "pasa" refers to the kinky hair, one of the strongest signs of blackness in Puerto Rico if not the Spanish Caribbean, and echoes the verb "pass" as in "passing white"; "grifo", another epithet and

¹² According to F. James Davis, the "one-drop rule", also known as the "one black ancestor rule," "traceable amount rule," or "hypo-descent rule," means that a single drop of "black blood" makes a person black, assigning thus racially mixed persons to the status of the subordinate group. Latina in the United States enters the equation of the "one-drop" rule that perpetuates "the enslavement, segregation, and institutional exploitation of blacks". F. James Davis. 1991. *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition*, Pennsylvania: State University Press, 184.

derivative of “grifería”, refers to very tight curly hair and also connotes a social and psychological stereotype.¹³

Just as in Cuban and Puerto Rican literature, racial representations of the black woman and *la mulata* by the Dominican elite abound with images of sexuality, sin, primitiveness, and are presented as posing a threat to white civilisation. One such example is Dominican Francisco Muñoz del Monte’s “La Mulata” (1854) [“The Mulatta”], in which he dramatises the encounter between *la mulata* and her white male “victim”:

Elástica culebra, hambrienta boa,
La mulatta a su víctima sujeta,
Lo oprime, estrecha, estruja, enreda, aprieta
Y chupa y lame y muerde en su furor

[...]

¡No más, por Dios, no más! No es piedra el hombre.
No hay más que un ser de bronce: la mulata.
Plegaria inútil: ella goza y mata,
Abre y cierra la tumba a su querer.¹⁴

[Elastic snake, hungry boa,
The mulatta seizes her victim,
She crushes, squeezes, presses, entraps him,
In her frenzy she sucks, she licks, she bites

[...]

No more, for God’s sake, no more! Man is not made of stone,

¹³ As in negrista poetry, in painting, both *la mulata* and the black woman were depicted as idle servants and slaves and fetishised as objects of male pleasure for erotic appropriation and delectation. In Europe between 1850 and 1890 in particular, the thematic thread on which French photographers’ work focused was the erotic and sexualised images of the black body usually as nudes, and generally of an ethnographic nature, or as clothed companions to a nude or sexually suggestive white female. The black/white duality intensified on the one hand, the greater value of the white female icon —conceived as *nude* pictured— and on the other hand, it underscored the sexuality of the white woman by portraying the black female body *naked*, and thereby non-aesthetically pleasing. Deborah Willis and Carla Williams. 2002. *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2.

¹⁴ The serpent motif as a metaphor to address the mulatta and the black woman’s predatory and dangerous nature could also be associated with the biblical connotations of the serpent, and therefore woman as source of temptation and original sin. Muñoz del Monte “La Mulata”, <http://www.elcaribecdn.com.do> No translator named. Date of access 20/08/2005.

There is only one made of bronze: the *mulata*
Useless plea. She feasts, then kills,
She opens and closes the tomb at will]. (Williams 2003, 70)

In the twentieth century too, examples such as Tomás Hernández Franco's poem "Yelidá" or Puerto Rican Luis Lloréns Torres' "Copla Mulata" (1940) ["Mulatta Balad"] illustrate the misogynistic society promoted in Caribbean literature through the use of sexist discrimination in language and content. "Copla Mulata" reads:

Esta semisalvaje mediasangre,
Ibera y antillana,
Merece que la corra a todo escape
En la pista de llamas
Sobre la mar Atlántica
Tendida entre ambas razas.

[...]

Hecha para subir sobre ella en pelo
La cuesta de la noche a la mañana,
Digna de ensangrinar en sus ijares
Mis espuelas de plata.¹⁵

[This semi-savage half breed,
Iberian and Antillean
Deserves to be driven at full speed
On the flaming track
On the Atlantic ocean
Lying between both races.

[...]

Made to be ridden bareback
Up in the night's hill till morning,
Fit for staining my silver spurs
With blood from her flanks.] (Williams 2003, 73)

Unlike the *negrista* poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Cuban Alejo Carpentier

¹⁵ Luis Lloréns Torres "Copla Mulata", *El Boricua: A Monthly Bilingual, Cultural Publication for Puerto Ricans* http://www.elboricua.com/Poems_Llorens_CoplaMulata.html. Date of access 21/08/2005.

offers for the first time an engagement with European aesthetics that reverses the paradigm adopted by *negrista* poets in *El Reino de este Mundo* (1967) [The Kingdom of this World]. In Carpentier's novel "lo real" [the real] becomes "lo maravilloso" [the fantastic] as human beings turn into animals, slaves become masters, and a monarch becomes part of his fortress. He juxtaposes the sterility of what he sees as European royalty with the need to awaken in the black consciousness the feeling that slavery is an accident of history, not an immutable destiny for the black.¹⁶ He refers to the white elite classes as:

esos soberanos cubiertos de pelos ajenos, que jugaban al boliche y sólo sabían hacer dioses en los escenarios de sus teatros de corte, luciendo amaricada la pierna al compás de un rigodón. (1967, 22)
[those sovereigns bewigged, who played bowls and only knew how to make gods on the stage of their court theatres, turning an effeminate leg to the rhythm of a rigodon.]¹⁷

Carpentier wants to wipe out the colonial ideology that perpetuates the hegemonic relations of the slavery system. He presents the relationship between the black slave —the indigenous— and the decadent *colono* —the ridiculous— as not merely a relationship between master and slave, or as representatives of the sharply contrasted worlds of aristocracy and oppressed servitude. Rather, he exposes the ludicrous pomp of colonial aristocracy and the incongruities that emerge when European influences and indigenous elements come together and merge.

The assimilation of white racial ideologies by non-whites promoted by the *negrista* poets that centred on woman's sexuality as erotic and exotic, and enforced by European representations of the black and mulatta female body in the arts, resulted in meanings of black and white as fluctuating within multiple colour grades. To be more precise, the elaboration of colour-coded terms reveals Cubans' and especially Puerto Ricans' awareness of distinctive

¹⁶ Ironically, Alejo Carpentier himself had produced *negrista* poetry which included reductive images of blacks.

¹⁷ All translations from Spanish are by the author of this thesis unless otherwise indicated.

racial phenotypical features that mark 'African' in their ethnicity.¹⁸ Contemporary Dominicans' ethnic hybridity is represented by the *mulata/o*. Dominican racial identity is based on the rejection of African ancestry and, therefore, of *négritude*.¹⁹ In order to avoid identifications with derogative stereotypes of African ancestry such as the ones implied by words like *mulato/a* or *negro/a* in the Spanish Caribbean, racial terminology varies from words such as coffee, chocolate, cinnamon, wheat, rosy, faded, blond or fair, dark or ashen to the adoption of the term *indio/a* (denominating the mixed ancestry of those who are in-between the Dominican *mulato/a*) in the Dominican Republic, and terms such as *moreno/a* and *pardo/a* (mulattos and others) instead of *negro/a* and *mulatto/a* in Puerto Rico and Cuba (Torres-Saillant. 2000, 1104).

Gender and racial discourses in Spanish Caribbean societies have largely been used as tools to reinforce and secure the political and economic integrity of capitalist nations by "reward[ing] and encourag[ing] some individuals and activities while punishing and suppressing others" (Rubin 1984, 309). According to Ulrich Beck's notes on globalisation, this repression creates a discourse of exclusion that is passed on those who fall outside the dominant mainstream society which, in the case of North America refers to Latina, Hispanic and Black [woman], who are therefore relegated to the borders of the nation (2000, 43).

The historical framework of colonialism and imperialism in the Spanish Caribbean is

¹⁸ Unlike Dominicans in the North American Diaspora, who according to Silvio Torres-Saillant face the problem of self-definition because they lack a "discourse of black affirmation among their strategies of social resistance". Silvio Torres-Saillant. 2000. "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity", *Callaloo. Dominican Republic: Literature and Culture* 23 (3): 1086-1111, 1090, Puerto Ricans "are strongly aware of their African background and the possibility of African blood in their veins (and African features in their phenotype)". Mervyn C. Alleyne. 2002. "Puerto Rico", *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World*, Barbados: University of the West Indies Press: 114-51, 142.

¹⁹ The Haitian invasion of the Dominican Republic and its occupation for twenty-two years (1822-1844) is the main reason attributed to the antagonism that exists between Haitians and Dominicans in the Dominican Republic. Dominican anti-Haitian sentiment implies a rejection of blackness and, therefore, of African ancestry. David Howard. 2001. *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic*, Oxford: Signal Books. See also Silvio Torres-Saillant. 2000. "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity", *Callaloo. Dominican Republic: Literature and Culture* 23 (3): 1086-111.

central for an understanding of Latinas/os' position in North America under the politicised terms of Latina/o and Hispanic. Firstly, their multiculturalism has been shaped by colonial difference; secondly, it is in North America where these colonial differences continue to be reproduced by white Americans and are imposed by Latinas/os on themselves. As Dominican poet Scherezada Vicioso states, "In the United States there is no space for fine distinctions of race, and one goes from being *"trigueño"* or *"indio"* to being "mulatto" or "black" or "Hispanic" (Heyck 1994, 272).

How can Latinas/os and Hispanics be de-racialised in the United States?: A Problem of Nomenclature

The fast-growing presence of Latinas/os in "a new United States where half of the population will be Latino in the next century" (Kevane and Heredia 2000, 68), has led to the emergence of multilayered identities of Chicanos, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans, among others, each group having its individual character, traits and social systems. Borrowing Benedict Anderson's terminology (1983) when referring to the concept of nation as an "imagined community", Latinas/os fail to comply with such a definition in North America. Latinas/os in the United States do not form a homogeneous fraternity of strangers who share the same geopolitical and temporal coordinates; rather, they are hyphenated and hybrid identities comprising different cultural minority groups that carry the weight of specific historical backgrounds, these being varied among themselves and in relation to their Anglo-American counterparts.

North Americans' use of the terms Latina/o and Hispanic to portray these diverse communities are inaccurate and dangerous. On the one hand, the term Latina/o suggests an identity shared through the use of the Spanish language, but disregards the many varieties of

Spanish spoken by different Latin American communities, their verbal adaptation in the United States, and the fact that many Latin Americans speak other languages such as Portuguese, French and English.²⁰ On the other hand, the more official term Hispanic—in the context of public policy—implies an association with Spain and Spanish culture denying the African heritage that many Latin Americans share. At the same time, it fails to recognise the many divergent connotations that such term has everywhere in the United States. In her article “Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?”, Linda Martín Alcoff explains the conflictive meanings that “Hispanic” carries when used across multiple locations in North America. She quotes Jorge Gracia’s words in a personal communication, noting that:

[Hispanic] in Miami means Cuban; in New York City it means Puerto Rican; and in the southwest it means Mexican. So in California I am supposed to have as my native food *tacos*, in New York City, *arroz con gandules*, and in Miami, *arroz con frijoles negros*! (2000, 33)

Similarly, Earl Shorris also refers to the complex implications and uncertainty involved in using the term Latino/a in his 1990 article “In Search of the Latino Writer”:

No one is really quite certain about who exactly qualifies as Latino — or whether Latino, Hispanic, Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Nuevo Mexicano, Puerto Rican, Neorican, Borinqueño, Puertorriqueño, or other appellations are proper names [...] How shall the category be defined? By ancestry? Surname? Subject matter? Or geography? (1990, 27)

The terms Latina/o and Hispanic only come into existence within the specific territory of the United States and only have meaning within the North American experience. Latina/o identity

²⁰ In fact, the phenomenon of many Latinas writing in English is partially explained by the impossibility of their claiming Spanish as their first language.

is arbitrarily imposed according to a geographical location, and more importantly, by political history denying all personal meaning. Eliana Ortega asserts that the preference for the term Latina over Hispanic is a political statement because the latter has been inflicted on Latinas by North Americans:

Al usar el adjetivo *hispana/o*, bastardilla, quiero hacer hincapié en que es un gentilicio impuesto por la cultura dominante al pueblo latinoamericano en EE.UU. (1985, 163)

[In using the adjective *hispano/a*, italics, I want to emphasise that it is a name imposed on Latin American people in the United States by the dominant culture.]

Ortega's association between place and identity is not as simplistic as she might seem to be suggesting. It involves other more complex issues, as Earl Shorris proposes above, if one takes into account the different backgrounds, religion, economic, linguistic, sexual, racial and cultural heterogeneity of the many Latin American countries. Latina/o and Hispanic are overly inclusive categorisations when considering not only the miscellaneous character of the different communities, but also the particular experiences that Latin Americans have undergone throughout history. Thus, Cubans or Dominicans have not encountered the same processes of assimilation and colonisation by North America as Puerto Ricans have; nor have men shared the same experiences of discrimination as women. Some Cuban Americans might be faced with bigotry because of their skin colour, while some Dominican Americans might feel alienated from mainstream society because they are poor.

The term Latina/o fails to acknowledge the uniqueness and diversity of these communities by attempting to classify in Offelia Schutte's words, "*all* people of Hispanic-American backgrounds residing in the United States" under the same ethnic label (2000, 68). Recalling the practices of colour grading in the Spanish Caribbean, Chicana writer Gloria

Anzaldúa addresses her sense of alienation from both cultures and her need to survive in the borderlands as a subaltern of North American mainstream society in her poem “To live in the Borderlands means you...”:

[you] are neither *hispana* *India* *negra* *española*
ni gabacha, *eres mestiza*, *mulata*, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from. (1999, 216)

Because the ethnic terms Latina/o and Hispanic are all-embracing, many Latin Americans living in the United States show preference for the use of a hyphenated nomenclature that recognises both their Latin American heritage and their North American status. Chicana writer Cherrie Moraga, for instance, claims about her identity:

I call myself a Chicana writer. Not a Mexican-American writer, not an Hispanic writer, not a half-breed writer. To be a Chicana is not merely to name one's racial/cultural identity, but also to name a politic, a politic that refuses assimilation into the US mainstream [...] With the misnomer “Hispanic”, Anglo-America proffers to the Spanish surnamed the illusion of blending into the “melting pot” like any other white immigrant group. But the Latino is neither wholly immigrant nor wholly white; and here in this country, “Indian” and “dark” don't melt. (2003, 104)

According to Moraga, “Chicana” directly implies a racial and cultural identification within North American society, as do terms such as *Nuyorican* and *Dominican-york*. How do these categorisations then differ from the racial/ethnic terms Latina and Hispanic? And how does Moraga explain her resistance to North American assimilation when she affirms that:

Today more and more of us insist we are “American” writers (in the North American sense of the word). The body of our literary criticism grows... we assume tenure positions in the University, secure New York publishers and our work moves further and further away from a community-based and national political movement. (2003, 105)

Moraga's assertion presents more intricate arguments. In the same way as any general statement about the terms Latina/o and Hispanic is problematic, those terms that ascribe specific national origin in North America (Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican and so on) are also disputable. Whereas more precise categorisations such as Asian American, Afro American, Hispanic American, Cuban American, Dominican American, Puerto Rican American, among others, mark dual identity, many Latinas/os do not feel comfortable with particular classifications because they constitute a means of keeping them at a remove, or as writer Julia Álvarez says in an interview with Hillary McClellan (2000), it is "as if we are not part of the whole stew". In agreement with Álvarez, Cuban American Ofelia Schutte insists that the term Latina has allowed women the use of a common designator that surpasses the more exact ones of "Chicana", "*puertorriqueña*," "*cubana-americana*", and so on", which emphasise their exclusion from North American society (2000, 68-69). Hence, "Latina" functions as an all-inclusive category that provides an instant identification, prevents individuals from experiencing alienation within mainstream society and is equivalent to taking a political stand. In this sense, the more accepted term and definition of Latina is preferred by Latin American people to recognise their many different backgrounds within a single but multifaceted community that identifies itself within a larger Latin American heritage in North America. Referring to her own experience, Offelia Schutte says that:

I have found the Hispanic-Latina identity very comforting, because it allows me to speak as a Latina in terms of a broader group whose political views are not homogeneous and whose conception of culture recognizes the diversity of Latino/a experiences. The Latina identification encourages me to recover my early childhood roots in my culture of origin, without forcing me, as a Cuban American, to split my cultural legacy, in terms of national origin, into two irreconcilable political halves. (2000, 73)

The use of the term Latina/o by Puerto Ricans, Chicanas, Dominicans, Cubans and others,

serves as a political statement by which these groups associate themselves as a united force and strong presence in the United States. Nonetheless, as Martha E. Gimenez points out in her article “Latino/ “Hispanic”—Who Needs a Name?”:

the differences among “Hispanics” are greater than their imputed commonalities: it is unlikely that they may become united as a single political force, although they may form local alliances around single-issue objectives. (1997, 235)

In spite of the terms Latino and Hispanic being still inadequate to refer to Latin Americans’ heterogeneous communities given their wide-ranging implications of race and ethnicity, Jorge Gracia says that Hispanics’ unity as a group is seen as a metaphor for a family through history: “We are nonetheless united by a web of historical relations that also separates us from other groups in the way a family is separated from other families” (2000, 204).

The wider acceptance of the term Latina/o is also expressed by the editors of the book *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writers and Critical Readings* (1989). Although Asunción Horno Delgado and others acknowledge the difficulties implicit in defining the term Latina, and even more when positioned in parallel with the also political term Hispanic, Nina Scott, one of the editors, offers the following definition in her essay:

Latina is a woman of Latin American origin or descent who resides more or less permanently in the United States, who may choose to express herself in Spanish or English or both, but who identifies with a Latin heritage rather than opting to assimilate into the dominant Anglo-culture of this country. (1994, 58)

From my point of view, the parameters that Latinas rely on in order to assert their identities as hybrid and multilocated subjectivities, and the terminology they choose to acknowledge themselves as part of a whole depend on their own negotiation of places and on the extent to

which they identify with and within these spaces. The construction and reconstruction of Latinas' contemporary selfhood is conditioned fundamentally by modes of adjustment. According to Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, travelling identities are constructed "within a field of social values, norms of behaviour and collective symbols" both in the homeland and in the mainland (1991, 94). Latina identity can be unified into a collective self by amalgamating hybrid identities within and outside the borders of the Diaspora, or else the self can be separated from a national collectivity when giving into assimilationist North American culture. In this sense, Latinas' politicised bodies within national capitalist discourses function, as Debra Gimlin (2002, 149) puts it, albeit in a different context, either as devices to re-invent, change, reject and rebuild the self, or as tools of resistance and agency. The movement across cultures, nevertheless, is intricate since it positions Latinas within a site of cultural conflicts or incompatible value systems. Just like Esmeralda Santiago, Julia Álvarez, for instance, sees herself as a combination of both cultures, the one in the homeland and the one in the mainland. She asserts that "by allowing myself to be those mixtures and not having to choose or repress myself or cut myself off from the other, I have become a citizen of the world" (Kevane and Heredia 2000a, 32).

In my opinion both terms Latina and Hispanic may obscure the differential traits of these women's identities. They are, as Martha E. Gimenez refers to them, "umbrella" terms, that is, "all-encompassing term[s] useful to identify all the population [it] they label[s]" (1997, 226).²¹ She adds that the generic term "Hispanic" "fulfils primarily ideological and political functions [...] its presence in scientific and popular discourse adds nothing to knowledge while it strengthens racist stereotypes" (1997, 225). Referring back to Linda Martín Alcoff's idea of representing Latinas/os' identity as an ethnicity, the terms Latina/o and Hispanic

²¹ Of course, black-skinned Dominicans or light-skinned Puerto Ricans do not suffer the same degree of homogenisation or racial prejudice as white Argentineans or Cubans because they are able to blend into the North American melting pot without visible distinctiveness.

eventually reduce the racial connotations that others such as black or white denote in North American society; at the same time, the former recognises the cultural links among Latinas/os in the North” (Alcoff 2000, 25). However, if ethnicity consists of a set of social practices that can be discerned and distinctly drawn out, the ethnic terms Latina/o or Hispanic are not yet adequate to portray the reality of heterogeneous Latin American communities in the United States. For many people in the United States, “‘white ethnic’ indicates that unless otherwise identified, ‘ethnics’ are assumed to be nonwhite and thus they are racialized” (Alcoff 2000, 37). The term “ethnicity” implies race, since for Latinas/os it is primarily used to refer to the culture of those considered non-white, and therefore, unable to escape racial connotations.

Perhaps William Luis’ approach to the definition of the term Latino offers a view closer to the reality experienced by many Latinas/os living in the United States. Luis states that:

Latino refers to political, social, historical, and racial realities that define the lives of many Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics, born or raised and educated in the United States, demanding the same rights enjoyed by Anglo-Americans. (1997, 279)

Following William Luis and until a more accurate definition is identified, I will use the term “Latina” —and more specifically US/Caribbean— to refer to a group of women with a Hispanic Caribbean background that live in the United States who represent a united force on the mainland that seeks the same political recognition as North Americans. Similarly, I will use dual nomenclatures such as Puerto Rican American, Dominican American, and Cuban American specifically to address those writers born or educated in the United States and to emphasise, when appropriate, Latinas’ individualities and particularities.

US/Caribbean Women's Writing: Differences and Divergences

The major themes found in Latina literature are not exclusive to Hispanic Caribbean women's experience of (post)colonialism.²² In the particular case of Dominican American literature written by women, their works converge with those of male writers in sharing similar topics such as the narration of the traumatic immigrant experience of Dominicans in the United States, the difficulties of adjustment within mainstream society, and the construction and negotiation of their identities between two worlds. Both Dominican American women's and men's literature are marked by three important events: the North American invasion of the island, the end of Trujillo's dictatorship and the post 1980s economic migration to New York. As a result of the declining economic conditions in the Dominican Republic during these periods, soon the migrant poor peasants and residents of urban ghettos outnumbered Dominican middle class emigrants in the United States increasing the number of unemployed, destitute and the hopeless. The experience of immigration from turbulent and tumultuous Dominican governments such as those of Trujillo, Balaguer and North American imperialism, as well as Dominicans' isolation and poor living situations within the dominant culture in North American society constitute central literary themes that unite Dominican writers in the United States. A well-known literary figure of the 1990s who illustrates the situation of poverty and disempowerment in these transplanted Dominican communities is Junot Díaz. Díaz's collection of stories *Drown* (1996) portrays the lives of misery and uprooting of Dominicans who live either in the Dominican Republic or the United States.

Among topics of exile and migration, race —an issue evidently absent from Dominican literature written in the island— becomes one of the major concerns in Dominican

²² Political exiles from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Cubans José María Heredia, Cirilo Villaverde and José Martí were forerunners of these women in their use of certain literary topics.

American literature.²³ Writers such as Noberto James Rolling, Chiqui Vicioso and Miguel A. Vázquez choose to confront racial issues in their writings: prejudices against Hispanic Caribbean culture, the mutilating strategies of the self through the whitening of skin colour, and Dominicans' lack of awareness of an African American heritage. Dominican American literature analyses the extent to which the immigrant and exile experiences between patriarchal Spanish Caribbean and North American societies impact on, alter or extend the vision of belonging across transnational contexts. Because Dominicans are the newest members of a Caribbean population living in the United States, Dominican American literature combines elements that already appeared in Puerto Rican and Cuban American literature.²⁴

As regards Cuban American literature, its heterogeneity is not only visible in the divergence between themes tackled by first and second generation Cuban writers in the United States. The variety of their literary production is noteworthy, on the one hand, for their use of the English and Spanish languages in their works, and on the other hand, for the different thematic threads developed by both men and women. Writers who belong to the first generation of Cuban exiles, such as Hilda Pereira, María Irene Fornés, Matías Montes Huidobro, and Benítez Rojo, Heberto Padilla, José Kozer, and Lourdes Gil, write in Spanish as a means of preserving their Cuban cultural roots, and in order to affiliate themselves with the canon of Cuban and Latin American letters. Cuban American literature produced in

²³ One notable exception is the poet Blas Jiménez who has consistently cultivated a Black aesthetic in Dominican poetry for the last twenty years. Dominican literature written in the island addresses mainly religious and philosophical topics, the struggle between right and wrong, dictatorships, history and travelling experiences, among others. For an overview of the main literary topics present in the literature written in the Dominican Republic see Giovanni Di Pietro. 1993. *Temas de Literatura y de Cultura Dominicanas*, Santo Domingo: Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo.

²⁴ The Puerto Ricans were soon joined by a large wave of Cubans as middle-class exiles. They sought refuge in San Juan but also in Miami, Newark, and New York City. Cubans arrived in four migratory waves: from 1959 to 1962; from 1965 to 1972 and from 1989 to 1994; whereas Dominicans became a noticeable presence in Latino communities only from the 1970s and 1980s. William Luis. 1997. *Dance between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States*, London: Vanderbilt University Press.

English, on the other hand, is common in the narratives of writers such as Roberto Fernández, Achy Obejas, Elías Miguel Muñoz, Pablo Medina, Virgil Suárez, Reinaldo Arenas, and Cristina García, who try to create a distinctive culture of Cuban roots that serves as mediation between Spanish and English worlds.

Cuban literature written in North America is concerned to a lesser extent with those topics it shares with Puerto Rican and Dominican American writers and deals mainly with events and situations on the island. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans concentrate on their lives as immigrants or political refugees who migrated to New York and present a view of both spaces, from the inside and the outside. Therefore, they not only illustrate life in their native country, but they combine two continents, two cultures and two languages. Although the memories of a past life on the island and the processes towards the definition of the self in the new mainland vary depending on the perspectives and approaches Cuban American writers have on the Cuban (native) land and (adopted) North American society, both generations engage in the construction of a personal and collective identity: they connect past and present, and share common cultural, social and sometimes political concerns. It is, however, the similarities and divergences of their literature that shape their identities as Cuban Americans, build bridges between Cuban communities in the United States, and bring Cuban American writing into mainstream North American literature continuing, in this way, to establish itself as a significant writing force in the United States.

Like Dominican American and Cuban American literature, Puerto Rican American literature is also marked by a clearly delineated period of history: the Operation Bootstrap (North America's industrialisation of Puerto Rico) that resulted in massive migratory waves of Puerto Ricans to North America in the 1940s and 1950s. In the same vein as their counterparts in the island, Puerto Rican writers are concerned with examining the lives of

exiles in North American society and in questioning conflicts of identity that arise from the clash that occurs when two languages and cultures come together. Topics such as isolation and alienation from mainstream society and North American racial attitudes are ever present in their literature: Puerto Rican Americans Nicholasa Mohr, Sandra María Esteves, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Esmeralda Santiago, Piri Thomas, and Aurora Levis Morales focus on the problematics of Puerto Rican self-representation in contexts of ethnicity, gender and nationhood.

The literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant are common themes in the literary works of both Hispanic Caribbean men and women because as Diasporic subjects, they share what Stephanie Newell identifies as a state of “exile, displacement, nomadism, migration and in-betweenness” (1996, 43) —each of these terms expressing a different relationship to home. Latinas’ literature amplifies our knowledge of the Spanish Caribbean Diasporic experience because they focus on intimate questions of subjectivity which often escape some of the more public male discourses. These issues include the politics of the lesbian body (Achy Obejas), rape within marriage (Loída Maritza Pérez) and difficult pregnancies that bring with them conflictive mother/daughter relationships (Cristina García), among others.

Just like Latinas, their female counterparts in the Caribbean islands have also moved into the mainstream of literary activity. Different generations of women writers such as Puerto Ricans Ana Lydia Vega, Mayra Montero, and Mayra Santos Febres, Dominican Aída Cartagena Portalatín and Ángela Hernández Núñez coincide in sharing a preoccupation with articulating their gendered position in Spanish Caribbean societies to become the catalysts of their own voices. Although questions of gender are foregrounded in their literature, it would be misleading to suggest that these women are only concerned with gender issues. Indeed,

their range of themes includes religion, history and politics and so on. In contrast to the literature produced by Spanish Caribbean women at home, Latinas write from a hybrid perspective of living at the interstices of multicultural geographies and thus the idea of “hybridity” becomes a major concern in their literature.

Latina literature provides a background for understanding Latinas as a collective voice that advances the position of women as writers and agents of their own stories, rather than being a creation of men’s literary works.

It is also important to highlight the intersection of constructs such as race, class, gender, and sexuality with history and Historiography given their importance to our understanding of Latina’s processes of identity formation in the works examined in this thesis.

Conventional historiography has always relegated the “subaltern” —borrowing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s terminology—, to the “object” upon which Western elite literature has re-written its own history “from above”, as Madhava Prasad suggests (1997, 147). Such reproduction of history through a capitalist and imperialist perspective has implied the appropriation of the subaltern’s discourse. As a result, the subaltern only acquires a voice through the voice of the one that reproduces it, that is, the white historian, thus producing a “distortion” of that same history. This appropriation by the dominant, elitist/bourgeoisie historian leads to, as Ranajit Guha critiques:

[...] a mediation of the insurgent’s consciousness by the historian’s— that is, of a past consciousness by one conditioned by the present. The distortion which follows necessarily and inevitably from this process is a function of that hiatus between event-time and discourse-time which makes the verbal representation of the past less than accurate in the best of cases. (Guha 1983, 33)

In his article “Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography”, Gyan Prakash describes the subaltern figure as one “produced by historical discourses of domination”, but which

nevertheless “provides a mode of reading history differently from those inscribed in elite accounts” (Prakash 1997, 492). Latinas are a clear example of re-appropriation of their own history; being the “speaking subjects” they challenge nationalist and imperialist conventions of historiographical representation together with the “abstraction” to which they have been subjected within the national realm.

As a product of the Diaspora, Latina literature is written from a new perspective that enables women to re-think culture, history and identity, and their position within the national arenas. Puerto Rican American Judith Ortiz Cofer has suggested that literature by Spanish Caribbean women writers most of the time “is obsessed with class and race” and “lacks the universality that bonds the common human family, regardless of language, class or geography” (1994, 268). Latina literature, instead, helps to develop a consciousness of what it means to be Latina in the United States and back in Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Latina feminist writing is best seen, as Chandra Mohanty Talpade says in her article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” when referring to postcolonial feminist writing, as “a mode of intervention into particular hegemonic discourses and as a political praxis which counters and resists the totalizing imperative of age-old ‘legitimate’ and ‘scientific’ bodies of knowledge” (1994, 197). Mohanty’s observations regarding the monopoly of the national and literary discourse by men are particularly substantiated in US/Caribbean women’s literature which offers new representations of women through women’s perspectives.

In representing and reformulating US/Caribbean women’s subjectivity, the issue of language has created some of the major differences between those writers that produce in the United States, writing in English, and their women counterparts back in the Spanish

Caribbean islands who write in Spanish.

The Politics of Latina Language

Latinas' attempts to knit together different strands of identity through the processes of assimilation and resistance are stylistically reflected in their literature through the use of both the English and the Spanish languages. The choice of using one language or another is related to three major reasons: the politics of economics and publishing, the psychology of adapting to a new society, and the question of code-switching.

Latinas' use of English is closely connected to the audience they write for and their efforts to place themselves within the North American literary market. Sherezada Vicioso, who has been publishing in the United States in English, says that "because so many of my potential readers live in New York, I am definitely moving more and more toward publishing in the United States" (Heyck 1994, 275). However, other Latinas' decision to write in English corresponds to their processes of assimilation in North American society. Julia Álvarez says that "what happened to me is that we left the Dominican Republic and I landed not in the US, but in English" (Sirias 2001, 2).²⁵ Latinas' writing in English, as Francis Aparicio states, does not derive simply from a process of voluntary assimilation or acculturation (1994, 795-801). Along Aparicio's lines, I propose that Latinas' use of the English language is not a deliberate choice, but that it finds its basis in both the historical background of the islands, such as Puerto Rico's subjugation to North American imperialism, and Puerto Ricans' consequent

²⁵ Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a widely published Cuban American, addresses the question of identity and language in his poem "Dedication" in the following terms: The fact that I/am writing to you/in English/already falsifies what I/wanted to tell you./My subject/how to explain to you/that I don't belong to English/though I belong nowhere else,/if not here/in English". Denis Lynn Daly Heyck, ed. 1994. *Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*. London: Routledge, 375.

Puerto Rican Tato Laviera's poem "My graduation speech" also offers a similar, if more poignant comment, on issues of linguistic code-switching: "english or spanish/ spanish or english/spanenglish...so it is, spanGLISH to matao/what digo/ay, virgin, yo no sé hablar". Tato Laviera. 1992. *La Carreta Made a U-Turn*, Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992, 17.

education and upbringing in North America. Although they have been criticised for writing only in English and are seen as both intruders and outsiders who have adopted a foreign language (Cofer 1994, 265), Julia Álvarez, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Chicana Sandra Cisneros write in the language they know best. Judith Ortiz Cofer states that “as a daughter of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, English is the language that gives life to my work, the characters I create, and that stimulates me as a writer” (1994, 266). Despite the fact that their almost monolingual English texts derive from their intellectual formation, the intersection of English and Spanish reflects their hybridity as members of multicultural spaces. Cofer asserts that Latinas:

do not write English “like a “British subject”, nor are they in any way trying to emulate the culture or the values of England. The rhythms of our American language are ever changing, representing the many cultures that exist in the nation. (1994, 269)

Latinas’ code-switching from English to Spanish is more than an act of resistance to becoming English monolinguals. Rather, the play with both English and Spanish is an adaptation to the trauma of migration. Celia Jaes Falicov points out in her article “Ambiguous Loss: Risk and Resilience in Latino Immigrant Families” that this adaptation involves the creation of “cultural spaces and pockets of remembrance that facilitate continuity and change” (2002, 274). Indeed, Latinas’ “continuity” is reflected by the use of Spanish language in their works; “change” is filtered through their internalisation of the English language. As descendants of a mixed heritage, Latina writers have the privilege of being able to express themselves in both languages (if not fully in Spanish, like Puerto Ricans Esmeralda Santiago and Rosario Ferré) as a response to their feelings of being inside and outside of a culture. Language is, after all, “a powerful lens through which we can detect the ways in which

Latin@s use different voices to speak as members of different groups at different times, and even at the same time” (Zentella 2002, 321).

Despite language being a vital component that stresses Latinas’ differences from their female counterparts back in the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico, other major reasons exist for the separation and divergence of the literature from the islands and that written in North America.

A Literature of Journey, Diaspora, Home and Memory

As mentioned earlier, Latina writers recreate the stories of migrations, the desire and the complicity of being and not being part of a country and its official and unofficial histories. The struggle to build a national identity, the constant metaphor of the refugee, the displaced past, and the preservation of rituals and traditions make the writings of these women a kind of threshold between the past and the present, the new and the old that complicates earlier narratives both spatially and temporally. Their literature is, according to Robert Pack and Jay Parini of “undeniably imaginative power and complexity” (1994, ix).

One of the main topics that underlie US/Caribbean women’s literature is the representation of the self through the motif of the body, both in physical and psychological terms. Whilst Cuban poets attempted to procure a process of cultural and national differentiation after the middle of the nineteenth century and during the 1920s and 1930s by textualising *la mulata* in their works, the repositioning of images of *la mulata* and the black woman within the national sphere started to be disseminated at the beginning of the twentieth century from a woman’s point of view. The body becomes a tool that is used to criticise the violation of women by heterosexual discourses and that serves as a device to explore issues of race, sexuality, and gender. Indeed, the racialisation of the Latina body becomes one of the

pivotal topics in US/Caribbean women's literature. Julia Álvarez (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, 1991), Loída Maritza Pérez (*Geographies of Home*, 1999), Angie Cruz (*Soledad*, 2001) and Cristina García (*The Agüero Sisters*, 1997) depict the female body as a mechanism to denounce the historical baggage that encumbered women in the Spanish Caribbean and Latinas' present reality in the United States.

One direct consequence that results from the racialisation of Latinas' bodies and has a crucial impact on Latinas' subjectivity formation in North America are the practices of "passing", or *blanqueamiento*, that already existed in the Spanish Caribbean. Under these practices, Latinas (the colonised subjects) are forced to (re)produce the coloniser's discourse of power (North America). In turn, this mimicry, as Jacques Lacan refers to it (2001), modifies colonial discourse and produces a new hybrid identity for the colonial subject.

For Latinas, "passing" is not only a mere shift from one cultural self to another or from a certain economic condition to a successful capitalist position within mainstream white North American society. Rather, the physical transformation of the body also means an alteration of identity since "[a]ppropriate class behaviour must be demonstrated, such as having the right occupation, income, social club, and church, so that it is clear the person 'acts white'" (Davis 1991, 97). Because "passing" requires the need to cut away one's roots, the rupture in the relationship between body and mind/identity exacts deep emotional costs. The body becomes an assertively explicit text that demands to be read as a political statement about gender, ethnicity and relationships of power.

Another pivotal area of concern that characterises US/Caribbean women's literature results from the experience of migration, the need to return to one's roots as a means of self-discovery. This literary motif is filtered through the journey theme and the mechanism of

memory.²⁶ The journey motif becomes a physical movement and psychological metaphor for the search for identity and a crucial device in representing identities on the move, in particular, those subjectivities that search for a place of belonging. Many Latinas have been born in the United States and their connection with the homeland is through memories, family stories and imagination. Others, descendants of exiled communities, have only been able to return to their homelands when they reach adulthood. Through the discourse of memory and nostalgia they try to put together two different worlds, two different languages, two different ways of expressing their concerns. Similarly, nostalgia —and its manifestations of melancholy and longing for a lost past— functions as a mechanism that keeps traditional values alive as well as hindering Latinas' assimilation in North American society by acts of resistance filtered through the motif of memory.

Memory plays an important role in that the act of remembering becomes both a metaphorical and intellectual shift to explore the self through nostalgia, the relevance of the past, and the reality of the present. Indeed, memory as a tool that helps the character to move towards the future can provide a way to shape identity when bringing together past and present since this results in a cultural recovery and, in turn, develops new relationships with the past. Memory is the medium through which history is re-interpreted and identity revisited, as in Julia Álvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000) and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994); memory also functions to connect personal family ties and the sense of longing for home, as in Loída Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home* and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*. It also works to link individual experiences of migration to a wider collective unity of Diaspora. Cristina García's most recent novel *Monkey Hunting* (2003) portrays this

²⁶ The journey, in the nature of the novel genre and as a powerful expression of a character's initiation in life and search for his or her own identity, has always been a particular metaphor and topic in Latin American literature, to answer the question "Who am I?"

association by reflecting how the migrant's memory is used to represent individual and collective struggles of self-expression across (trans)national contexts. The articulation of personal testimonies through memory and ultimately through journeying back to the homeland either physically or psychologically (Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* and Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*) is necessary in order for healing to take place. On another level, nostalgia for the homeland is nurtured by a remembrance of the past, of pleasant memories of childhood in the homeland, but it is also invaded by terrible memories of political struggle and social instability.

Memory sometimes corresponds to a non-existent experience in history, that is, a product of imagination and fantasy that results from the distortion of reality.²⁷ Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints*, for instance, portrays this "absent experience" by imagining the Dominican Republic as a tropicalised myth based on its stereotypes as perceived by many North Americans. As Judith Ortiz Cofer says in the case of Puerto Rico, many (but not all) Latinas who go back to the island see it as:

a "paradise" where sunshine, flowers, and ownership of one's own business or plot of land brought everyone abundant food and eternal happiness. This mythical island (Puerto Rico) also boasted a population who knew no prejudice and where neither the dark color of one's skin nor one's humble birth were ever seen as a cause for rejection. All of this mythology had little or nothing to do with Puerto Rico, its inhabitants, and the reality of that culture. (1994, 267)

These more individual accounts of memory through the different combined discourses of the characters represent a microcosm through which in reconstructing memory, national and cultural identity are redefined. The literary journey and the reclaiming of the past are the primary motifs used to explore the intersections between memory and identity.

²⁷ The "absent" physical experience does not nullify its condition of being an experience, even if this is constructed by the imagination or through fantasy.

Going back not only demythifies stereotypes of the homeland, or as Judith Ortiz Cofer says “there is no pretense that going back will solve problems, bring equality and happiness” (1994, 269). Rather, the journey motif stresses the discovery of sense of belonging, which in some cases means a permanent stay in the island, as in Angie Cruz’s novel *Soledad*; and in others, it signifies the return to North America, as exemplified in novels such as Julia Álvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* and Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints*. In her article “Nostalgia, Resistance and the Mestiza Migrant Subject in J. M. Gorriti’s *Si haces mal no esperes bien* and C. Matto de Turner’s *Aves sin nido* and *Herencia*”, Catherine Bryan perceives this homesickness as:

a many layered process, and one that clearly chooses sides. Nostalgia proves to be a political emotion, illness, motivation, act or desire that cuts across prohibition with a will to memory, as fragmented as that memory may seem. (2004, 48)

The decision to choose between one and another geographical place depends on the ability to come to terms with two realities that clash with each other. As Julia Álvarez expresses in an interview with Juanita Heredia:

we had experienced situations that our Dominican cousins back on the island had not. Our eyes had seen new things that they had not seen and the same occurred with our USA friends. We were between worlds. We belonged nowhere. (Kevane and Heredia 2000a, 22)

Through Latinas’ interpreting the mechanisms of memory and journeying, identity is re-valued and re-thought as much at individual as at collective levels; Latinas’ return to the past strategically contributes to the negotiations of their sense of self. This individuality and collectivity are, moreover, achieved through the polyphonic discourses assigned to the plural

voices in the novels. The different narrators that connect their personal experiences with broader ones result in both pleasant and painful memories that constitute a united force across different spaces and varied historical periods. History therefore becomes a central presence in the formation of Latinas' perception of their identities and sense of belonging. Tsehloane Keto T. underlines the importance of history as closely related to one's identity formation, suggesting that:

History performs a fundamental task for society. This information or lack thereof shapes the contours of our evolving social identities as collectives of peoples in our inexorable passage through time. Our memory of the past molds our sense of consciousness about what went before us in this part of the universe in which we presently live and, by so doing, defines who we are. As a result the scope and content of the historical information that survives in our consciousness is a powerful social instrument with which we carve out an identity of who we were in the past, who we are in the present, and who we can be in the future. (1995, 3)

One of the narrative strategies that emphasises the journey motif and stresses its connections with different historical moments is the use of the flashback and forward technique. The backwards and forward movement of Latinas' subjectivities not only helps to reflect the shifting identity and problems of adjustment of the protagonists in both worlds, it also facilitates the characters' internal and external maturation. These narrative techniques are not just accidental, they coincide in showing the character's initiation into life. They answer the contentions of Annie O. Estuoy (1996) and Geta LeSeur (1995) when they refer to the formation and self-creation of identities from the point of view of the *Bildungsroman*:

among women and men who have been marginalized by the dominant social group, the *bildung* of the individual must take place within the context of community, chronicling culture, race, history, and place. It must provide its own referentiality since, for the Chicana, for blacks, and certainly for Dominicans, the white Eurocentric, English-speaking world holds few points

of common experience. (Augenbraum and Olmos 2000, 118).

Julia Álvarez responds to this coming to terms with the self in an interview with Catherine Wiley in *Bloomsbury Review*:

I think when I write, I write out of who I am and the questions I need to figure out. A lot of what I have worked through has got to do with coming to this country and losing a homeland and a culture, as a way of making sense. (1992, 9-10)

Latinas' position within North American culture and their physical and psychological odyssey to the homeland reports the journey of a traveller, but also the adventures, reunions, losses, lovers and battles that form part of one's sense of identity formation.

In fact, the fictionalised autobiographies of Latinas are, as Margaret E. Montoya says in her article "Masks and Identity", more than stories: "They are an important site of resistance. Furthermore, they invent, reform and refashion personal and collective identity" (1998, 37). The commonality of Latina themes lies in their feminist approaches and priority of issues such as their interests in class, gender, race and nationhood from a woman's perspective.

The first chapter of this thesis, "Transformation, Mutilation and Resistance: The Politics of the Female Body", focuses on the works of Cristina García's *The Agüero Sisters* (1997) and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), and Julia Álvarez's *How The García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), Angie Cruz's *Soledad* (2001) and Loída Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home* (1999). I shall explore the different ways in which Latinas mutilate themselves. These practices range from attempts to (re)create images of the self that respond to paternalistic and capitalist discourses on femininity, to failed efforts to denounce the negative impact that heterosexual discourses have upon women's bodies.

To continue my discussion on the nature of Latinas' identity exploration, the second chapter of this thesis, "Mothers, Daughters, Wives and Prostitutes: Contesting Identity within the Politics of Family and Nation", will consider the different ways in which Latinas' subjectivities are negotiated within the institution of the family. The works of Cristina García (*Dreaming in Cuban*), Julia Álvarez (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*), Nelly Rosario (*Song of the Water Saints*), Angie Cruz (*Soledad*), and Loída Maritza Pérez (*Geographies of Home*) offer a view of how Latinas' coming of age is determined by institutions such as motherhood, wifehood and family that question social and cultural values between different generations of women within and across national contexts. Family relationships are furthermore troubled by cultural, linguistic and ideological differences that highlight the emotional and psychological distance between family members across diasporic borders.

The third chapter, "Travelling Across Languages: Journey, Memory and Return", analyses the works of Julia Álvarez (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*), Cristina García (*Dreaming in Cuban*), Angie Cruz (*Soledad*), Loída Maritza Pérez (*Geographies of Home*), Nelly Rosario (*Song of the Water Saints*) and Esmeralda Santiago (*When I was Puerto Rican*). Here I shall explore how identity is complicated by irreconcilable language games through the backward and forward movement between the Spanish Caribbean and North America, and the dynamics of journeying and memory. The processes of identity formation and cross-cultural subjectivities through the journey motif acquire metaphorical dimensions when travelling across geographies.

The fourth chapter "Searching for Home: (Trans)national Connections and the (Im)Migrant Chinese Experience in Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*", opens new ground to explore the Chinese immigrant experience in Cuba, and in particular, how the collective

experience of loss, exile and migration can link hybrid identities across transnational spaces, that is, the connection that exists between the Diaspora and the migrant experience.

The fifth chapter, “Rethinking History: Women and National Identity in Julia Álvarez’s *In the Name of Salomé* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*,” illustrates the project of historical recovery by using techniques characteristic of the testimonial genre and by the dual positioning of the narrator as outsider/insider in relation to both North American and Dominican cultures. The reconstruction of history and the chronicling of women’s feminist contributions within the national sphere are recounted from a position of in-betweenness that confronts cultural displacement and dislocation from an historical Dominican heritage. At the same time, the involvement of women in socio-political movements for national independence, liberation and decolonisation both in the private and public spheres are rendered visible.

As writers whose works are still in progress, US/Caribbean literary production offers a fresh and up to date insight into the reality of many Latinas living in the United States. The five chapters that constitute this thesis disclose fluid identities on the move and trace the psychological and physical movements in the formation of Latina’s identity through physical and psychological spaces. Latinas’ experiences are located within a microcosm of negotiation of the self (body) and others (family) that moves towards a further complicated macrocosm (nation and Diaspora) through the motifs of race, gender, memory, return, language and home.

CHAPTER ONE

TRANSFORMATION, MUTILATION AND RESISTANCE:

THE POLITICS OF THE FEMALE BODY*

*Los cuerpos de mujer que se entregan a los artificios y tecnologías del adorno abren una interrogante: ¿se trata de una tortura voluntaria, de un acto más de sumisión o de una experiencia dirigida hacia un sentido de la identidad?*²⁸

Lucía Guerra 2004

(Re)Creating the Body and the Mind in Cristina García's *The Agüero Sisters* and Angie Cruz's *Soledad*

Lucía Guerra's observation, which interrogates the reasons behind women's bodily transformation, introduces one of the main concerns in US/Caribbean women's writing: the motif of the body —and its representations— which function as a strategy for self-identification, social recognition and integration in both the Spanish Caribbean and North America.

The manifestations of Latinas' bodies through skin colour and racial features become leading signifiers of empowerment or dispossession when associated with social and cultural

* An earlier, shorter version of this chapter appears in the special issue of *Letras Femeninas: Asociación Internacional de Literatura Femenina Hispánica: Cuerpo/Género/Texto: El Imaginario Corporal en la Literatura Femenina Hispánica* under the title "Mutilation, Poetics and Aesthetics: Writing the Female Body in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*", eds. María Alicia C. Garza and Florence Moorhead-Rosenberg, 2004. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 51-63. A short article on Julia Álvarez's *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* has been published in Spanish in the second volume of *Reflexiones: Ensayos sobre Escritoras Hispanoamericanas Contemporáneas* under the edition of Dra. Priscilla Gac-Artigas in http://bluehawk.monmouth.edu/~pgacarti/A_Alvarez_Ensayo_el_cuerpo_inscrito.html. August 2005, entitled "El Cuerpo Inscrito: De Cómo Sandra García Perdió su Identidad".

²⁸ "Those women's bodies that give themselves up to the artifices and technologies of adornment open up interrogations: is it a voluntary torture, another act of submission or an experience towards a sense of identity?" Lucía Guerra. 2004. "Cuerpo de mujer y rituales del adorno en *Ifigenia* de Teresa de la Parra", *Letras Femeninas, Número Especial Cuerpo/Género/Texto: El Imaginario Corporal en la Literatura Femenina Hispánica* 3 (1): 129-40, 129.

politics. As Sidonie Smith suggests in her book *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*, the body functions as “a sorting mechanism whereby the culturally dominant and the culturally marginalized are assigned their “proper” places in the body politic” (Smith 1993, 10). Latinas’ negotiation of identity across transnational spaces through bodily transformations results from the need to conciliate systems of domination, imperialism, colonialism, and racism that de-identify the self, giving rise to a psychologically mutilated Latina consciousness.

Debra. L. Gimlin’s study *Body Work: Beauty and Self-Image in American Culture* (2002) explores precisely the idea of the concept of mutilation and of female subjectivity formation in terms of the relationship between women and beauty. Gimlin analyses from a feminist sociological perspective how North American emphasis on stereotypes of beauty has created a collective preoccupation with achieving the perfect body, describing the experience and processes of “outrage at the self-torture, deprivation, and mutilation” that women undergo to attain hegemonic beauty ideals (Gimlin 2002, 16-17).

While Gimlin’s position on female identity construction focuses on the interplay between participation and resistance to dominant ideologies of beauty, Cristina García’s *The Agüero Sisters* (1997) and Angie Cruz’s *Soledad* (2001) elaborate a wider and more complex view on how Latinas perceive their bodies as the means of achieving economic and upward social mobility, or as the mechanism to resist —unsuccessfully— assimilation in North American society. Strategies of self-mutilation acquire a politicised dimension in identity constructions that go far beyond purely aesthetic concerns: whereas in Cristina García’s text transformations of the female body are welcomed to avoid racial, class and economic discrimination in white North American mainstream society, in Angie Cruz’s novel the racialised body that tries to resist and rebel against such established standards of taste and

beauty succumbs to the impact that discourses of the dominant cultures have upon Latinas' psyche.

In Cristina García's *The Agüero Sisters*, Constanica Agüero epitomises the image of the successful North American businesswoman. She has built her financial capital in Miami through her *Cuerpo de Cuba* factory, is Americanised and treated by Anglos as an honorary "white", and her factory in Miami places her in a position of economic success (she is awarded a "powder-pink Cadillac convertible") for her profitable sales (García 1997, 18). Constanica's strategies for being included in white North American economic mainstream society take the form of an effective physical device of empowerment through altering the self through the art of dressing, the worshipping of make up, the hairstyle, the whitening of the self: "she has soft white skin and a petite figure, and wears a short strand of pearls and lacquered nails to match her scarlet lips" (García 1997, 18).²⁹ For Constanica, the embellishment of her physical appearance through artifice is a tool that enhances her complexion and disguises her self in order "pass".³⁰ Constanica's efforts to be accepted in capitalist North America through the phenomenon of "passing" are risky and dangerous. Although "passing" stands as a site of pleasure and pride that allows the creation of a new selfhood, at the same time, "passing" becomes fundamentally conservative. Maria Carla Sánchez refers to this act noting that, "although it may often represent social progress for an

²⁹ Constanica's nonconformity with her physical features recalls the protagonist in Loida Martiza Pérez's novel *Geographies of Home* Iliana, the whitest of three light-skinned Hispanic sisters. She knows about the contradictory features of her face, which are definitely not beautiful (Pérez 1999, 43): "Her brows curled every which way and met each other so that it seemed she had not two but one above her horn-rimmed glasses. Her lips pouted so sullenly that despite chiseled cheeks and a nose her sisters envied as "white" she appeared the ugliest of the three" (Pérez 1999, 41). Like Constanica, Iliana struggles to come to terms with her physical appearance when set against North America's standards of beauty. Her concerns with not being accepted in mainstream society create an internalised perception of herself as ugly and worthless. Loida Maritza Pérez. 1999. *Geographies of Home*, New York: Penguin Books.

³⁰ The phenomenon of "passing" as white in the context of North American race relations is of significant importance given the effect and impact that processes such as whitening the self have on Latinas' perceptions and definitions of selfhood. The desire to "pass" results from the racialisation of non-white bodies, ensured by North America's "one drop rule" which recognised any person with black blood as black, and therefore as the subaltern and the excluded. While passing seeks inclusiveness in North American society, the internalisation of these racial discourses also guarantees the continuation of racial and class hierarchies.

individual, it generally holds larger social hierarchies firmly in place” (Sánchez 2001, 3). “Passing” might be also understood in Homi K. Bhabha’s terms of mimicry, of repetition rather than representation of another culture that helps to articulate “those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference” (Bhabha 1994, 89). For Constancia, “passing” becomes both a site of danger and shame: her self is physically and psychologically mutilated and ultimately alienated within social structures of power.

The processes that Constancia undergoes in order to “pass” by whitening herself physically (and psychologically) through her cosmetic surgery cross racial and cultural lines, and as Joel Williamson suggests in a different context, “maintains the fiction of being white” (Williamson 1980, 102). In the same vein, in his work *The Black Image in Latin America* (1976), Richard L. Jackson points out that the emphasis on physical appearance and celebration of white female beauty transforms whiteness into the norm, and leads to “those practices common in Latin America and the United States by which individuals seek to “whiten” themselves” (Jackson 1976, xii).

Constancia’s identification of white with power, prestige, and beauty is common to the Hispanic Caribbean experience in which Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban *mulatas* and black women have been victimised throughout history. In the Hispanic Caribbean where skin colour and physical features ascribe racial identification and class status to individuals, the practices of “*blanqueamiento*” (whitening) were significant as a path to political power and social prestige; while darker skin stood as synonym of dispossession and powerlessness.³¹ Constancia’s attempts to reinvent the Cuban female body through her *Cuerpo de Cuba* factory show her to be an individual who has internalised the vestiges of colonialism and imperialism,

³¹ The exploration of the role that race and ethnicity have played in the formation of Spanish Caribbean national identity is dealt in great detail in works such as David Howard. 2001. *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic*, Oxford: Signal Books, and Lewis K. Gordon. 1983. *Main Currents of Caribbean Thought The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

in a society where whiteness corresponds to power and social privilege. Her recreation of the Cuban body in the United States through the aesthetic priorities that she chooses to reflect the ideology of the Cuban nation that she espouses are as significant as the name she chooses for her parlour which promotes “high desirability stem[ming] from [her] physical similarity to the white standard of beauty” (Neal and Midge 1989, 328).

Constancia’s equating of power with whiteness contrasts with Puerto Rican Julia de Burgos’ poem (1996, 32-33) “Ay, ay, ay de la grifa negra” [“Ay, Ay, Ay of the Kinky-Haired Negress”] (see the discussion of the term “grifo” on page 14). De Burgos presents the Puerto Rican nation as a mulatta entity where “*la [raza] blanca se ensombrará en la negra*” and her black race will mix with the white one. While in De Burgos’s poem the image of the woman moves from being an object to a vitalising force, Constancia remains both object and victim of a colonial past of racial and social stratifications which she re-enacts in North America. Constancia’s colonised mentality functions metaphorically as her island Cuba in the sense that her consciousness and her body become a space colonised by North America. Judith Williamson refers to this metaphorical correlation in her article “Woman Is an Island: Femininity and Colonization”:

Woman is an island because she is mysterious, distant, and a place to take a holiday; but she is also an island within ideology —surrounded and isolated, as the colony is by the colonizer, held intact as the “Other” within a sea of sameness. (Williamson 1986, 107)

Constancia’s strategies of “passing” blur racial, gender and class boundaries and whitening her self creates false alternatives of self-representation. Indeed, her means of recognition and empowerment are translated into an overt rejection of her racial identity and her internalisation and promotion of white cultural values suggests continuity with the colour and

class hierarchical structures in Spanish Caribbean society and the North American dominant culture. Ultimately, Constancia's attempts to "pass" become, as María Carla Sánchez states in a different context, a site for anxieties regarding "visibility, invisibility, classification, and social demarcation" (Sánchez 2001, 1). The physical signs that Constancia has deliberately inscribed on her body are more than a decorative mask. As Lucía Guerra notes in her article "Cuerpo de mujer y rituales del adorno en *Ifigenia* de Teresa de la Parra" when discussing women's bodily representations:

[e]stos signos son, por lo tanto, índices de construcciones culturales que emiten significados con respecto a las distinciones genéricas, a un determinado concepto de belleza, a una actitud y a una relación específica con el espacio natural procesado por una cultura determinada. (Guerra 2004, 130)

[These signs are, therefore, an indication of cultural constructs that emit meaning in relation to generic distinctions, a particular concept of beauty, an attitude, and a specific relationship to the natural space as processed by a particular culture]

Constancia's yearning to be white —and North American— results in a profound psychological crisis. Her appropriation of this racial discourse echoes Frantz Fanon's idea in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) that the internalisation of whiteness by blacks creates self-hate, self-negation and turns into a valuing of the self which depends on the other's perception.³² Claudette Williams refers to this concern with beauty when analysing the *mulata's* perception of race and social status of which Constancia is a metonym. Williams

³² Puerto Rican poet Carmen Colón Pellot reproduces the desire of a *mulata* to achieve closeness to the white female body in her poem "¡Ay, señor, que yo quiero ser blanca!" ["Oh Lord, I Want to Be White!"]: Oh, my Jesus!/Oh Lord, I want to be/blond and white:/like the foam,/like the pond,/like the blossoms/of the orange trees/on my mountain". Cited in Claudette M. Williams. 2003. *Charcoal and Cinnamon: The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 100-1. Equally, the dominance of whiteness and the link between the *mulata's* race and her social status are made explicit in the title of her poem "Motivos de envidia mulata" [Roots of Mulatta Envy]. Cited in Claudette M. Williams. 2003a. *Charcoal and Cinnamon: The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 102-3.

says that “her self-image depends totally on her perception of her white counterpart. She has internalized that perception of race that has led to the aesthetic, sexual, and moral devaluation of the colored woman” (Williams 2000, 102).

Aware of the pre-eminence men give to white women, Constanica reconciles class and power with beauty through a physical celebration of her body that leads her to an objectification of herself. Her body and femininity are simultaneously commodified and idealised through the excesses that capitalism exercises upon her. Constanica’s *Cuerpo de Cuba* factory attempts to reconstruct the female Cuban body through emollients, her products promising to “eradicate even the finest lines around the eyes” (García 1997, 17). Following Williamson and Jackson’s ideas on the internalised discourse of whiteness, Constanica’s *Cuerpo de Cuba* company may be read as not only promoting the idea that in order to be successful one must have the right skin colour, but also as expressing anxieties about being the right age and “keeping oneself young and beautiful”. Constanica’s concerns with beauty and her relating economic power with sex recalls the musical comedy *Roman Scandals* (1933), particularly the number “Keep Young and Beautiful”, in which the white male protagonist Eddie Cantor disguises himself as a black woman and sings to a group of female slaves on beauty secrets:

Keep young and beautiful,
It’s your duty to be beautiful;
Keep young and beautiful
If you want to be loved.
Don’t fail to do your stuff
With a little powder and a puff,
Keep young and beautiful
If you want to be loved.
If you’re wise, exercise all the fat off,
Take it off, off-a here, off-a there;
When you’re seen anywhere with your hair;
Take care of all those charms

And you'll always be in someone's arms,
Keep young and beautiful
If you want to be loved.

[...]

Athletics, cosmetics, a weighing machine,
Are part of the feminine daily routine,
For what?
And oceans of lotions and potions you take,
To keep that old something or other awake,
Why not?
Even after you grow old, baby,
You don't have to be a cold baby.

[...]

Each wrinkle in your skin,
Rub it out and rub a dimple in,
Keep young and beautiful
If you want to be loved.
If using or choosing a lipstick,
Use the kind that won't leave any mark;
Use the kind that'll make both his lips stick
When he kisses you in the dark.
Get him to hold you tight,
Let him get a whiff of Christmas night,
Keep young and beautiful
If you want to be loved.³³

The verses of this song not only underline women's position as sexual objects and victims of a masquerading femininity, a position that Constancia sustains with her beauty parlour *Cuerpo de Cuba*; it also echoes the race and power relations of capitalist societies and criticises the economics of sex.

While in North America youth and youth culture are highly rated symbols of activism and beauty, ageing signifies loss and deprivation of power and privilege. In his article "Ageing, Status Politics and Sociological Theory", Bryan S. Turner refers to political entitlement in North America as being clearly influenced by economic class. Turner suggests that the politics of ageing are "conceptualised as a series of conflicts along the economic, political and

³³ Dubin, A. 1993. "Keep Young and Beautiful", Written for *Roman Scandals*, <http://www.harrywarren.org/songs/0259.htm>. Date of access 27/09/2005.

cultural dimensions of the system of social stratification” (1989, 591). Constancia’s fear of ageing is symbolic of her fear of social disapproval, of being deprived of a particular life-style and economic class, and therefore, of losing her possibilities to reinforce her social entitlement in white North American mainstream society.

Constancia’s obsession with redefining the physical Cuban body differs greatly from the racial assurance of her half-sister Reina whose excessively androgynous and libidinous character, and her “dark-skinned and fat and impossibly placid” (García 1997, 45) makes her in Miami an “Amazonian goddess” for the men of Key Biscayne. Reina’s facial reconstruction by the attachment of a patch from Pepín’s backside, her daughter Dulcita’s long stretch of thigh and other people’s skin is not the result of her desire to configure a new representation of herself. Her cosmetic surgery is a physical reconstruction of a disfigured face, resulting from an accident that occurred while repairing an electrical system during a thunderstorm. Unlike Constancia, Reina does not deny the reality of her body: even though she has undergone plastic surgery she is proud of “the image of her image of herself” (García 1997, 13). Contrary to her sister, Reina articulates a more genuine and faithful discourse of racial pride. First, instead of recognising that the essence of her identity fails to conform to a popular version of beauty, Reina sets aside such a definition as her beauty comes from an assertion of her black body as power. Race takes a central and crucial position in Reina’s self-perception as for her, her skin colour embodies an integral part of her beauty. In fact, she takes pride in her racial identity and becomes a challenge to the white representation of blackness.

Constancia’s exaggerated efforts to accommodate North American standards of beauty as a means of embracing North American capitalism becomes, in contrast, a denial of her racial identity and, as a result, the other *Cubanas* “can’t make comfortable assumptions about



her” (García 1997, 43).³⁴ Aspiring to be white and North American comes first in her priorities. She represents “the processes of cultural conditioning whereby her internalization of white supremacist ideology determines [the *mulata*’s] her self-perception. Her desire to be white is self-denying and results in unhappiness” (Williams 2000, 104).

Constancia’s alteration of the self is also related to her rejection of her Cuban cultural past which is emphasised in Miami where she refuses to be part of a cultural environment. The presence of Miami in Constancia allows her to mediate her condition of exile and her memories of her past life in Communist Cuba:

Miami is disconcerting to her, an inescapable culture shock, the air thickly charged with expiring dreams.

The light is blinding too, a sentence to the past, to her life in Cuba. Everywhere, there is a mass of disquieting details. The deep-fried croquettes for sale on the corner. The accent of the valet who parks her car. Her seamstress’s old-fashioned stitching. And the songs, slow as regret, on the afternoon radio. (García 1997, 44)

Although Constancia romanticises her Cuban past in the island through the labels that appear on her beauty products that promote a nostalgic essence of female Cubanness, she avoids awakening personal memories from the past: her relationship with her mother Blanca, who abandoned her when her sister Reina was born, and her mother’s murder by the sisters’ father. In her book *Writing Mothers, Writing Daughters: Tracing the Maternal in Stories by American-Jewish Women*, Janet Burstein (1996) refers to the internal struggle daughters confront between the possibilities of behaving like their mothers and the desire to be different

³⁴ Constancia’s exclusion by and alienation from the other exiled *Cubanas* living in Miami recalls the racism that the García girls experience back in the Dominican Republic after living in New York in Julia Álvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*. Carla García, for instance, is criticised because “her hair turned frizzy on the Island, and every night she ironed it, then rolled it into a “tubie”, using her head as a large roller”. Julia Álvarez. 1991. *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, New York: Algonquin Books, 113. Like the García girls, Constancia’s choice of North American dominant ideology over Cuban values in her search for social integration in North America positions her as betrayer of her own heritage, identifying her instead as a supporter of North American racial and gender discourses.

from them through the mirror motif. Although Burstein focuses on Jewish-American women, her analysis on daughters' battles to de-identify themselves from their mothers could be applied to Constancia's relationship with her mother Blanca. Burstein points out that daughters have two choices:

[b]etween the choices their mothers had made and the alternatives offered by their own time. They stood, as it were, between mirrors that offered incompatible images of the world and themselves. (Burstein 1996, 115)

Clearly, Constancia opts for separating herself from her mother choosing a different life driven by the need to break free from her mother's image in order to become individuated (Rich 1977, 236). She distances herself spatially and emotionally from her mother's memory and, therefore, from her Cuban land. Effectively, Constancia develops a "matrophobia", to which Adrienne Rich refers as:

[is] the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of becoming one's mother. Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (Rich 1977, 235-6)

Amid the workings of narcissism Constancia's matrophobia lies in her fear that her true self might "no longer exist" (García 1997, 103), but just remembered in the image of her mother Blanca's face that connects her to her Cuban past, her Cuban culture and life before becoming a Miami-Cuban exile.

Constancia's failure to negotiate her identity in North American society leads her to displacement and psychological fragmentation. She measures her worth in racial, social and

economic terms. Her processes of physical transformation clearly reflect her desire for material comfort, privilege, power and general social approval within North American society, but they also imply a rejection of her race. In doing this, she unconsciously helps to perpetuate racial and gender discourses inscribed on Latina women's bodies. Moreover, recalling the quotation from Lucía Guerra, certainly Constanacia's self-mutilating acts upon her body become actions of submission as Latina in North America and her acquiescence in her own racial and gender discrimination.

The strategies that Constanacia uses on her body in order to be included in white North American capitalist society and to appease society's dominant expectations contrast with those of Flaca in *Soledad*. Although Flaca cannot avoid the effects of the North American aesthetic discourse, her physical appearance projects an image of rebellion and resistance to authority and manifests her struggle against prevailing standards of beauty.

Flaca's frivolous painted red nails with silver lines down the centre, turquoise seashell bracelets and fake onyx necklaces (Cruz 2001, 30) are among the accessories she wears as sexual and racial signifiers as a Dominican American from the barrio. Although she has never been to the Dominican Republic, to "plátano land" where kids "are raised to be hard workers" (Cruz 2001, 28) and where, according to her cousin Soledad the "toilets don't flush" (Cruz 2001, 137), Flaca is proud of being part of the Dominican culture. Her self-determination about beauty concerns is reinforced by a proud sarcastic attitude in wearing a T-shirt that reads in big bold letters DOMINICANS GO ALL OUT (Cruz 2000, 43-44), when referring to Dominican women as "supposed to be the most beautiful women on the planet" (Cruz 2001, 42).

As a Dominican who lives in the barrio in New York, Flaca transcends both cultures spatially and reorganises them culturally offering a new alternative of bodily manifestations.

The latest essential North American fashion Flaca wears —“big door-knocker earrings, stretch denim jeans, hair slicked back tight into ponytail” (Cruz 2001, 14) — clearly suggest her distance from a Dominican youth culture. In fact, she cannot escape the gang subculture to which she belongs, reflected in her own style and use of street language. Whilst her mother wishes her to do better in school and dress more like “una señorita” (Cruz 2001, 26) —as Soledad does— Flaca’s identity is shaped by barrio life illustrated by her and her family’s segregation in a neighbourhood with poorly planned buildings, unpaved sidewalks and with “more cops on the streets than fire hydrants” (Cruz 2001, 13).

Although Flaca presents an alternative image of the body as urban and young, she cannot however escape North American racial discourses on beauty, particularly when her looks, and therefore her sexual power, are threatened by the “blanquitas” presence in the barrio: those “fugly bitches walking around here like they own the block ‘cause homeboys treat them like beauty queens just ‘cause they blanquitas” (Cruz 2001, 54). While Constancia opts for cosmetic products and makeup, Flaca expresses her feelings of disempowerment in the barrio through her hair alteration since black people’s hair is “the most visible stigma of blackness, second only to skin” (Mercer 1990, 249).³⁵ According to Angela M. Neal and Midge L. Wilson:

[b]lack females have been more profoundly affected by the prejudicial fallout surrounding issues of skin color, facial features, and hair. Such an impact can be attributed in large part of the importance of physical attractiveness for all women. (Neal and Wilson 1989, 328)

³⁵ In her text *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks also pays attention to the importance of hair as a sign of femininity. She says that “in European culture blond hair, in particular, was associated with characteristics of idealised femininity. Nineteenth-century ideology about the blond, the fair, and the golden haired usually associated blondness with both purity and power”. bell hooks.1992. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press; Bertram D. Ashe describes the impact that hair has on perceptions of the self, too. He asserts that “Hair alteration remains the most popular way to approximate a white female standard of beauty”. Bertram D Ashe. 1995. “Why don't he Like My Hair?": Constructing African-American Standards of Beauty in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", *African American Review* 29 (4): 579-592, 579.

Kathleen Thomson and Hilary Austin's photographic book *The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present* (1999) which focuses on images of black women in America throughout history, accurately places Flaca's preoccupation with hair in perspective as deriving from derogatory internalised images and assumptions that persist in society today:

Good hair is hair that is not kinky, hair that does not feel like balls of steel wool, hair that does not take hours to comb, hair that does not need tons of grease to untangle, hair that is long. Real good hair is straight hair, hair like white folks' hair. (Thompson and Austin 1999, 76)

Flaca's attempts to position herself at the level of the "blanquitas" prove to be useless since the physical features of her body are symptomatic of her true identity. As her mother Gorda says, although her bones stick out and she is thin and long "Flaca can't deny her raza" (Cruz 2001, 53).

The same concerns with hair and beauty as signs of exclusion from the mainstream are also present in Julia Álvarez's essays "I want to be Miss América" in her collection of essays *Something to Declare* (1999a, 37-44). Álvarez illustrates the impact that North American stereotypes of beauty have on herself and her sisters. They are anxious to look as if they belong to white North American society:

Although we wanted to look like we belonged here, the four sisters, our looks didn't seem to fit in. We complained about how short we were, about how our hair frizzed, how our figures didn't curve like those of the bathing beauties we'd seen on TV. (Álvarez 1999a, 39)

Bodily and racial preoccupations also beset in other characters in the novel *Soledad*, such as

Gorda and Soledad. Flaca's mother Gorda, for instance, is concerned with the physical image that a woman should have, and she projects these feelings on to her daughter:

For weeks Gorda was an emotional wreck. Everything anyone said hurt her feelings. [...] It's easy for you to say that, you're perfect. I look like one of those ugly wrinkled dogs. Gorda's eyes filled up in tears and all of a sudden Flaca started crying uncontrollably in the bedroom. (Cruz 2001, 33)

Like Gorda, Flaca's cousin Soledad cannot find comfort in her own body, of which she is deeply ashamed. Not only is Soledad anxious about how she is perceived by the others because her hips are as wide as the halls of the streets of East Village or her nipples harden every time they are exposed to the air conditioning (Cruz 2001, 11, 14, 62); but Soledad's lack of self-confidence is rooted in her coloured skin which, even though paler than her family's, does not grant her acceptance within white North American society. Soledad's racial recognition is related to a lack of self-determination which she admits contrasts with the confidence of her lesbian girlfriend Caramel, filled with "so much strength, comfortable in her own skin, not caring what anyone thinks" (Cruz 2001, 101). Furthermore, Soledad's nonconformity with her own skin is based on her fear of overcoming her sexual inhibitions. Her desire for acceptance by others, especially men, is founded upon her own insecurity. Unlike Caramel, Soledad has "learned not to make eye contact" (Cruz 2001, 12), and to keep herself to herself, which alienates her from her own community. Whilst Soledad's cousin Flaca uses her body as a source of empowerment, Soledad's nakedness creates the opposite effect. When Richie looks at her "up and down", for instance, she feels embarrassed at her own body as her stomach rolls around her waist and her thighs are covered in cellulite. More important, nevertheless, is Soledad's hesitation against giving her body and soul to someone who "ain't white" (Cruz2001, 86). Just like Flaca, Richie is shaped by barrio life. Soledad

fears that her sexual and emotional involvement with Richie might expose her to the violence, danger and ignorance that barrio life connotes. In an interview with Angie Cruz, Silvio Torres-Saillant recalls Washington Heights as “a rather notorious spot, a place which, at least in the 80s and early 90s, many viewed as a brood of drug activity, a dangerous locality” (2003, 109), to which the Dominican American writer responds:

Yes, and also it was the border of danger. Eventually, most of my family moved to 164th St. The novel takes place on 164th because I have a strong love for that street since I spent so much time growing up there. 164th was really hot. 165th St. was facing New York Presbyterian Hospital. The hospital served as kind of protection from that one street, and we occupied the border of what was “good” and “bad”. (Torres-Saillant 2003, 109)

Soledad fears that she might be associated with the working class, the poor, and the Hispanic community, she, “an art student with a full scholarship and [having] so much talent” (Cruz 2001, 18). In her work *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz defines the body not as “an ahistorical, biologically given, acultural object”, but as “a lived body” that is “irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities” (Grosz 1994, 18-19). Soledad’s awareness of skin colour and hair texture in the novel sets her apart from her family, causing her initial distance from and rejection of the barrio as well as of the people. Angie Cruz explains Soledad’s concern with race and hair and her relationship with her neighbourhood in the following terms:

I think if she had been a white Latina girl who was embarrassed by her neighborhood, it wouldn’t be such an issue. She didn’t trust the girls from the neighborhood, and she didn’t act like those girls or dated the guys from the neighborhood. Those attitudes just set her farther apart and she chose to be an artist and she chose to move out, I think that set her apart even more than color. But I think color really matters. Also I think hair texture does

make a big difference [...] I feel girls with straight hair have a certain privilege in the neighborhood, and I feel that also sets Soledad apart in the novel in a way. I think that a lot of Soledad's feeling like an outsider has to do with her light skin, but she in the end accepts Washington Heights culture. (Torres-Saillant 2003, 122)

Ultimately, Soledad's sexual experience with Richie on the roof is a lasting symbol of her accession to freedom and self-esteem since it symbolises acceptance of herself and allows her to focus on bodies other than her own. Once she has confronted her fear of having a relationship with a black boy from the "hood" she will signal her self-recognition as a woman and her inclusion by others in the society to which she belongs. Soledad's search for and acceptance of the self becomes a spiritual, bodily and racial recognition. Sex not only becomes a physical expression of the body, it also mirrors the soul; it is spiritually the mechanism that activates and reassures Soledad's respect for herself and others like herself.

Life in the barrio and the failure to achieve the American Dream is also portrayed in Angie Cruz's latest novel *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005). The author depicts the life of a Dominican family in Quepasó Street. Within the borders of a community that struggles for survival in its attempt to pursue the American Dream, Cruz reveals the family members' battle for survival on the streets: Bobby fights against drugs and violence, Dallas is reluctant to acquire an education, Don Chan and Santo long to go back to the island and Esperanza is obsessed with material comfort.

Despite Don Chan and his son's displacement in New York and their desire to return to the Dominican Republic, Esperanza Colón despises life in the island which has nothing to offer her:

my husband and I were dealt a bad hand. We were born in the wrong place, planted in the wrong lot. We were born to be roses or gladiolus, but we were planted among a whole bunch of weeds in DR. There really is nothing in D.R. for me. God got confused when he planted our seed. (Cruz 2005, 110-1)

Instead, she aspires to the attractive and luxurious life in consumerist North America, the land of opportunities, where “[t]o be important, one has to look important” (Cruz 2005, 32). Angie Cruz describes Esperanza’s obsession with the soap opera *Dallas* and her excessive materialism as a “commentary on globalization and how television is affecting the way American culture is perceived abroad” (Torres-Saillant 2003, 120).

Esperanza, whose Chinese father-in-law Don Chan Lee describes as a descendant from a clan of opportunists whose family worked for Trujillo, (Cruz 2005, 30) escapes to Puerto Rico abandoning her husband Santo and her first child Roberto María in the Dominican Republic. Once they reunite in New York Esperanza renames her son Bobby and her daughter Dallas, evoking the glamorous actors in *Dallas*. Had she herself had been born in the States, she would have changed her own name, “maybe into Hope Saint or Saint Hope. Something American sounding” (Cruz 2005, 182)

Esperanza becomes obsessed with being accepted in North America and develops an uncontrollable impulse to acquire consuming goods. She saves her pennies scrimping at every opportunity, cutting corners on the groceries:

Every minute she had alone, she counted the dollars and cents that added up to the new blouse she had seen at her neighbor’s basement apartment. A real Chanel, which fell off a truck, in bright red, for only forty dollars; and the Gucci bag [...] the Fendi strappy sandals [...] The more she bought, the more insatiable she became. (Cruz 2005, 32-33)

Esperanza sinks deeper into debt, having to spend the next thirty years paying off the cordless

hairdryer she never used, the Walkman for her commute to work, the pearl necklace and the Chanel blouse back to the creditors (Cruz 2005, 34). Her attempt to live the American Dream proves to be only a fallacy if not a fantasy, and is stressed in her everyday life by the events that remind her where she comes from and to where she belongs. Despite her reassurance that life in New York is better than in the Dominican Republic, Don Chan complains that the promising life for which Esperanza yearns ironically becomes a trap that prevents them from being free, both physically and spiritually:

Look at you two. It's not so bad. You live like rats. Twenty-five locks on the maldita door, afraid someone is going to break in, spending your days and nights sheltered from the cold, hoarding things in closets. Goddamn rats. (Cruz 2005, 31)

Her husband Santo, a taxi driver, dies on the streets of Broadway “stabbed in the neck, right below his earlobe” (Cruz 2005, 79). The streets that Esperanza calls unsafe, with the dealing and the occasional shooting in Broadway terrify her: “Every sound jolted her from her sleep, forcing her to check if the doors were locked, that no one was lurking in her fire escape” (Cruz 2005, 85). Esperanza, and her children Bobby and Dallas, spend their routine days along the streets of Broadway, where everything seems dangerous, and across the Bronx, “where all the gangs were, where [she'd] Esperanza'd heard the buildings were burned down and the mice ruled” (Cruz 2005, 107). Her daughter Dallas is attacked by a pervert in the park at gun point, her brother Bobby is sent to a juvenile centre for shooting the same man and Dallas's friend Hush becomes pregnant by her stepfather Oswaldo having to give up her dream of going to college and dramatically dying in the delivery room.

Although Flaca and Soledad eventually seem to escape visible and radical self-mutilating strategies and serve as devices that depict other more superficial or less dangerous

forms of reconciliation with themselves, recourse to these acts as represented by Constancia in *The Agüero Sisters* occupies central stage in other narratives such as Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Julia Álvarez's *How The García Girls Lost Their Accents*. The motifs of bodily disfigurement and self-deprecation in García and Álvarez's novels take on an extra and more radical psychological dimension to the one depicted by Constancia. In both these novels, physical symptoms speak of psychological distress and conversely, self-mutilation stands as a means of protest against abusive discourses of power.

Violence and Trauma in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Julia Álvarez's *How The García Girls Lost Their Accents*

In *Dreaming in Cuban* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* bodily disfigurement and psychological fragmentation filtered through eating disorders represent the disintegration of the self that results from the abuse, violence and oppression inflicted on Latinas by both patriarchal and capitalist societies. Paradoxically, by using silence —another form of repression— as the main strategy of resistance and denunciation, Lourdes del Pino (*Dreaming in Cuban*) and Sandra García (*How the García Girls Lost their Accents*) become double victims of their own struggle: they are conceived by others as products of North American cultural insistence on the slenderness of women, and they are powerless to 'talk back' against the racist and sexist nature of male-dominated societies.

Lourdes del Pino, like Constancia Agüero, articulates social demarcations according to North American consumerist and capitalist ideology, of which she is a fervent supporter. By expanding her Yankee Doodle Bakery into a nationwide chain, she attempts to access a life of money, luxury and acceptance. However, despite her success within the North American economy, she has not addressed either the trauma of her departure from Cuba nor her new

condition as an exile in the United States. Lourdes's body becomes a site on which multiple forms of violence converge, which she manifests through her eating disorders. Her bingeing and gorging serve as strategies for dealing with the violent impact of the sexual abuse, racism, and class snobbery to which she has been subjected in both Cuba and North America.

Similarly, Sandra García's eating disorder mirrors the trauma of her uprooting from the Dominican Republic and her struggle to negotiate her hybrid identity in North America. She migrates to New York with her family as a result of her father's conspiracy against dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. Neither Lourdes nor Sandra can overcome the impact of their uprooting. They are inscribed within Homi K. Bhabha's category of the "unhomed" (Bhabha 1992, 141) as they are positioned within an unfamiliar situation and an alien place. Oppressed by the overprotection of her controlling father and disempowered to fulfil North American demands of assimilation, Sandra's —like Lourdes's— first symptoms of self-disintegration begin when she stops eating.

In her article "What (N)ever Happened to Aunt Jemima: Eating Disorders, Fetal Rights, and Black Female Appetite in Contemporary American Culture" (2002, 239-62) Doris Witt states that:

[m]any [women] eat to suppress emotions, particularly the post-traumatic stress of incest and sexual assault, as well as the strain of living in a white-supremacist, heterosexist, capitalist patriarchy. (Witt 2002, 246)

Following Bhabha's idea of the unhomed and Witt's ideas on eating disorder, I wish to suggest that Lourdes and Sandra embody the consequences that violence and sexual abuse, the traumatic experience of migration and social and cultural alienation have upon Latinas in North American society, disempowering the self and leading to corporeal and spiritual

fragmentation.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Lourdes del Pino's compulsive eating is a strategy to numb pain and cope with the violations of her body of her past life in Cuba. Back on the Island she miscarried her second child when she fell off a horse; and a week later two revolutionary soldiers not only raped her at her house, but also cut into Lourdes's belly "crimson hieroglyphics" (García 1992, 72):

the soldier sliced Lourdes's riding pants off to her knees and tied them over her mouth. He cut through her blouse without dislodging a single button and slit her bra and panties in two. Then he placed the knife flat across her belly and raped her (García 1992, 71).

Lourdes is possessed, and her possession is described as an invasion of her body perpetrated by an exploitative penetration and ownership by the soldiers who attempt to enforce women's submission through abusive sexual acts. The soldiers' violation of Lourdes acquires a political and historical significance in revolutionary Cuba (aspects that will be addressed in more detail in chapter two). Lourdes's rape by the soldiers responds to the lack of freedom and repression of Cuban Communism, and is ultimately the result of her defiance of Fidel Castro's government when the soldiers attempt to confiscate her land. Lourdes's rape could be interpreted in the light of what Susan Griffin identifies in her article "Rape: the All-American Crime" as one of the motivations for the sexual molestation of women, that is, the "result of behaving as if she was [women were] free" (Griffin 1975, 39).

Lourdes's eating disorder in North America is reminiscent of her past in Cuba since it functions as a defence mechanism to anaesthetise her feelings against sexual abuse. Eating sedates her, it alleviates her anxieties and combats her feelings of distance from her family. Although she identifies eating compulsively as a quick, accessible and immediately satisfying

way of handling her past, food has become her own trap in her present life. Therefore, her eating disorder attributed to her repression and lack of freedom in Cuba becomes ironically the result of North American capitalist demands, where apparently she can fulfil her dreams of “democracy” and “freedom”.

Lourdes’s migration to North America, her fervent materialist fanaticism, and her rupture with her family back in the island worsens her relationship with her daughter Pilar. Her adaptation to North American life, her husband Rufino’s constant unfaithfulness, and her difficult relationship with her daughter are translated into a period of dieting, which becomes a temporary solution that will develop into cycles of weight fluctuation. Lourdes’s 118 pound flesh clashes with idealised Euro-American concepts of beauty. Her body presents the anti-aesthetic feminine as “men’s eyes no longer pursued her curves” (García 1992, 21) because:

[t]he flesh amassed rapidly on her hips and buttocks, muting the angles of her bones. It collected on her thighs, fusing them above the knees. It hung from her arms like hammocks. (García 1992, 20)

Lourdes’ rejection of her obese body responds to her desire to take on the psychological characteristics of the socially dominant group, which according to Dean MacCanell and Juliet Flower are “rigorously conceived and executed, totally, and minutely policed by collective observation and moral authority” (MacCanell and Flower 1987, 208).

As a result, Lourdes starts to disdain fatty foods and her dysfunctional dietary habits have serious repercussions: she overeats, then diets instinctively, is obsessed with crime in her neighbourhood and has a perpetual hunger for sex with Rufino, apparently to fill her inner emptiness; the more she eats, the more her sexual appetite increases, leaving Rufino’s body aching from his exertions (García 1992, 21). For Lourdes, her lack of control of her body weight parallels her lack of sexual control. Her last period of starvation is not only reduced to

her vision of food as her enemy: “She can’t even look at it without her mouth filling with the acrid saliva that precedes vomiting” (García 1992, 169), or because she wants to “be clean and hollow as a flute” (García 1992, 169), it signifies a denial of her sexuality as well, as she has not had relations with Rufino since she stopped eating (García 1992, 169).

Lourdes’s abuses of her body demonstrated through a series of parodical signifiers of her hyper-Americanism foreground the culture and economics of excess that sustain both. She decides to diet by fasting and drinking liquid food substitutes until she loses her 118 pounds, only to start eating again at the annual American celebration of gorging, Thanksgiving Day. By this date, Lourdes has completed her metamorphosis by losing 118 pounds; she will eat today for the first time in months. She rushes to consume immense quantities of food in order to make up for the previous months of starvation:

In a moment her mouth is moving feverishly, like a terrible furnace. She stokes it with more hunks of turkey and whole candied yams. Lourdes helps herself to a mound of creamed spinach, dabbing it with a quickly diminishing loaf of sourdough. The leek-and-mustard pie, with its hint of chives, is next. (García 1992, 173)

Lourdes’s physical and psychological fragmentation is unquestionably the product of her attempts to live the American Dream in the land of “freedom”. Ironically though, she manages to enslave herself by being trapped between North American materialism and the repressive politics of her Cuban homeland.

Lourdes also addresses the issue of the intersection between sexuality and body image. Her control over sexuality is exercised by her looks, particularly through the motif of thinness. Her slim body represents power, which reinforces women’s objectification of slenderness, or mirroring Susan Bordo’s words it stresses the “intimate and minute elements of the construction of space, time, desire, embodiment” (Bordo 1993, 27). Lourdes’s

oppression is the product not of her “physical restraint and coercion”; rather the denial of herself is due to “individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms” (Bordo 1993, 27). In this sense, Flaca in *Soledad* represents the opposite side to Lourdes’ interpretation of thinness. Indeed, although her name Flaca (Thin) makes reference to her physical appearance, and she hates to be called by that name, “she wouldn’t like to blow up fat on account of people calling her Flaca” (Cruz 2001, 53); instead, she marks her curves (or lack of them) by wearing cropped T-shirts which expose her belly button.³⁶ Lourdes’s body, like that of Constanica Agüero, becomes as Mary Douglas says in another context, a symbolic surface on which are inscribed the rules, hierarchies, and commitments of a dominant culture (Douglas 1978, 116, 129).

In Julia Álvarez’s novel *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* (1991), Sandra García’s eating disorder, on the other hand, is an act of rebellion against the traumas of her life in the Dominican Republic and the pressures that restrictive societies and parental figures exercise upon her both on the island and in North America.

Even though her “fine looks, blue eyes, peaches and ice cream skin” (Álvarez 1991, 52) grant her acceptance and prestige within the Dominican social stratum, Sandra feels unable to identify with the other members of her family as her sisters have darker complexions than she does. Within her family, she sees faces that do not resemble her own, as if come from different continents. Her physical features and light-skin that assigned her class status in the Dominican Republic turn into visible markers of the subaltern in North American

³⁶ The fact that Flaca is so thin and still declares herself as being sexually powerful provokes criticism from her cousin Soledad, who accuses her of being flat-chested. Judith Ortiz Cofer portrays the dilemmas about body size that surround women in her book of short stories *An Island Like You: Stories of the barrio*. In the section “Beauty Lessons” she illustrates in particular women’s concerns with being flat-chested. Jennifer, the one that has “the look that boys like” because of her big breasts, teases Sandra about her breast size: “[S]omeone pushes Jennifer’s button, the one that makes her talk in one-syllable words, and she calls out, “Come on Sandi baby, show off our brains. What size are they? I think they’re triple A cup, myself. Hee, hee, hee” (Ortiz 1995, 42, 44). Judith Ortiz Cofer. 1995. *An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio*, New York: Penguin, 41-54.

discourse of the black/white dichotomy.³⁷

Despite the fact that her mother reassures her that her light-coloured skin will “pass her as” North American (Álvarez 1991, 181), Sandra cannot avoid being the victim of racial discrimination in her neighbourhood and in school. Moreover, her inability to recover her trivialised Spanish heritage in North America aggravates her alienation from both cultures. In the chapter “Floor Show” (Álvarez 1991, 168-94), for instance, Sandi feels part of the wild and beautiful Flamenco dance on stage as it is part of her own culture. When the drunken American Mrs. Fanning joins the dancers, the music turns into a “popular American tune with a Spanish flair (Álvarez 1991, 186) and Sandra turns away, disappointed: “This woman had ruined the act of the beautiful dancers” (Álvarez 1991, 189). Her powerlessness to bring together her Dominican identity and values with the North American life complicates Sandra’s efforts to reconcile her hybridity. Her bodily transformation —like that of Lourdes, Flaca and Constancia— lies beyond discourses of beauty. Rather, the progressive disintegration of her self into a lifeless corpse symbolises her repression and victimisation in both the Dominican Republic and North America. Because Sandra has always been seen as a beautiful girl with harmonious and fine looks, both her parents and doctors misunderstand Sandra’s illness, reducing her anorexia nervosa to a preoccupation with beauty. Her mother Laura thinks that Sandra has internalised North American social perceptions and values that she does not entirely feel comfortable with, affirming in her discussion with Dr. Tandleman that “Sandi wanted to look like those twiggy models” (Álvarez 1991, 51). She thinks that Sandra’s slender body is the result of “that crazy diet” (Álvarez 1991, 51), a more general

³⁷ In her collection of essays *Something to Declare* Julia Álvarez talks about alienation from society and lack of self-esteem according to standards of beauty: “I knew I would never be one of those girls, ever. It wasn’t just the blond, blue-eyed looks or the beautiful, leggy figure. It was who she was —an American— and we were not. We were foreigners, dark-haired and dark-eyed with olive skin that could never, no matter the sun blocks of foundation makeup, be made into peaches and cream”. Julia Álvarez. 1999a. *Something to Declare*, New York: Plume/Penguin Book, 43.

social interpretation of anorexia.

The family's misinterpretation of Sandra's crisis forces her to adopt a position of invisibility and absence, which in turn becomes her only way of establishing presence. Her refusal to talk implies both the loss of her language and her accent, symbolic of her heritage, but it also means a loss of her humanity as she gradually imagines she is physically disappearing. She opts for non-verbal communication leaving the deterioration of her body to be her main means of expression.³⁸ Sandra's physical and mental disorders, her loss of voice, mobility and alienation from the collectivity are symbolic of the political rules that govern the historical construction of gender, and they are intrinsically related to North America's ideologies of class and race-biased.

The last stage in her dehumanisation, as Hélène Cixous explains in another context in relation to women's silence, is the "decapitation" of a woman's head, maintaining her in a subordinate position:

They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks [...] In the end, the woman pushed to hysteria is the woman who disturbs and is nothing but disturbance. (Cixous 1990, 352)

Sandra's dehumanisation is manifested through her hallucinations of turning into a monkey. Not only does she imagine that she is gradually becoming an ape, she claims to literally see her hands in the shape of a monkey's hands. The changes in Sandra's body match her version of Darwin's theory of evolution, the author who seems to have the greatest influence on her.

³⁸ Sandra's choice of bodily communication instead of verbal expression brings to mind Soledad's mother Olivia in *Soledad*. Like Sandra's mother, Olivia's sister Gorda also misinterprets the causes for Olivia's madness. She insists on the process of cleansing the body as a means of cleansing the mind to rescue Olivia from insanity. However, Olivia uses her nudity and her body language as a mechanism to communicate her need to return to her homeland, the Dominican Republic. Olivia's body becomes, like Sandra's, the representation of an unspoken language. It is Olivia's traumatic experiences in New York and her alienation from society that lead her to speak a different language, a symbolic language like the one Sandra uses in *The García Girls*.

She constructs her own theory of the backward evolution of humankind into animals. In her essay “The Corporeal and the Sensual in two Novels by Shani Mootoo and Julia Álvarez”, Angela Brünig interprets Sandra’s inversion of Darwin’s theory of evolution as “a questioning of social power relations” in which the marginalised will succeed over the most influential (2002) (the weakest over the strongest): “with her adaptation of scientific findings and literary claims Sandra tries to establish an alternative to dominant discourses and cultural conventions” (Brünig 2002). Sandra rebels against the nurses and doctors through reading and refusing to speak to them or the other patients. The girl argues that she has to read as much as possible in order to be able to retain something of her life as a human being: “If she read all the great books, maybe she’d remember something important from having been human” (Álvarez 1991, 54). She becomes uncommunicative. Her mental disorder is regulated by her silencing, surprisingly her best strategy to talk back.

Contrary to Cixous’ position, I would suggest that Sandra’s “decapitation” and “silence” function as strategies of resistance, as the “tretas del débil” [tricks of the weak] in Josefina Ludmer’s words. Ludmer defines these “tricks” as an ambiguous practice, which is exactly what the character of Sandra is trying to convey: “...combina, como todas las tácticas de resistencia, sumisión y aceptación del lugar asignado por el otro, con antagonismo y enfrentamiento, retiro de colaboración” (Ludmer 1984, 51-2) [“...combines, like any tactic of resistance, submission and acceptance of the place assigned by the other, with antagonism and confrontation, refusal to collaborate”.]

Lourdes’s and Sandra’s eating disorders are clearly responses to the traumas of their lives. Behaving in a self-defeating way and engaging in self-mutilation responds, according to Denise Russell, to social restraints on individuality (Russell 1995, 42-3). The silence that denounces the abuses that patriarchal and racial discourses have on Lourdes and Sandra is

misread by society and interpreted instead in terms of stereotypes of beauty. Lourdes's and Sandra's withdrawing from society hidden inside fat and slender bodies is self-harming and in the end does not suggest any real solution. Even though silence maintains them in a subordinate position and has devastating consequences, this mechanism of resistance is precisely the element that paradoxically attributes agency to Lourdes and Constancia.

Whereas self-mutilating strategies inflicted upon the body are ultimately self-destructive for Lourdes and Sandra, for Felicia del Pino (*Dreaming in Cuban*) and Marina (*Geographies of Home*) the impact that discourses on the body have on the psyche are considerably more serious since the characters' madness turns not only against themselves, but manifests itself in physical aggression towards the members of their families.

Schizophrenia and Madness in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Loída Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*

Probably some of the most radical and frightening aspects of self-mutilation may be found in the figures of Felicia del Pino (*Dreaming in Cuban*) and Marina (*Geographies of Home*), given their embodiment of a permanent state of schizophrenia and fragmentation. Loída Maritza Pérez and Cristina García's novels explore the reactions of the inner self (mind) through self-destructive manifestations of mental disturbance, madness and schizophrenia as a response to social and cultural dislocation, and the pressure exercised on women by conservative codes of conduct.

From the very beginning, both Felicia del Pino and Marina are introduced as characters if not in a phase of psychosis, at least at a stage of mental and physical decline: they are sexually and physically abused, they try to kill members of their families, they attempt to commit suicide and they both end up in a mental institution. Their bodies are ruled by an

incontrollable state of madness, therefore, defining their actions towards themselves and others as the most radical.

Felicia del Pino —like her sister Lourdes— and Marina are both subjected to social factors that, in Cuba and New York respectively, are primary causes of their personality disorders, such as confinement in the home, frustration of the female role under patriarchal ideologies, and isolation and alienation in North America. In analysing the biological base of conditions such as schizophrenia, depression, anorexia and bulimia, Denise Russell says that:

Madness is to be understood in terms of sex roles – attitudes towards being female or being male – that exist in modern Western cultures. The female role is one of dependency, passivity and submission. The male role is one of activity, independence and assertiveness. The female role is regarded as inferior to the male role. (Russell 1995, 113)

Along these lines, both Felicia's and Marina's symptoms of trances, amnesia, lethargy, passivity and dissociative states of consciousness are products of a rebellion against established patriarchal social norms of behaviour and moral codes that erode women's independence. Furthermore, Felicia del Pino's madness is understood in terms of oppression and social conditioning in the period of a revolutionary Cuba, when the instability of the country results in disruption of the self.

Felicia del Pino's mental disorder finds common ground in the character of Olivia in Angie Cruz's novel *Soledad*. Olivia prostitutes herself during adolescence when she meets her husband Manolo, with whom she embarks —like Felicia with Hugo— on a disastrous relationship in which she is physically and psychologically abused.³⁹ In *Dreaming in Cuban*

³⁹ Felicia del Pino's and Olivia's reaction to the protective paternalistic attitude of their husbands differs greatly to that of Iliana's and Marina's sister Rebecca's in *Geographies of Home*. Rebecca, wife and mother of three,

Felicia del Pino marries Hugo, a violent sailor who abuses her and infects her with syphilis. Her mental and physical decline starts with her neglecting her children and at one point she tries to commit suicide and to kill her son Ivanito. Felicia's attempted murder of her son responds to what Russell refers to as a "personality disorder characterized by dependency and submissiveness or anti-social behaviour" (Russell 1995, 98).⁴⁰

She also tries to kill her first husband, who beats her and chokes her on the first night they are married. Disgusted by another pregnancy, she sets her husband on fire with an oil-soaked rag. Unlike Olivia who murders Manolo by throwing him out of the window five storeys down (Cruz 2001, 200), Felicia succeeds only in disfiguring Hugo's face and banishing him forever from the house, not murdering him as she intended. Fire is also involved in the death of her second husband Ernesto, a restaurant inspector who dies in a fire in one of the restaurants. Felicia, blaming *El Lider* for her second husband's death, decides to take revenge on one of his spies, Graciela Moreira. Felicia invites her to her beauty shop for a free permanent when she avenges her husband. Felicia's cruel and horrific method of revenge reveals the extent of her mental disturbance:

[Felicia] mixes lye with her own menstrual blood into a caustic brown paste, then thickly coats Graciela's head. Over it, she fastens a clear plastic bag with six evenly spaced hairpins, and waits. Felicia imagines the mixture melting through Graciela's frail scalp, penetrating the roots and bones of her skull until it eats her vicious brain like acid. (García 1992, 151)

Felicia marries, for the third time, to Otto Cruz who rapes her when he "mistakes" his wife's

lives in precarious conditions trapped between a brownstone populated by hundreds of hens and her husband Pasión's abuses. Unlike Felicia del Pino and Olivia, but similarly to Constanca and Sandra, Rebecca adopts silence as her means of submission and failure to live the North American Dream, destined instead for poverty, misery and unhappiness.

⁴⁰ Because of Felicia's indifference to the Revolution —"the only thing Felicia ever did for the revolution was pull a few dandelions during the weed-eradication campaign in 1962, and then only reluctantly"— she is sent to a rehabilitation programme where, according to her mother, her *antisocial behaviour* would be corrected. Cristina García. 1992. *Dreaming in Cuban*, London: Flamingo, Harper Collins Publishers, 107.

sobs for cries of pleasure when they are making love and pushes “his muscled hips against hers” (García 1992, 154). Otto Cruz dies on a roller coaster, from where Felicia watches him “die on a bed of high-voltage wires” (García 1992, 155). The fire and burning motifs involved in the deaths or attempted murders of Felicia’s three husbands evoke Changó, the *orisha* of fire and lightning.⁴¹ She assumes the role of a demigoddess as she makes her attempt on Hugo’s life, “standing over him like a goddess with a fiery ball in her hand” (García 1992, 82).

Felicia del Pino is the character most involved in the practice of *Santería*.⁴² For Felicia, as for Lourdes, but in religious terms, food becomes something sacred they can both rely on; moreover, food has an either physical or psychological symbolic meaning, as it has for Lourdes, or spiritual as it has for Felicia. Felicia becomes obsessed with coconuts one summer, excessively consuming the fruit commonly used in *santería* ceremonies, attempting suicide in that “summer of the coconuts”.⁴³ She goes into *Santería*, progressively reducing the natural needs of her body by the extreme cleansing of both the physical and spiritual. Felicia starts the three-day ritual as a novice *santera* of Obbatalá, who is believed to control the mind

⁴¹ Changó is the powerful and regal *oricha* (divinity or deity) of thunder and justice, usually imagined as strong and virile and often called the king of religion. Changó or Shangó is a hero and warrior, one of the most venerated of the tutelary gods of Cuban *Santería*; a womaniser and drinker, quarrelsome, courageous, and daring; the god of music, master of the sacred batá drums, of thunder and lightning. Margarite Fernández-Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert eds. 1997. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 284. See also Natalia Bolívar Arostegui. 1994. *Los Orishas en Cuba*, Ciudad de la Habana: PM Ediciones.

⁴² *Santería* or *Regla de Ocha* is some of the main religious systems that exist in the Caribbean, in Central and South America, and in the United States today. It emerged from the syncretism “between European Christianity (in the form of Spanish folk Catholicism), traditional African religion (in the form of orisha worship as practiced by the Yoruba of Nigeria), and Kardecian spiritism, which originated in France in the nineteenth century”. George Brandon. 1993. *Santería from Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Stories*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2. See also Patrick Taylor. 2001. *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Puerto Rican Mayra Montero, among the new generation of Caribbean women writers, portrays in detail Afro-Caribbean spirituality and culture in novels such as *La Última Noche que Pasé Contigo* (1991) and *Del Rojo de su Sombra* (1992) and *Tú, La Oscuridad* (1995).

⁴³ The coconuts in *Santería* are used as a form of divination in which four pieces of coconut are cast and their pattern reveals that an *oricha* has accepted or rejected an offering. Michael Atwood Mason. 2002. *Living Santería: Rituals and Experiences in an Afro-Cuban Religion*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 125.

and thought.⁴⁴ She searches for her identity through the rituals of *Santería* which becomes a process of ritual sacrifices, blood and body mutilation: “The *santeras* had made eight cuts on her tongue with a razor blade so that the god could speak, but Felicia could not divulge his words” (García 1992, 187).

Felicia’s madness may be interpreted as the result of the damage inflicted by a patriarchal society which objectifies and dehumanises women. Moreover, she is the victim of a chaotic and turbulent period of Communism where like Lourdes —and Olivia in the Dominican Republic—, women’s bodies become the site of exploitation by male figures of authority. Felicia’s body goes through a process of transformation that restores her full vibrancy by removing the lumps, smoothing out her skin, returning her washed out eyes to their natural colour, and covering her colourless hair in scruffy patches on her skull hair (García 1992, 189). Her final sacrifice is a metaphor for her denunciation of women’s position in Spanish Caribbean society as victims of paternalistic power, but also implies issues that go beyond gender concerns: her sacrifice is for the young girl molested at the train station, the beggar families, the families of *guajiros* sleeping in the city’s park under flashing Coca-Cola signs, and even the prostitutes in Bombay to which her niece Pilar refers (García 1992, 98, 54, 206, 28). Through her sacrifice Felicia not only addresses the violation of women’s bodies, but she denounces the social and economic conditions of the subaltern in Cuba, the urban class structures and North American imperialism.

Celia del Pino, Lourdes’s and Felicia’s mother, embodies similar experiences to those that both her daughters have lived. She recalls her daughter Felicia’s state of mind as she is

⁴⁴ Obbatalá or Orisaalá is an androgynous god in *Santería*, the god of purity and justice; he also represents truth, the immaculate, peace — hence his representation at times as a white dove —and wisdom. Margarite Fernández-Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert eds. 1997. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 286.

also sent to a mental hospital where she lies to the doctors, telling them that her father raped her, that she ate rusted sunsets and scalded children in her womb (García 1992, 51). Celia, like Lourdes, also loses her son. Javier, abandoned by his wife for a mathematics professor and turning into an alcoholic, decides to leave his mother's side and "die (in sequins and feathers) at the head of a conga line" (García 1992, 160). Like the abuses on Felicia's body, Celia's pregnancy and missing breast denote a range of theories which, according to Kathryn Schwarz in her essay "Missing the Breast: Desire, Disease, and the Singular Effect of Amazons", involve the denunciation of sexual politics, reproductive practices, aesthetics, and violence wrought upon women's bodies by authoritative and oppressive discourses on gender roles (Schwarz 1997, 147-69). Celia's pregnancy is a burden, a malformation of her body. Her disconnection with the foetus is an anti-maternal position that translates into her separation from and rejection of her daughter Lourdes. Moreover, Celia's mastectomy disrupts the terms of the erotic, aesthetic, and maternal conventions as does her rejection of pregnancy. While pregnant, "she felt like if she had swallowed a bell" (García 1992, 42) and "her feet got too swollen" (García 1992, 42). Removing the breast itself, suggests that the female body is no guarantee of a maternal role. According to Kathryn Swcharz:

[r]epresentations of the breast, and particularly of the maternal breast, are always at least as concerned with morality as with medicine, and the question of what obligation a mother has to nurse her child. (Swcharz 1997, 152)

Swcharz adds that:

the breast has more power than the womb or even the seed, excluding men from the child's formation; whether exposed for the sake of nursing or of fashion, the breast threatens always to signify an excess of female control. (Swcharz 1997, 152)

Obviously, Celia's missing breast echoes the lack of control of her family and the rupture of ties, particularly with her daughters. The mutilation of the breast in Celia's case evokes the inability to bear the pain of a fragmented family: Lourdes and Felicia do not support the Communist cause, which divides the family politically, emotionally, and geographically. Lourdes migrates to the United States refusing to go back to Cuba and Felicia goes through a process of bodily decay, decomposition and finally death (García 1992, 189); ultimately, Celia's husband Jorge and son Javier die and Celia finally commits suicide by drowning in the sea. Celia's images of dismemberment, just like Felicia's, reflect her inability to hold together past and present, body and psyche, self and society within the political system of Cuban Communism that divides the del Pino family.

In contrast with Felicia, in *Geographies of Home* Marina's split personality is stressed through the interrelation between the different stages of her state of mind. Her body offers another level of complexity given the fact that she possesses two bodies/two minds in one: the mad and dangerous and the passive one. Sometimes she appears as docile, tranquil and sociable. She even dreams of a loving husband who approaching her from behind wrapped "his arms around her and sprinkled kisses on her neck. Turning to face him, she returned his kisses with her own" (Pérez 1999, 85). Other times though, Marina's insanity, "not schizophrenic, [at least not definitely]" (Pérez 1999, 41) as her sister Iliana maintains, would turn her into a violent monster making her family and herself victims of her own cruelty: she accuses her brother of raping her, she sets fire to the kitchen in the family home, she attacks her sister Iliana physically and sexually, and she tries to take her own life, like her sister's, at least three times before she is permanently hospitalised.

Just like Sandra García in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* and Olivia in

Soledad, Marina suffers from delusions. She sees apparitions, ghosts, “a tall, lean figure absorbing the room’s darkness” (Pérez 1999, 16) that nobody else can see. Her mental distress and illusions result from a combination of the life left behind in the Dominican Republic, where she was abandoned by her parents, and her present dislocation in North American society.

Marina decides to escape from home and make a journey on her own from Brooklyn to Manhattan. What is meant to be just a simple ride to escape her family’s lack of understanding and social pressures becomes a trip towards self-consciousness and self-discovery. Through the other people’s gaze, Marina begins to acknowledge her physical condition. The black woman’s scrutiny and that of the three other people who are sitting in the train with her awaken Marina’s awareness of how she appears to the others: “Disgust. That’s what she had glimpsed in the eyes of each. Sheer, unadulterated disgust” (Pérez 1999, 86). For the first time, she is conscious of her naked body:

[...] her ashy thighs, her feet filthy, her coat gaping open at her crotch. Now Marina becomes conscious of her uncombed hair and unbrushed teeth. She also feels the itch and prick of hair growing back in the areas she had shaved and smelled the stench oozing from her pores. (Pérez 1999, 86)

Marina’s perception of herself filtered through the eyes of the others is a condition created socially that intersects with her skin colour and class. North American dominant ideology and its emphasis on femininity devalue Marina; poor, *mulata*, she is relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy of physical beauty. Following on from this, her sister Rebecca recalls Marina’s cultural alienation and her economic needs in the poor Dominican neighbourhoods of North American society to which both are relegated.

In her article “The Odor of the Other: Olfactory Symbolism and Cultural Categories”,

Constance Classen (1992, 133-66) analyses the different ways in which social categories are constructed and conveyed by olfactory codes in different cultures that express themes of identity and difference. Waiting at the bus stop, people next to Rebecca step aside covering their mouths and noses (Pérez 1999, 59).⁴⁵ Marina and Rebecca's smell responds to Classen's examination of how odours establish cultural and class differences among individuals:

how odors are used to categorize "others" in different societies provides an important insight or, better, "inscent" into the construction of concepts of "oneness" and "otherness," and their basic similarities and differences across cultures. (Classen 1992, 133)

In this sense, Rebecca and Marina's body odours mark them as belonging to a specific social class for the people around them. A similar experience is recalled by Graciela in Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints* after her arrival at the brothel La Pola Inn. Once in the bedroom a tub with salt grit at the bottom is brought to Graciela. Soon afterwards, Eli Cavalier opens Graciela's legs and rubs dried leaves into her pubic hair and her armpits to season his meal just before having sex with her (Rosario 2002, 78). What she thinks is an act of caring is the result of Cavalier's assumptions that Graciela is a prostitute, and therefore, filthy. According to Constance Classen:

this stench is the metaphorical product of prostitutes' and sluts' failure to regulate their bodies in accordance with cultural norms, and it signals their symbolically polluted and polluting status. (Classen 1992, 143)

Moreover, Cavalier's assumptions of Graciela's impurity arise out of his association of black with dirt (uncleanliness). Although he specialises in "the exotique erotique beauty of racial

⁴⁵ Another example of Rebecca's subaltern position in North America occurs when she receives a note from her children's teacher that reads: "Your son's clothes are filthy and smell bad. It would be greatly appreciated if in the future you concerned yourself with his hygiene" to which Rebecca responds by refusing to send her children back to school, thus, reinforcing their marginal position and alienation in North American society. Lóida Maritza Pérez. 1999. *Geographies of Home*, New York: Penguin Books, 53.

types” (Rosario 2002, 64), Cavalier’s disgust for Graciela goes beyond concerns of odour, relating more to his racial prejudices. Cavalier’s removal of Graciela’s stench, which at the same time is replaced by the smell of the dried leaves, responds to what Classen identifies as the lack of odour. Inodorateness, as she says, “is generally associated with cleanliness, in certain cases it signifies barrenness and insensibility as well, as in the examples of the empty desert and the unfeeling woman” (Classen 1992, 148). Thus, while Cavalier tries to deprive Graciela of her natural odour he is also careful that her smell incites sexual pleasure for him.⁴⁶

A different version of body smell is portrayed in Cuban writer Sonia Rivera Valdés’ *Las Historias Prohibidas de Marta Veneranda* (2001) [*The Forbidden Stories of Marta Veneranda*, 2001a]. In the section “El olor del desenfreno” (2001c, 27-36) [“The Scent of Wild Desire, 2001b, 24-31], both class assumptions assigned to smell are overcome and cultural differences are set aside. The Cuban journalist living in New York tells about his most disturbing experience with his neighbour when he senses that the revolting pungency of the four-hundred-pound woman turns into an aphrodisiac. The narrator eagerly plunges into the mass of flesh to explore its crevices:

Le pedí que pasara. Entró con su balanceo, y la tela fina de la camiseta dejaba ver los numerosos cúmulos de grasa, apelotonados debajo de los brazos, en las caderas, los muslos [...] cerré la puerta tras ella, irrumpió en la casa una fetidez horrible [...] Sentí náuseas, se lo juro, tan fuerte era la peste [...] Me senté frente a ella en una butaca, en vez de a su lado en el sofá, y traté de imaginar que mi nariz no existía e ignorar las arcadas que me subían del estómago a la garganta cada vez que se me olvidaba olvidarme del olor [...] Entonces, pasó lo más raro del mundo [...] El hedor se había desaparecido, transformado en un aroma penetrante que yo aspiraba con avidez. La mujer, recostada con mayor languidez, mostraba por entre los muslos, más abiertos ahora, su sexo oscuro emanando aquel olor embriagante, porque de allí brotaba la poderosa fragancia [...] Me desenfrené [...] Loco, le juro que me volví loco. Desenfrenado. (31-33)

⁴⁶ Ironically, whilst Eli Cavalier assumes that Graciela’s dirtiness comes from her being a prostitute, Graciela’s griminess is quite simply the result of her journey from La Vega to Santiago.

[I asked her to come in. She entered swaying, and the thin cloth of the T-shirt let me see the heaping balls of fat that hung under her arms, around her hips, from her thighs [...]. When I closed the door behind and she started toward the living room couch, a horrible, fetid odor burst into the apartment [...]. I was nauseous, I swear, that's how strong the smell was [...]. I sat down across her in an armchair, instead of next to her on the couch, while I tried to pretend that my nose didn't exist and to ignore the heaves that would rise up from my stomach to my throat every time I forgot to forget the stench [...]. Then the weirdest thing in the world happened [...]. The stench was gone, transformed into a deep aroma that I was eager to breathe in. Leaning back languidly on the couch, her thighs more open now, the woman was displaying her dark sex that gave off that intoxicating odor, because that was where the powerful fragrance was welling from [...]. I went nuts, I swear that I went nuts. Wild. (29-30)]⁴⁷

At the beginning of the short story, the journalist makes sure that the interviewer Marta Veneranda (and the reader) do not make judgements about him as a crazy and a pervert man or “guarro” [pig], but as someone who considers “peste un pecado capital” [stinking is a capital crime] (Rivera-Valdés 2001, 27). General assumptions that “good smell” suggests freshness and niceness, cleanness and purity, and that “bad smell” is repellent and redolent of decay with implications of disease and death are reflected in the journalist's words:

Que me haya pasado esto a mí es un fenómeno, con lo limpio que yo soy, que me baño aunque tenga cuarenta de fiebre. Usted es cubana y sabe la manía que tenemos los cubanos con los olores. (Rivera-Valdés 2001, 27)

[That it should have happened to me is truly strange, because I'm so committed to cleanliness that I'll take a bath even if I'm running a fever of a hundred and four. You're Cuban; you know the fixation we Cubans have about smells.]

However, the smell that he rejects so much as a symbol of impurity and unpleasantness is transformed into an erotic, almost animal attraction that empowers his neighbour before him. While the woman's smell is repulsive at the beginning, it becomes irresistible, a bewitching

⁴⁷ Sonia Rivera-Valdés. 2001a. *The Forbidden Stories of Marta Veneranda*. Translated by Dick Cluster, Marina Harss, Mark Schafer, and Alan West-Durán. New York: Seven Stories Press, 24-31.

perfume. According to Classen, odour in different societies is symbolic of cultural differences. The journalist's yielding to his neighbour's bodily "enchantment" becomes symbolic of the communicative nature of smell that breaks taboos and overcomes sexual inhibitions and cultural differences.

Marina's experience in *Geographies of Home* contrasts with the one presented by Sonia Rivera-Valdés. Embarrassed and humiliated after her episode on the train, Marina's dissatisfaction with herself, her foul-smelling and unhygienic body makes her long for invisibility:

She wished the Williamsburg Bridge had collapsed. She wished the river had swallowed the train and all its passengers so that not one had survived to recount the details of her appearance or of the nauseating smell. (Pérez 1999, 87)

Desperately, Marina hopes for refuge in her parents' house, the only place which seems suitable to hide from society's judgement. However, once again Marina's family, like Sandra's, misunderstands the reasons for her illness. First, similarly to Sandra García's parents who deny the girl's personality — "[s]he was a dolly on wheels to roll that illustrious de la Torre name from social gathering to social gathering" (Álvarez 1991, 241)— Marina's self is also disrupted by her family through their continuous questioning of her self-sufficiency, which they express by keeping her in the basement of the house from which a "fetid air from a septic tank" is released (Pérez 1999, 35).

Secondly, her parents taking for granted the financial and health improvement provided by North America where "democracy" and "freedom" provide their children with better opportunities —the Dominican Republic is "a backward, poverty-ridden place" (Pérez 1999, 21-22)— is one of the crucial common components that underscore Marina's and the other characters' state of mind and self: if they lived "in a better neighbourhood or at least

wore better clothes, [they] would think better of [themselves] and the world would too” (Pérez 1999, 143). Her parents do not realise that Marina’s body is both a text of culture and a practical direct location of social control (Bordo 1990, 13).

Marina’s life means little to her. Her own war with the world becomes “a part of her very being, unreconcilable as the color of her skin and the texture of her hair” (Pérez 1999, 87). Her alienation from North American society creates a kind of interior crisis which prevents any possibility of perceiving herself as having any self-worth. As Haile Gerima says, “blue-eyed, blond-haired demi-gods are falsely made to believe they are gods and the non-blond, non-blue-eyed ones are made to feel less than human” (Gerima 1991, 338). Marina’s lack of beauty and physical attraction in the eyes of the visually dominant culture, and her estrangement from it thrusts her into invisibility and absence which is externalised through symptoms of madness, which are exclusively socially produced. In an interview, Loída Maritza Pérez explains that in her portraying of the Dominican family in the United States, she tried to recreate more than a particular Latina experience. She attempts to illustrate issues common to marginalised subaltern groups in society, victims of racism, isolation and discrimination:

But are these issues specifically Latino? I don’t think so. Ultimately, these issues pertain to the human condition: our need to belong and be accepted; the contradictions inherent in all of us; our attempts to do the best we can even in the worst of circumstances; our desire to guide our children and the risk of making mistakes along the way; our wondrous ability to sometimes understand and forgive; and our faith in a force greater than ourselves.⁴⁸

Lourdes, Marina and Sandra’s illness enter the category of what Susan Bordo (1993) has defined when referring to the oppression of women’s bodies and their resources available for

⁴⁸ http://www.penguinputnam.com/static/rguides/us/geographies_of_home.html. “An Interview with Loída Maritza Pérez”, No author named. Date of access 19/02/2003.

resistance, “the “pathologies of resistance””. These pathologies mark the ways in which individual women insert their bodies into a network of practices and institutions within which those bodies are produced, at the same time as they struggle against those very same networks (Bordo 1993). Unfortunately, like the other female protagonists in the novels, both Felicia’s and Marina’s alternative ways to escape victimisation lead them to a tragic end. Their self-mutilating strategies acquire a contradictory meaning since they help to reproduce rather than transform precisely what Sandra and Marina denounce. Their individual responses to the abuse inflicted upon their bodies criss-cross the political and social chasm of fulfilling the North American Dream, that is, to be part of a culture of capitalism that promotes subordination to feminine stereotypes of beauty and behaviour. The scars on their exiled bodies serve as constant and permanent reminders of themselves as abused and violated subjects of discriminatory male societies that foreground the politics of capitalism, racism, and dominating discourses on gender. The different strategies of self-mutilation to avoid assimilation become contradictorily the “tetas del débil” as a tool for Latinas’ resistance. By portraying alternative forms of disfigurement through physical and psychical alterations of the self, the novels attempt to show the devastating effects that the controlling, limiting, and demanding capitalist and paternalistic systems of power have on Latinas’ definition of selfhood in both the Caribbean and in North American Diaspora.

CHAPTER TWO

MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, WIVES AND PROSTITUTES: CONTESTING IDENTITY WITHIN THE POLITICS OF FAMILY AND NATION

The young female self is defined not through independence from the mother but through bonding and identification with her. Thus the nature of adult female identity arises specifically from the daughter's relationship with her mother.

Nielsen De Abruna (1998)

According to Nielsen de Abruna, interconnectedness between mothers and daughters is of particular importance for daughters' possibilities of self-definition, initiation in life and subsequent social integration. However, the discourses on the politics of maternity as a condition experienced as a state of bonding and dependency between mothers and daughters are questioned and reshaped in US/Caribbean women's writing. In Latina's novels, the concept of "maternal nature" contradicts much of feminist theorising on motherhood and female identity formation through the mother-daughter unbonding motif. Each of the sections in this chapter considers the different approaches to motherhood and daughterhood adopted by different generations of women. The maternal body and definition of Latinas' identities are conditioned by both social and political factors, internal and external, that re-evaluate the politics of maternity and the formation of female subjectivity.

Between Two Sides of the Ocean: Crossing Boundaries in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

In an interview with Iraida H. López, Cristina García explains that in *Dreaming in Cuban* the

positioning of three generations of women in a very close relationship with one another before and after the Cuban Revolution was done in order to examine “how women have responded and adapted to what happened to their families after 1959”, and to explore “the emotional and political alliances that form within families” (López 1993, 609).

The trope of family (dis)unity as metonym of the national state is a symbolic thematic strategy that prevails throughout the novel. García subtly weaves Cuba’s past and present history of political, social and economic relations and antagonism with North America in parallel to the separation, lack of communication, and betrayal among the Del Pino family members. By placing women at the centre of the novel within a tumultuous political past and present, García locates the understanding of Cubans’ and Cuban Americans’ selfhood within bicultural spaces where the private/domestic sphere is combined with a public/political context. Celia, Felicia, Lourdes, and Pilar, in particular, are empowered as mothers and daughters, but are also active political agents in Cuban and North American national contexts. The historical and political circumstances in which the characters’ lives evolve are significant devices that link politics and family in the novel as inseparable mechanisms to rewrite women’s history from an angle that differs from traditional representations of the nation. In Cristina García’s 1994 interview, the writer explains that:

Traditional history, the way it has been written, interpreted and recorded, obviates women and the evolution of home, family and society, and basically becomes a recording of battles and wars and dubious accomplishments of men. You learn where politics really lie at home. That’s what I was trying to explore on some level in *Dreaming in Cuban*. I was trying to excavate new turf, to look at the costs to individuals, families, and relationships among women of public events such as the revolution. (López 1993, 610)

The political framework in which the Del Pino family is located in the novel is of particular

importance given the significance of history and politics as conditioners both of family relationships —especially ties between mothers and daughters— and individual negotiations of selfhood. Lourdes's violation, for instance, is translated into Castro's agrarian land reform in 1959.⁴⁹ Her raping symbolises her forced submission to the regime and the denial of her human rights. The aftermath of the Cuban Revolution between 1972 and 1980 and Cuba's relationship with the United States is the framework that shapes the emotional and personal ties of Del Pino family. Furthermore, the narrative strategy of analepsis exposes family relationships through other political events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the first Cuban exodus between 1959 and 1961. Thus, history acquires a metaphoric dimension for the representation of the meaning of political/family life in the island and in the United States.

From the very beginning of the novel, the characters' commitment to different political systems is an essential component in defining their attitude towards Cuban national identity. While Celia, a fervent supporter of Castro's Communist regime, criticises North American capitalism from outside, her daughter Lourdes supports North American consumerism from her Yankee Doodle Bakery's counter in Brooklyn, from where "she's convinced she can fight Communism" (García 1992, 136); and Celia's granddaughter Pilar is caught between national loyalty and political affiliation across Cuban and North American borders.

The political affinities of the members of the family, Pilar's in particular, are as controversial as the relationship between Cuba and North America. Since the establishment of the Cuban Constitution in 1901 through the Platt Amendment —which gave power to Cubans

⁴⁹ In May 1959 Fidel Castro passed the Agrarian Reform as a measure that turned over to the state the right to confiscate and operate plantations and estates, which were made into state farmers, causing production fall drastically and leading to the emigration of many Cubans to the United States. Julie Marie. 1994. *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

to govern themselves whilst still being subjected to North American sovereignty—relationships between Cuba and the United States have at best been troubled, at worst downright antagonistic. In the novel, Pilar's acknowledgement of the impossibility of rapprochement and liaison between Cuba and the United States is translated into the disrupted relationship between herself and her mother and grandmother, and between Celia and her daughter Lourdes. The interrelationship between the nation state and the concept of family is recalled in Homi K. Bhabha's (1990) idea of national unity, which David Mitchell explains in the following terms:

both nation and family function as classificatory units of belonging [...] they exist in parasitic relation to one another by virtue of a shared desire for a unity that inevitably proves to be illusory and contradictory. (Mitchell 1996, 52)

Mitchell argues, as does Homi K. Bhabha, that the homogeneous and fixed national unity that Benedict Anderson refers to in his *Imagined Communities* (1991) is obsolete because of the fluidity and mobility of identities. The impossibility of rapprochement between nation and family acquires central importance in the analysis of the following novels since the characters are defined by the interstitial spaces across which they move and the different political systems by which they are conditioned.

Throughout *Dreaming in Cuban* Pilar's political views move progressively from an empathy with Celia's towards a greater acceptance of her life in North America. Firstly, Pilar's closeness to Celia's political views could be explained in part by the link with her grandmother's birthday —11 January 1959— soon after Castro entered Havana in triumph with his troops. Similarly, Felicia marries her second husband during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and Pilar and Lourdes go back to Cuba in 1980 during the storming of the Peruvian

Embassy. Secondly, only after Pilar returns to Cuba after 28 years, in search of her place of belonging, does she recognise that she has to return to New York where she belongs - not *instead* of Cuba, but *more* than Cuba (García 1992, 236).

The different interests that both countries have at heart create internal divisions reflected in the Del Pino family members. This lack of affinity is expressed in Homi K. Bhabha's words in a different context, as "circumstantial [...] since [their] identity is constructed about interests which are at the end strictly incompatible" (Bhabha 1992, 55). Celia is moved by her strong support for Communism, patriotism and loyalty to *El Líder*, and refuses to leave the island; Lourdes, however, driven by her pursuit of the American Dream migrates with Pilar to New York leaving Castro's "island prison" behind (García 1992, 173); her father Jorge, although he moves to New York for health reasons, does not share Celia's beliefs; Lourdes's sister Felicia's indifference and lack of commitment to the revolutionary cause is a source of great rancour between her and her mother Celia (García 1992, 107); and her son Javier departs for Eastern Europe, leaving one Socialist/Communist context behind to be part of a different one in Czechoslovakia.

Celia's fears and anxieties over the degradation of pre-revolutionary Cuba under Fulgencio Batista are signalled by the letters she writes to her Spanish lover Gustavo. In 1952 she writes about the dictator:⁵⁰

That bastard Batista stole the country from us just when it seemed things could finally change. The US wants them in the palace. How else could he have pulled this off? I fear for my son, learning to be a man from such men. (García 1992, 162)

And in 1954, she writes about Felicia and her concern for her daughter's safety on the streets

⁵⁰ Among the regimes that Cuba underwent, Fulgencio Batista's was one that did not help to improve the situation of the country. John Edwin Fagg describes his administration as "unedifying and cynical, careless of national pride, insincere in advocating social justice, and ineffective in dealing with the country's problem". John Edwin Fagg. 1965. *Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 99.

of Havana. She bemoans prostitution as the only means of survival for young girls (Felicia sells herself at the age of fifteen to American businessmen):⁵¹

I've heard too many stories of young girls destroyed by what passes as tourism in this country. Cuba has become the joke of the Caribbean, a place where everything and everyone is for sale. (García 1992, 164)

Celia's reference to prostitution during Batista's regime recalls his policy of encouraging tourism and appealing to foreigners to participate in the island's economic development. The mass tourism attracted mainly Americans given the island's proximity to the mainland, its cheap prices and the low-cost opportunities for pleasure. Celia's concern about the oppression of women is also textualised when she dreams of "massacres in distant countries, pregnant women dismembered in the squares", and herself "walking among them mute and invisible" (García 1992, 218). In turn, her embracing of Fidel Castro's regime could be explained, in part, by Castro's policy and the US embargo that prevented people from travelling to the island, putting an end to the tourist industry and prostitution.

Although the Cuban Revolution has brought opportunities to women in the military that expand on their previous traditional domestic role (as represented by Celia's mother-in-law Berta del Pino), Celia is profoundly disillusioned with the Revolution, which proves to be as disappointing as pre-revolutionary Cuba. If we consider that the role of the mother prevails as the most notable contribution in post-revolutionary Cuba, women's position is re-located as primarily a biological function, giving birth, a role that "remains the same as in old, patriarchal, pre-revolutionary times" (Torrents 1991, 177).

Pilar makes this observation on inequality when after returning to Cuba, the "island-colony" (García 1992, 219), she laments Castro's Communist system that attempts to

⁵¹ The letters Celia writes to Gustavo also lament her lack of control over her daughters and her inability to mother them.

equalise the politics of sex and class, while it stands as a blatant division between “the women on Calle Madrid” who are “bare-armed in tight, sleeveless blouses” and the “magnificent finned automobiles [which] cruise grandly down the street” (García 1992, 220).

Pilar’s mother Lourdes embodies what Pilar sees as a “kind of Cuban version of an earlier America” (García 1992, 220) but in the United States. In her pursuit of the American Dream, Lourdes betrays her own people by selling out to North American interests, doubly emphasised when she opens her second bakery in Brooklyn. She exploits her immigrant staff by demanding excessive labour for low wages, and by replacing them easily with others. She is not only complicit in North American exploitation and a victim of her own fanatical consumerism, but Lourdes becomes part of the impoverishment of her own people who are suffering from severe food shortages as a result of the United States embargo on Cuba’s largest export crop, sugar: “Each glistening éclair is a grenade [...] each strawberry shortcake proof—in butter, cream, and eggs— of Lourdes’s success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba” (García 1992, 117). Lourdes’s anti-*fidelismo* and antagonism to Celia’s Castro is again stressed by her “fomenting her own brand of anarchy closer to home” (García 1992, 177), that is, by holding sessions at the bakery with pro-Batista exiles, becoming in a paradoxical way, as exploitative and abusive as Fulgencio Batista in Cuba before and during the 1950s.

The imbalance between life in Cuba and North America, and the way both political systems impinge upon the freedom of the individual is highlighted through a series of metaphors concerning the family members which also indicate the impossibility of their becoming reconciled. As mentioned in chapter one, the removal of Celia’s breast, for instance, is symbolic of her dismembered family: her husband Jorge, Felicia and Javier die, and Lourdes migrates to the United States refusing to go back to Cuba. Ivanito’s scene at the

Peruvian embassy leaves open the disintegration of the Cuban family: Luz and Milagros remain in Cuba, Pilar hides from Celia the fact that Lourdes has taken Ivanito with her, telling her grandmother instead that she has seen her cousin at the Peruvian embassy, daring to leave the country in his escape to freedom (Pilar and Ivanito will live in the United States); Javier's daughter, Irinita, resides in Czechoslovakia and Celia finally takes her own life. The removal of Celia's breast is also a metonym for the deprivation of many Cubans who suffer severe food shortages, given the association between mother as reproducer of the nation and therefore with her being signifier of the motherland.

The situation of Cuba, a "peculiar exile", is best expressed in Pilar's words, "we can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all" (García 1992, 219). Although Pilar recognises her closeness to Cuba spatially, she also laments Cuban exiles' failure to reach the country's national spirit. Like her mother's rape in Cuba, years later in New York, Pilar is also the victim of a sexual attack. The tallest of the eleven-year-old assailants "presses a blade to her throat. Its edge is a scar, another border to cross" (García 1992, 201-2). Thus, Pilar and Lourdes also stand as representatives of the continuous violence stemming from Cuban Communist oppression and US capitalist policy.

The ocean, as a demarcating space that divides Cuba from North America geographically and also distances the family members acquires a metaphoric meaning at both the personal and political levels. The motif of the ocean functions as a positive and negative device for Celia. A fervent supporter of Castro's Communist regime, and married to the revolutionary cause, Celia stands guard protecting her side of the ocean from invasion by the North American enemy, making sure there is "no sign of *gusano* traitors" (García 1992, 3). She certainly proves to be a strong character in the novel: at sixty years of age, she dedicates herself to the revolution, volunteers to cut sugarcane for microbrigades, builds nurseries for

infants, and becomes the judge in her neighbourhood. Her empowerment is also reflected in her defiance of her husband Jorge by contesting his dominance of her, playing Debussy on the piano although he has forbidden her to do so. However, Celia is disempowered when trying to “guard” her family. She resents this physical (and emotional) separation by the ocean as an obstacle that prevents keeping her family under her authority. This lack of control problematises theories of the family as an untouchable and respectable institution that maintains family values and holds its members in perfect harmony.⁵² Although she still manages to watch over Felicia’s children, who are in a boarding school and Pilar, in New York, from a distance, she cannot control her Americanised and rebellious daughter Lourdes, an “auxiliary policewoman, the first in her precinct” (García 1992, 127), who clearly expresses her anti-Communism with the slogan “*Socialismo es muerte*” [“*Socialism is death*”] (García 1992, 222), and embraces North American capitalism instead, disappointing her mother, her family and her country. Celia refers to Lourdes’s acts as a betrayal saying: “We have no loyalty to our origins [...] what do all the years and the separation mean except a more significant betrayal?” (García 1992, 240).

The division of the del Pino family begins with the first generation represented by Abuela Celia, the descendant of a broken family: she comes from a second failed marriage and is neglected by her mother and sent to live with her great aunt Alicia in Havana. Celia, “the backbone and strength of the novel” (García 1992, 611) is perhaps the best representative

⁵² Until the 1950s theoretical approaches to the meaning of family and family values perceived the family as a conjugal nuclear institution in which the relationship between husband and wife was central to the relationship between mothers and children. Although after the 1950s the concept of family values entered into a crisis, as Gill Jagger and Caroline Wright suggest (1999), the romantic ideal of defining the family based on patriarchal values and on the traditional sexual division of labour persisted as a way of empowering men and disempowering mothers and children. According to Jagger and Wright, the family, perceived as an adoptive unit, should mediate between the individual and society to provide the individual with personal growth and development, and for physical and emotional integrity. For a detailed analysis on modern sociological theories of family life and the diverse realities of contemporary family values, see Gill Jagger and Caroline Wright. eds. 1999. *Changing Family Values*, London: Routledge; and David Cheal. 1991. *Family and the State of Theory*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

of the family institution and Cuba's national good because she lives both before and after the Revolution.

The relationships between Celia, Lourdes and Felicia, and those between mothers and younger generations of women encompass a gender and feminist discourse that counters discourses on the institution of the family. Indeed, in the novel there is no evidence of a theory of a mother-daughter relationship that sustains women's role of mothering daughters successfully. Celia and Lourdes's relationship, for instance, is bitter from the start. After giving birth to Lourdes, Celia is confined to a mental institution as a result of a nervous breakdown, increasing the lack of communication between both. Likewise, Felicia's verbal utterances and her madness create a rift between her and her children which will never be healed. This is echoed in Felicia's relationship with her children who call her the "not-Mamá" (García 1992, 123). Both Luz and Milagros decide not to forgive their mother even though they are aware that the reason for her neglecting them is Hugo's abusive treatment of her. The twins reject their mother to such an extent that Felicia "can't penetrate us" (García 1992, 120). Felicia's relationship with her twin daughters is emphasised by their misunderstandings through language. Luz accuses her mother of the emptiness and abstractness of her words and the little effect they have on both sisters as a way of bringing them closer to their mother: "this was just like her. Pretty words. Meaningless words that didn't nourish us, that didn't comfort us, that kept us prisoners in her alphabet world" (García 1992, 121). In turn, Felicia takes refuge in *Santería* in order to find meaning to her life, the ceremonies turning into "a kind of poetry that connected her to larger worlds, worlds alive and infinite" (García 1992, 186). In the same way, Pilar and Lourdes are antagonistic towards one another; not only is politics a crucial barrier between mother and daughter, but the gap existent between them is accentuated by their clash of ideologies. While Pilar comments that "Mom's views are strictly

black-and-white” (García 1992, 26), Lourdes admits that she “has no patience for dreamers, for people who live between black and white” (García 1992, 129). Witness to the ironic idea of liberty embodied in her mother’s obsessively patriotic and capitalist North Americanism, Pilar paints an ironic version of the Statue of Liberty to commemorate the opening of Lourdes’s second Yankee Doodle Bakery which is fiercely attacked by pro-North Americans.

Celia’s and Pilar’s relationship deteriorates when Pilar realises that she cannot be the guardian of history as Celia thought. Celia regards Pilar as the granddaughter who “will remember everything”, who can guard her knowledge “like her first fire” (García 1992, 222). It is surprising that among her daughters and granddaughters Celia chooses Pilar, a Cuban-American, as the keeper of history. Perhaps her preference is based on Lourdes’s immigration and her deliberate attempt to forget Cuba, expressed by her calling her a “porous baby”, “with no shadow” (García 1992, 50), that is, with no past; and on Felicia’s madness and amnesia. Moreover, according to Pilar, her mother “rewrites history to suit her views of the world”, “contesting reality”, “filtering other people’s lives through her distorting lens” (García 1992, 176). However, Pilar’s observations of history do not seem to be any more reliable than those of her mother or aunt. Pilar is still struggling with her hybrid identity as a Cuban-American and her final decision to return to New York makes her an unreliable source to represent Celia’s Cuba. Pilar is aware of her inability to preserve Cuban history through her grandmother’s letters: “Everyday Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there’s only my imagination where our history should be” (García 1992, 138). Her reinvention of history is reflected in her ironic representation of the Statue of Liberty, which like her mother’s, also suits her vision of the world. But a more distorted reality is found in the portrait she paints of her grandmother Celia when in Cuba. Instead of painting her as she sees her, Pilar asks her how she would like to be remembered, already

creating a different reality to the one in front of her. Pilar totally reinvents a kind of romantic version of Celia “dancing flamenco with whirling red skirts and castanets and a tight satin bodice” (García 1992, 233), and an illusionary view of the past that moves beyond the present reality of Cuba. In this context, the difficulty for Pilar to be the guardian of the family’s history accentuates even more the disruption of the family not only the break between family members but also between Cuba and the United States. Furthermore, because of her deeply ingrained resentment of the politicians and generals who try to structure and dictate Cubans’ lives (García 1992, 138), Pilar is completely unreliable as a transmitter of Cuba’s history since this resentment is an overt statement of her anger to the way in which *El Líder* has shaped negatively the lives of the Cuban people as well as those who now live in exile. Her hybrid identity prevents her from acting as an objective observer; like her mother, she manipulates the truth through her painting and by lying to Celia about Ivanito at the end of the novel.

The state of the nation is also reflected in *Dreaming in Cuban* through the male characters’ infidelities to their wives that help to reinforce the separation and division in the Del Pino family. Combining her household responsibilities with her revolutionary activities, Celia finds a way of being wife and mother (if not a successful one) at the same time as she is independent and self-sufficient. According to Andrea O’Reilly Herrera in her article “Women and the Revolution in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*”:

despite these positive aspects many believe that women’s changing role in society was partly responsible for a shift in the structure of the family which caused the divorce rate to rise dramatically in Cuba. (O’Reilly 1997, 76)

Before the Revolution, Celia has already been left by her Spanish lover Gustavo. He goes back to Spain to his wife and Celia stays with Jorge. When on business trips, Jorge abandons

Celia to her evil step-mother Berta del Pino and spinster daughter Ofelia who treat her as another servant. Although Jorge is aware of Celia's torture at the hands of his mother and sister (Jorge admits this to Lourdes) he remains indifferent to his wife's misery as a way of punishing her for her love for Gustavo. Ironically, after the Revolution Celia runs a court that handles domestic disputes.

Celia's story is repeated in the younger generations. Felicia has three failed marriages; Lourdes's husband Rufino is unfaithful to her with a "huge and blond and puffy woman with bleached hair and high-muscled calves" (García 1992, 25); and Pilar has two unsuccessful relationships first with her boyfriend Rubén Florín, a Peruvian immigrant whose family is also divided by politics, and later with Max the musician, both of whom are sexually unfaithful to her. The Del Pino women are disillusioned and betrayed as much by the men who try to control their lives as by *El Líder's* regime. The lack of rapport between the Del Pino family members is not only manifested in political terms; furthermore, their differences are emphasised by the successive generations of women, which is translated in the novel as a lack of communication through betrayal between mothers and daughters.

Failed relationships between husbands and wives are a recurrent theme in Cristina García's novels. In García's second novel *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), Reina and Constancia Agüero are also divided by political views and family relationships. Like Celia and Lourdes, Reina lives in Cuba where she supports Castro's regime and Constancia resides in North America where she too pursues the American Dream. The Agüero sisters attempt to understand the meaning of family ties through an exploration of their mother's secret relationship with a mulatto man and her mysterious death, both of which have kept the sisters distanced from each other through feelings of resentment and hatred. Family as institution is contested as nonexistent in the novel since, as in *Dreaming in Cuban*, mothers and fathers are

incapable of fulfilling their roles of parenting their children, giving rise to traumatic and dramatic relationships between the different generations of family members. Ignacio's mother Soledad is unfaithful to Ignacio's father; Blanca betrays Ignacio by having an affair with a mulatto from which relationship Reina is born, never knowing her biological father; Ignacio shoots Blanca and later commits suicide; Constancia's son Silvestre kills his father for betraying his mother; Dulce's father drowns; and Heberto, Constancia's husband and Isabel's father, is killed after being part of the force which invades the island. The breakdown of the Agüero family, like the Del Pino's, reflects Cuba's political instability and turmoil, as well as the sisters' traumatised identities displaced between the reality of the island and life in North America. Moreover, the Agüero's troubled relationships problematise once more Latinas' search for identity within the family. Instead of being a source of attachment, belonging and self-affirmation, the family becomes a place of destruction and in response the quest for reassurance is found in the connection with other communities elsewhere which might offer new possibilities of self-representation.

The complex relationships between the family members, especially between mothers and daughters are complicated even further by the development of other liaisons: the daughters' connections with their fathers and those of the mothers with their sons. Lourdes's abandonment by her mother consequently leads to a closer tie with her father Jorge del Pino that Celia envies. And Felicia is jealous of her daughters' and son's connection with their father Hugo Villaverde; despite having found him with a prostitute, they embrace him because in him they find a "language more eloquent than the cheap bead necklaces of words their mother offers" (García 1992, 124). Felicia and Ivanito comfort each other for a while in a world of poetry and coconut ice cream; Lourdes fantasises about the son she miscarried, and replaces this feeling at the end of the novel by taking Ivanito to New York with her. However,

as a symbol of Cuba's and Castro's failure to satisfy Cubans' needs, fathers also fail in their relationships with their daughters, as they have done with their wives. Thus, Lourdes feels abandoned by her father and only after Jorge dies can Lourdes communicate with him; Javier abandons his daughter in Czechoslovakia and Pilar, Luz and Milagros are disappointed at different moments in the narrative by their fathers' unfaithfulness to their families.

The division of Celia's family across generations and Celia's failed relationship with her two daughters Lourdes and Felicia in particular evoke Cuba's problematic relationship with Spain and Cubans' gradual disillusionment with the Revolution and with *El Líder*, who fails to create a nation independent of imperialist control. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, due to the strong political content of the novel, the family is seen as much as an institution of power as a nationalist discourse. The mesh of relationships that Cristina García disentangles in *Dreaming in Cuban* interacts with the image of maternal and national politics in different ways. Each character must experience the implications of mothering within discourses of national identity; they must explore the meaning of family, and they have to negotiate their integration into two different political systems and cultures that separate generations of women from each other. As the author says in an interview in a publication by Alfred Knopf, "there is no such thing as a Cuban 'type', only individuals who reflect in their subjective ways, the greater political and social realities of their identity" (Knopf 2005). The separation among the members of the Del Pino family symbolise at a national level the political abuses of the island by a deceitful government, thus perpetrating the questioning of national self-sufficiency and the continuation of fragmented collective and individual identities.

The disruption of subjectivities across national spaces is also a metaphor for describing family relationships in Julia Álvarez's *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, which as in the previous novel, becomes a signifier of the Dominican Republic's relationship

with North America, the two spaces between which the Garcías try to come to terms with themselves and among themselves.

“A Regular Revolution”: Coming of Age in Julia Álvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

In Julia Álvarez’s novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* the relationship between family members is, similarly to Cristina García’s novel, the product of cultural and ideological differences rooted in experiences undergone by different family generations in the Dominican Republic and North America. Like the turbulent relationships between the Del Pino family, family disruption in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* questions and reformulates traditional meanings of family as a venerable and sacrosanct institution. In the United States the García girls are subjected not only to the paternalistic attitudes brought by their parents from the island, but they have also to accommodate to the sexist and capitalist values in the host society wherein, recalling the Dominican Republic, they are judged according to race and class. Moreover, in the United States the girls struggle to maintain their Dominican culture whilst adopting the North American one.

The traumas the girls experience from oppressive Caribbean conservatism and in assimilating the North American life are embodied in their Dominican relatives and their father Carlos. Authoritative figures become agents that problematise, in part, the girls’ difficult adaptation to North America and their reconciliation of both cultures. Sofia and Yolanda García, two of the four sisters, detach themselves, as Lourdes and Pilar do from each other, from their father Carlos’ repressive authority. The control and domination exercised primarily by male figures is a topic explored in Obioma Nnaemeka’s book *The Politics of M(O)thering* (1997) in which the author examines the traditional approaches to mothering and

the role of men as controlling authorities that nullify family relationships.

Similar in many respects to Lourdes and Celia, Sofía and Yolanda García are the two sisters who overtly resist their father's control, continuously defying Carlos' abusive dominance over the girls. From the beginning Sofía is portrayed as the rebel and the individualist of the family. Her insubordination towards her father, who belongs to the "heavy-duty Old World" (Álvarez 1991, 47), is the reason for the constant antagonism between father and daughter. Like Lourdes del Pino with Pilar, Carlos García imposes on his daughters traditional Dominican values such as the cultural and social rituals of dress, dating and appropriate public places for young ladies, which Sofía categorically rejects. Carlos García's attempts to prevent the girls' Americanisation are futile, particularly since he contradictorily reinforces their assimilation into North American culture by sending his daughters to American schools when still living in the Dominican Republic. Instead, Sofía packs her bags and leaves her family, drops out of college, becomes rapidly americanised, and is found with a bag of marijuana at the age of seventeen, the time when she is sent back to the Dominican Republic. Once in the island, Sofía becomes, in her father's and her Dominican family's eyes, a successfully repatriated daughter. She turns into "a jangle of bangles and a cascade of beauty parlor curls held back on one side very smart by a big gold barrette" (Álvarez 1991, 117). Sofía's rebelliousness paradoxically transforms into a passive and obedient attitude to the demands of her cousin and boyfriend Manuel Gustavo García, "a tyrant, a mini Papi and Mami rolled into one" (Álvarez 1991, 119). Her punishment means her relocation within the boundaries of oppressive male-dominant society from which she is rapidly rescued by her sisters in "A Regular Revolution" (Álvarez 1991, 107-32) and brought successfully back to the United States. Sofía's relationship with her father mirrors that between Celia and Lourdes, and Lourdes and Pilar. After several years of refusing to speak to

her, her father only breaks his silence when she gives birth to a male child. This is because he takes inordinate pride in his blond, blue-eyed grandson as he represents the “good blood” in the family lineage. However, tired of not being recognised by her father as an independent and sexually liberated woman, Sofía blatantly challenges Carlos’ authority in chapter two, “The Kiss” (Álvarez 1991, 24-39). It is Carlos’ seventieth birthday, and Sofía dares to kiss him sensuously, threatening the traditional and patriarchal values of filial respect.

The clash between parents and daughters in the novel acquires a national dimension that discloses metonymically the relationships between two different political contexts, those of the Dominican Republic and North America. Yolanda and Sofía García grow up in an upper-class family in the Dominican Republic and are later forced to migrate to the United States where, according to their father’s decision, they are to remain permanently. Moreover, Sofía and Yolanda’s fragmented identity is not only exacerbated by their loss of a collective sense of security founded upon the family’s class and social privilege, of which they are deprived of on their arrival to the United States.⁵³ Rather, familial bonds become even more complex because of the girls’ transitional subjectivities in the process of assimilating North American values as opposed to their parents’ Dominican traditions. The girls’ North American and Dominican cultures are inevitably tied together and constitute a product of the economic and political influence of North American capitalism that results from years of military and market control of the island. The García girls’ relationship with their overprotective father Carlos during their childhood recalls Trujillo’s controlling and repressive regime in the Dominican Republic of more than three decades. Furthermore, the interference of the girls’ Dominican family members back in the island and their father’s unrelenting control in North America during their adolescence could be interpreted as the

⁵³ At the end of the chapter “Antojos” the Palmolive soap billboard serves as a reminder of the island’s ruling class and its dependence on North American enterprise. Julia Álvarez. 1991. *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, New York: Algonquin Books, 3-23.

nation's invasion by and dependency on North American imperialism. The United States' assuming part in paying off Dominican Republic's foreign debt in 1916 granted them control of the island and limited the Dominican government's economic power and political independence. Although the US military occupation lasted until 1924, US capital still held control of the island's sugar industry when in 1965 the North America military intervened again to stop the civil war. It was in its own interests to avoid a second socialist revolution, not losing the Dominican Republic in the same way they had lost Cuba to the communists (Sagas and Orlando 2003).

The García girls denounce the patriarchal and repressive morality of the Dominican State, and recalling the Cuban Revolution as the liberator from oppression, they cry “¡Qué viva la Revolución!” (Álvarez 1991, 126). With their “Che Guevara smiles”, they successfully rescue their sister Sofía from the hands of Manuel Gustavo.

Politics is also part of the girls' coming to terms with their new life in the United States. Yolanda is obsessed with the possibility of being attacked by the Russian missiles and her father Carlos is still obsessed with Trujillo's secret police, the SIM, who he dreams will finally come for them (Álvarez 1991, 117).⁵⁴ In a very comic episode in the novel, “Snow” (Álvarez 1991, 166-7), Yolanda recalls her fear of living in the United States under attack. She learns “what was happening in Cuba. Russian missiles were being assembled, trained supposedly on New York” (Álvarez 1991, 167). When she sees the white dots in the air, she panics and screams Bomb! in the class, confusing the snow with an attack from the

⁵⁴ Although Carlos García has managed to escape from Trujillo's secret police in the Dominican Republic, he is still haunted by Trujillo's ghost. In Álvarez's biographical sketch “El Doctor”, in which she tells about life with her father through the voice of Yolanda, she describes Carlos García's fear through the motif of darkness: “I remember him mostly at night, moving down the dark halls, undressing as he climbed the dark stairs to bed”. Julia Álvarez. 1999b. “El Doctor”, *Something to Declare*, New York: Plume/Penguin Book, 45-60: 46. Similarly, in “Chasing the Butterflies” Álvarez declares that “My parents still lived as if the SIM might show up at our door any minute and haul us away”. Julia Álvarez. 1999a. “Chasing the Butterflies”, *Something to Declare*, New York: Plume/Penguin Book, 197-210: 197.

Russians.⁵⁵ Equally, Sofia's forced repatriation to the island embodies the violation of the Dominican Republic under Trujillo's dictatorship and the coercion of the island under North American invasion.

Yolanda and Sofía García's coming of age is all the more problematic in the United States since living outside the dictates of the homeland, definitions of gender and nationhood are contested within other patriarchal discourses. Guided by the possibility of re-invention in a new cultural and social space, they encounter a reality that sustains the same positions of women within the family and the nation as those from which they try to escape in the first place. Additionally, Yolanda and Sofia's attempts to define themselves in the United States are problematised because of their multicultural and interstitial identities.

In an attempt to position Latinas in the United States as forces that try to integrate themselves in the national discourses of racial, sexist, and capitalist societies, García and Álvarez's novels are concerned with the idea of breaking the silence that surrounds women's oppression. In a strong feminist case against the exploitation of women through male domination, Andrea Dworkin (1981) calls for giving women "the power of naming", that is, giving women authority to take control of their own individual lives. This attempt to liberate women from the restrictive and dominating discourses that reduce them to objects to be controlled by men's authority is clearly dramatised in novels such as *The García Girls*.

Because mothers play a crucial role in the formation and development of their daughters, Yolanda and Sofía's process of self-definition is greatly conditioned by older generations of women who, as keepers of traditions within the family discourse, help to perpetuate restrictive and heterosexual discourses that reinforce women's subalternity within

⁵⁵ The Cold War between Russia and the United States soon after the end of World War II functions as a metonym for the division of the García family, and vice versa, the abyss between Dominican and North American values. Yolanda's scene of panic in the classroom signifies North America's fear of annihilation by the Russians and the spread of Communism at home.

family structures and lead to family crisis and the wider society.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, for instance, Pilar's mother Lourdes becomes a controlling and repressive authority figure who stunts her daughter's individuality. When Pilar is away studying anthropology in Rhode Island, Lourdes fears that her daughter's wedding night sheets will not be marked by the blood of defloration. She thinks that Pilar has lost her virginity and reputation by having sex with her Peruvian boyfriend Rubén Florín. The concept of "family crisis" that Álvarez and García portray in their novels is explored in Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto's essay "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother" (1982). Chodorow and Contratto address the myth of the mother as a figure that according to Halldis Leira and Madelien Krips, "sees, understands, and fulfils her children's very need" (Leira and Krips 1993, 87). In much the same way, Adrienne Rich addresses the assumptions behind "natural" motherhood in her work *Of Woman Born*. She says that:

First, that a "natural" mother is a person without further identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children, living at a pace turned to theirs; that the isolation of mothers and children together in the home must be taken for granted; that maternal love is, and should be, quite literally selfish; that children and mothers are the "causes" of each others' sufferings. (Rich 1977, 22)

Going back to Chodorow and Contratto, the belief in this great mother expressed in Rich and Leira and Krip's terms, "spawns a recurrent tendency to blame the mother on the one hand, and a fantasy of maternal perfection on the other" (Chodorow and Contratto 1982, 192).⁵⁶ The relationships between Lourdes and Pilar and Celia and Lourdes deny this idealised image of

⁵⁶ In *Geographies of Home*, Rebecca maintains the idea of the fantasy mother that Chodorow and Contratto criticise. Rebecca blames her mother (and father) for her unhappiness and miserable situation in the United States and her relationship with Pasión, blame which she transfers over her children. She insults her parents and admits that: "if her parents were genuinely concerned, they could pool their resources and set her up in an apartment instead of offering what they knew she could not accept". Loida Maritza Pérez. 1999. *Geographies of Home*, New York: Penguin Books, 79.

the mother as all-powerful, all-giving and always available to satisfy her children's needs. Indeed, Lourdes is continuously infuriated by Pilar's resistance to coercion; and Pilar suffers from her mother's impetuosity and precision: "Mom is arbitrary and inconsistent and always believes she's right. It's a pretty irritating combination" (García 1992, 140). Lourdes admits that "this girl looks nothing like her daughter" (García 1992, 23), and Pilar wonders how Lourdes can be Abuela Celia's daughter, and what she is doing as her mother's daughter (García 1992, 178). Lourdes cannot control Pilar's individuality, and Lourdes's illogical, contradictory and exasperating character escapes Pilar's understanding to the point where they do not recognise themselves in each other. According to Chodorow and Contratto, maternal authority "is a product of mother's entrapment within patriarchy rather than a product of her [their] evil intentions" (Chodorow and Contratto 1982, 56). If patriarchy, therefore, has a negative impact on mother-daughter relationship as Judith Arcana suggests (1979), women should be encouraged to free themselves from paternalistic oppression in order to become perfect mothers. Arcana's assertion, however, proves to be inaccurate given the implication that women's abandonment of patriarchy repositions them in the category of the perfect or "fantasy mother", thus falling within the same patriarchal discourse of motherhood they trying to escape. Chodorow and Contratto refer to Arcana's suggestion noting that "this implies that if only we could remove theses patriarchal constraints, mothering would be perfect" (Chodorow and Contratto 1982, 57). If Pilar's artistic manifestation is a way of expressing opposition to her mother's consumerism, Yolanda, the only writer in the García family, alleviates the pain of acculturation and the stigma of being an outsider through her writing (Rifkin 1999, 181). Yolanda also denounces her father's authoritative attitude by comparing him with Trujillo after Carlos García tears her school speech into pieces because, according to him, she has not observed the conventions of class and society.

Oppression also extends to employers and master-servant relationships. Gender stereotypes become secondary oppressors, and as Nielsen Sigrid points out in her article “Maps of Patriarchy” when referring to the complexities of women’s social, sexual and economic oppression, “oppression comes not from a few obvious authorities but from all directions, from father, husbands, landlord, employers” (Sigrid 1985, 37).

Gladys, one of the black servants of the house, is unjustly sacked after it is revealed that she has been given away Carla’s piggy bank as a present. Even though Carla confesses “I gave it to her” (Álvarez 1991, 272), Carlos and Mami “can’t trust her [Gladys]” any longer (Álvarez 1991, 273). However, although Carlos García is the symbolic figure in the novel of the girls’ oppression, ironically, Yolanda also becomes as controlling as her father over other members of the family in the sequel to *The García Girls, ¡Yo!* (Álvarez 1997). In the chapter “The Maid’s Daughter” (Álvarez 1997, 54-72) Sarita, the daughter of the García’s family maid, is aware of the class differences between them, even though the girls consider her as “their little sister” (Álvarez 1997, 56). When Yolanda writes an essay addressed to “Sarita y Primitiva, parte de mi familia” (Álvarez 1997, 65) Sarita feels the need to express her own resistance to such claims, which she knows to be false. She wants to reclaim her real mother’s rightful name, María Trinidad. Even though Yolanda has regarded them as “same” and not “other”, ironically she has given the maid the name “primitive”, thus stressing Yolanda’s awareness of her class privilege in relation to the maid and Sarita. The same Yolanda, as a writer, adopts her father’s patriarchal behaviour rendering Sarita an object of study; in Yolanda’s report about the textual representation of Sarita, Yolanda encloses her within the text which represents her but without a voice inside or outside Yolanda’s report. Likewise, Yolanda’s near theft through representation is even more pronounced in the chapter “The Stranger” (Álvarez 1997, 97-109). Consuelo tries to dictate a letter for Yolanda to write, as

she herself is illiterate. However, in the process, Yolanda takes control of the text of the letter, imposing order and correctness on Consuelo's words. By the end of the letter, Consuelo's words have been literally obliterated under the pressure of Yolanda's authorial efforts, leaving her unable to speak for herself.

Unable to penetrate their mother's world, daughters are forced to seek motherly affection elsewhere (without diminishing daughters' needs for their biological mothers) by connecting with other female figures, which Alexander Simone A. James has defined as "othermothers" (2001). "Othermothers" function as substitute or surrogate mothers who provide daughters with security, self-affirmation and guidance that they cannot find in their biological mothers: Pilar attaches to her grandmother Celia and the García girls establish a bond with Mami (to a certain extent), their aunt Carmen de la Torre, and particularly Chucha.

Even though Carla considers Mami as Papi's alter ego and blames her because she "had weakened the four girls' abilities to differentiate themselves and made them forever unclear about personality boundaries" by dressing the sisters alike (Álvarez 1991, 41), Laura García is also quite unique. She is the bridge between Carlos' patriarchal values and the coming-of-age of the girls, especially since her transplantation to the United States where she discovers her spirit of invention. After living in North America, Laura discovers her potential as a woman, and declares that "[s]oon he [Carlos] would be surrounded by a houseful of independent American women" (Álvarez 1991, 146). Laura appreciates the freedom women enjoy in North America and admits that she does not want to move back "to the old country where, de la Torre or not, she was only a wife and a mother (and a failed one at that, since she had never provided the required son). Better an independent nobody than a high-class houseslave" (Álvarez 1991, 141-2). In her article "Talking About Language", Elizabeth Starcevic positions Laura as a character who seeks to emancipate herself in North America by

challenging herself in the new adopted land. She writes about Laura that “she merges self-confidence of her wealthy background with a receptivity toward the new challenges” (Starcevic 1992, 25).

Subjected to the paternalistic restrictions both their parents exercise upon the girls (Carlos García more than Laura), Carmen de la Torre and Chucha function as supporters of the girls’ independence. Carmen de la Torre, the girls’ aunt, for instance, is the reigning head of her family. She does not adopt an authoritarian attitude towards the girls, but she helps to attenuate the girls’ homesickness. Chucha is another example of a gentle and affectionate “othermother”. In contrast to Papito and Laura who try to maintain the girls’ purity and innocence, Chucha brings them out of their parents’ protectiveness and child-like stage. Even though Chucha’s spiritual powers are such that the other maids fear her, she is an important source of knowledge through which the García girls can access their past memories of their fading childhood in the Dominican Republic and their present life in the United States. (Álvarez 1991, 12).⁵⁷ As she also went through the same experiences, she understands the girls’ struggle for reconciliation with their now alien mother country: “When I was a girl, I left my country too and never went back. Never saw father or mother or sisters or brothers” (Álvarez 1991, 221). Chucha watches over the girls’ future in the new land as she sees “their future, the troublesome life ahead” (Álvarez 1991, 223). Although the attachment and close relationship between the girls and the maids prevail throughout the novel, the class and racial differences between servants and De la Torre sometimes prevent understanding of one another.

Sarita is considered part of the family, but she is aware of the racial differences that separate her and her mother Primitiva from the De la Torre family:

⁵⁷The fact that the other maids fear Chucha reveals the racial prejudices towards Haiti and Haitian culture in the Dominican Republic predating the Trujillo regime and continuing nowadays.

Mrs. García with her pale skin kept moist with expensive creams and her hair fixed up in the beauty parlor every week; Mamá with her unravelling gray bun and maid's uniform and mouth still waiting for the winning lottery ticket to get replacement teeth. (Álvarez 1997, 66)

And Gladys, with whom Carla spends much of her time was, according to her mother, “only a country girl who didn’t know any better than to sing popular tunes in the house and wear her kinky hair in rollers all week long” (Álvarez 1991, 258). Although Chucha’s role as “othermother” for the García girls positions her in a close interrelationship with the family, her Haitian origin and traditions clash with the Dominican ones since the girls are unable to understand Chucha’s “strange stuff” (Álvarez 1991, 221).⁵⁸ Chucha began to work for the García family in 1937 when the girls’ grandfather took her in as a result of Trujillo’s orders to execute the black Haitians living on the Dominican side of the island. Chucha’s fellow servants look down on her because she is “so black and Haitian” (Álvarez 1991, 219). Her position as the migrant Haitian servant and her being left behind in the Dominican Republic to take care of the house underscores the historical class and social stratifications between Haitians and Dominicans.

The social hierarchies that position the García girls within the national realm are paralleled by the same socially structured family discourses. The relationships between mothers and daughters, sisters and sisters and fathers and daughters reflect once again the state of the nation. In both *The García Girls* and *Dreaming in Cuban*, for Pilar and Yolanda life in the United States offers no guarantees of personal advancement. On the one hand, if they comply with patriarchal rules, their lives are restricted by imposed stereotypes of women’s femininity; on the other hand, if the feminine subject resists these mores, she is

⁵⁸ The girls’ estrangement from Chucha’s practices of voodoo which they name “strange stuff” derives from Trujillo’s prohibition of practising any African spiritual expression, and in particular voodoo which was directly associated with Haitian religious practices.

forced to live outside society and without the comfort and security that the community provides. Instead, Yolanda and Pilar try to create a transnational space of reinvention of the self where they are subjected to a continuous interaction between their national cultures and the ones from the adopted land. Paradoxically, arrival in the United States, which for the protagonists is seen as a way of emancipating themselves from the restrictions that gendered discourses on female subjectivities in their homelands impose on them, becomes a time-honoured of traditional female roles within the national realm. Their identities are conditioned as much by their cultures of origin as by their cultures of settlement. This view of living across cultures and the complex process of negotiating hybrid identities is expressed in Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés review of the novel:

Álvarez's novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is not simply about adjustment and acculturation in North America. Moreover, the novel is about the formation of Hispanics' subjectivity as Latinas in the United States and *gringas* in Santo Domingo. (Milanés 1991, 39)

Contradictorily, only within a space of relocation in the United States can the power of traditional constructions of femininity be contested and sometimes displaced by Latinas in the Diaspora.

Prostitution, Marriage, and Violence in Loída Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*, Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints* and Angie Cruz's *Soledad*

Motherhood as an institution that positions women as simultaneously powerful and powerless agents within the family, especially in patriarchal culture, received early attention in Adrienne Rich's text *Of Woman Born*, where she explains motherhood as an "institution, which aims at ensuring that [...] all women shall remain under male control" (Rich 1977, 13). Similarly, in

the edited book by Jean F. O'Barr, Deborah Pope, and Mary Wyer *Ties That Bind: Essays on Mothering and Patriarchy*, the institution of motherhood is named as an authoritative voice of patriarchal culture that shapes women's subjectivity at home and abroad (1990, 2). In novels such as *Geographies of Home*, *Song of the Water Saints*, and *Soledad* motherhood and the role of mothering is examined in terms of gendered and national formulations on female subjectivity and responds to the feminist theories of "family crisis". Motherhood becomes the mechanism that defines women solely in terms of reproducers and biological subjects of the nation. Olivia's (Angie Cruz's *Soledad*), Rebecca's (Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*), and Graciela's (Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints*) alienation from society is not only the product of their subaltern position within Caribbean and North America societies. The experience of migration is also felt within the confines of their own houses as they progressively lose their ability to function in the family compound. As in the previous novels, nation and family are depicted as interrelated as a means to denounce the damage that conservative, traditional and exploitative political systems inflict upon family relationships. In fact, Nelly Rosario stresses the importance of the history that moulds the lives of her female characters when she wrote the novel:

I chose those key historical events because they represent, again, intersections of the two countries that have shaped me. I wanted to examine my characters through the lens of the US's influence on the DR and our subsequent immigration and integration into this country. I also used history as a zoom-out device, a way of offering a bird's-eye view of the character's reality. In our own present, it's sometimes hard to look at our lives as part of a historic moment, since we're experiencing and shaping it. Unfortunately, it takes this current state of war to remind us that we don't live in a vacuum, that the personal is historic, and that history is very personal.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ "An interview with Nelly Rosario". 2001. *Urban Latino Interview*, <http://www.marsh-agency.co.uk/>. Date of access 28/07/2003.

In *Geographies of Home* Rebecca, the first one to move to the United States at the age of twenty-one, recalls memories of pain in her homeland where soldiers inspected homes, executed people or carted off to jail those who defied Trujillo or dared to disregard the law (Pérez 1999, 147). Her life as a poor Dominican woman with her family during Trujillo's dictatorship is passed under the surveillance of her parents who, in a Dominican Republic where people daily disappeared and still-born children were buried in the field behind their house, try to prevent her from coming to any physical or sexual harm. Rebecca migrates to the United States to live the American Dream where, convinced of being able "to pick gold off the streets" (Pérez 1999, 59), to her disappointment finds instead that "those who moved to the States lived as miserable as most in her own country" (Pérez 1999, 59). Rebecca's disillusionment with life in the United States is highlighted through the family's subaltern position in North America. Instead of picking up gold off the streets, the family earns its own money by praying as Adventists for the poor, only to secretly use the money for themselves; in order to feed themselves they queue along with other people waiting for the free meals distributed by the city. Ironically, when she moves to the United States in search of a new life Rebecca becomes the oppressed victim of what her parents had been trying to prevent for so long: men. Rebecca's relationship with and attachment to men, as with Felicia in *Dreaming in Cuban*, does not become a site of emotional confinement, but her experience as wife locates her within the inequalities between men and women in the marriage institution. Rebecca's position includes her in a general sexual discourse of power inequity in which marriage becomes "sexual commodification, and male domination", as well as a contract of "infidelity, brutality and betrayal" (DuCille 1993, 112).

In the same way that Felicia and her relationship with her twin daughters Luz and Milagros in *Dreaming in Cuban* is conditioned by the impact that her husband's

psychological abuse has on her as a mother, in *Geographies of Home* the male character also acquires a force that influences negatively the relationship between Rebecca and her children.

According to Sara Ruddick in her article “Maternal Thinking”, “a good mother may well be praised for colluding in her own subordination, with destructive consequences to herself and her children” (Ruddick 1982, 84-85). Ruddick’s assertion recalls the notion of the fantasy mother to which Chodorow and Contratto refer to as a self-sacrificing and all-empowering figure. In fact, Rebecca, Graciela and Olivia’s actions are counter-examples of the idea of the fantasy mother proving to be an illusion.

Rebecca’s marriage to her husband Pasi3n is, as his name ironically indicates, a cycle of passion based on hostility and possessiveness, and desire for control sustained by Rebecca’s state of what Simone A. James Alexander calls “zombification” (Alexander 2001). Iliana, the youngest of the sisters, blames Rebecca for her failure as a mother, which is the result of her dependence of men: “You’re so desperate for a man that you don’t even care how your children are affected” (P3rez 1999, 61). The relationship of dependence on men and the consequent psychological and physical abuse is also explored in *The Turkish Lover*, Esmeralda Santiago’s sequel to *Almost a Woman*. Like Rebecca who chooses Pasi3n over her family and children, Negi writes a letter to her mother explaining to her that she has left with “*el hombre que yo amo*” [the man that I love]. Only after she reads the letter again, does Negi take note of the language play in the word *amo*, which in Spanish means both love and master: “He controlled the money I made, how I ate, what I wore, what I said, when I said it” (Santiago 2004, 60). Negi’s personality is limited and restricted by her Turkish boyfriend Ulvi who had christened her Chiquita, little girl (Santiago 2004, 3).⁶⁰ This act of infantilisation by

⁶⁰ In *How the Garc3a Girls Lost Their Accents* the motif of infantilisation of the girls by their father Carlos is also noticeable through his always referring to his daughters as little children and more particularly when he still gives them money on his birthdays questioning the girl’s self-sufficiency: “After his cake and candles, the father distributed bulky envelopes that felt as if they were padded, and they were, no less than several hundreds in bills,

Ulvi maintains Negi in a position of passivity and dependency and ensures his superiority and control over her. Like Rebecca, she becomes hypnotised and controlled by Ulvi, by his obsessed possession of Negi as his little, naïve and innocent girl who needs to be taught everything: from how an elegant girl should dress “well and behave[d] appropriately according to a complicated system of etiquette and demeanor” (Santiago 2004, 305) to how she should eat, when to talk and when not to have personal opinions. What is described as Rebecca’s state of zombification is translated in Negi in her relationship with Ulvi as what her psychologist friend calls the “passive-aggressive pattern” which develops in neurosis when the systems formed by couples to keep the relationship going are not based on equality and mutual respect (Santiago 2004, 184).

Both Rebecca and Negi’s reliance on male figures that overpower them is suggested by bell hooks when referring to woman’s self-valuation as they rely on men. According to bell hooks “male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men” (hooks 1984, 43). Rebecca’s submission to Pasi3n’s demands not only helps to perpetuate the master’s cycle of oppression, but her complete inability to assert her independence and self-sufficiency also results in lassitude, self-negation, guilt, and depression. Her powerlessness in the face of Pasi3n’s abuses generates, according to Rich in another context, “a kind of psychological keenness, a shrewdness, an alert and practiced observation of the oppressor—“psyching-out” developed into a survival tool” (Rich 1977, 65). Rebecca’s “psyching out” creates a void between herself and her family. Her state of submission leads to a breakdown in her relationship with her sisters and the other women of the family. Iliana threatens to report her to Social Services for being a bad mother (P3rez 1999, 61). Her rejection of Rebecca lies in the fact that Rebecca

tens and twenties and fives, all arranged to face the same way, the top one signed with the father’s name, branding them his”. Julia 3lvarez.1991. *How the Garc3a Girls Lost their Accents*, New York: Algonquin Books, 25-26.

sets Pasión's abuse over the needs of her children and she does not fight back but instead crawls back to Pasión whenever she has the chance.

Rebecca's isolation from her family, especially from her sisters and her mother, responds to bell hooks' assertion that:

We [women] are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. (hooks 1984, 43)

Caroline Ramazanoglu agrees with hooks that:

Understanding the full range of women's lives has entailed looking not only at women's oppression by men, but also at women's solidarity with men, and at women's oppression by women. (Ramazanoglu 1989, 93)

Rebecca transfers Pasión's abuse of her to her children. During the many arguments that Rebecca and Pasión have throughout the novel, Rebecca seems to attack those who have less power than her in the relationship. She continuously blames her children for her misery in the United States and for her failed marriage to Pasión: "All of you are the reason why my life is crap! If I hadn't had any of you, I could've made something of myself! If none of you had been born, he'd [Pasión] never had left my side!" (Pérez 1999, 195-6).

Rebecca is hypnotised by her husband. He takes possession of his wife's body, mind and soul which symbolises the death of her self and the spirit. In fact, Rebecca uses sex as the mechanism that attaches her to Pasión. In chapter 11 (78-82) when Aurelia and Papito go to rescue Rebecca and her children from Pasión, she admits to her parents her eagerness to stay with him because "he fucks me like this. And he licks me where I like! She stuck out her tongue and flicked it. "Like this! (Pérez 1999, 79), and her father admits that "The itch in her

crotch keeps her from thinking straight!” (Pérez 1999, 81).

In addition, Rebecca helps the master to perpetuate his position as the controller, stressed by her ironic reinforcement of her legitimacy as wife and mother by admitting that she does not need to work because “Pasión provides for me and my children” (Pérez 1999, 269) even though they live in a flat “with no heat or hot water” (Pérez 1999, 53). Accordingly, Rebecca insists on Pasión’s role as the breadwinner of the family and Rebecca’s acceptance of this role discloses theories of gender and dependency within the stratification of the family unit since “economic provision is largely perceived as a ‘traditional fathering role’ (Reynolds 2001, 151). Pasión’s hierarchical position within the family challenges fundamental assumptions of equality between husband and wife. Rebecca’s economic dependence on Pasión perpetuates her position as subaltern and maintains her subordination within marriage and family structures. Neither Pasión nor Rebecca understands her need to provide for her children, disempowering Rebecca from performing an appropriate mothering role.

Rebecca’s dependency on her husband echoes the relationship between Manolo and Olivia in *Soledad*. Manolo, like Pasión, is a macho who restricts Olivia’s freedom and interferes in the relationship between mother and daughter:

He was very strict with her. He didn’t let her speak in public. He said she didn’t know about certain things like ordering her own food. That there are things he’d like to do for her. He told Olivia how to wear her hair, the color to paint her nails, the way to swing her hips. (Cruz 2001, 60)

Both Rebecca and Olivia are inscribed within the power of their husband’s patriarchy, which according to Caroline Ramazanoglu when referring to the impact that patriarchy has on women:

[It] encapsulates the mechanisms, ideology and social structures which have enabled men throughout much of human history gain and to maintain their domination over women. (Ramazanoglu 1989, 33)

As in *The García Girls*, Rebecca, and her family's migration to North America "where the fulfilment of dreams was possible" (Pérez 1999, 149) is a living metaphor for both their dislocation in the adopted land as individuals and as a family. The uprooting from the homeland and the displacement in the Diaspora makes them targets of a constant racism, and the victims of sexual and physical abuse.

Motherhood is synonymous with Rebecca's lack of control over her own life but also over her body. Equally, for Olivia in *Soledad*, motherhood is not a personal choice but the result of the traumatic experience of prostitution in the Dominican Republic. Olivia prostitutes herself in Puerto Plata after escaping from a marriage arranged by her parents and before moving with Manolo to New York "where all the money is" (Cruz 2001, 59).⁶¹ Olivia also experiences, as Rebecca does, a shift from cultural and geographical spaces that shapes her relationship with her daughter Iliana.

After the birth of Soledad and her unrecognised image in the figure of Manolo and Olivia, Olivia's life turns into a continuous cycle of physical and psychological abuse that brings her to the brink of madness:

Since the day she was born, he watched her, waiting 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. (Cruz 2001, 150)

⁶¹ Similar to Rebecca's and Olivia's disillusionment with the American Dream, in Angie Cruz's latest novel *Let It Rain Coffee*, the protagonist Esperanza leaves *Los Llanos* in the Dominican Republic to go to North America. Esperanza is desperate to live the life of the North American actors in the soap opera *Dallas*. Two years after her arrival, however, she is still trapped in a cramped apartment with her husband Santo and her two children Bobby and Dallas, and works as a home aide in Washington Heights. Ten years later, "Esperanza stood in the kitchen in New York City. She was much older, heavier, and tired". Angie Cruz. 2005. *Let It Rain Coffee*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 19.

Moreover, the distance between mother and daughter results from both Soledad's lack of mirroring in the mother who unlike Olivia, has straight hair, smaller eyes, and fairer skin (Cruz 2001, 16), and the mother's lack of affection from her unyielding daughter which leaves Olivia powerless to mother Soledad and Soledad unable to allow herself to be mothered.

Olivia and Soledad's detachment and alienation from one another begin in childhood. Soledad's independence from her mother from an early age breaks Olivia's heart. Olivia laments how already as a little girl Soledad did not need her when she needed her so much (Cruz 2001, 232). Unable to mother her own daughter in childhood, Olivia finds comfort in her sister's new baby Flaca, which she mothers like her own, kissing and holding Flaca like a new beginning (Cruz 2001, 34). In fact, as soon as Soledad leaves home, Olivia shuts up the house, allowing only Flaca to visit from time to time, even denying entry to her sister Gorda and to her mother. Olivia betrays her sister Gorda's trust replacing Soledad with Flaca and creating a barrier between the biological mother Gorda and her daughter. As a result of this distance between them, both Flaca and Soledad seek affection in "othermothers", inversely and respectively with Olivia and Gorda.

The inverted relationships between Olivia and Flaca and Gorda and Soledad resemble those of the fathers and daughters and mothers and sons in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Olivia resents the fact that Soledad "would defend Gorda everytime" (Cruz 2001, 29), and Soledad dislikes it when Flaca and Olivia are together making her feel like an unwelcome visitor: "I imagine myself painting a portrait of me and my mother, without Flaca" (Cruz 2001, 41). Likewise, Gorda and Flaca's relationship resembles that of Pilar and Lourdes or Carlos García with Sofia, since Gorda's authoritarian and controlling attitude towards her rebellious daughter Flaca is the source of conflict between both. In response to Gorda's control, Flaca finds refuge

in her aunt Olivia, consequently forcing Gorda to build a closer relationship with Soledad, in return causing both Flaca and Gorda's and Olivia and Soledad's separation from each other.

Olivia's failure to mother her daughter during Soledad's childhood is rooted in her past of prostitution in Puerto Plata, memories which are constantly revived by the presence of Soledad, of a "faceless child [that] climbs out of me from right in between my legs" (Cruz 2001, 56). But Olivia's secrets are also re-activated within the confines of her bedroom in New York, secrets which are released by Soledad when she reads out loud the names of those men that her mother had written in a notebook and tried so hard to keep hidden:

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 [...] Naked, tall, short, lumpy, old and young men. And my father is also there. (Cruz 2001, 205)

At this moment, Soledad reveals her mother's secret and with it she starts to understand hers and her mother's story. Although Soledad blames her mother for keeping that secret from her, Soledad is also guilty of hiding her past from Olivia, which separates mother and daughter even more. Indeed, as Soledad admits: "Maybe everything got so out of hand because we never talked about it" (Cruz 2001, 179).

In the same way that Olivia hides her past from her daughter, Soledad hides from her mother Manolo's sexual abuse of her:

I pretended to sleep, kept my eyes closed, as he reached over me, his arms heavy on my side. His fingers reached under my nightgown [...] his breath deeper on my neck [...] I pretended to sleep, him rubbing softly between my legs, me trying not to breathe. (Cruz 2001, 201)

Both Olivia and Soledad are bodies violated by the same man, who even in death visits at

night Olivia's sister Gorda. While the common experiences of mother and daughter should unite them in a bond of mutual support, understanding and comfort, paradoxically they become hidden secrets that keep them apart. Even their complicity in the murder of Manolo does not bring mother and daughter together, but their silence and fear intensify their separation. Only at the end of the novel when mother and daughter go back to the Dominican Republic are Soledad and Olivia reunited by following a kind of rehabilitation in their relationship. The scene when Soledad falls into the lake marks the awakening of Olivia from "the catatonic condition that has imprisoned her since the beginning of the text" (Torres-Saillant 2003, 129). In an interview with Silvio Torres-Saillant, Angie Cruz explains that, at the end:

I feel like Soledad and Olivia are almost the same person. It's like a cycle and the fact that one wakes up and the other sleeps sort of shows two facets of their experience. I see one side of Soledad dying and a new side being born. It's like the ultimate *limpieza* to me, with her falling into the lake and Olivia now getting a chance to being listened to". (Torres-Saillant 2003, 125)

In contradiction of the views expressed by hooks and Ramazanoglu, the relationship between mother and daughter proves to be a valid assertion of women's bonding and solidarity with one another in *Almost a Woman* (Santiago 1999) and *The Turkish Lover* (2004). The mother-daughter relationship occupies central position in the first part of the novel, whilst the second part focuses on Negi's individual coming of age. Negi's portrayal of her mother differs quite substantially from the perspectives of mothers and daughters in *Dreaming in Cuban*, *Song of the Water Saints* or *Geographies of Home*.

The family moves to Brooklyn in 1961, leaving Negi's father behind in the island. They settle in Mami's mother's house, Abuela Tata. Mami plays a crucial role in the novel for

Negi's initiation into womanhood:

The reason she had brought me to New York with the younger kids was that I was *casi señorita*, and she didn't want to leave me in Puerto Rico during what she said was a critical stage in my life. (Santiago 1999, 14)

Mami tries to teach Negi family values and the significance of being a respectable woman, as “Mami belonged there, [...] to a safe space in which decent women lived and thrived and raised their families” (Santiago 1999, 15). Even though Mami's tutoring sometimes restricts Negi's independence, there is a strong bond between mother and daughter based on love, care and mutual support. Ramona provides for her children economically and stands for a site of protection and safety for Negi and her siblings: “We huddled closer to Mami [...] certain that the only safe place in the world was the four walls that enclosed us, small and vulnerable, in our mother's shadow” (Santiago 1999, 64). This protection results in a mother-daughter relationship that goes deep and is fraught with emotional intensity. Mami teaches Negi how to survive the sexual politics of intersecting oppressions. She then demonstrates varying combinations of behaviours dedicated to ensuring her daughter's survival: she provides her with the basic necessities and protects her in dangerous environments, helping Negi to go further than she herself was allowed to go. As Negi grows, confidences and trust between mother and daughter are exchanged and reinforced— “We like sharing a secret with her, knowing something about her life that no one else knew” (Santiago 1999, 114)— and her dreams of becoming an “artista” are enthusiastically supported by her mother. When Negi goes to audition for the Performing Arts High School in Manhattan, not only does Mami decide to accompany her to buy nice stockings and new shoes, but she also offers to make a dress for Negi. Negi comes to understand that her mother's physical care and protection are acts of maternal love. This understanding originates positive responses from Negi, who feels a

deep love for her mother:

I held on to her. Mami's hugs were scarce these days, and I wanted to stay in her arms, to smell the flowery scent of her soap, so faint I buried my face into her neck to find it. (Santiago 1999, 47)

Even though they live surrounded by drugs, poverty, unemployment, Mami manages to keep the family together. Mami provides for the family. She makes sacrifices for her children and she succeeds in overcoming their hopelessness and despair. "While she never complained that we were a burden, her voice quivered when she told us it was hard to be both mother and father to eight children" (Santiago 1999, 86).

However, as in any overprotecting act of mothering, Ramona's figure echoes a contradictory anxiety between her attempts to avoid the Americanisation of her children and her deliberate support of North American influence on them, which might remind readers of Carlos García's same ambivalence towards his daughters' assimilation to North American culture. Whilst Ramona, mother of eleven, accuses Negi of behaving like a North American girl, of being too independent, too quickly assimilated as those North American ambitious and strong-minded girls (Santiago 1999, 58), she herself admits that she brought her children to the United States to have an education and that she will not go back to Puerto Rico until her children have secured a career and a job. Whereas Mami keeps on protecting Negi from acting like "those fast American girls" (Santiago 1999, 28), Negi keeps on defying, unknowingly, the contradictory norms of her mother and grandmother Tata.

Like her mother Ramona, Negi's Turkish lover Ulvi, criticises her for being a spoiled American girl:

When he attached "spoiled" to "American girl" I winced, remembering

Mami's accusations that my Puerto Rican identity was compromised because in eight years in the United States I had learned to function outside our culture. (Santiago 2004, 63)

Whereas Negi struggles to understand her mother's traditional Puerto Rican codes of behaviour, she is confused by the contradictory examples offered by her mother and her grandmother. While:

Tata warned us not to smoke or drink as she sat at the kitchen table with a cigarette in one hand and a beer in the other. Mami talked about church weddings for us, then used herself as an example of how tenuous nonsanctified unions were. (Santiago 1999, 209)

Ramona, suffocatingly protective, is determined to mould her daughter in her own image, or the image of "*a nena puertorriqueña decente*" [decent Puerto Rican girls], thus helping to perpetuate Puerto Rican women's devaluation in society:

A nena puertorriqueña decente listened to her mother, learned to cook and keep a neat house [...] did not give the neighbors cause to gossip [...] was a virgin until she married in a church [...] [and] then she became a *mujer puertorriqueña decente* [...] who could wear makeup and dress in a way that pleased her husband but not so sexy as to provoke other men's lust [...] She honoured her mother and mother-in-law, managed her home efficiently but deferred major decisions to her husband, who was to wear the pants, literally and figuratively. (Santiago 2004, 8)

Negi's independence and detachment from her mother begins to be more acute during her adolescence when they both go to buy a dress for Negi's graduation. Negi rejects the navy blue dress her mother wants to buy her and instead she chooses a lemon yellow peel one. Behind this assertiveness, "she looked at me resentfully, as if I had betrayed her" (Santiago 1999, 56). When she looks at the mirror standing next to her mother she notices for the first time the differences between them: "Standing next to each other, Mami and I looked like

darkest night next to brightest morning, each determined to get her way, knowing one would have to cede to the other” (Santiago 1999, 56). Faced with Negi’s defiance of her mother, Mami thinks that she has become “too independent, too bent on [her] way, too demanding”, “ambitious and hard to please, always wanting more” (Santiago 1999, 58). This is the starting point in the novel for the rupture of mother-daughter ties. Their separation drives the novel to develop a central focus on Negi’s individual search for independence away from her mother’s voice, who moves into a secondary position in the novel. Now Negi wants “to be out in the world, to earn my own living, to help Mami, yes, but also to stop depending on her for my every need” (Santiago 1999, 142). However, Negi’s struggle for independence from her mother results in a more controlled image of her from which she tries to escape. Her Turkish boyfriend Ulvi, fifteen years older than Negi, acts as the “fathering model” who tries to teach her the dangers of the life:

He wanted to be Pygmalion, and I became the stone upon which he sculpted Galatea. Whenever I felt as if he controlled too much of my life, I complained, but he shushed me with caresses and a promise (Santiago 1999, 305).

Ulvi attempts to protect the naïve Negi, as her mother used to do, from the dangers of “sex” and men. He tries to shelter Negi from sexual violence, securing and controlling her and thus safeguarding her sexual virtue. Ulvi’s paternalistic and sexist view of women is revealed when he expresses his antipathy for Shoshana, Negi’s best friend, whom he says is cheap for dating men, and when later he calls Negi a “cheap whore” (Santiago 2004, 283).

Only at the end of *The Turkish Lover* when Negi goes back to Puerto Rico, does she succeed in breaking the ties and memories of Ulvi, returning to her mother, her father and a family “away from a man who disdained me and my people” (Santiago 2004, 337).

In Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints*, the life of the protagonist Graciela involves a situation in some ways similar to that of Rebecca or Olivia. Although Rebecca, Olivia, and Graciela's experiences of mothering, as well as their personal stories as individuals, differ temporally and spatially, the characters' search for self-definition is a common ground that reflects many Latinas' lives in their quest for self-affirmation within the family home as both wives and mothers. For both Rebecca and Graciela, marriage and motherhood become modes of self-destruction. As women, they are supposed to be responsible adults, fulfil their roles as mothers and wives in situations where they both have very little power over their own lives. If Rebecca rejects marriage and motherhood, Graciela consciously rejects both. They are seen as confinements that limit her freedom and self-development.⁶²

If "[d]aughterhood and motherhood are two key concepts in identity formation and definition as women" as Adrienne Rich argues (1997, 246), Graciela's inability to mother her daughter Mercedes emphasises the conflicting demands of selfhood and individuality. Mercedes' relationship with her mother Graciela is fraught with sentiments of anger, resentment and maternal need. As in *Dreaming in Cuban*, the mother-daughter relationship in *Song of the Water Saints* is largely determined by a history of repetition of the failures of mothers and daughters in the past. The circular structure of the novel offers a possibility of mother-daughter reconciliation and questions the validity of the female's role within family structures.

Mai, Graciela's mother, had had four children, one after another but all of them died. She would have wished for having a boy just to make Pai happy. The premium in having male

⁶² In Felicia's case, for instance, it is her twin daughters who drive her to commit the ultimate sacrifice. The lack of comprehension and emotional ties with their mother since they were born prevails throughout the novel. Their punishment of Felicia by embracing their father, refusing to participate in Felicia's rituals of *Santería* and their unwillingness to forgive her is their way of blaming her for her inability to mother them.

children is a key issue in many societies, particularly in paternalistic ones, given the fact that in having a male descendant, men believe their lineage to be assured. We have seen how *In The García Girls* Carlos García resents not having a son and only when Sofia's son is born does he take pride in her daughter and respond to her. A similar situation is illustrated in *Geographies of Home*. Iliana's brother Tico is treated differently because he is the only male after three daughters, and the favourite child:

Looking at him grinning beside her on the couch, Iliana remembered other photos of him astride a wooden pony, at the wheel of a fire engine, and atop an emerald tricycle—all toys her parents had been unable to provide for their other children. (Pérez 1999, 44)

In contrast to the treatment Tico receives from his parents, Iliana is valued less “for not being as pretty as Beatriz as well as for not being born a boy—an act which had defied their expectations and disrupted the pattern of two boys, two girls, two boys and so forth” (Pérez 1999, 185).

In *Song of the Water Saints* when Graciela is born Mai shows her not affection but disrespect and rejection: “You are uglier than a running monkey, she used to say if she thought I was too happy” (Rosario 2002, 151). Graciela's problematic relationship with Mai is traced to her mother's rejection of her for being born a girl. In this way, Graciela will also project the same negative response to Merceditas. Graciela's lack of her mother's love is extended to her own daughter, whom she nudges away with a foot: “Go away, little runt, and let me live!” (Rosario 2002, 57). Graciela's abandonment makes her craziness and subsequent rejection by others inevitable: “Celeste and Mercedita glanced at each other and walked ahead of the madwoman” (Rosario 2002, 62). She tries to construct her life around the lack and absence of those who love her. Her entire life, from beginning to end, is marked by Silvio's

absence and Mercedes and Casimiro's suffocating presence which has dispossessed her.

For Graciela and Rebecca marriage and motherhood are a negation of personal autonomy with their becoming disoriented, drowned, and mutilated bodies. Motherhood and wifehood are associated with the relationship between conquerors and conquered, between authority and submission and between victor and victim. Instead of love and consensus in the marital union, the characters' experiences relate to a wider phenomenon of gender inequality within the family where, according to Carole Boyce Davies "love is the "pivot of women's oppression today" because love between the sexes is complicated, corrupted or obstructed by an unequal balance of power" (Boyce Davies 1994, 13).

Both Graciela in *Song of the Water Saints* and Olivia in *Soledad* address the topic of prostitution in the Spanish Caribbean, through a metaphor that implies the islands' dependence on North America.⁶³ Prostitution becomes a means of economic survival for Graciela in the Dominican Republic, that is, for those who are homeless and poor. Prostitution emphasises the male power to which women are subjected to since they are imprisoned within a discourse of subordination and exploitation which prevents them from fulfilling their own expectations as women.

In her book *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman refers to the importance of "contracts" through which institutions are constituted and maintained. Prostitution as institution consists of a contract which is both social and sexual:

The original pact is a sexual as well as a social contract; it is sexual in the sense of patriarchal—that is, the contract establishes men's political right over women—and also sexual in the sense of establishing orderly access by men to women's bodies. The original contract creates [...] "the law of

⁶³ Reina's daughter Dulce, in *The Agüero Sisters*, also prostitutes herself to tourists in exchange for money "to buy some luxury". Her body becomes a site of exploitation as well as a source of power. Cristina García. 1992. *The Agüero Sisters*, London: Picador, 51.

male sex-right". (Pateman 1988, 2)

In *Song of the Water Saints*, Graciela abandons her second partner and her daughter and engages in a journey which, initially thought to be a search for her identity, becomes an ordeal of prostitution, exploitation and servitude. In 1921 Graciela, sick of herself and on a desperate quest for selfhood, leaves home. On her way from Santo Domingo to Santiago, she meets Cavalier, a "germanyfrench" who specialises in "the exotique erotique beauty of racial types" (Rosario 2002, 64). At the brothel La Pola Graciela enters "the law of male sex-right" to which Pateman refers to as "one of the ways in which men are ensured access to women's bodies" (Pateman 1988, 194). She is victim of Cavalier's sexual abuse who as a "beast on a hunt", "pushed himself inside of her" (Rosario 2002, 79). Within the brothel, however, Graciela also experiences a kind of abuse that goes beyond mere sexual intercourse. During her stay in the brothel, she becomes part of the social space of the business of prostitution. Given the importance of brothels as having their own social and economic significance, Graciela enters a space of negotiation of power as a woman among other women. The brothel, "*the house of ill repute*" as Geoffrey L. Simon refers to it in his book *A Place for Pleasure* (Simon 1975, 8), acquires as much importance as the house as a location of empowerment and/or disempowerment for women. In his analysis of the multifaceted character of the brothel throughout history, Simon describes the brothel as a location that establishes hierarchies among its employees. He says that:

Inevitably there is always a discernible hierarchy among employees, sub-cultural mores and ritual, and the idiosyncratic stamp of the *madam* or some other administering authority. (Simon 1975, 2)

As soon as Graciela arrives at the brothel, the *madam* La Pola thinks of Graciela as a source

of money, like many of the other girls that “had put so much shine in her teeth” (Rosario 2002, 73). La Pola corresponds to what G. L. Simon states in respect of the figure of the *madam* and the power that she wields in the brothel:

The power-centre of the brothel almost invariably focused on the madam—that lusty woman, often an erstwhile prostitute herself, who ruled with a rod of iron and charmed the men out of their money for the goods to hand. (Simon 1975, 11)

Graciela soon becomes the envy of the other prostitutes, especially of money-maker Sopa de Hueso who, in a deliberate attempt to maintain her position as such, attacks Graciela and cuts her face with a knife leaving Graciela disempowered (once again) and disfigured.

Graciela’s flight to freedom ends with her prostitution and a fatal sexual disease from Cavalier. Decades later, her great-granddaughter Leila runs away from home to end up in a cheap motel with an adulterer.⁶⁴ Rosario says in an interview in reference to Leila:

I grew up feeling that the price exacted for a woman’s desire for freedom is some kind of sexual punishment, though I knew that that same freedom could lead to lots of delicious experiences. In the novel, this is Leila’s quandary.⁶⁵

At fifteen, Leila starts to drink alcohol, to smoke mentholated cigarettes, and she maintains a sex-love relationship with Miguel, a married man with three children. The isolated young Leila turns to men, undergoing destructive and disorientating experiences which erode her self-respect. Like Graciela—and Rebecca—Leila also escapes from social correct behaviour and defies her adoptive parents by having sex with Miguel with no fear of the consequences:

⁶⁴ In *Dreaming in Cuba*, this cycle of sexual repetition is also represented by Felicia’s present that echoes Celia’s past. She recalls this through her same experiences: they both make love to their boyfriends, Gustavo and Hugo respectively, in the same Hotel *Inglaterra*; both relationships fail; and they are both committed to an asylum.

⁶⁵ “An interview with Nelly Rosario”. 2001. *Urban Latino Interview*, <http://www.marsh-agency.co.uk/>. Date of access 28/07/2003.

Leila and Miguel were in the basement, hidden in the labyrinth of thick walls [...] She moaned, afraid and excited that the superintendent of the building would catch them and trot upstairs to tell her grandparents. She imagined them racing down with her Uncle Ismael to beat up Miguel and beat her with the belt, and Mercedes would then have the home attendant write a long I-told-you-so letter to Amalfi. (Rosario 2002, 210)

Just like Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban* who communicates telepathically with her grandmother Celia, so too does Leila with her great-grandmother Graciela from the world of the dead. Graciela's visits in Leila's dreams make her understand the importance of "family". After Leila has sex with Miguel at a hotel she realises her indifference towards her grandparents, the same lack of emotion that Graciela displayed towards Mai and Pai and Casimiro and Mercedes:

She wondered if Mercedes and Andrés' spirits were watching as their bodies lay asleep at home. But her grand-parents were probably too entertained in the dream world to spot her dry heaving in a Bronx motel. It was then that Leila really began to cry. (Rosario 2002, 234)

The end of the novel leaves open Leila's awareness of her misbehaviour towards Mercedes and Andrés, Ismael and Amalfi, and even the great-grandmother she never met:

[s]he unpinned Mamá Graciela's amber crucifix from her bustier and put it in her mouth and was overcome with a desire to love them, to make their lives happy before they all turned to leather, then ash underground (Rosario 2002, 242).

Returning to Olivia in *Soledad*, she does not experiment a physical confrontation with the other prostitutes while selling herself in Puerto Rico; but like Graciela she does experience sexual aggression by "the law of male sex-right":

She tried not to smell their acid skin, or taste them, mouths like sour milk.
She would turn and lay on her belly, letting them come on her back. (Cruz
2001, 58)

Although Olivia escapes to Puerto Plata to avoid being married to the man they called Pelao (Cruz 2001, 57), she is forced to have sex for money, transforming her into a disposable body and sex-slave: she would allow the “licking, kissing, scratching” for “a monetary gift”; “she learned that playing hard to get made them want her more, made them pay her more” (Cruz 2001, 58).

Both Graciela and Olivia’s prostituted bodies are signifiers of their marginalised social-sexual identity, of exploitation and physical and sexual abuse. As prostitutes they are disempowered entities placed outside the borders of society. The selling of their bodies situates them within the discourses of the deviant and, therefore, those who are excluded from society. During the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the body of the prostitute has been identified with dirtiness, repulsiveness and contaminating places. Shannon Bell describes the many images of the prostitute body as:

[the prostitute] as the diseased physical and moral body; the prostitute as a suffering victim; the prostitute as a working-class body; the prostitute as the sexual deviant —the lesbian and the perverse; the prostitute as an urban blight signifying a diseased city; the prostitute as the mother body; the prostitute as the criminal; the prostitute as the physically abnormal body; and the prostitute as the desublimated sexual woman. (Bell 1994, 71)

Graciela and Olivia both answer Shannon Bell’s description: they are fragmented bodies despised by society or as Sigmund Freud refers to the position of the prostitute, they are “a lower type of sexual object” who lacks “sexual integrity” (1972, 64, 51).⁶⁶ As mothers and

⁶⁶ Prostitution as a successful source of empowerment for women is portrayed in Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré’s short story “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” in her collection *Papeles de Pandora* (1976). Whilst in *Song of the Water Saints* and *Soledad* prostitution reinforces stereotypes of class and race of Spanish

daughters and mainly as women, Graciela and Olivia acknowledge the humiliating acts of their prostitution and their failure as mothers.

Olivia, for instance, becomes resentful of her daughter Soledad and hides her past from her (ironically bringing it into the present as part of her subsequent madness), shutting herself away in solitude in her bedroom. Similarly, after a six-week adventure, Graciela's isolation from her family leads to her desolation, rage and destructiveness, and "[n]ow full of self-pity, Graciela again ached for her life with Mercedita and Casimiro" (Rosario 2002, 95). She recognises her abandonment of her daughter and this produces emotions in her which border on self-hatred: "The very thought of herself like this, so unfeeling toward a man and child she was supposed to love, made her hate herself" (Rosario 2002, 143). Graciela feels guilt for her failure as both mother and wife since she finds both roles interfering with her struggle to pursue her own interests. This feeling of guilt can be explained in Julia Kristeva's words when she refers to the fusion of the idealised status of the maternal body with the simultaneous contamination of it (Kristeva 1982, 54). The confrontation of the maternal body (as recipient of other's "innermost being") through the pollution of it with urine, blood, sperm and excrement, is translated metaphorically in Graciela's perception of Mercedes and Casimiro as the factors that infect her body and prevent it from being free.

After spending some time at home, Graciela goes to a convent to try to escape herself from her daily duties with her family. Her commitment to the convent fails and as eight years before, she comes back home seeking refuge in her family. In the chapter "Prodigal Daughters" (166-9), Graciela returns home in 1930 "sick and ready for death" (Rosario 2002, 166). When she sees Mercedita they do not recognise each other. For the second time,

Caribbean women, Ferré "breaks class divisions and racial dystopia in Puerto Rican society" (Balseiro 1997, 8) by positioning in parallel the black prostitute Isabel La Negra and the white aristocratic Isabel Luberza. For an analysis on this particular short story, see Isabel Balseiro. 1997. "Through the Looking Glass, Darkly: Rosario Ferré's 'Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres'", *Afro-Hispanic Review*: 3-9.

Mercedes and Graciela start a period of reconciliation as Graciela allows Mercedes to take care of her in her dying days. However, Graciela's isolation from her home has enabled Mercedes to establish stronger bonds with her father: Casimiro's role as a father is prioritised and ultimately Graciela is no more than an instrument in the narrative, culminating with her death. Although Mercedes stays with her father, she bears the shame of being abandoned by her "mare-assed runaway mother" (Rosario 2002, 158). The final moment of imposed separation between mother and daughter reaches its climax in the chapter "A Sage" (Rosario 2002, 170-177) when Graciela dies. This scene openly declares Mercedes' connection with her step-father and her distance from her mother. Indeed when Casimiro dies, Mercedes admits that:

Casimiro's death had been simpler, had belonged to her. Mercedes' cries for him had flooded her body for weeks and eventually drove her to the lap of Christ. But now, there were so many more details to take care of with her mother. The wig had to be returned to Celeste, as did the shoes. And she worried there would not be enough oatmeal drink and dumplings for everyone, including the stragglers expecting a free meal. (Rosario 2002, 176)

Mercedes is now seen by neighbours as an orphan child, left by her evil mother and by her benevolent father.

The strained mother-daughter relationship favours the closeness towards the grandmother.⁶⁷ The death of both parents marks Mercedes' agency in the world and introduces the relationship between the second and third generation of women in the novel, which ironically will become a cycle of failed relationships between Mercedes' daughter Amalfi, who resides in the Dominican Republic, and her daughter Leila, who lives in North America.

⁶⁷ As already seen, the figure of the grandmother as the alternative to the "natural" mother and a source of security is a recurring motif in Caribbean women's writing.

Graciela's and Olivia's prostitution becomes a source of male power that not only reinforces the position of women as subordinate subjects in the national realm, but strengthens men's master position within national discourses. Olivia's situation is illustrative of Rebecca's disillusionment with the American Dream, indicative of the permanently low status of poor and coloured women in paternalistic, racist and sexist societies which minimise if not totally deny women's active inclusion in the national discourse. Additionally, the position of Graciela and Olivia as prostitutes, in contrast to Rebecca, disrupts notions of marriage: while marriage is legitimised and an official engagement between men and women, prostitution is despised but desired by men. Paradoxically, the position of Rebecca within her legitimate marriage questions once again the extent to which family and marriage, sacred institutions, differ from other institutions, such as prostitution, where in both cases women remain as subordinates of gender power relationships. Rebecca is no better able to recuperate a sense of self for being married to Pasión than Graciela or Olivia who sell their bodies and are sexually exploited.

Unlike Olivia, for Rebecca, motherhood is chosen for her within the confines of marriage, but both women's situations are aggravated by their inability to mother their children, which confers on them invisibility in the eyes of society. Trapped into early motherhood, as a result of the limited possibilities of fulfilment for women who belong to the lower classes in the Dominican Republic, at the time "a speck of land with so much misery" (Rosario 2002, 27), motherhood and marriage bring Graciela to the brink of madness. Madness is certainly one of the recurrent devices in the novels, which far from being a form of contestation is a plea for help; going mad might be considered "the only response to an insane world" (Felman 1997, 8).

Geographies of Home, Song of the Water Saints, and Soledad explore the implications

and the effects that the institutions of marriage and child bearing have on discourses of sexual politics. Women's role as mothers and wives, and therefore, their quest for self-affirmation within patriarchal spaces responds to a wider context of gender relations where "love, eros, romance, coupling, sexual intercourse all carry with them their own bonds and bogeys: male domination, domestic drudgery, perpetual pregnancy, eternal motherhood, sexual violence, and even death" (DuCille 1993, 144). Graciela, Rebecca, and Olivia are, like their country, fragmented bodies.

In discussing the role of mothers as initiators for their daughters in life, as facilitators of support, understanding and nurture, women who separate themselves from these fundamental roles belong to different cultural images that are "uncommon currency around them [her]" (Nnaemeka 1997, 218). This position is portrayed in Graciela, Rebecca, and Olivia as they demythify socially accepted notions of disciplined motherhood, the preeminence of the nuclear family structure and the intrinsic blissfulness of the institution of marriage. While these are not always prioritised in Caribbean societies in which family structures are more fluid, they nonetheless remain significant markers of identity. As mothers, they maintain a kind of love-hate relationship with their children: they want to mother them but they also need their individuality, at times negated by national discourses on gender. Often, bonding between mother and daughter becomes possible only after journeying back to the roots. The homeland becomes a space of reconciliation in which the recollection of shared memories strengthens ties between them.

CHAPTER THREE

TRAVELLING ACROSS LANGUAGES:

JOURNEY, MEMORY AND RETURN

Inner, as opposed to outer, mobility thus denotes the extent of mental and physical mobility that is necessary or desirable to master everyday life between different worlds.

Beck Ulrich (2000)

Transnationals are people who move, often in great swarms, in order to create collective 'homes' around them wherever they happen to land [...] Their hybridity is collectively negotiated in practice.

Pnina Werbner (1997)

Home and Identity: (Im)possibilities of Reconciliation through the Journey Motif

In *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* and *Dreaming in Cuban* home, belonging and identity are understood as anchored in more than one cultural and national context. Home is a state in-between that offers alternative ways of identity representation. The possibility of returning home is complicated for the García girls and Pilar del Pino since, as hybrid subjects, they are divided between their cultural and social homes in North America and the Dominican Republic and Cuba respectively. Home is perceived as multilocalized and hybrid spaces that delineate boundaries not between the Spanish Caribbean *or* North America, but more between the homeland *and* the mainland.

The thematic thread of home and return in the novels as a mechanism that allows the female characters— particularly Yolanda and Pilar— to relocate their hybrid identities is filtered through the journey motif and stressed through the problematics of language and

memory. Travelling across cultures becomes a journey of (re)discovery through which Yolanda García and Pilar del Pino attempt to understand the meanings of their present life in the United States by exploring their past heritage in the Spanish Caribbean.

The narrative technique in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* is the perfect device that creates a movement of identities and home between “intermittent time and interstitial space” (Bhabha 1990, 312) recounting the girls’ backward and forward shifts between cultures, and the recovery of their long forgotten childhood memories in the island. The girls move backwards in time, from the closest point in the present (1989-1972) to the furthest (1960-1956) between spaces until both past and present merge. In an interview with Margot Anne Kelley, Julia Álvarez underlines the importance of considering one’s origins by journeying back to one’s roots:

I didn’t want the conventional growing-up plot [...] what I wanted was to structure it very much the way an immigrant’s mind works, which is going backwards to where you came from. Here are these women who are now American women, living in the States, and how did they become the way that they are? How did that happen? So they keep going back to try to trace, trace it to the root. (Kelley 1998, 47)

Álvarez’s exploration of how an immigrant’s identity is negotiated in hybrid spaces by returning to one’s roots is best exemplified in Yolanda García. Yolanda’s sense of belonging occurs in different stages through her journeys back and forwards between the United States and the Dominican Republic. Her ultimate decision to stay in the United States, like that of Pilar (and Lourdes) in *Dreaming in Cuban*, responds to Homi K. Bhabha’s positioning of the immigrant in a situation where “the migrant recovers only when he or she is able to construct an alternative home” (Bhabha 1992, 141).⁶⁸ From a North American location the girls fail to

⁶⁸ Note that in *The Agüero Sisters* a similar situation occurs since neither Constancia nor Reina see themselves returning to Cuba permanently, especially after Reina has a child with her North American boyfriend.

find Bhabha's "alternative home" in the Dominican Republic. However, their decision to leave the island provides them with a substitute home in the United States. The meaning embedded in "home" becomes a need for physical relocation somewhere else, never recovering from the uprooting.

After living twenty-eight years in the United States, Pilar's memories of Cuba offer a wider perspective shared by many one-and-a-half generations of Cuban immigrants.⁶⁹ Cuba is "an enduring, perhaps and endearing, fiction", and as for many Cuban-American born, "as ethereal as the smoke and as persistent as the smell of their grandfathers' cigars" (Pérez-Firmat 1994a, 5). Pilar's memories of Cuba are not her own, and what remains of her Cuban heritage is kept alive through the image of her grandmother Celia, the representative of her Spanish past left behind on the island. Pilar's longing for Cuba is inevitable even though "most days Cuba is kind of dead to me" (García 1992, 138), and her need to return to the island derives from her need to remember, to examine her past in Cuba: "But every once in a while a wave of longing will hit me and it's all I can do not to hijack a plane to Havana or something" (García 1992, 138). Pilar's nostalgia for a lost childhood and her need to revive the memories that fix the multiple images in her mind of the "lost paradise" can be explained as a reserved space elided in the memory (Pérez-Firmat 1995) or as a source of reminiscences that evoke the previous and lost experiences of childhood (Medina 1990).

Similarly, the García girls' distant past is only remembered through the character of Chucha, the very dark-skinned Haitian maid who, left behind in the Dominican Republic to look after the compound, predicts the girls' being haunted by "what they do and don't

⁶⁹ The term "1.5 generation" was originally invented by sociologist Rubén Rumbaut to refer to those Cubans "who belong to an intermediate immigrant generation between Cuba and the United States. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat expands on this definition by suggesting that the members of this generation spent their childhood or adolescence abroad but grew into adulthood in North America". As such, the "1.5 generation" is divided between the first generation of their parents (the old world) and the second generation of children born and educated in the United States (new world). Their position of "incompleteness makes them hyphens—more than one, less than two—circulating within and through both the old and the new cultures". Gustavo Pérez-Firmat. 1994a. *Life-on-the-Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 4-5.

remember [...] [that] they will invent what they need to survive” (Álvarez 1991, 223).

Moreover, in *The García Girls* and *Dreaming in Cuban* the attempts to create an “alternative home” are directly related to the motif of memory and loss of language, the latter often serving as a metaphor for existential alienation (Alvarez-Borland 1994, 46). Álvarez-Borland refers to dual spaces and separation and the effect that these have on language in the following terms:

These tales seem to fall into two categories: those in which language loss is directly related to the exile experience and those in which the loss of voice transcends exile and becomes a metaphor for existential alienation. (Alvarez-Borland 1998, 138)

Similarly, Julia Álvarez asserts the power of the Word as the one that can position people either at the back of the queue or in the Tower of Babel:

Our first few years in this country, we encountered lots of prejudice because we couldn't ‘defend ourselves’ by speaking good English [...] I realized that with an accent and not knowing the right word...and not being able to do that, I really didn't have...I was no...We were nobody. (Caminero-Santangelo 1998, 17)

Despite the fact that the girls’ father’s “money had paid for the good private schools which unrolled our r’s and softened our accents” (Álvarez 1991, 27), Carla García, for instance, experiences a profound feeling of alienation in the United States because she cannot at times communicate in English. In the chapter “Trespass” (Álvarez 1991, 150-165) Carla cannot utter one word in English or Spanish after being attacked by a pervert (Álvarez 1991, 157). Later on, when the police try to interview her about the assault, Carla feels pressured by the policeman who insists on her describing something in a language she does not understand to someone who “had no recognition of the difficulty she was having in trying to describe what

she had seen with her tiny English vocabulary” (Álvarez 1991, 162). Carla’s feelings of displacement in the United States are magnified when the family goes back to the Dominican Republic after a year. In the chapter “An American Surprise” (Álvarez 1991, 256-74), her family prepares a cake to celebrate the occasion when the girls turn one American year old. But Carla cannot understand the reason for celebrating the day they lost everything (Álvarez 1991, 150). At this moment, she recalls her sense of estrangement once again in the English language: when reading the sign PRIVATE: NO TRESSPASSING she can only associate the word “trespass” with the Lord’s Prayer. When her mother explains to her that it refers to private property, Carla nods disappointed: “[s]he would never get the hang of this new country” (Álvarez 1991, 151). At this stage Carla García wishes to go back to the Dominican Republic because she sees herself as incapable of mastering the English language, and in “An American Surprise” (Álvarez 1991, 256-74) she asks God to let the family return home.

This same experience is echoed in her sister Yolanda. Although Yolanda has a better grasp of English than her sister Carla, she perceives herself as a foreigner on several occasions. When Yolanda and her boyfriend Rudy decide to write a sonnet together (“The Rudy Elmenhurst Story”, Álvarez 1991, 86-106), Yolanda feels frustrated because he has included words and sentences with double meanings that she is unable to decipher. Yolanda’s anxiety with integration in North American society is closely connected to her accent. After she reads out loud the sonnet she and Rudy have written her classmates make fun of her accent and Yolanda curses her immigrant origins for the hundredth time (Álvarez 1991, 94). Yolanda’s sense of detachment and isolation in North American society is also reflected as her being seen not only as a foreigner, but as a “geography lesson” (Álvarez 1991, 98) when Rudy’s parents suggest that she would be a good opportunity for Rudy to learn about different cultures. The same experience of objectification is experienced by Negi in Esmeralda

Santiago's novel *Almost a Woman* (1999). Like Yolanda's boyfriend, Negi's lovers make stereotyped assumptions about her sexuality based on her racial and cultural identity. She was:

a "shiksa" for the Jewish Sidney, or Puerto Rican for the German Otto, or "Spanish girl" for the Texan Avery Lee, "a hot-tomato Latina, the promiscuous Anita of *West Side Story* [...] a "Spanish" girl, good enough to sleep with but not good enough to marry. (Santiago 1999, 247-249)

After Yolanda and Rudy split up Yolanda laments that no one will understand her biculturalism:

What a cold, lonely life awaited me in this country. I would never find someone who would understand my peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles. (Álvarez 1991, 99)

In the same vein, Yolanda's relationship with married North American John is severely affected by the cultural and linguistic gap: "He spoke kindly, but in a language she had never heard before" (Álvarez 1991, 77). When playing a rhyme game John is unable to access the Spanish language and Yolanda realises that they "just didn't speak the same language" (Álvarez 1991, 81). Negi's problems with language in her relationship with Turkish filmmaker Ulvi in *The Turkish Lover* (Santiago 2004) give rise to her lack of identification with the English language and also her estrangement from a third culture, that of Ulvi, which does not belong to her:

His name, Ulvi Dogan, sounded so foreign to my tongue, that it was sometimes difficult to pronounce it. That initial vowel made it awkward-not the rounded Puerto Rican "u" nor the puckered, sharp English "u," but a sound halfway in between, a strangled diphthong. (Santiago 2004, 3)

In the same way Yolanda laments that no-one will understand her biculturality, Negi also accuses Ulvi of not understanding or accepting her: “You don’t like the American part of me and you disdain the Puerto Rican!” (Santiago 2004, 220).

Yolanda’s failure in her marriage and her inability to be understood or understand the English language creates a fragmentation of her personality also shared with the character of Negi in *The Turkish Lover*. Yolanda’s identity crisis is evidenced by her names: she is the Dominican Yolanda, Yo and Yoyo, and the Americanised Joe: “No, no, no, she didn’t want to divide herself anymore, three persons in one Yo” (Álvarez 1991, 78). A similar situation of self-division and identity crisis is experienced by Negi. The different spatial locations through which the protagonist travels and contact with different cultures seem to render her real self invisible:

As in Brooklyn, where I had been Negi at home and an official Esmeralda to outsiders, I was Chiquita with Ulvi and his friends, but answered to the shorter, less intimidating Es or Essie at Course Irving Memorial Hospital [...] I gave the world a shadow me, a me who looked like me but wasn’t, a me that could function according to the rules that would get me what I wanted and needed [...] I kept that me so hidden, that I was invisible even to myself. (Santiago 2004, 209-10)

Yolanda and Carla García’s foreignness in these novels becomes “a metaphor for separation and estrangement” that, according to Mary S. Vasquez, can exist as “fully within a family home as in exile in an alien land” (Vasquez 1995, 23). In *Dreaming in Cuban*, for example, the alienation at home occurs because of the impossibility of communication through the loss of language. Pilar is unable to communicate with her grandmother. Celia detects through Pilar’s letters that “Spanish is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw dice on green felt or asphalt” (García 1992, 7). And when Lourdes goes back to Cuba with Pilar, she shouts on the street in English at Cuban revolutionaries who

cannot understand her: “I pull my mother from the growing crowd. The language she speaks is lost to them. It’s another idiom entirely” (García 1992, 221). Pilar’s disconnection from the Spanish language creates feelings of separation from her Cuban culture that results from her hybrid condition as a Cuban-American, and is accentuated by the separation of her family living between Cuba and North America. As Rocío G. Davis notes in her article “Back to the Future: Mothers, Languages and Homes in Cristina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuban*”, “language functions in *Dreaming in Cuban* as a measuring device for gauging both connection and separation, loyalty and abandonment, between families and land” (Davis 2000, 64). Her preoccupations are revealed through the motif of painting which characterises Pilar throughout the novel. Painting for Pilar is a way of transmitting meaning without words, by replacing text with images and feelings with colours and shapes. Moreover, painting prevents her from losing meaning in translation: “Painting is its own language [...] Translations just confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English” (García 1992, 59). Pilar refuses to title her paintings and instead she numbers them: “I mean, who needs words when colors and lines conjure up their own language? That’s what I want to do with my paintings, find a unique language, obliterate the clichés” (García 1992, 139).

Pilar’s relationship with Celia and their difficulties in communication due to the loss of language echoes the relationship between Leila and Amalfi in Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints*. Amalfi’s strong sense of patriotism keeps her in the Dominican Republic away from her little daughter, who has been taken to live with her grandmother Mercedes in Washington Heights. Their relationship is maintained by an unequal correspondence since Amalfi refuses to answer Leila’s letters. Leila’s persistence in writing and sending letters to her mother from the United States to the Dominican Republic signifies her longing for emotional attachment: “Leila wished her mother would not have stayed behind in DR like a

goddamned coward” (Rosario 2002, 205). In an attempt to keep alive Leila’s relationship with her mother, her grandmother Mercedes decides to go back to the Dominican Republic in 1998. Even though Leila does not want to go back to meet her mother, there nonetheless exists a subconscious, subliminal need to journey to regain her mother’s love and reconcile with her and with the Motherland. However, Leila finds a reality different to her imagined Dominican Republic. Where she thought she could “run down beaches and [dance] merengue into the night for the five weeks” (Rosario 2002, 219), she finds a de-romanticised and tropicalised island. Instead she discovers:

a country boring and backward as her mother is. No way in hell was Leila going to leave New York and come and live with that corpulent woman who smelled like doughnuts in a country as boring and backward as this one. Not one cute guy in sight — and she knew the papis had to be somewhere on this half of the island. Leila lowered her head and cried out of sheer boredom. (Rosario 2002, 219)

Leila’s rejection of her mother signifies a denial of the Motherland. She knows that neither the Dominican Republic nor her mother can keep her happy, and so the family returns to the United States leaving Amalfi behind.

In *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* alienation from the home is best exemplified in Yolanda’s visits to the island. Five years have elapsed since the first time Yolanda returns to the Dominican Republic. Her cousin Lucinda criticises her clothes for being like those of a hippie and she calls her “Miss America”. Yolanda admits that she and her sisters had become “pretty well Americanised” and that the island “has become old hat”. She superimposes her adopted North American values on Dominican traditions in her need to be part of North American society and this, at the same time, distances her from being part of the Dominican Republic. Later on, after twenty five years, Yolanda decides to return to the

island for good. So in much the same way as Pilar, though unlike Sofía who undergoes a forced repatriation to the island, Yolanda García initially wishes to return to the Dominican Republic and make it her home (Álvarez 1991, 11).

Yolanda is caught between her alienation in the United States and her desire to find out how much she belongs to the Dominican Republic. However, she realises that she does not belong to the island either. She is equally alienated from the “family home”. However, Yolanda’s arrival on the island in 1989 awakes in her a distant past. Her trip to her roots symbolises both a reunion with her place of origin and her search for her childhood recollections of life in the Dominican Republic:

This is what she has been missing all these years without really knowing that she has been missing it. Standing here in the quiet, she believes she has never felt at home in the States, never. (Álvarez 1991, 12)

Whereas Sofía who returns to the island for a second time because life in North America does not make her happy, Yolanda García returns for the last time to stay. She is embraced by what seems to her a genuine welcoming by her Dominican family. Her aunts and cousins make her a cake in the shape of the island to welcome her home. However, Yolanda’s alienation from home recalls an earlier past, when she is again criticised for having a “typical North American” behaviour, after setting out by herself to pick wild *guavas* in the countryside. In response, Yolanda does not understand why women should wait at home for their husbands’ return. This little but symbolic adventure triggers her awareness of her misplacement in the island. When Yolanda goes into a *cantina* to ask for some *guavas*, the lady apologises because her son has hidden from the *Americana*. Later on, when one of her tyres goes flat in a deserted guava grove, and two *campesinos* approach her to help her, Yolanda panics for fear of being raped, kidnapped or killed (Álvarez 1991, 17). Her sense of misplacement

heightened by the men's look when they ask her if she is *Americana*, "as if not quite sure what to make of her" (Álvarez 1991, 20). Unable to utter a single word in Spanish to identify herself, Yolanda starts to speak English as a means of self protection, thus moving herself even further from her roots. Her displacement is further emphasised when on her way to drop off the boy who goes for help from a *guardia*, the child explains to her: "He said I was telling stories. No *Dominicana* with a car would be out at this hour getting guayabas" (Álvarez 1991, 28). On the way home she sees a Palmolive bill board with the picture of a "creamy, blond woman [who] luxuriates under a refreshing shower, her head thrown back in seeming ecstasy" (Álvarez 1991, 14-5). This scene signifies a country divided into those who can afford to buy Palmolive soap and live a life without economic worries and those, the majority of the islanders, who have no means of accessing this lifestyle. The woman has her "mouth [...] [is] open as if she is calling someone over a great distance", (Álvarez 1991, 23) which Yolanda interprets as a call for her to return to the United States.

Yolanda's attempts to reconcile her hybrid identity through the journey and language respond to an experience shared by many transnationals whose identities are, according to Patricia Waugh "the illusion produced through the manipulation of irreconcilable and contradictory language games" (Waugh 1989, 7). Likewise, linguistic barriers as obstacles for negotiating identity are visible in *Dreaming in Cuban*, to which Mary S. Vasquez refers, suggesting that:

individual language in the novel's world becomes an emblem, and expression of foreignness becomes impenetrability, the ultimate isolation to which each of Garcia's characters is condemned. (Vasquez 1995, 23)

Yolanda's journey to the Dominican Republic is more than a mere recalling of her childhood years in her country of origin. Rather, her spiritual journey affirms her sense of belonging to a

reality different than that of her family, at the same time as it reviews relationships among generational family members separated by opposing Spanish Caribbean and North American cultural contexts. Yolanda's trip back to her roots symbolises more than her efforts to retrieve her lost Spanish language, but also to recover her Dominican past now replaced by life in the United States.

Like Yolanda, Lourdes, after going back with her daughter and witnessing the misery and hunger of post Revolutionary Cuba, celebrates not being part of the present: "she considers herself lucky", "she wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her" (García 1992, 73). Similarly, Pilar wishes to return to Cuba as a way of exploring and rediscovering her Cuban self, but finds a reality different to the one she had imagined whilst living in North America. To Pilar's surprise and Celia's disappointment, Cuba is no longer the country of which she dreams. After witnessing the Cuban reality at first hand, Pilar feels that Cuba has gone back in time to become a version of an earlier America (García 1992, 220).

Some critics such as Donna Rifkind have found fault with Álvarez's narrative structure and characterisations. Rifkind asserts in the review of the novel entitled "Speaking American" that:

Alvarez's goal of translating her characters' voices into an unhackneyed American idiom has gone unrealised. The García Girls may indeed have lost their accents, but in her first book of fiction Julia Álvarez has not yet quite found a voice. (Rifkind 1991, 14)

In fact, and as a response to Rifkind's argument, I would suggest that the aim of the novel is to show that the girls have not found themselves either in their homeland or the United States and the underlying structure of the book is the strategy adopted by Álvarez used to reflect

their confused identity and lack of voice. Certainly, Wendy Perkins' statement offers a better understanding of the narrative strategy of the novel:

this structural fragmentation, however, skilfully reinforces the novel's main point —that the difficult process of acculturation can result in feelings of dislocation and a fragmented sense of the self. (Perkins 1999, 180)

Roberto González Echevarría describes the difficult process of journey as a mechanism to negotiate hybrid identities and cultures in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* and *Dreaming in Cuban*. He refers to the binary of living between irreconcilable cultural spaces:

Even those born here often travel to their parents' homeland, and constantly face a flow of friends and relatives from 'home' who keep the current culture. This constant cross-fertilization makes assimilation a more complicated process for them than for other minority groups. (Echevarría 1998, 28)

The García girls and Pilar del Pino are subjected to the centrifugal and centripetal forces that pull them away from and closer to home both in the United States and in the Dominican Republic and Cuba respectively. At the same time, because the Diaspora involves a movement of reconciliation or negotiation of more than one world, it challenges the traditional notion of transnational subjectivities as fixed identities, precisely because although the characters have chosen to live in the United States their identities will always be divided between more than one physical space. Silvio Sirias addresses the complexity of this dichotomy of the self when referring to Álvarez's novel:

Álvarez ably mines this feature of the immigrant experience: the duality, linguistic and cultural, of living on the hyphen, of being a Dominican-American, and by extension a Hispanic-American. (Sirias 2001, 33)

The García girls and Pilar's experiences of relocating their identities through the physical movement between one home and the other differs from the experience of those characters in Angie Cruz's novel *Soledad*, and Lóida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*. Pilar and Yolanda's inability to adopt to the islands and their final decision to return to the United States responds to what Raphael Dalleo says in his article "How Cristina Garcia Lost her Accent, and other Latina Conversations" when he explains Pilar's refusal to stay in Cuba:

Pilar wants us to read this not as a rejection of Cuban-ness, but as an affirmation of a more complicated American-ness. Pilar decides to leave because she thinks that staying in Cuba is to limit herself: as she thinks of it, to choose Cuba, she would be choosing to be Cuban, but to choose the United States, she chooses to be Cuban and American. (Dalleo 2005, 15)

This choice of home and multiple identities found in Pilar and also applicable to Yolanda's situation contrasts with how Soledad and her mother Olivia perceive life in the Dominican Republic, that is, as their way of salvation and reunion between mother and daughter. Unlike Pilar del Pino, for instance, whose decision to leave Cuba and stay in New York is an open statement of her feeling trapped in the island, Olivia's fragmented identity in New York results from her desire to return to the island (Cruz 2001, 217): "leaving the homeland "[i]t's like selling your soul" (Cruz 2001, 165). For Olivia and Soledad, the initial impossibility of their returning to the Dominican Republic is an indication of their continuous powerlessness in the novel.

Soledad's insecurity begins, as for most characters in these novels, with her disappointment in the American Dream. Although she has made her family believe that she has left barrio life in 164th Street for the West Upper Side to live in "the school dorms, which [I] she kind of described to be more like high-rises, with a view of the East River and really great showers" (Cruz 2001, 11), the truth is that Soledad still lives at East Village in

Washington Heights, in an area with “the smell of piss” and “the lightbulb in the lobby that flashes on and off like a cheap disco light” (Cruz 2001, 11).⁷⁰ Living in Washington Heights has a profound impact on Soledad’s perception of herself given its social, class, and racial connotations. To avoid being categorised by whites as belonging to working-class, or more precisely the uneven economic development and the environmental and material conditions of blacks and Hispanics associated with Washington Heights, Soledad identifies herself as living in the “Upper Upper Upper West Side” (Cruz 2001, 12). Her pursuit of the American Dream implies a need to leave barrio life, in particular the black enclave of 164th Street, which she describes as a “prison sentence” (Cruz 2001, 13). While the West symbolises prosperity, educational and economic opportunities and, therefore, upward mobility, the East is “a war zone filled with cop killers, killer cops, crack dealers, gang members and lazy welfare mothers” (Cruz 2001, 12). Soledad is forced to return home, to her family’s eccentricities, superstitions, fights and craziness and the barrio life that she never left in the first place. Her return to her family, particularly to a mother who has lost her mind and dances naked in her room, awakes Soledad’s awareness not only of her displacement in New York, but also of the effects of her mother’s uprooting from the Dominican Republic.

Olivia represents the most harrowing case of this uprooting and its fatal effects on identity. The mad woman in the novel, she is locked up in her bedroom until her final journey to the Dominican Republic.⁷¹ The reasons for Olivia’s psychological fragmentation escape the

⁷⁰ During the 1940s Washington Heights was divided into two sections according to race and class: the Western and white part and the Eastern and black section. According to Ira Katznelson, the latter “was treated as an extension of Harlem”, “a black tenement area”. While East Washington Heights, northern Manhattan’s smallest neighbourhood, was mainly populated by Cubans and Dominicans, the West had a significant white population. The differences between the two sides also applied to education and income, being the latter more prosperous and living in better conditions than the former, or as Katznelson says, “for the better classes”. Ira Katznelson. 1981. *City Trenches: Urban Politics and Patterning of Class in the United States*, New York: Pantheon Books, 85, 76.

⁷¹ The literary theme of female madness and the metaphor of confinement to a physical place, such as the bedroom or the attic, which Olivia recalls in the novel, echoes other female characters in literature. See Charlotte

understanding of her sister Gorda, who thinks that she can be cured by a continuous cleansing of the body, the lighting of candles around her face and with Soledad's return.

Not until the ultimate scene in the Dominican Republic, in which Soledad is rescued by her mother after falling into the river, do mother and daughter embrace each other by going back to their roots. Their journey to the Dominican Republic is an attempt to retrace the past and rebuild the present. The reunion with the land allows Olivia to recover her childhood memories thus regaining herself and her lost innocence. But it also means the retrieval of the lost emotional ties with her daughter Soledad.

Geographies of Home presents a different perspective on the impact of going back to one's roots. Although the characters have the same feelings of longing for home, the Dominican Republic, the lack of movement entraps them in the impossibility of returning. While both Olivia and Soledad decide to identify themselves as Dominicans by staying in the island —the opposite of Pilar and Yolanda as Cuban and Dominican Americans— Aurelia and Papito's family are trapped in between both realities without belonging to either of them. In contrast with Olivia and Soledad for whom the yearning for home is a constant reminder of their lives in North America, in *Geographies of Home*, Rebecca, the first member of the family to move to the United States at the age of twenty-one, from where she would send for her parents, only recalls memories of pain in her homeland. The illusion of the United States, "where the fulfilment of dreams was possible" (Pérez 1999, 149), serves as a metaphor for their dislocation in the adopted land as both individuals and as a family: Iliana struggles to belong in the United States where she is the subject of constant racism and within her family where she is the victim of sexual and physical abuse; and Marina's craziness is attributed, according to her parents, to her uprooting from the homeland. As Erica Sanders notes in

Brönte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).

“Miserable in Brooklyn”, a review in *The New York Times*, “Pérez relates much of this story in eerie flashback. Memories of a plentiful island life in the Dominican Republic collide with Brooklyn’s alienated landscapes” (Sanders 1999).

“Geographies” and “Home” acquire an additional sensorial meaning as both become a mental state. Apart from determining the feelings of the family members and driving them to continuous states of depression and madness, the physical and psychological home in Loida Maritza Pérez’s novel works continuously as a memory of the absence of a home —an experience also shared by many of the female protagonists in the novels under discussion:

Throughout more than fifteen years of moving from apartment to apartment, she had dreamed, not of returning, but of going home. Of going home to a place not located on any map but nonetheless preventing her from settling in any other. Only now did she understand that her soul had yearned not for a geographical site but for a frame of mind able to accommodate any place as home. (Pérez 1999, 137)

Knowing that returning to the Dominican Republic is impossible, Aurelia resigns herself to finding somewhere which she can consider as home.

The fact that Pérez situates her characters in the same place throughout the novel, and that the desire to go back to the Dominican Republic is just an illusion, an unrealisable dream for Aurelia and Papito, is symptomatic of the negative effects that uprooting has upon the family members: Marina’s madness recalls Olivia’s uprooting from the Dominican Republic, Iliana’s displacement at school and at home, the failure of Rebecca’s life, the suffering of Papito because his sons have left him in the Bronx, Aurelia’s troubled relationships with her daughters, and Aurelia and Papito caught between their desire to go back home and their knowledge that they will never see their island again: They “spent several late-night hours planning how they would move their family back to the Dominican Republic”, unsuccessfully

(Pérez 1999, 233). The physical space becomes a psychological and emotional need for self-reassurance and stability, an option not available in *Geographies of Home*.

Becoming and Being: Travelling Transnational Spaces in Esmeralda Santiago's *When I was Puerto Rican*

Recalling Yolanda García's recollection of life in the Dominican Republic through her "*antojo*" of picking up guavas, the motif of the guava as the symbol of a lost or nostalgic past is also a recurrent theme in Esmeralda Santiago's novel *When I was Puerto Rican*. Right at the opening of the novel, there is a detailed description of how a guava should be eaten. This provokes a reflection on the tasteless predictability of the fruit staples in a New York supermarket, foregrounding the memory of a past life in Puerto Rico of long-forgotten smells and tastes:

Today, I stand before a stack of dark green guavas, each perfectly round and hard, each \$1.59. The one in my hand is tempting. It smells faintly of late summer afternoons and hop-scotch under the mango tree. But this is autumn in New York, and I'm no longer a child. (Santiago 1993, 4)

The different guavas that the protagonist Negi tastes, and ultimately accepts, are a metaphor of her moving backwards and forwards across cultures, of travelling across spaces as a way of reconciling her hybrid Puerto Rican American identity.

Like Álvarez's title *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* refers to the meaning of home and identity, dislocation and displacement. In his article "Travelling Voices of Caribbean Nationhood: Bilingualism, Translation and Diaspora in the Work of Julia Álvarez and Esmeralda Santiago", John D. Perivolaris (1997, 117-125) comments on the connotations of the past tense in both titles. He

suggests that the use of the preterite in both titles not only implies a “hypothetically primary Hispanic or Caribbean nationality and culture” (Perivolaris 1997, 117), but that the past tense also alludes to issues of assimilation and the re-definition of identities in the Diaspora and back in the homelands through the implication of bilingualism or “the very unclear political boundaries of two languages” (Perivolaris 1997, 118). In both novels, the past tense suggests “a linguistic departure” (Perivolaris 1997, 118) which, at the same time, is continuously re-enacted through the journey back to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico and through the practice of memory by the remembrance of a lost past. As Perivolaris indicates in relation to Santiago’s *When I was Puerto Rican*:

Puerto Rico is a place of loss and recollected physical sensation; Puerto Rico also represents a type of history whose continually renewable incompleteness is rendered in translation by the use of the imperfect verbal tense of the book’s Spanish title: *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. (Perivolaris 1997, 119)

Through the use of the past tense the novel addresses a nostalgic vision of an independent Puerto Rican nation under the cultural transformations of North American colonial power. By narrating the personal and political story of Puerto Rico through Negi’s experiences, the author questions the formation of a Puerto Rican hybrid identity at cultural, social and national levels. As Santiago says, “[t]he past tense in the title of my book is an attempt to provoke Puerto Ricans into examining what we mean when we call ourselves Puerto Rican” (Kevane 2000b, 131-32). Carlos Hiraldo asserts that “the title does not indicate that she is no longer Puerto Rican, but that the book portrays a bygone time in her life defined by Puerto Rican folk culture” (2003, 105). This Puerto Rican folk culture defines Negi’s identity in the first chapters of the novel, which narrate the historical period of North America’s relationship with Puerto Rico, particularly during the years of the Operation Bootstrap of the 1950s and

1960s, and more specifically in the chapter “The American Invasion of Macún” (Santiago 1993, 61-84).⁷² During this decade Negi’s identity is marked by a linguistic and cultural invasion of her Puerto Rican identity by North American cultural (and political) values. Once again, language acquires a cultural-conditioned subconscious and a dimension of national belonging and identification.

“The invasion of Macún” is the chapter of the novel that best exemplifies the Puerto Ricans’ disempowerment and initial signs of forced assimilation of North American culture, the experiences that will mark the greater part of Negi’s coming of age. Since 1898 North America had profited from the control of the most important economic activity on the island. The sugar cane industry had provided the United States with substantial amounts of surplus capital. This situation continued until the 1950s, by which time the Puerto Rican economy had developed a close dependency on North American products, destroying, as a result, its agricultural and commercial sectors. Puerto Rico’s economy regulated by North American legal systems restricted the island’s own control of imports and in turn provided North America with the ownership of the island’s internal markets and a total control of its economy. Since the 1940s Puerto Rico had embraced the planning of the island as official policy. The first steps towards the industrialisation of Puerto Rico occurred when the PDP’s (Popular Democratic Party), under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín, allied with the governorship of North American Rexford Tugwell. Since Puerto Rico’s political concomitant —Commonwealth status— met the needs of Muñoz, he took part in Operation Bootstrap and the planning for economic development and infrastructures in Puerto Rico. In order for North

⁷² During the post-war period, the attempts to industrialise Puerto Rico started with the New Deal program of running island-owned factories. By 1947, these factories were sold to attract investors and build up new industry, and in 1951 the industrialising programme “was reorganized into the Economic Development Administration called *Fomento* and Operation Bootstrap began to transform the island”. Roberta Ann Johnson. 1980. *Puerto Rico, Commonwealth or Colony?*, New York: Praeger.

America to invest its capital and enlarge its markets, certain privileges such as cheap electricity, road construction and tax exemptions were allowed to Puerto Ricans. In turn, Puerto Rico would remain functioning as the vital force that helped to maintain North American imperialism. Puerto Rico was economically valued for North America because of its territorial extension, population and economic activity. The island, rich in nickel and petroleum —natural resources of strategic importance for North America— also provided the perfect location to process raw materials imported from other countries ensuring North America's position in the economic industry (Economic Research Group, 1976). One of the goals of "Operation Bootstrap" program was the focus on capital-intensive industrialisation. According to Michael Lapp:

urban planners, economists, sociologists, and other academic researchers attempted to create in Puerto Rico a social laboratory, a model for Third World economic development, and a 'showcase for democracy'. (Lapp 1995, 170)

In the novel, one of the most acute observers of the effects of North American imperialism on Puerto Rico is Doña Lola. She is conscious and suspicious of the repercussions on the island's modernisation and progress. She distrusts the *Americanos* "who are really something" with their trucks and buses, electricity and water looking for *artesanías* (Santiago 1993, 55), and she criticises their right to appropriate *fincas* to be substituted by hotels. She is the only one who sees beyond the guarantees of a better economic and social life offered by the *Americanos*. This historical backdrop, that is, Puerto Rico's status quo and North American imperialism on the island is noticeable when Negi finally goes back to Puerto Rico to visit her family after almost twenty years of living in the United States:

The first thing I saw as the plane turned and dipped toward the runway in

Isla Verde was a billboard for Mercedes Benz. Next to it was another for Burger King. The third was the first one in Spanish, for *es de Velasco*, which I later learned was a department store in Plaza las Américas, the biggest shopping mall in the Caribbean. It was not the Puerto Rico I remembered [...] Our house, and that of our neighbors Doña Lola and Doña Ana, was torn down to make way for the highway that would bring tourists to a gated community and golf resort in what was once a sugar plantation. (Santiago 2004, 273, 278)

While North America enriches its economy, many Puerto Ricans face inequality and exploitation and are forced to migrate in search of a better life.

The arrival of North Americans in Macún signifies the uprooting and replacement of local Puerto Rican identity for North American values: “You could tell the experts from San Juan from the ones that came from the Jun-ited Estates because the *Americanos* wore ties with their white shirts and tugged at their collars and wiped their foreheads with crumpled handkerchiefs” (Santiago 1993, 64). The expertise of North Americans was seen as vital to transform Puerto Rico into a modern society, and therefore, this expertise was necessary to be imported in Puerto Rico, resulting in the manipulation and humiliation of the islanders.

The section in which North American medical experts instruct women and children about hygiene is an ironic and comical representation of North Americans’ attempts to control the island, which in individual terms translates into Negi’s being forced to deny herself of her Puerto Rican identity. The identification of Puerto Ricans as a non-white nation created medical concerns which classified them within a racialised discourse on hygiene. When referring to Puerto Rican Americans Roberto P. Rodríguez-Morazzani states that “Puerto Ricans and other groups have been described as ‘dirty spics’, ‘greasy Porto Ricans’, etc” (Rodríguez-Morazzani 1998, 152). Rodríguez-Mozzarani’s observations about Puerto Rican Americans transgress North American borders by the doctors and dieticians in Puerto Rico, perpetuating prejudices of impurity and disease, of infection and degeneration in the island. In

the novel, North Americans give Puerto Rican women a chart of the appropriate foods to be consumed and provide them with instructions on how to brush their teeth, as well as toothbrushes to be distributed in each family. They promote North American culture by reassuring the local population that “*La buena* [North American food] nutrition is *muy importante para los niños*” (Santiago 1993, 66), as it is the best diet to make them “grow up as tall and strong as Dick, Jane, and Sally, the *Americanitos* in our primers” (Santiago 1993, 66). Despite the impossibility of growing North American vegetables and fruits in the island, they tell the women to eat assorted North American foods and, therefore, to disregard the local ingredients such as *pan de manteca*, *queso del país* and *batatas*, together with staples of rice, plantains, oatmeal and sausages (Santiago 1993, 66). North Americans’ imposition of values concerning food and hygiene over the Puerto Ricans jeopardises the island’s cultural identity and enmeshes it in the political, social and racial discourses of the United States.

Negi’s shifts from one culture to another are also visible in the novel through the food motif. The replacement of Puerto Rican food at school in Macún by ‘huevos Americanos’ and ‘salchichas Americanas’ (Santiago 1993, 75) points to North America’s economic monopoly of Puerto Rico. This monopolisation of the island is symbolically criticised and rejected by Negi. In contrast to her best friend Juanita who welcomes North American food, Negi condemns its peculiar odour, its salty, dry and fibrous taste. She vomits in the school lounge and overtly declares in front of her teacher Mrs. García that she refuses to eat the “disgusting gringo imperialist food!” (Santiago 1993, 82). This statement reveals the emergence of Negi’s awareness of deliberate North American abuse of Puerto Rican social, cultural and national values that violates principles of equality, *dignidad* and harmony.

This economic policy was just one of many other strategies involved in the Operation Bootstrap. In order for North Americans to maintain their metropolitan power, education in

English became one of the priorities in the Puerto Rican educational system as a means to Americanise the population. The constitutional English Language Amendment, according to James Crawford sought “to prohibit most uses of other tongues by government (federal, state, and local) and, in some circumstances, by individuals” (Crawford 1998, 559). However, through the imposition of the English-only plan, as the medium of instruction and all legal proceedings, educational failure and socio-political unrest became a serious concern for Puerto Ricans (Zentella 2002, 303-4).

In Santiago’s introduction to the Spanish translation of *When I was Puerto Rican*, (*Cuando era Puertorriqueña*) the author says that “The life presented in this book was lived in Spanish but was initially written in English” (Santiago 1994, xv). In the memoir itself, Negi’s minimal command of English is only sufficient for basic survival and the language the family communicates in is Spanish. However, as the novel moves forward—a parallel movement with Negi’s travelling across cultures—a different Negi is revealed, and English language progressively becomes a main part of her bicultural identity.⁷³ Contrary to the García girls and Pilar del Pino, Negi does not go through a process of language loss, but through social advancement she learns English whilst maintaining her Spanish. Even before the family moves to the United States, Negi experiences the introduction of English into her life in Puerto Rico. At the beginning, Negi resists assimilation into North American culture by refusing to learn and speak the English language, so she does not become an imperialist *Americana* (Santiago 1993, 73). The attempts to introduce English language and to study “the Jun-ited Estates gee-o-graphee” (Santiago 1993, 63) in Puerto Rican schools is shown

⁷³The practices of linguistic code-switching between English and Spanish across the geographies of Puerto Rico and the United States, particularly New York, have been defined by Puerto Rican writer Mayra Santos Febres as “translocality” in her Doctoral Thesis *The Translocal Papers: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Puerto Rican Literature*. Febres pays special attention to gender and national subjectivity formation through the translocal experience, that is, how the self, influenced by the historical conditions of colonisation in Puerto Rico, is constructed within a circular movement of migration, the internal exiles inside the nation. Mayra Santos Febres. 1993. *The Translocal Papers: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Puerto Rican Literature*. (Ana Lydia Vega, Manuel Ramos Otero, Sandra María Esteves, Luz María Umpierre), Cornell University.

ironically through Miss Jiménez's failed efforts to teach English. Not only do pupils struggle with the English sounds, but they acknowledge the empty meaning of imposed words of which they cannot make any sense: "She tried to teach us "America the Beautiful" but had to give up when we stumbled on "for spacious skies" (4 espé chosk ¡Ay!) and "amber waves of grain (am burr gueys oh gren)" (Santiago 1993, 77). Negi's struggle and initial resistance to learning the English language contrasts with the García girls' quick assimilation of the language and their adoption of North American culture when still living in the island.⁷⁴ The different approach to assimilation by Negi and the García girls underlies the latter's desire for acceptance as North Americans as well as their interest in maintaining their class status in both the Spanish Caribbean and once they move to the United States.

The cynical and humorous representation of Miss Jiménez's English class satirises the repression exercised by the United States' colonial power over the Puerto Rican teaching system. From both a linguistic and a cultural point of view, Negi's refusal to accept English language education is a central determinant in maintaining her language and preserving her integrity and identity as a Puerto Rican. However, once in New York, Negi's need to survive inevitably forces her to move from a position of a 'one true self' to a state of "'becoming' as well as 'being'" (Hall 1996, 112) and thus, she turns English into an instrument for social advancement. Moving from the family's insufficient command of English at the beginning, as the novel progresses, Negi develops a more comfortable attitude to her adoptive language, which becomes the source of rancour and causes problems of communication between mother and daughter: "You think just because you speak a little English you can do anything you

⁷⁴ The girls' assimilation of English in the Dominican Republic is expressed in Álvarez's own words in an essay entitled "An American Childhood in the Dominican Republic": "[My mother] enrolled her daughters in Carol Morgan's school where we began to each day by pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States, which I much preferred to the Dominican one, for it had the lovely red-and-white stripes of the awning at the ice-cream parlor [...] We also sang the marine song [...] marching in place to the rallying beat". Julia Álvarez. 1988. "An American Childhood in the Dominican Republic", *The American Scholar* 57 (1): 77-87, 77-8.

like!” (Santiago 1993, 251). The psychological shift between becoming (North American) and being (Puerto Rican) in North America determines Negi’s building of a hybrid identity. Linguistically, the crossroads of two languages emerges as an unavoidable site of hybrid bilingualism linked to her dual self, which she describes whilst living in North America in the following words:

[We] spoke in Spanglish, a combination of English and Spanish in which we hopped from one language to the other depending on which word came first:

“*Te preguntó el* Mr. Barone, you know, *lo que querías hacer* when you grow up?” I asked.

“*Sí, pero*, I didn’t know. *¿Y tú?*”

“*Yo tampoco*. He said, *que* I like to help people. *Pero*, you know, *a mí no me gusta mucho la gente*”. (Santiago 1993, 258)

Culturally, Negi struggles to reconcile Caribbean and North American cultural values. She develops a taste for pizza and tries out the other North American girls’ styles at home, “locked in the bathroom where no one could watch” (Santiago 1993, 230). She realises that adopting the North American way of life does not mean that she is not Puerto Rican any more or enough, but that she has become a new person living in two worlds and therefore with two histories:

For me, the person I was becoming when we left was erased, and another one was created. The Puerto Rican *jíbara* who longed for the green quiet of a tropical afternoon was to become a hybrid who would never forgive the uprooting. (Santiago 1993, 209)

While living in Macún, Negi’s small personal yet significant contribution to reclaim her spirit as a Puerto Rican in New York is manifested in cultural and national terms by her rethinking

home and nation under the *jibaro* figure, “the Puerto Rican country dweller” (Santiago 1993, 12).⁷⁵ Negi thinks of ‘cultural identity’ in terms of a shared culture, or as Stuart Hall refers to it, as a ‘one true self’ (1996, 110-11). She feels strongly identified with the highland peasants, the national icons that represent the authentic Puerto Rican identity that is based on “independence and contemplation [...] and a deeply rooted and proud nationalism” (Santiago 1993, 12). Like the Puerto Rican *jibaro*, Negi lives in a “box squatting on low stilts” (Santiago 1993, 12). In school, she learns poems and stories about the *jibaro*’s poverty and happiness, and she enjoys the *jibaro* tales about “phantasms, talking animals, and enchanted guava trees” which represent *jibaro* folklore (Santiago 1993, 49).

Once in the United States, she holds on to her Puerto Rican roots by keeping poems of Don Luis Lloréns Torres in her room, that inspire her to “love [my] her country, its *jibaros*, and the wild natural beauty” (Santiago 1993, 208); and she retains the *jibaro* folklore by gathering her family in the warmth of the house while she tells them fairy tales.⁷⁶ Negi’s refuge in literature is a strategy to get away from the sounds of the city and its constant roar. It represents an escape from the cruelty of life in Brooklyn where racial segregation and cultural

⁷⁵ The *jibaro* figure re-emerged in scientific and literary discourses in Puerto Rico during the first decades of the twentieth century. He was transformed from an image of ignorance and idleness to a symbol of Puerto Rican national identity. The “*jibaro histórico*”, as Puerto Rican writer Antonio S. Pedreira (1969) refers to him, belonged to the rural population, to the mountainous areas and could be of any colour and may have been mostly mixed. Physically, the *jibaro* is characterised by wearing broad-brimmed straw hats or the “*pava*”. Spiritually, he is attributed the qualities of docility and strong individualism, honour, dignity and virility. Roberta Ann Johnson defines the figure of the *jibaro* as “content to live in what has been idealised as a “culture of leisure”, [that is] he relaxed away most of his days in a hammock beneath some guava trees, playing his guitar, betting in cock fights, singing, dancing”. Roberta Ann Johnson. 1980. “The Puerto Rican *Jibaro*: Demise of Spirit and Symbol”, *Puerto Rico, Commonwealth or Colony?*, New York: Praeger, 110-26, 112. Also see Mervyn C. Alleyne’s notes on the *jibaro*. 2002. “Puerto Rico”, *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World*. Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 114-51.

⁷⁶ Puerto Rican poet Luis Lloréns Torres (1817-1941) was of great national importance given the nature of his poetry, which acted as a new wave of renovation in the contemporary letters of Puerto Rico both in terms of aesthetics and content. Lloréns wrote about love and death and faithfulness to the homeland “in a heroic effort to overcome the regional and spiritual limitation of the island as such and to suppress the anguish and despair of the Puerto Rican generation of 1898”. María Teresa Babín. 1958 “Landmarks in Contemporary Puerto Rican Letters”, *The Americas* 14 (3): 247-57, 251. Lloréns-Torres published monthly the *Revista de las Antillas* (1913), a magazine that allowed other writers such as Rubén Darío help to popularise the trends of the Modernist movement in the island. He also gathered a selection of his life’s work in *Alturas de América* (1940); his poems “*Canción de las Antillas*” (1913) and “*Mare Nostrum*” (1940) sang to the Caribbean with pride and glory, to the cradle of American civilisation.

intolerance deny individual and collective affirmations of the self. The violence and isolation that surround Negi force her to look for other places where she feels secure. This is why Negi keeps herself safe after school at the library where she “sat for hours reading fairy tales, diving into them as into a warm pool that washed away the fear, the sadness, the horror of living in a home where there was no love” (Santiago 1993, 204). Even though the roads of Brooklyn have become familiar, Negi wishes to move out of this place and “never go back” (Santiago 1993, 263).

However, Negi’s development of a ‘one true self’ is continuously interrupted by the dominant, denigrating representation of the *jibaros* at home and abroad, particularly in the cities where they are “mocked for their unsophisticated customs and peculiar accent” (Santiago 1993, 12). While living in Santurce, one of the many places the family moves to while living in Puerto Rico, Negi compares her life with that of the rich Catholic schoolchildren: “I knew they were different, or rather, I was different ... A *jibara* was something no one wanted to be” (Santiago 1993, 39). Even her teacher Doña Leona, who despises the invasion and conquest of the English language, naming it “a bastardisation of [our] the Spanish language” (Santiago 1993, 137), herself colludes in racial discrimination as she openly insults Negi, blaming her for contributing to the ignorance and backwardness of the nation. She undermines Negi’s identity by accusing her of being a *jibara* who has come down from the mountains to the city (Santiago 1993, 139) but her accusations also suggest that Puerto Rico itself—as represented in institutions such as education—is caught in a crisis of self-confidence and self-deprecation. Despite Negi’s humiliation, alienation and degradation by others, she resists abandoning her culture, her language and her Puerto Rican values. In the United States Negi’s memories of her life in Puerto Rico as a *jibara* are re-enacted in school in New York where cultural nationalism is understood according to the

relation between class and race, and different groups are separated from each other by the racial lines established among them.

In North American society racial and class differentiations between white/non-white are used “to create social boundaries and hierarchies of prestige” (Gutiérrez and Genaro, 1993, 19). Racial segregation into different ethnic groups is collectively labelled under many nationalities, cultures and historical backgrounds, and therefore, racism, like other forms of discrimination, becomes “a product of ethnic absolutism related to the ideology of nationalism” (Friedman 1997, 74). Submerged in a multi-ethnic society which embraces Jews, Italians and *Morenos Americanos* (Santiago 1993, 225), Negi questions the politics of identity, segregation, and exclusion at her new English school in New York. She laments that Italians, Latinos, Blacks, and Puerto Ricans are divided by prejudices of race and class: “The Italians all sat together on one side of the cafeteria, the blacks on another. The two groups hated each other more than they hated Puerto Ricans” (Santiago 1993, 229). This racial and class stratification is experienced by Negi at school where the racial groups are segregated from each other according to a hierarchical social order: first, the *Americanos* girls and boys with matching cardigans; second, the girls who wear heavy makeup; and third, the black girls with “hair straightened, curled at the tips” (Santiago 1993, 229).

Negi tries to come to terms with her self and her racial identity in a space where integration in mainstream society depends on the texture of one’s hair, the shade of one’s skin, the makeup one wears, and the way one walks down the hall (Santiago 1993, 230). In *The Turkish Lover* (2004), the sequel to *Almost a Woman* (1999), Negi expresses her difficulties to adapting to North American society where the others’ vision of herself judge her own identity:

The racial middle in which I existed meant that people evaluated me on the spot. Their eyes flickered, their brains calibrated the level of pigmentation they'd find acceptable. Is she light enough to be white? Is she so dark as to be black? (Santiago 1999, 242)

While she longs for acceptance in the dominant North American culture, which provides access to economic and social privileges, she also struggles to preserve her own cultural identity by remaining faithful to Hispanic traditions. On the one hand, she tries never to embarrass Puerto Ricans; but on the other hand, she secretly hitches her skirt up and wears eye makeup which she washes off before she comes back home (Santiago 1993, 251). Ultimately, the displaced position of third-colonial countries in capitalist North American society is emphasised in the novel through a biological descent classification of being white or non-white. Problems of social adjustment and personal identification, among others, are as James F. Davis (1991, 149) says, "the internalized counterparts of the ambiguities and strains involved in occupying a marginal status in the pattern of race relations in the United States".

Contrary to the García girls or Pilar del Pino, and to the characters in *Geographies of Home*, Negi does not return to the island physically, but her strategy of evoking a nostalgic past is made possible by the psychological journey to Puerto Rico. The journey is one of the most important motifs in the novel for Negi's negotiation of her self, since Negi's experiences are determined by the continuous peripatetic movement from place to place with her family. However, these changes are traumatic for Negi, who even when living in her own country feels that she does not belong. Her desire for home is expressed after her first return from Santurce to Macún while living in Puerto Rico:

The truck creaked to a stop, and I jumped out and ran into our yard, looking from one thing to the next, not knowing if what I was seeing was the same or different from what was there before because it didn't matter; I didn't care. I was home. And I never wanted to leave home again. [I walked] the land from post to post, trying to place myself within its

borders. (Santiago 1993, 46)

Her migration to the United States creates a yearning to go back to the native land and to her father. The event of her audition at the High School for the Performing Arts is a symbolic dramatisation of the many barriers that she has to cross in order to escape Brooklyn, Hispanic cultural ghettoization and her life of poverty. Like her perpetual motion across Puerto Rican spaces, she later makes her way through different landscapes in the United States: to Lewiston, Bangor, and Portland, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. However, her longing for Puerto Rico cannot be satisfied by the cold and unwelcoming cities of New York:

I yearned for my life in Macún. I missed the dew-softened air, the crunchy gravel of the dirt road, the rooster's crow, the buzz of bees, the bright yellow sun of a Puerto Rican dawn. (Santiago 1993, 31)

The reassurance that Macún provides for Negi's is lost after she moves to New York. The dangers in the neighbourhood deter Negi and her family from any non-essential movement. The dehumanising living conditions of the poor in Santiago's novel are not described in order to illustrate the unhygienic notions assigned to Puerto Ricans by North Americans but rather as a reflection of the colonial inheritance of corruption, segregation, and repression of 'third cultures' under North American power. Negi's descriptions of the poor state of the houses, both in Puerto Rico and in Brooklyn, shows spaces without hope within a context of the wretched and the deprived situation of marginalised groups: In Macún "[O]ur home was a giant version of the lard cans used to haul water from the public fountain" (Santiago 1993, 7), with "snakes and scorpions [that] could crawl into the house from their holes in the ground"

(Santiago 1993, 7). Negi is conscious of her family's and other families' dispossession and insolvency, when she compares her family household with others in the barrio which had "running water inside their houses, electric bulbs shining down from every room, curtains on the windows, and printed linoleum on the floors" (Santiago 1993, 31). Their subaltern position forces Negi's family to transfer back and forth between the impoverished San Juan barrio of Santurce and Macún, until their relocation to Brooklyn.⁷⁷

When she goes to visit her mother's cousins to Tío Lalo's house, Negi is fascinated by the magical air of Angie's room. As if in the virginal and inviolate place of a princess in a palace, Negi backs away from the room in order not to touch anything or "stain, or break, or somehow contaminate the feminine air of this fragrant room" (Santiago 1993, 163). Moving to New York, "where life will be better" (Santiago 1993, 33), only points up more the unequal conditions of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. The family is cooped up inside the house separated from other 'dangerous' neighbours by "thick doors with several bolts, windows with iron grates, peepholes" (Santiago 1993, 254); and they are subjected to the dangers of the barrio such as potential rapists and "*gente mala*" (Santiago 1993, 252). The geographical spaces between which Negi and her family move throughout the novel illustrate the extremely indigent neighbourhoods of a displaced Diaspora population, and denounce the Commonwealth and US central governments that ignore the living conditions of the immigrant subaltern classes. Therefore, Santiago is using her character Negi's experiences as a vehicle for social and political commentary.

⁷⁷ In *Almost a Woman*, Santiago's sequel to *When I was Puerto Rican*, Negi gives an explicit account of the continuous movement of the family as a means of showing how identity formations are conditioned by fluid movements across transnational spaces: "In the twenty-one years I lived with my mother, we moved at least twenty times [...] We moved from country to city to country to small town to big city to the biggest city of all. Once in New York, we moved from apartment to apartment". Esmeralda Santiago. 1998. *Almost a Woman*, New York: First Vintage Books Edition, 1.

Negi recreates a new home by recalling the many spaces that remind her of her Puerto Rican homeland. This suggests her definition of home according to the place that she never has to leave because it is everywhere. Negi's idea of home as imagined and a product of her psyche, echoes Loída Maritza Pérez's sense of belonging across cultures between which the concept of home is equally difficult to define. In a conference for Caribbean Women Writers hosted by *Meridians*, she says that:

Identity, nationality, and "home" therefore remain paradoxical, and it is up to each of us to define for ourselves what those terms mean. I don't even tie the concept of home to a specific land mass. For me, "home" is an abstract, a psychic space with which I render as "home" any place I choose to inhabit. (2004, 92)

When she finally moves from Brooklyn to Manhattan new possibilities open up for Negi as for her mother when she crossed the ocean between Puerto Rico and the United States. And so, she tries in her mind to travel to Puerto Rico by recalling New York's cities in Puerto Rican's land:

A blustery morning in Salem, Massachusetts, recalled the warm, soft dawns of the Puerto Rican countryside. As I walked the shore in Newport, Rhode Island, with my fellow actors, I felt compelled to describe San Juan harbour. A side of pilaf next to my meat loaf elicited memories of my mother's tender rice. (Santiago 1993, 241)

Negi's travelling between real spaces inhabited by varying blends of the Puerto Rican and North American cultures is echoed when she sees Puerto Rico everywhere. These physical and emotional movements frame Negi's identity between personal awareness of the politics of her country and her bicultural identity as a Puerto Rican-American. She witnesses and participates in the clash between capital and labour, and the sexual and racial discrimination

of marginalised groups. She is physically and psychologically involved in the negotiation of her identity as a colonial Puerto Rican on the island and an immigrant in North America, and she is concerned with her country's search for independence that inevitably fails under North American colonial conquest.

In the United States her evocation of the island is possible through other characters who bring to life Negi's memories of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican cultures. The recreation of sounds and aromas is found in the six-storey building in which Negi's family lives. Inside it, she feels as if she has never left the land:

I smelled brewed coffee across the hall, and further up, someone cooked salted codfish with eggplant. On the next level, *sofrito* sizzled into hot oil, and across the hall, the beans needed water, because they smelled scorched. A *merengue* played full blast behind another door. (Santiago 1993, 25)

Only in adulthood does Negi finally go back to the homeland. In the final section of the novel *In The Turkish Lover*, "Alábate pollo...", Negi finally goes back to her Puerto Rican homeland after graduating at Harvard in 1976, at the age of twenty eight, and seven years later after leaving her mother in Brooklyn to start her travels with Ulvi. Unlike the García girls or Pilar del Pino who return to North America after they visit the homeland, Negi decides to return to her family in Puerto Rico:

having exceeded even the most optimistic expectations for a poor girl from a huge family raised by a single mother under the most challenging conditions in a hostile culture and environment. I was returning to Puerto with a funded project that would draw attention to part of our artistic and cultural heritage. (Santiago 2004, 337)

Negi's bicultural identity, as in the *García Girls* or *Dreaming in Cuban*, cannot be regarded as an isolated journey between two cultures, but it should be understood as a dynamic

movement across transnational spaces intimately related to one another, or in Homi K. Bhabha's terms, of multilocation to "an intermittent time and interstitial space" (Bhabha 1990, 312). Negi's life in Puerto Rico is marked by her position of living both in the island as a colonial and in the United States as an immigrant under predominantly mainstream North American values. The journey between the two cultural poles implies, in each case, an identity crisis and a series of translocations created by the conflicting forces of aspiration and rejection. Although the narrative voice seems to have reached a certain kind of equilibrium, taking what she considers best for her from two cultures, there is still some bitterness and alienation. The journey motif and the travelling scenes in the novel are very important for Negi's discovery of her identity at the same time as they impact on mother-daughter relationship and her family in general. As her life out of the ghetto changes radically because of the jobs she takes and mainly because of the theatre company, Negi experiences a dramatic change in her life which is not shared by other members of the family. In Manhattan, Negi wins a scholarship to Harvard after auditioning for the School of Performing Arts, thus gaining access to elite education. She achieves a personal equilibrium which sets her on the path of ambition, conquest and personal achievement. However, only when she enters in Harvard and has contact with other Puerto Ricans, does she realise for the first time of her disconnection with the island, and of what being North American means. She declares that she:

had spent the five last years isolated from both Puerto Rican culture and my generation. I could no longer identify the latest Puerto Rican celebrities or musical trends, didn't know which party was in power on the island, or who was governor [...] I did not identify with any movements [...] I was not well informed about *estadounidense* or world events [...] and I didn't know what to make of myself [...] I became defensive. (Santiago 2004, 258-9)

Negi's journey is not only geographical and spatial, but it is also a psychological movement. She moves between two cultural poles: one related to childhood, home, mother, family, emotion, and the other to adult life, society, school, and intellectual achievement. The travel motif shifts between cultural spaces, through boundaries around the individual to confines within the narrator's consciousness. Recalling similar experiences of displacement in the García girls, and especially the motif of language as a way of identifying with one or the other culture, Negi also travels along these lines. Santiago shows how identities are in conflict when they orient themselves by what Ulrich Beck calls "a 'one-world model' of transnational social movements" (Beck 2000, 26). Negi's national and personal selfhood evolves in a political economy of migration and forced assimilation to North American capitalist culture. Through her experiences she offers new possibilities for rewriting the meaning of home in which the effort to be recognised as member of a collective society marks her definition as part of a unified nation.

By offering an account of her childhood and adulthood in both Puerto Rico and the United States respectively, Santiago reveals how multiethnic identities, heterogeneous societies and cultural diversity are threatened by the "melting pot" theory in the pursuit of building a homogenous nation. The author criticises the economic, political and cultural control of nations within transnational spaces which throws people "into transnational lifestyles that they often neither want nor understand" (Beck 2000, 20). Racial segregation and continuous multilocation between Puerto Rico and New York creates dislocation of the self as a result of "crossing the borders of separate worlds (nations, religions, cultures, skin colours, continents, etc.), [and] whose oppositions must or may lodge in a single life" (Beck 2000, 75). By exploring a historical discourse based on power and racial relations in both Puerto Rico and the United States, Esmeralda Santiago prompts readers to reconsider issues

of identity and cultural formation framed within a context of colonial legacies, racism, displacement and the Caribbean Diaspora experience under the threat of dominant systems of power.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEARCHING FOR HOME: (TRANS)NATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND THE CHINESE (IM)MIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN CRISTINA GARCÍA'S *MONKEY HUNTING**

We are migrant animals in the labyrinths of the world metropolises

Alberto Melucci (1997)

Dynamics of Gendered Identity Formation within National Discourses

According to John D. Perivolaris Latinas' identities "are exemplified by a continuing history of Diaspora" (Perivolaris 1997, 117). Many texts by contemporary US/Caribbean women writers' focus on the impacts that North American cultural discourses have on the formation of female gendered subjectivities. However, very few concentrate on how the common experience of displacement and constructs of gender in the Diaspora are simultaneously replicated by migratory processes within the homeland. In this respect Cristina García's latest novel *Monkey Hunting* (2003) is a notable example of how in defining identities in terms of gender, articulations of the self are not unique to subjectivities on the move across national frontiers. Instead, these negotiations are part of a broader experience of Diaspora. García's text, located within the literature of US/Caribbean women's writing derives significance from its focus on the experience of the Chinese Caribbean Diaspora. Gender identity formation within national discourses is clearly exemplified in García's work by Chinese female

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character Chen Fang. Although Chen Fang as a character was the easiest to write because, as the author says in an interview with Pablo de Sainz (2003), “she was literary and female and out of place”, she is no less complex than the other characters in the novel. Chen Fang, the youngest of three sisters, is of particular importance for García’s exploration both of questions of gender identity formation (she is forced to dress as a boy for sixteen years) and how the search for identity develops around the interrelationship between nation, gender and belonging within the boundaries of traditional cultural discourses in the homeland. Simultaneously, migration and the processes of identity formation within national mythologies echo the broader collective experience of diasporic communities. Through the life of Chinese migrant Chen Fang, the building of women’s subjectivity is looked at within cultural and national heterosexual discourses that recreate stereotyped images of women as reproducers of the nation, and holders of traditional values and moral codes in Chinese paternalistic society. Because identity and its manifestations are not self-contained but politically and culturally constructed “within a field of social values, norms of behaviour and collective symbols” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 94), the formation of female subjectivities is examined through multiple points of intersection such as gender and nation. According to Julie Mostov:

gender and nation are social constructions which intimately participate in the formation of one another [...] National mythologies draw on traditional gender roles, and nationalist discourse is filled with images of the nation as mother, wife and maiden. (Mostov 2000, 89)

Considering that the nation is constructed within the boundaries of a politicised and heterosexual discourse, sexuality and gender are by default organised into systems of power. Femininity and sexuality stand as unmarked signifiers of women’s identity within the national

sphere. Women are depicted as loyal and obedient to the national “moral code”, and central to the national project in biological terms, a principle particularly sustained by conservative and paternalistic national ideologies.

Chen Fang grows up in a long-established Chinese society in which, at the time of the narration, women’s sexuality was defined solely in terms of reproduction and women’s movement was confined to domestic spaces. Chen Fang’s identity is constructed according to traditional Chinese conceptions of gender roles and traditions that constitute the essence of the nation and perpetuate women’s position as property, owned or exchanged by men, and in some cases, even destroyed. This power is wielded by those who, having control over Chen Fang, manipulate her identity and determine her position and role within the family, the microcosm of the nation.

Abandoned by her father Lorenzo Chen when she was four months old, Chen Fang’s existence and sexuality are as alien to her as to her Chinese/Afro-Cuban father Lorenzo who thinks he has left a male descendant behind in China. Being the youngest of three daughters, Chen Fang will bring bad luck to the family (Thakur 1997, 57-58), and thus, her mother forces her to adopt an alternative mode of self-representation by dressing her as a boy. For sixteen years Chen Fang disguises her actual identity and develops a “passing as” existence by hiding her gender behind a boy’s image until “soon everyone seemed to forget that [I] she was a girl” (García 2003, 90). Whilst the strategy of “passing” has been discussed as a racial/colour line phenomenon in chapter one, through the figure of Chen Fang “passing” acquires a gender dimension which complicates the processes of identity and sexual formation.⁷⁸ “Gender passing”, which inverts cultural gender roles, confuses the perception of

⁷⁸The implications of cross-gender and transvestism are depicted in director Chen Kaige’s film *Farewell My Concubine*. The processes of gender identity by “passing” are recorded in Chinese Peking Opera through the relationship of the transvestite “Concubine” and her “King” and the prostitute who comes between them against

selfhood and/or reorients sexuality, is practised through the strategies of cross-dressing or transvestism. In *The Psychology of Sex*, Havelock Ellis says that:

We may not know exactly what sex is, but we do know that it is mutable, with the possibility of one sex being changed into the other sex, that its frontiers are often uncertain, and that there are many stages between a complete male and a complete female. (Ellis 1933, 225)

Chen Fang's embodiment of a male is initially a physical transformation that will inevitably develop into psychological confusion concerning her gender. She is confronted with the effects that gender-crossing has upon her at three particular moments in her life: in childhood when she behaves as a boy and is perceived by society as such; in adolescence when she is suddenly married and forced to fulfil unknown expectations of her as a woman; and in adulthood when she confronts her true sexuality through her relationship with Madame de Möet.

As a boy, Chen Fang has the opportunity to receive an education with the money her father Lorenzo sends her from Cuba, an alternative denied to if not impossible even for free Chinese women at the time. Unlike her two sisters, traditional women obedient to their men and eldest sons (García 2003, 88), Chen Fang does not need to bind her feet, or learn how to cook or pour tea. Instead, she is allowed to play with boys, visit brothels, attend university, and learn the art of Chinese calligraphy, "one of the most powerful symbols of the moral authority of a ruling elite composed exclusively of men" (Hamlisch 2000, 215). She "is praised for her intuitively understanding the sway and press of the brush, the precise images they conjured up" (García 2003, 90). She hides beneath men's clothes and assumes attributes, behaviour and roles specific to males. Chen Fang's impersonation of a boy allows her to enter

the historical backdrop of fifty years of Chinese political history which include the Japanese Occupation, Communist rule and the Cultural Revolution. Chen Kaige. 1993. *Farewell My Concubine*, Hong Kong, China.

a hierarchical space composed by and for men, thus avoiding:

the extensive set of restrictions and expectations regarding women which made it virtually impossible for them [women] to participate in the elaborate networks through which men climbed the social and political ladder of success. (Hamlish 2000, 217)

The assumption underlying female transvestism is, as Valerie R. Hotchkiss suggests in her analysis of female cross-dressing and gender roles in Europe, “that maleness is a gender of empowerment” (Hotchkiss 1996, 125). Chen Fang’s transvestism could be applied to what Hotchkiss says about the motives for committing transgressive acts:

In a male-centered society, women in men’s clothing are reflection of male institutions, perceptions, and language, but they are also positive models, not only for men but also for women, whose impressions and values were formed in an andocentric context. (Hotchkiss 1996, 127)

Chen Fang’s transvestism or simulated masculinity empowers her with recognition and talent. She transgresses gender boundaries since as a man she not only escapes socio-sexual entrapment, but her cross-dressing or “passing” allows her to break with prescribed roles for women while acquiring those assigned to men. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar say in their article “Sexchanges”, this inversion of roles in society through gender-crossing offers “a modicum of hope for the destruction of old sexual rules and the redemptive construction of new social roles” (Gilbert and Gubar 1988, 771).

Chen Fang’s shifting from female to male and male to female later in life exposes the notion of gender as both a product and a process. Her sexuality is not determined by “nature” or her body itself; it is cultural and societal perceptions that establish gender identity and behaviour. If we consider that within theories of transvestism gender identity formation is

fluid and always in process —as identity itself— the notion of gender as a biological given loses credibility as a static traditional binary opposition between masculinity and femininity; rather, gender, through gender-crossing, becomes ironically a construct that foregrounds the flexibility and instability of subjectivity and stresses the vacillation of gender itself, helping to break firm constraints formulated by the opposite poles of male/female. Chen Fang's (de)/(re)construction of her gender through the practice of "passing as" exemplifies what Teresa de Lauretis has argued in *Technologies of Gender*, that "[t]he construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation" (de Lauretis 1987, 5).

In childhood, Chen Fang's "passing as" can be explained according to three different approaches to the theory of gender-crossing, as Hsiao-Hung Chang has summarised when referring to three specific critics' ideas (Chang 1997): the "traditional" cross-dressing which stresses the incongruity between outer appearance and inner essence, the outside serving to disguise the inside; the "modernist" cross-dressing as identified by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar who advocate the notion of "a wardrobe of costume selves" (Gilbert and Gubar 1989, 344). Because clothing powerfully defines sex roles, Gilbert says that "imagining costumes of the mind is closely connected with the pressures and oppressions of gender and [...] women have far more to gain from the identification of costume with self or gender" (Gilbert 1980, 393); and the "postmodernist" cross-dressing described by Judith Butler (1990, 128-41) who depicts gender as an exteriorisation of uniform/clothes, voice, gesture and body movement, deconstructing completely the binary oppositions of masculinity/femininity, reality/appearance and body/clothes. Although Chen Fang is aware of the privileges that "gender passing" provides her, she struggles to keep up an appearance of masculinity through her clothes and her physical features since her true sex keeps deceiving her. Her male qualities inevitably clash with her female ones: "Although [I] she kept her hair cropped short

and affected a gruff manner, [my] her hands and neck were too delicate for a boy” (García 2003, 92). Moreover, her gender boundary transgression is problematised once she becomes an adolescent.

In traditional Chinese society, where there was little possibility of fulfilment outside the home as educational opportunities for women were fewer than those for men, women were more likely to accept their traditional role of virtuous wives and good mothers.⁷⁹ The persistence of these gender hierarchies and the denial of Chen Fang’s empowerment occurs when, as soon as Chen Fang stops studying, she begins to form part of a collective social structure which inscribes women within their essential reproductive nature.

Out of poverty or callousness, Chen Fang’s mother marries her daughter to Lu Shêng-pao. Chen Fang enters a lineage of familial structures dominated by men which “insured Chinese women’s physical survival, and ultimately provided the only means for them to gain at least a modicum of power and influence” (Hamlish 2000, 225).

As both wife and daughter-in-law, Chen Fang confronts for the first time, out of obligation or fear, a sexual and social identity that she has been denied throughout her childhood. She is forced to adopt the clothing, manners and skills of her true sex. She is supposed to carry out menial duties in and around the home, such as pouring tea, cooking or sewing. She is required to fulfil the traditional role of Chinese women within the family household, which forces women to adopt a natural reproductive role within the nation. In this sense, Chen Fang’s identity is not only determined by Chinese patriarchal national culture, but she herself ironically contributes to the construction of this particular national mythology by avoiding challenging the injustices that underpin the social construction of gender. Instead

⁷⁹ According to Confucian thought —and coinciding with the temporal frame of the novel— Maude B. Warner explains that women’s education should be perfect submission rather than cultivation and development of the mind, since they are of a lower state than men. It is a natural law that women should be under the control of men with no agency or will of their own. Maude B. Warner. 1925. “Living Conditions in China,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 122: 170.

she accepts and echoes gender parameters that demarcate women within the national discourse, but her inability to comply with the roles of mother, wife and daughter-in-law frustrate her, marking her internal conflict of sexual identity. Her mother-in-law accuses her of being unworthy and ridicules her for her unbound feet saying that “we wouldn’t have paid so much for you if we’d seen those clumsy hooves!” (García 2003, 96). Chen Fang’s being ridiculed for her unbound feet is of particular importance as a sign of the representation of her sexuality in Chinese culture. According to Siu Leung Li “the small/bound feet are the most powerful signification of the female gender specific to Chinese culture” (Li 2003, 148).⁸⁰ Chen Fang’s unveiling of her “clumsy hooves” not only reveals her unfeminine side, but her revelation stresses some of the consequences of the phenomenon of “gender passing”, since it deprives her of associations with her true sexuality.

The duty of having children as a member of a specific national collectivity is best exemplified through Chen Fang’s sister-in-law who “received endless scorn after seven childless winters” (García 2003, 97). In keeping with the Confucian tenet that the main purpose of marriage is to produce children to continue the family line, since “one of the most sacred duties of a son is [was] to provide descendants for his and his father’s ancestors” (Wolf 1984, 215), Chen Fang expects to be seen as worthy in the eyes of her husband’s family (García 2003, 97) when she gives birth to a son.⁸¹ Following Mayer’s statement that “[I]n the

⁸⁰ In analysing Chinese erotic paintings, Siu Leung Li tells the story of how a Chinese woman disguised as a man becomes the prime minister. As soon as her tiny feet are unveiled, her gender identity is discovered. Siu Leung Li. 2003. *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 147.

⁸¹ In Julia Álvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Carlos García’s pride is hurt because he has been unable to father a son despite always saying “Good bulls sire cows”. Only when Sofía gives birth to a son does he recover from his preoccupation of having a male heir in the family and only then does he talk again to her daughter after many years of resentment as a result of her rebellious and insubordinate character. Julia Álvarez. 1991. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, New York: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 57, 58. In the same vein, in Xinran’s collection of essays *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices* there are plenty of references that point to the position and duties of Chinese women in Chinese society. In the first story “My Journey towards the Stories of Chinese Women”, Chinese families “will go to incredible lengths to make sure that their family lines are perpetuated so as not to sin against their ancestors by failing to produce an heir”. Xinran. 2002. *The Good Women of China : Hidden Voices*, London: Virago, 1-8:3. In another chapter “The Mothers Who Endured an Earthquake”, the author explains that “There are thirty-six virtues, but to be without

intersection of nation, gender and sexuality the nation is constructed to respect a “moral code” which is often based on masculinity and heterosexuality” (Mayer 2000, 12), I would suggest that the role of women and their sexual behaviour are important markers which define who is excluded and included in the nation. Women are depicted as loyal and obedient to the national “moral code”, as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, an ideology especially maintained by paternalistic societies. As a result, patriarchal hierarchies become the foundation of the nation and sustain the principles of both gender and sexuality.

Chen Fang’s fertility is a sign of both prosperity and fecundity. However, after an attempt at abortion caused by the herbal tea her husband prepares for Chen Fang, she is expelled from the house soon after Lu-Chih mo is born, leaving her son in the hands of her despotic mother-in-law. If women’s role within the nation is based on their reproductive roles, as Julie Mostov has indicated (2000), the attempted abortion of Chen Fang’s baby by her husband not only demonstrates how little choice women have regarding what they do with their bodies (since reproduction is not negotiated between Chen Fang and her husband in the first place), but further emphasises how men exercise control over women’s fertility and reproductive functions, restricting them to a place defined by gender.

Chen Fang’s disempowerment over her self can be compared with that of Afro-Cuban Lucrecia, Chen Pan’s wife and Chen Fang’s grandmother. The descendant of *cimarrones* (runaway slaves), Lucrecia was the daughter of and mother of a child by a Spaniard who repeatedly raped her mother, then her. Having little power over herself or her body, Lucrecia is forced to give birth to D. Joaquín’s baby. D. Joaquín sends her to a convent to have the child only later to put them up for sale. Like Chen Fang in misogynistic China, Lucrecia is a female body violated and imprisoned by the national discourse of slavery in Cuba where

heirs is an evil that negates them all’. A woman who has had a son is irreproachable”. Xinran 2002. *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, London: Virago, 65-84: 65.

(black) women's reproductive rights were circumscribed by the desires and dictates of men. Moreover, Lucrecia is a figure who serves as an image of the reproducer of the nation, when after losing her first child, she engages in her progenitive capacity with Chen Pan giving birth to a whole generation of "brown children with Chinese eyes who spoke Spanish and a smattering of Abakuá" (García 2003, 209).⁸² Lucrecia's and Chen Pan's multicultural family draws attention to alternative ways of self-identification and creation when transnational cultures enter into contact. As Deborah A. Kapchan has noted elsewhere:

Although the most obvious hybrid genres are those which combine ethnic identities, hybridity is effected whenever two or more historically separate realms come together in any degree that challenges their socially constructed autonomy. (Kapchan 1993, 6)

The locus of cultural hybridity which the Pan family represents becomes a sign for the dissolution of geographical, ethnic and cultural borders in the Diaspora. The mixture of Chinese/Cuban/North American ethnicities signifies, as Rafael Perez-Torres asserts in his essay "Ethnicity, Cultural Hybridity, and the Mestizo Voice", "a way to articulate subjectivity outside dominant paradigms" by which "counterhegemonic identities can be articulated and

⁸² The book by Cuban author Lydia Cabrera —*La Sociedad Secreta Abakuá Narrada por Viejos Adeptos*— explores the Abakuá or Nñāngos, an exclusively male secret society initially established by Africans in Regla, La Havana in the 1830s. This society was carried over to Cuba as the only African society to survive the passage of slavery. Cabrera's study addresses the topic of cultural hybridity at social, cultural, ethnic and political levels through the syncretism of the Africans and the Cubans. This contact allowed movement among different racial/ethnic groups and functioned as a cultural strategy to survive and as a means of ethnic identification. The Abakuás were secret, anti-colonial and highly organised, and celebrated some of their religious ceremonies on the streets. They were considered dangerous by white Cubans and Spanish for their aggressivity and accused of being criminals and sacrificing white children. Cabrera Lydia. 1959. *La Sociedad Secreta Abakuá Narrada por Viejos Adeptos*, Habana: Ediciones CR. White Puerto Rican poet Luis Palés Matos addresses the fear for the nñāngos in his poem "Canción Festiva para ser Llorada" [Festive Song to Be Wept]. He describes the scene in which an *habanero* warns a woman, referred to as "niña" to beware of the nñāngo, the member of the secret society of black Cubans: "Mira que te coge el nñāngo/niña, no salgas de casa./Mira que te coge el nñāngo/del jueguito de la Habana./Con tu carne hará gandinga,/con tu seso mermelada:/ nñāngo carabali/de la namigua Cubana" [Out there's the nñāngo/girls, don't leave the home./Out there's the nñāngo/from the small Havana sect./With your flesh he'll make a stew./with your brains a marmalade,/that carabar-blooded nñāngo/from the Cuban bush]. Luis Palés Matos. 1978. *Poesía Completa y Prosa Selecta*, ed. Margot Arce de Vázquez. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 159.

enacted” (Perez-Torres 1998, 156). Hybridity as a liminal or in-between space (Bhabha 1996) becomes a third space, a site for the articulation of new forms of cultural meaning that blurs the boundaries that define culture and identity. This third space is, according to Bhabha, an ambivalent location in which cultural meaning and representation have ‘no primordial unity of fixity’ (Bhabha 1994). It becomes a spatial locus that “initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha 1996, 1). The racial, ethnic and cultural syncretism of the Pan family demonstrates, thus, how in diasporic conditions cultures are transformed, renegotiated and created anew through assimilation and adaptation and through the plural coexistence of different cultural values.

Lucrecia and Chen Fang’s position as wives and mothers indicates how gender roles are controlled by national myths of the nation. It also emphasises how women, ironically, aid in the construction of these particular national mythologies and images according to male and female performances within the national culture. Moreover, traditional and stereotyped perceptions of women in Chinese culture are also echoed across nations through Chen Pan’s friends, who criticise him for choosing to live with an Afro-Cuban woman, and instead strongly encourage Chen Pan “to get a proper wife from China” (García 2003, 75). Although in the Diaspora, Chen Pan has acquired many Cuban traits and identification with the nation, he is still Chinese in the eyes of his male counterparts. As such, he is expected to enjoy the company of more women and to have more children. On the one hand, it showed strength that a man could satisfy a young wife and keep producing sons; on the other hand, it showed the status of men, since “*the more cows, the richer the man!*” (García 2003, 238). On his seventieth birthday his best friend Arturo Fu Fon sends him a prostitute who has just arrived from Hong Kong. Chen Pan, refusing to have sex with her, pays her instead a fistful of notes so she will not reveal anything of what has not happened. The ways in which women are

represented in patriarchal national ideologies and their participation in the economic, political and cultural life of the nation are closely linked to the impossibility of their taking part in the self building process.

Chen Fang's submission to her husband and elders responds to what Bauer denominates as the nation's 'ego' (Bauer 1996, 39-77). The nation's 'ego', produced as a heterosexual male construct, is intimately connected to patriarchal hierarchies and norms that affect gender formations of identity because of women's subjection to socio-historical factors. These rules are, furthermore, represented by other older generations of women:

Very often it is women, especially older women, who are [...] empowered to rule on what is 'appropriate' behaviour and appearance and what is not and to exert control over other women who might be constructed as 'deviants'. (Yuval-Davis 1997, 37)

The impact that stereotyped socio-cultural images of mothers, daughters, and wives have on feminine subjectivities is a crucial determinant for the negotiation of female identities since, as we saw in Chapter Two, within family structures, the relationships between mothers and daughters are key factors in the formation of identity. Mothers function as transmitters of beliefs as part of their role as educator in the home. This phenomenon, however, carries with it for women the implicit contradiction of being the pillar of the family as transmitter of essential values while at the same time sustaining paternalistic discourses. It slows down the process of women's own emancipation, whilst maintaining heterosexual national ideologies. Chen Fang's lack of domestic skills empowers her mother-in-law with effective control against her, ensuring in this way the legitimacy of male power structures. Both Chen Fang's mother and mother-in-law function as preservers of conventional morality and thus perpetuate the subordination of women. Her mother is a domineering authority figure, intent upon

moulding her daughter's life to fit her own prescriptions and those of the traditional Chinese society in which herself has been raised. They both illustrate the remnants of the feudal thinking, superstition, and backwardness that existed in China. These antinomies as mothers and oppressors are neither played out nor are simply a struggle between mother and daughter, but enshrine a tension between individual agency over the self and collective power. Chen Fang's oppression is endemic and integral, deriving not only from the unequal distribution of power between men and women but also between women and women. And so, as daughter and daughter-in-law, she has little choice in choosing between her own self-fulfilment and family obligations. In the stratification of power between genders, mothers and mothers-in-law can become capricious tyrants to their children and women are therefore exploited and colonised by other women (Henao 2003, vi). Chen Fang submits to the dictates imposed on her by her elders. She is undoubtedly a symbol of the disempowerment that results from a traditional paternalistic Chinese society that constructs women's identity and defines their gender according to the conventional duties of women as household labourers and reproducers, thus reinforcing the persistence of women's oppression.⁸³

Revolutions of Identity

After being expelled from her mother-in-law's house, Chen Fang migrates to Shanghai in 1924 where she becomes a teacher through the recommendation of her teacher, Professor

⁸³ Chen Fang's experience as wife, mother and daughter-in-law sharply contrasts with her past life as a boy. As a woman, she is deprived not only of those privileges she had access to as a man, but she is denied her independence and humanity. Chen Fan's position as a woman could be explained in the words of Xinran in her collection of short stories: "From the matriarchal societies in the far distant past, the position of Chinese women has always been at the lowest level. They were classed as objects, as a part of property, shared out along with food, tools and weapons. Later on, they were permitted to enter the men's world, but they could only exist at their feet- entirely reliant on the goodness or wickedness of a man". Xinran. 2002. *The Good Women of China*, London: Virago, 49.

Hou.⁸⁴ Unable to mother her own child, she takes responsibility for French, English, and Chinese children's education in the Chinese classics and modern literatures. As a woman, Chen Fang falls into the category of what Elisabeth Croll (1995) has described as "daughters of rebellion". Croll is referring to Chinese women from the early years of the Republic (1911-1949) for whom rebellion took the form of rejecting conventional patterns of behaviour and pursuing new opportunities for education and employment, which are an integral element in shaping the identities of Chinese women within the national context. However, during this period Education was proscribed by the Party:

In the 1930s, when Western women were already demanding sexual equality, Chinese women were only just starting to challenge male-dominated society, no longer willing for their feet to be bound, or to have their marriages arranged for them by the older generation. However, they did not know what women's responsibilities and rights were; they did not know how to win for themselves a world of their own. (Xinran 2002, 49-50)

Luckily, for Chen Fang hope is found in her life as an educator, as a woman and an intellectual in Shanghai where, with the prospect of a new life and a new self, she does not have to hide her gender (García 2003, 101).

Although her educational career has provided her with self-affirmation and economic independence, her life in Shanghai is a shadowy existence marked by loneliness, self-negation, and displacement between her life in rural and urban China. Chen Fang's life in Shanghai is a journey of sexual and personal discovery. Using Nira Yuval-Davis' terminology but in a different context, Chen Fang's existence might be described as a "permanent temporariness" (Yuval-Davis 1997, 110). Her identity is that of a permanent outsider dwelling

⁸⁴ Shanghai was in the vanguard of the new movement to establish women's education. Although schools run by missionaries had come into existence a few years earlier, the first modern girls' school was established in Shanghai in 1897, and was associated with the reform movement of 1898. In 1907, an official nationwide system of elementary school for girls was established and over the years their number continued to increase. Ravi Thakur. 1997. *Rewriting Gender: Reading Contemporary Chinese Women*, London: Zed Books, 39.

in a new place who has feelings of displacement that no new geography can replace.

At forty years old, Chen Fang is stripped of any self-worth. She experiences a loss at an emotional level, when her French lover, Dauphine de Moët goes back to France with her husband and children. Chen Fang's feeling of isolation could be interpreted on a more general context as the inevitable result of women who on their road towards freedom break down traditional values, but still retain a sort of nostalgia for traditional attachments because they are unable to find anything new (Thurston 1984-1985).⁸⁵ While in China "the greatest glory for a woman is to bear and raise sons for the future" (García 2003, 149), Chen Fang is alone and childless. Although through Madame de Möet Chen Fang manages to "uncloth" her body and discovers her sexuality, finally relocating her with her true identity, her security and place in the world appears to be ambivalent and full of contradictions. The opening up of new avenues for self-invention and self-assertion as a free educated Chinese woman carries with it serious consequences. As Minh-ha T. Trinh points out, "violations of boundaries have always led to displacement, for the in-between zones are the shifting grounds on which the (doubly exiled) walk" (Trinh 1991, 70). Chen Fang becomes a double exile, both physically and sexually or, borrowing Leslie W. Rabine's term (1987), an "eccentric" in that she does not find comfort in her life nor her place between both cultures, and, as Homi K. Bhabha refers to it (1992a), an "ex-centric" in that she hopes for a cultural articulation of new ethnicities through reconciliation with her cultural hybrid Chinese/Cuban family.

She experiences the life of a boy for sixteen years, and forced to abandon her son in rural China, finds herself alone in cosmopolitan China, a place where she "is neither woman nor man but a stone, a tree struck by lightning long ago" (García 2003, 148). Her separation from

⁸⁵ Thurston says in her article that there is "a profound sense of loss as a result of the Cultural Revolution—loss of culture and of spiritual values; loss of status and honour; loss of career and dignity; loss of hope and ideals; loss of time, truth and of life; loss, in short, of nearly everything that gives meaning to life". Anne F Thurston. 1984-1985. "Victims of China's Cultural Revolution: The Invisible Wounds: Part I," *Pacific Affairs* 57 (4): 605-606.

her family and her rejection by her nation turns into an individual and psychological traumatic experience: “I longed for my father in Cuba, for my kind older sisters, for the touch of my beloved Dauphine” (García 2003, 226). Chen Fang’s negotiation of her subjectivity is seen as more than culturally and politically constructed, but as Nancy Chodorow suggests in her essay entitled “Gender as a Personal and Cultural Construction” (1995, 517) about the dynamics of gender formation, identity and gender are created through “perception and meaning and experienced emotionally through fantasy and memories”. Furthermore, Chodorow adds that:

Gender is an ongoing emotional creation [...] of cultural meanings and bodily, emotional, and self-other experience, all mediated by conscious and unconscious fantasy. (Chodorow 1995, 540-1)

Chen Fang’s identity crises could be interpreted in relation to a past of trauma when living with her mother. Whereas in China women obey their husbands, brothers, and older female relatives Chen Fang “lived outside the dictates of women, and so her [my] life proved as unsteady as an egg on an ox” (García 2003, 226). Her position as subaltern in a nation which relegates women to the periphery is further complicated when she moves to Shanghai, since here the search for individuality becomes a negotiation of multiple moral codes across spaces. For Chen Fang, family and nation draw on the metaphor in which the need for self-definition stands for the dis-unity of both kinship and homeland.

Chen Fang’s disempowerment is more a question of her deviating from the norms which are socially acceptable for women in a profoundly traditional society. The effects that her actions have upon her can be explained in terms of Frantz Fanon’s notion of machoism (Fanon 1986, 53), whereby, ironically, liberated women can become disempowered. Furthermore, the ruptured and incomplete nature of her identity is heightened by the political and cultural contradictions of her life in Shanghai. In a period in which the Cultural

Revolution in China was supposed to fight for gender equality and the freedom of a nation, it became a revolution against cultural and social values. Chen Fang falls victim to the national politics of those who support the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, “of all Chinese cities, the most urbane and Westernized” (Pan 1991, 281).

In a parallel trajectory to China’s Cultural Revolution, during Castro’s Cuban Revolution, Chen Fang’s Chinese-Cuban step-brother Pipo Chen had been declared a traitor by Cuban revolutionaries who believed he was working for the North Americans and, therefore, planning against Communism. He had been working as a cook for seventeen years in Guantánamo Bay, —the American naval base retained by Roosevelt since after the modification of the Platt Amendment in 1934. Because he developed a taste for American food, or as his wife called it “the Yankee’s food” (García 2003, 55) and refused to give up his job with the Americans, he was transformed into a traitor in the eyes of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. Similarly, Chen Fang is accused of supporting the Nationalist Chinese Party and of being “too corrupted by Western ways” (García 2003, 224), that is, contaminated by humanist values of equality, justice and freedom for all. She is tortured, punished and humiliated by her own students who insult her calling her a “‘Dirty running dog!’”, a “‘Capitalist roader!’” and “a ‘Spy!’” (García 2003, 229).

In 1970 Chen Fang is taken to Mao’s prison for three years where she utters laments of hopelessness and desperation: “Instead of one hundred flowers blooming, we have ten thousand bloody corpses, ten thousand pairs of vacant eyes” (García 2003, 231). At seventy-two years old, after suffering cruel beatings and torture at the hands of Mao’s generals, her life becomes a bitter nonsense, an empty space without hope. Mao’s reign of terror was based

on violence and massive murder.⁸⁶ He annihilated anyone who was against the communist revolution and even cut wives' breasts off and burnt their genitals (Buruma 15). In his article "Asesino Divino" ["Almighty Murderer"], Ian Buruma says that Mao's strategy to control those who opposed his government was to force them to confess their anti-revolutionary activities by torturing them or simply exterminating them:

El modo de eliminar a los conquistadores «contrarrevolucionarios» era arrestar a unos pocos probables sospechosos y torturarlos hasta que «confesaran» e implicaran a otros, que a su vez serían luego arrestados y torturados (Buruma 2003, 15).

[The way to eliminate the «contra revolutionaries» was to arrest a few possible suspects and torture them until they «confessed» and implicated others, who in turn would later be arrested and tortured.]

Through reading Mao's Communist Party newspaper Chen Fang discovers that her son Lu Chih-mo has become a bloodthirsty Communist official who has made his reputation running an important southern province "built on corpses" (García 2003, 230).⁸⁷ She considers using her son's name to be released from prison, but she rapidly abandons the idea when she realises that he would have to prove his loyalty to the revolution by killing his own mother.⁸⁸ Instead, she resigns herself to a life of loneliness and desperation haunted by a memory of a pleasanter past and a lost family. Chen Fang's misplacement within 'home' illustrates how the

⁸⁶ Mao's slogan for communism "Whoever is not in favour of the revolution is in favour of the contra revolution" echoes Fidel Castro's slogan of Communist Cuba "Dentro de la Revolución todo, fuera de la Revolución nada" ["Within the Revolution everything, outside the Revolution nothing"].

⁸⁷ García's comment on the cruel reality of Chinese society in the fifties refers to the fact that during this decade the Party called on the people to "let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" [...] Those who answered the call were all imprisoned or sent to poor mountain villages. Some of them had only expressed their thoughts in their diaries, but they too suffered public criticisms and imprisonment". Xinran. 2002. *The Good Women of China*, London: Virago, 87.

⁸⁸ During the Maoist Era, in particular, official propaganda regularly stressed that ultimate loyalties should be directed toward the nation, and Mao Zedong personally, and not toward one's family. In some cases Chinese were pressured to denounce their own parents and other relatives as a way of demonstrating their new loyalties to the regime. Martin King Whyte. 1997. "The Fate of Filial Obligations in Urban China," *The China Journal* 38: 2.

experience of uprootedness and displacement from Chinese rural space to urban Shanghai impact on and alter perceptions of the self. Simultaneously, Chen Fang's practices of the self in Shanghai are considered within national discourses and systems of power which by being male-orientated suppress women's activities and privilege men's participation within the national sphere (Rubin 1984).

Connecting Identities in the Diaspora through Memory and Narrative

One of the most conspicuous narrative strategies in *Monkey Hunting* is its interlacing of stories, characters, geographies and periods. Starting in Cuba in 1860 with Chen Pan, once established in Havana, the family tree begins to branch rapidly as the narrative moves unexpectedly back and forth between the turbulent political landscape of Castro's revolution, rural China at the turn of the century, and Mao's Communist Era, to the dreary reality of an immigrant New York experience in 1968, and the jungles of Vietnam just a year later. The intersection of anachronous narratives in the novel is not gratuitous; the play with chronical deviations such as flashbacks and prolepses creates a relationship of continuity between the many complex stories. The proleptic and analeptic narrative strategies used in the novel reinforce the paradoxical (dis)connection between the different characters. This (dis)continuity emphasises that separation between past and present is almost impossible, since all family members share similar experiences of dislocation and a search for identity and stability between and within nations. Therefore, what seems an independent and disjointed relationship between the family members in the novel becomes, ironically, the principle that unifies experiences of migration and Diaspora across different national locations. At the same time, the non-linear development of the plot and the heterogeneity of form achieved by intertwining first and third person voices in the novel serve as devices that emphasise the

fragmentary identities of a collective family history of displacement and Diaspora. The many historical events narrated through each character's episodes function as central mechanisms for understanding the politics of identity formation and transnational connections.

In Diaspora experience "linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desire, but obstructed future: a renewed painful yearning" (Clifford 1997, 264). Although Chen Fang is not a product of Diaspora since she stays in China her whole life, her dislocation in both rural and urban China echoes the experience of Diaspora in the sense that it parallels the diasporic experience of her Chinese family. Chen Fang's search for answers requires returning to a past not as much geographically as mentally in order to feel connected with part of her lost Chinese/Afro-Cuban family (she knows nothing about the US branch of her family). In China her life is invaded by doubt, sorrow and nostalgia for a family and a country to which she does not belong and to which she can never return. Chen Fang's migration takes on an interrelated level of diaspora collectivity filtered through physical distance, the experience of misplacement and displacement from society. Her personal identity accepts loss as a permanent condition. Her sense of belonging in China is defined by its absence rather than by its presence. She explores her Chinese and hybrid roots and the multiple meanings of Chinese identity through collective memories of her family recovering the lost past and recuperating future (im)possibilities of reunion. Chen Fang's desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home, is the product of her migration experience. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home and the longing for another only acquire meaning once Chen Fang experiences a level of displacement from it (Davies 1994, 113). As stated above, her displaced identity in rural and urban China is representative of her movement between Clifford's "lateral axis of origin and return" (Clifford 1997). Addressing the empowering paradox of Diaspora, Clifford says that this empowerment means

that “dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there*. But *there* is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation” (Clifford 1997, 269). Following Clifford’s logic, Chen Fang’s place for belonging might be seen as symbolic of a metadiasporic condition: she does not long for China, but to be reunited with her Chinese/Afro-Cuban family back in the Cuba she has never known.

Although Chen Fang is portrayed in the novel as having a migrant identity, her sentiments of alienation and segregation from the national discourse respond to a wider diasporic experience dispersed across multi-national locations. These connections are exemplified in the novel through a recollection of the stories of Chen Fang’s family in China and Cuba. Chen Fang’s sense of connection and belonging to her family is mediated by distance, built on other people’s memories, and nurtured by the workings of her own imagination.

Since she was young, Chen Fang dreamt of escaping to Cuba with her father. She had grown up hearing the tales about Cuba, of how fish rained from the sky during thunderstorms; about how seeds would shoot up green from one day to the next; of the country’s abundant gold and how in Havana women chose their own husbands (García 2003, 92). When living in Shanghai, Chen Fang’s attachment to her transnational family is possible through the character of Madame de Moët. Chen Fang recalls Cuba through the many pictures of Havana; she listens to the torn-sounding voices of the singers and the torrent of drums, and even learns to dance like the Cubans (García 2003, 141). Chen Fang is connected to her family through a common point of suture physically elsewhere —Cuba— and temporally between past and present. As a migrant, Chen Fang’s sense of her Chinese identity is superseded by her cultural-national identification with Cuba and the history of her diasporic family. She descends from an immigrant Chinese/Afro-Cuban family which had been strongly committed to the political cause in their adopted country Cuba for nearly two centuries: her great-

grandfather Chen Pan fought in the Ten Years' War against Spain; her step-brother Pipo Chen worked for seventeen years as a short-order cook at the American naval base in Guantánamo; his son Domingo Chen had gone to the Vietnam War; and even Domingo's mother Idalia Quiñones had been an extremely loyal Cuban patriot who fought in the Bay of Pigs and had been president of the Cuban Physicians in Solidarity with Vietnam Brigade (García 2003, 153-54). Unlike her family, Chen Fang has done nothing remarkable. Instead, she stands as a figure victimised through barriers of dislocation and displacement in her homeland China.

Chen Fang's experience of migration seen as part of a collective diasporic phenomenon of apparently (dis)connected identities acquires meaning through the history of the members of her family. The multi-located and polysemic essence of identities is more evident in the diasporic condition since the Diaspora offers new possibilities of reinvention and negotiation of identities on the move (Parry 1996, 87). Or, as Samir Dayar asserts in his article "Diaspora and Double Consciousness", the Diasporic subject, "always in the waiting rooms of the nation-space, is preserved at least from the illusion of a fixed identity and a prefabricated cultural role" (Dayar 1996, 51). Moreover, because the Diaspora disrupts the connection between place, location and identity, transnational subjectivities are in a position of constant re-enaction between the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging. The need to place the self that emerges from the Diaspora often results in the amalgamation of new cultural and national forms of representation through individuals' acceptance and assimilation of socio-political patterns. However, because identities "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1996, 120), the mechanics of belonging are also negotiated by adopting a posture of rejection and disavowal from cultural, political, and national discourses that impact on, alter and extend identity formations. In this sense, in constructing identities the Diaspora functions as both a unifying source and as a

basis of creativity and separation from collective forms of representation.

Chen Fang's grandfather Chen Pan represents —among all the characters in the novel— the most detailed account of the presence of Chinese in Cuba. The critical period in Cuba of British embargo on the slave trade and the rapid abolition of slavery had serious economic consequences for the production of sugar —which continued to increase— at the time the main crop in the island.⁸⁹ The first Chinese labourers were brought to Cuba under the contract “Free Immigration to the Island of Cuba”, or the Chinese version “Voluntary Labour Contract” in 1847.⁹⁰ The introduction of Chinese workers in the sugarcane plantations meant the beginning of the “*trata amarilla*” or “yellow trade” (Hu-DeHart 1998, 80). Chinese labourers or coolies were contracted for a service of eight years after which period they could choose to become free men, stay in Cuba and even set up their own business. However, the reality imposed by the landowners on the Chinese proved to be quite different to what the contract stipulated. The trip to Cuba which lasted a hundred days or more was clear proof of the unfair treatment of Chinese coolies by the British and Spanish officers, particularly since mortality was estimated a 20 per cent (Hu-DeHart 1998, 79). Chen Pan recalls this journey to “paradise” as a continuous struggle for survival, being constantly threatened “with muskets and cutlasses and rattan rods”, the Chinese being “kept below decks, like animals in a pen” (García 2003, 8). He describes how his trip “to Paradise” (ironically the title given to this specific experience of journeying towards indentureship) turns into an endless journey of cruelty, humiliation and death — “[m]en drink their own urine, lick moisture from the walls

⁸⁹ Unlike the British colonies that were suffering from labour shortages given the exodus of African ex-slaves from the plantations, the Cubans (who did not abolish slavery until 1886) had an insufficient labour force because of the massive increase in sugar production.

⁹⁰ Lynn Pan refers to the big importation of Chinese coolies to Cuba between 1847 and 1874. He says that by 1860 the Chinese population in Cuba was as almost equal as the one in the United States (34, 834 versus 34,933). By 1870 Chinese were about 2 to 3 per cent of the Cuban population, constituted by a 60 per cent slave labour force in the plantations and a 40 per cent free and indentured labour force, the latter being mainly Chinese. Lynn Pan. ed. 1999. “The Caribbean”, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, Richmond: Curzon, 248-53: 249.

of the ship” and some even “choked in their own filth” (García 2003, 99).

Whilst corporal punishment or forced labour under inhuman conditions was prohibited, physical abuse prevailed. Lyn Pan says that “so harsh were Cuban conditions that many indentureds run away from the states and, like the slaves, were hunted down and recaptured by *rancheadores* or professional slave catchers” (Pan 1999, 249). In fact, following their arrival to Cuba, the contract proved to be just a continuation of slavery and Chinese coolies were treated under the same conditions as their African slave counterparts. In fact, the “yellow trade” consisted of more a system of supplementation than substitution: “the coolie system was barely disguised slavery, a ploy to prolong slave labour for the plantations” (Hu-DeHart 1998, 81). García’s novel illustrates the status of Chinese coolies by describing Chen Pan’s arrival on the island: “From his first hour in the fields, it was clear to Chen Pan that he was in Cuba not as a hired worker but as a slave, no different from the Africans” (García 2003, 24).

Race relationships on the plantations between white planters and slaves were the same as those between whites and Chinese coolies. Unable to classify the Chinese under a racial terminology and with the excuse that differentiation between Chinese and African slaves could cause sentiments of injustice among blacks, Chinese coolies came to form part of the slavery circle and were therefore subjected to the same labour conditions and physical abuse that Africans received from the white planters.⁹¹ In the novel, this physical abuse, one of the broken clauses of the contract, is recorded in Chen Pan’s stay in the plantation:

⁹¹ The need to make judgements about the Chinese’s racial status was problematic and contradictory for Cuban racial stratification. While as free men legally they were considered white, once baptised they were recorded in the “*libro de bautismo de color*” (baptismal registry for blacks); but when contracting marriage with white Cuban women they were registered in the “*libro primero de matrimonios blancos*” (marriage registry for whites). Evelyn Hu-DeHart. 1998. “Race Construction and Race Relations: Chinese and Blacks in 19th Century Cuba”, eds. Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu. *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays, Volume II*, Singapore: Times Academic Press, 78-85: 82.

Chen Pan was still bleating when the lashes stripped the shirt off his back, leaving a lattice of blood. For many nights afterward, Chen Pan nursed his wounds with the Africans' healing leaves and planned his reprisal. (García 2003, 27)

Furthermore, race relationships extended among Chinese and African slaves in the form of hierarchies: "The Chinese never forgot the fundamental distinction between them and the slaves, and whenever possible reminded everyone else in the plantations that they were free men" (Hu-DeHart 1998, 85). In the novel however, as soon as he arrives at *La Amada Plantation*, he quickly establishes a relationship of respect and admiration with the African slaves. Unlike his other field partners who believe that Chinese are better than Africans, Chen Pan feels an inevitable attraction to their "reddish black skin or blue-black skin or skin brown as bark that gave off a smell of the woods" (García 2003, 23). Chen Pan tries to learn from them, an extraordinary people. In China, "no one would believe such men could exist" (García 2003, 23). Whereas his countrymen keep their distance from the Africans, Chen Pan is bewitched by these men, so different from him, "as tall as two Chinese, with notched spines he could climb like a pine" (García 2003, 23). Such is his appreciation for the African slaves that he believes himself to be one of them as his skin had turned red-brown like the island earth and his arms were taut with muscles. His Chinese counterparts instead ridicule him and assert their superiority by saying that "they wanted nothing to do with the Africans: "[t]hey said the black men were liars, that they stank like monkeys and stole their food" (García 2003, 26). Nevertheless, despite the racial relationships and antagonism between white Cubans, blacks and Chinese, they all shared the same sense of patriotism in liberating the country from Spanish sovereignty and they joined together in the Ten Years' War, the Guerra Chiquita, and the final War of Independence under José Martí.

Chen Pan's story of slavery acquires more than a meaning to explore the tribulations involved in identity formation, it interlaces a history of slavery in Cuba without which Cuba would not exist. Author Cristina García says in an interview with Pablo de Sainz that:

One of the major themes in *Monkey Hunting* is slavery...The legacy of slavery is everywhere. Cuba, as we know it, would not exist without slavery's harrowing history [...] *Monkey Hunting* gives us a great opportunity to learn about slavery in the Caribbean. (De Sainz 2003)

Chen Pan arrived to Cuba with the first batch of Chinese coolies to be shipped abroad from Amoy, China, to the island between 1847 and 1862 (Pan 1991). Surrounded by destructive floods in the wheat fields of Amoy he decides to contribute to the welfare of the household by going "beyond the edge of the world to Cuba" (García 2003, 6) to come back with "[e]nough silk for three generations. New harnesses for the village horses. Countless jars of turtle eggs pickled in foreign wines" (García 2003, 16).⁹² He is taken instead into indentured servitude on a sugarcane plantation in Cuba.⁹³ After three years of forced labour, Chen Pan manages to make his way to the Cuban capital, Havana, where he becomes the proprietor of a prosperous antique shop, "The Lucky Find". Although he is one of the most important and famous

⁹² Between the 1840s and the 1890s China suffered famine, landlessness, oppressive landlords and overpopulation. Millions of Chinese, mainly men, emigrated to Southeast Asia, the Americas and Africa attracted by the prospect of making a better living elsewhere. Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers, eds. 1994. *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude and Escape*, London: Hong Kong University Press, 19.

⁹³ Indentureship in the Caribbean emerged as a strategy for some of Britain's and Spanish's sugar colonies to deal with the abolition of slavery and emancipation of slaves. The new labour system sought to establish less rigid and less equitable conditions to those of slavery, but it still remained as a strategy to secure the hierarchy and privilege of the British and Spanish-Caribbean Empire. Although indentureship as a contract was qualified as free labour given both men and women's choice to enter the system, the conditions under which they had entered into such a contract questioned the basis on which it had been formulated in the first place. It was a profitable business because it helped to continue to reorganise and capitalise on racial hierarchies and maintain a bourgeois-imperial sexual distinction of labour. For an extensive analysis on the indentureship of Indians in the Caribbean see Madhavi Kale. 1998. *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. For a comprehension of the history of indentured Asian migration to the British Caribbean from 1838 to 1918, also see Watton Look Lai. 2003. *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and Watton Look Lai. 1998. *The Chinese in the West Indies 1806-1995: A Documentary History*, Barbados: The Press University of the West Indies.

Chinese within the community, an example of fortune and fame for other Chinese immigrants who “wanted to be like him, rich and unflinching” (García 2003, 62), he is still seen as “*un chino aplatanado*, a Chinese transplant” (García 2003, 62), whose physical features provoke racial discrimination.⁹⁴

A *chino* like Chen Pan in a white linen suit and a Panama hat was something of a spectacle, like a talking monkey or a sheep in evening dress. Many people glared at him before turning their heads. The Spaniards were the worst, often pelting the Chinese with stones. Chen Pan, though, was too well dressed for them to menace. (García 2003, 65)⁹⁵

In order to be accepted in society, his Chinese friends had also adopted Spanish-sounding names in place of their original ones: “Yü Ming-hsing became Estéban Sariñana. Li Chao-ch’un renamed himself Perfecto Díaz [...] Thickheaded Kuo Chan insisted on being called Juan-Juan Capote” (García 2003, 36), but they cannot escape being the victims of racism and displacement in colonial Cuba. Even Chen Pan’s eldest son Desiderio, who had married a Spanish woman, feels ashamed of Chen Pan, “of his accent and the Chinese ‘pajamas’ he wore” (García 2003, 198). Desiderio despises anything Chinese, thus perpetrating racial discrimination of immigrants who are perceived as “*chinos de porquería*” (García 2003, 184) through the gaze of the Spaniards. Notwithstanding the fact that his Chinese friends advise him to return to China where he belongs (García 2003, 237), he realises that “from the moment he arrived [in Cuba], he knew it was where he belonged” (García 2003, 62). His sense of belonging in Cuba transforms him into an intellectual revolutionary aspiring to join

⁹⁴ During the 1860s in Cuba a small community of indentureds was established on the outskirts of Havana where a small Chinatown evolved: restaurants, food shops, fruit and vegetable stores, shops selling handicrafts porcelain and traditional medicines. In the early 1950s before the Cultural Revolution, although Chinese controlled about 3500 commercial enterprises, they did not hold any monopoly in any sector. Lynn Pan. ed. 1999. “The Caribbean”, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, Richmond: Curzon, 248-53: 249, 251.

⁹⁵ Aspects of the problematics of Chinese Cuban culture have been poeticised in an anthology by the Chinese Cuban poet Regino Pedroso entitled *El Ciruelo de Yuan Pei Fu*. Regino Pedroso. 1995. *El Ciruelo de Yuan Pei Fu*, Havana: Letras Cubanas.

José Martí in his fight against Spanish troops.⁹⁶ Soon after, he realises that revolution will never take place “sitting quietly under a mango tree” (García 2003, 194). Chen Pan’s comment recalls the fight for political recognition of Afro-Cubans and blacks in Cuba during the 1912. Evaristo Estenoz, the leader of the *Partido Independiente de Color*, justified revolutionary acts of stealing and appropriating whites’ possessions saying that “it would be impossible to carry on a revolution by organizing a band of men and sitting quietly under a mango tree” (Helg 1995, 210). Chen Pan decides then to enlist in the Ten Years’ War: he leaves Lucrecia and Chinatown for a year and heads east to deliver machetes to Commander Sian. Some years later in 1917 during a long train ride, Chen Pan witnesses the peak of the Afro-Cuban uprising of 1912 when Afro-Cubans were protesting their right to form a political party: “*los negros* were rising up, arming themselves with muskets and machetes, readying to launch a bloody race war that would leave every criollo dead” (García 2003, 183-184).⁹⁷ Chen Pan’s witnessing of the uprising of blacks corresponds to the armed protest led by the Partido

⁹⁶ José Martí’s importance in Cuba has defined him as the essence of the Cuban identity, as a symbol of *cubanía*. His place in the Cuban nation is of particular importance given his ideology of a raceless and classless society. His visions of *la patria* were based on what he called “la libertad ilustrada”, that is, that all Cubans regardless of colour would be assured of equal privileges. According to him, “A true man is more than simply a ‘white’, ‘black’, or ‘mulatto’” (Kirk 1982, 112). Martí’s priorities for re-shaping Cuba after independence had been won from Spain were based on extensive social, political and economic changes, all of which should first be grounded on a transformation of the Cuban morality regarding the recovery of the pride and self-worth of its citizens. Much of Martí’s ideologies were influenced by his life spent in New York where he lived for fourteen years and where he organised the Cuban independence movement, founded *Patria* in 1892, the official newspaper of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, and published most of his major writings. In New York, Martí observed class discrimination through the “money cult” practiced by that society (capitalism and exploitation), and the racial prejudices on the non-white minority groups and the black and Chinese immigrants. His ideologies on a raceless and classless Cuban Republic were and are still nowadays the inspiration for others regimes that supported an independent Cuba. John M. Kirk. 1982. *José Martí: Mentor of the Nation*, Florida: University Press of Florida. See also Deborah Shnookal and Mirta Muñoz eds. 1999. *José Martí Reader: Writings of the Americas*, Melbourne: Ocean Press.

⁹⁷ Only a year after the end of the Ten Years’ War (1870-1878) a second insurgent movement led by black and mulatto slaves who sought political power within the new Cuban Republic rose against Spanish domination. The *Guerra Chiquita* or Little War (1879-1880) is of much relevance in the history of Cuban nationalism given the significant participation of people of colour. It meant an opportunity to fight for the end of racial slavery under colonial rule. Ada Ferrer says that “This rebellion, then, was —to put it simply— blacker than the first one: [...] slaves and former slaves embraced it; and black and mulatto officers gradually assumed its most prominent military positions”. However, the pursuit of this position of power led to a conclusive assumption by the detractors of the insurgent movement who reduced the rebellion to a “race war” or “independent black political power”. Ada Ferrer. 1999. *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*, Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press.

Independiente de Color in 1912 to re-legalise the party that Senator Morúa's amendment had banned because, as being represented only by Afro-Cubans, it discriminated and violated the equality guaranteed by the constitution. The attempts to regain the power of the party however, took a radical turn when the press accused the protest of being a "race war" against Cuban's whites. Soon, rumours about the reasons behind the protest mobilised whites to defend themselves from Afro-Cubans, "against a clawing scratch from Africa" (Helg 1995, 196). Newspapers promptly revived anti-Black stereotypes that reactivated the fear towards them, including icons of "blood thirsty black beast, the black rapist of the white women, and black fanatic brujo" (Helg 1995, 195). In order to contain black power mobility, cruel treatment of blacks started, simulating North America's measures of mistreating blacks, by burning them alive, lynching them, keeping them segregated, and denying them the right to vote (Helg 1995, 198). Chen Pan glimpses the hanged bodies of captured rebels, and is unable to understand, "What did any of it have to do with race?" (García 2003, 188) and for the first time, he feels anguish for not having done something more important than delivering machetes during the War.

A similar yet different experience of Chinese Diaspora in the Caribbean is portrayed in Angie Cruz's latest novel *Let It Rain Coffee*. Cruz does not offer such a detailed account of the Chinese slave trade as García does in *Monkey Hunting*. The history of Chinese coolies in the Caribbean only receives attention in the chapter "Juan Dolio, 1916-1922" (Cruz 2005, 95-101). The author describes how abandoned orphan Little Chan is found on the beach by his future wife Doña Caridad when she is four years old. It is in the scene in which Little Chan and Caridad's father Juan Dolio go to the city, that Angie Cruz offers an insight into the traffic of slaves in the Dominican Republic, at the time of the island's occupation by North Americans. Juan Dolio is approached by a man who tries to buy Little Chan from him:

You see, I had a China boy myself and he died. It was not the best investment I made, he only worked for me for six years. You see, the China boys have a special skill for work [...] the China boys can go for hours and never say no to anything you ask. And when they're young like your China boy is, you can train them very well, the man said, waving his hands in the air as if he had told the story many times before. (Cruz 2005, 100)

Realising the dangers for Little Chan in the city where people are “hungry enough to steal him away and sell him for a profit” (Cruz 2005, 100), Juan Dolio decides to go and live in Los Llanos, a valley of women and children. After being bombarded by North Americans who incarcerated 112 men involved in the insurrection against the North American invasion, the area is almost deserted (Cruz 2005, 100). The physical space of Los Llanos in the novel is important as a location in which Angie Cruz unfolds the events of two crucial periods in the history of the Dominican Republic: the thirty-year dictatorship under Rafael Trujillo and the intermittent occupation of the island by North Americans up until 1965. Angie Cruz explains:

[Then] I came across an article [...] about the struggle of the people of Los Llanos against the first U.S. occupation in 1919. Llaneros captured American weapons, ambush-style. So bloody was this attack on the U.S. forces by the people of Los Llanos that the town was air-bombed and the Llaneros were incarcerated. (Cruz, 2005a)

Like Chinese/Cuban Chen Pan in *Monkey Hunting*, in Angie Cruz's *Let it Rain Coffee* Don Chan represents the hybrid Dominican/Chinese who learns to love the Dominican land, its flamboyant trees, its hibiscus flowers and its brilliant sky that mimics the ocean (Cruz 2005, 29). But most importantly, Don Chan learns to love his *patria*, and devotes his life to social change fighting for democracy: he forms the anti-revolutionary group “The Invisibles Ones”, who elect a president (Juan Bosch) for the first time in their lives and struggle to bring him back to power after only seven months in office; and they fight to legalise the titles to the land

that they had worked on for so many years. Los Llanos becomes a small refuge, the best place, according to the author, to imagine a revolution in the Dominican Republic (Cruz 2005a).

The physical space of Los Llanos is probably more relevant in the novel as a psychological geography that gives priority to feelings of nostalgia and memory, functioning as a literary device for the common experience of Diasporic and transnational subjectivities' negotiation between past and present. Don Chan moves from China to the Dominican Republic, from the Dominican Republic to New York, in Washington Heights, and back to Los Llanos at the end of the novel, where he spends the last two days of his life. Similarly to Chen Fang's experience of homesickness for home, family and belonging, in *Let it Rain Coffee* the movement between Los Llanos and Washington Heights (the same community in which Angie Cruz locates the characters in her first novel *Soledad*) reinforces the idea of home as essential for coming to terms with one's identity. It is precisely through the flashback and forward technique that the yearning for the island and the ever-present past in the Dominican Republic becomes vivid in the imagination, a non-forgotten memory. Moreover, the intensity of Don Chan's homesickness for the Dominican Republic is cleverly achieved by the author's positioning the character in relation to that one of Esperanza. While Esperanza tries to forget everything connected with the Dominican Republic, Don Chan is anchored in the past and invades the family with his memories of life in Los Llanos always talking about his never-ending fight against Trujillo's regime and the North American occupation.

Don Chan moves to New York after his wife Doña Caridad dies. From the first moment he arrives in New York he feels displaced in a city made of "brick, and stoops and fire escapes and lampposts" (Cruz 2005, 10). He despises the cold nights and unpredictable weather in North America, he detests people's obsession with money and spends his days

reading the headlines in the newspapers as if to remain in contact with a wider world that exists beyond Esperanza's crowded apartment. With the passage of time goes by, Don Chan's desire to go home intensifies. In North America "he felt as a guest who had overstayed his welcome" (Cruz 2005, 102); he grows old with no one to talk to, angered by life in the city, wondering when he will be able to go home to die. It is 1999 and Esperanza decides to take Don Chan back to the Dominican Republic after eight years in New York. To Don Chan's surprise, however, his recollections of home are somehow dramatically altered: the capital is "lit with McDonald's arches and Baskin-Robbins neon signs, KFCs, Häagen-Dazs, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and Benetton, (Cruz 2005, 268), the beach has become a private area and the lands he had bought and distributed evenly among the "Invisible Ones" have been turned into sugarcane fields (Cruz 2005, 285). The only place that remains the same is his home in Los Llanos, the house he shared with his wife Doña Caridad and where he organised so many clandestine meetings to talk about the revolution. As if going back to the roots, Don Chan recalls the ocean, the place where he remembers his first years of life in the Dominican Republic:

the earth was asking him to surrender. He had learned that all he could do for the world was nourish the earth with his blood, with his skin [...] Don Chan's hand dug into the earth. And as he dug, the earth cracked open and he fell into it [...] He was no longer frail, but small like a child and the woman who lived in the core of the earth threw his body up into the sky, and before he could blink, he was surrounded by hundreds of women in birth dresses grabbing at him, laughing with joy that his fall had not killed him. (Cruz 2005, 289-90)

For Don Chan "home" becomes more than something to long for; "home" is what defines him, the realm in which history and politics, love and family help him to articulate a sense of oneness.

Domingo Chen, Chen Pan's great-grandson, and his father migrate to Chinatown in San Francisco in 1968, nine years after the Cuban Revolution. Like Chen Fang, Domingo's longing for his home is grounded in his memories of Cuba. Unable to return to his country, he still maintains his Cuban roots by bringing to New York what has been left behind in the island. He recalls the Cuban music by listening to *rumba-plena-merengue* (García 2003, 44). Even though his mother claims that drums are for blacks, when he listened to the *boom-tak-tak-a-tak* of the congas and the *tinkitín, tinkitín* of the drums, "he felt right in his own skin" (García 2003, 56-57). He remembers Cuba through the memory of its food, a leitmotif also present in Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*: the "avocados, tomatoes, spaghetti with butter" (García 2003, 54), and by showering with the "almond soap Mamá had given him before he'd left Cuba" (García 2003, 53). In 1969 following his father's suicide in the previous year — he threw himself to a railroad from a train platform —, Domingo decides to join the US army and goes to war in Vietnam where he ends up picking the remains of fellow soldiers out of breadfruit trees in the Central Highlands; when he is asked about his origins he "wanted to answer [her], to say that his blood was a mix of this and that. So how was he supposed to choose who he wanted to be? 'Cuba', he said. 'I'm from Cuba'" (García 2003, 47). The US Army questions Domingo's skin colour rather than his political affiliation. Similarly, when living in Guantánamo with his parents he is mistreated for asserting his individuality. He is arrested by a policeman "for practising 'negritude' —all because he'd let his hair grow into an Afro. *Por favor*" (García 2003, 209). In Vietnam, North Americans see him as too dark, his features not immediately identifiable as one of them, and a year later, he decides to go away and leave the country for an uncertain home. As with Chen Fang, the open ending of Domingo Chen's life raises concerns of non-belonging, isolation and homesickness. Domingo discovers the cruelty, the pain and the loss of his family; he yearns for his native

country Cuba. Domingo Chen stands for the collective 'Other'; he is victimised through dislocation and displacement, crucial barriers to be overcome by the subaltern in order to construct a sense of oneness with the national group. Similarly, Domingo Chen's grandfather Lorenzo is also trapped between notions of belonging and national identification. Lorenzo's first encounter with racial bigotry begins when he moves to China to study medicine. Unable to speak the language, he is marked as a foreigner by the people of his own country. Moreover, after wandering for twelve years through China, he also has to confront his return to Havana. Here, he is just a stranger who practices Chinese medicine and saves society girls' marriages and their families from disgrace (García 2003, 243). The Spaniards would only contact him "when their own remedies proved worthless" (García 2003, 66). Lorenzo's identity is troubled by his embracing in his skin three different continents, China, Africa and Cuba, in none of which he is accepted. His isolation from the world creates a loss of identity and alienation from his own people, his land, and consequently society. Domingo and Lorenzo Chen recall the racial prejudices of which Lucrecia is also victim in Cuba since when working at "The Lucky Find", where ladies from Boston and Britain came to buy all manner of heirlooms and oddities — braziers, wigs, French porcelains, coats and saints — she becomes the centre of attention of the white women's gaze who glare at her, amazed of "seeing *mulatas* in the finer shops" (García 2003, 126). However, in sharp contrast to Domingo or Lorenzo's feelings of displacement across cultures Lucrecia offers a symbol of individual progress and strong self-definition that surpasses her classification as the "Other" by the white women. Even though she is faithful to her Afro-Cuban identity, which is shown especially by her practice of African religious rituals, she welcomes her new 'hybrid' and renegotiated self: "she was thirty-six years old and the wife of Chen Pan, mother of his children. She was Chinese in her liver, Chinese in her heart" (García 2003, 138). Lucrecia's

assertion of herself as a hybrid that shares more than one culture dismantles the sense of 'imagined communities' as homogenous in class and ethnic unification. As Samir Dayal says, "by posing the challenge of an *internal* hybridity, "double consciousness" interrupts the narratives of national purity or autonomy" (Dayal 1996, 49).

In *Monkey Hunting* the family's experiences of displacement relate in this sense to the dwelling between *here* and *there* of the members of a Diaspora that transcends borders, nations and places. As Diasporic identities, Chen Pan's family is affected by a permanent movement in-between and across multiple national spheres. Therefore, the ways in which Chen Pan and Domingo Chen manifest themselves are not homogeneous; rather, they are the result of alterity and transformation when in contact with transnational cultures.

Even though the reader's last image of Chen Fang is one of suffering and dehumanisation, she survives by keeping alive the hope of reuniting with her family. Recalling her childhood memories when she longed to join Chen Pan in Cuba, the grandfather she knew only from a photograph and the many stories heard about him, in adulthood Chen Fang dreams of going to Cuba to meet the other half of her missing family, and even writing to her son in Shanghai. Chen Fang uses her experience of displacement together with the story of her Chinese/Afro-Cuban family as a mechanism through which she can understand the story of her life. Through the life of Chen Fang the novel narrates a woman's experience at the interstices of more than one world in which the idea of homeland connects a wider diasporic experience that merges past and present identities together through memory and imagination. Chen Fang's identity formation is positioned as a process in perpetual transition. Her attempt to find her place of belonging and relocate herself is an incomplete process. Furthermore, this process is not even: "times of crisis or transition are often periods of particularly intensive identity construction" (Schick 1999, 19).

Her migrant experience shares a history of dispossession and dislocation simultaneously linked by the Diaspora experience of her Chinese family that always leaves “a trail of collective memory about another place and time”, and the creation of “new maps of desire and of attachment” (Appadurai and Breckonridge 1989, i).

Chen Fang’s narrative and her diasporic family echo “a testimony to the inherent fragility of the links between people, polity and territory and to the negotiability of the relationship between people and place” (Appadurai and Breckonridge 1989, i). The common experience of alterity, discontinuity and disassociation that characterises identities on the move is accurately depicted in *Monkey Hunting*. Chen Fan’s gendered subjectivity is constructed through her identification with a broader Diaspora experience that supersedes racial, ethnic, and national borders. She is part of a multicultural and hybrid legacy of Chinese and Afro-Cuban descendants. *Monkey Hunting* attempts to take in five generations, four countries and more than a hundred years of turmoil. As in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, *Dreaming in Cuban*, *When I Was Puerto Rican* or *Let It Rain Coffee* history is an integral part of the characters’ identification across places. The multi-generational (hi)stories in *Monkey Hunting* move through time and geography, from country to country, and transnational family becomes the common thread that connects the nations’ history with the story of themselves. The turbulent and tumultuous historical periods narrated in the novel play a crucial role for the characters’ (re)negotiation of the self, since national instability threatens any possible sense of location, belongingness and (re)construction of subjectivity. Feudalism, indentureship, colonialism, (inter)national wars and revolutions in both the West and East throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries constitute the physical background against which different political parties attempt to restore sovereignty and establish free nations by offering their own political agenda. Given Chen Pan and his family’s location within periods

of permanent struggle and political confrontation, tensions regarding expressions of individualism are inevitable. García presents a family's struggle to locate themselves within deeply divided nations as a result of Eastern and Western national struggles in search of independence. The formation of identity as a continuous process of construction and reconstruction is not self-contained; historical, national, gendered and racial networks are intrinsically related to the political and cultural formation of the self.

The tensions existent between personal and collective national structures, thus, question the extent to which migration and Diaspora serve as mechanisms for collective identification, whether they offer potential for self-validation, or rather fragment and displace the self from the national context.

CHAPTER FIVE

(RE)THINKING HISTORY: WOMEN AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN JULIA

ÁLVAREZ'S *IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES* AND

*IN THE NAME OF SALOMÉ**

Audre said we need to speak up. Speak loud, speak unsettling things and be dangerous and just fuck, hell, let it out and let everybody hear whether they want to or not.

Kathy Kendall (1980)

Authenticity, Memory, and History in *In the Time of the Butterflies*

One of the striking characteristics of Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) is that it is a novel written by a US/Latina writer that does not deal with the US/Latina immigrant experience. Instead, the novel offers an insight into the lives of many Dominicans who for more than a century struggled to liberate the Dominican Republic from its despotic and tyrant governments in order to build a country —and a national identity— based on democracy and freedom.

Of particular interest, and in contrast with Álvarez's previous novels, is that *In the Time of the Butterflies* incorporates certain elements characteristic of “testimonial fiction”. In his article “The Margin and the Center: On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)”, John Beverley defines *testimonio* as a genre that:

* I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Odber de Baubeta for drawing my attention on some of the elements characteristic of testimonial fiction present in Julia Álvarez's novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*. I also thank Professor Frank Lough for sharing with me his material on *testimonio* and Dr. Amélia Hutchinson for her references on the boundaries between history and fiction.

may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novela-*testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or “factographic literature”. (Beverley 1992, 93)

In the novel, Álvarez includes some of the categories central to Beverley’s definition of *testimonio*: she reconstructs part of the fictionalised lives of the Mirabal sisters through the motif of the “diary”; she positions the character of the North American *gringa dominicana* as the journalist who interviews the surviving sister Dedé Mirabal; and she places Dedé Mirabal as the “eyewitness” of both the Mirabals’ story and the history of the Dominican Republic during Trujillo’s dictatorship.⁹⁸ Álvarez’s use of testimonial fiction techniques corresponds in many ways to John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman’s definition of *testimonio*:

Una narración de extensión de novela o novela corta (nouvelle), contada en primera persona por un narrador que es a la vez protagonista o testigo de los eventos relatados. La unidad de la narración es la de una vida o de un episodio significativo (la experiencia de ser prisionero, por ejemplo). Puesto que en muchos casos el narrador es analfabeto o, si sabe leer y escribir, no es escritor profesional o intelectual, por lo general la producción del testimonio implica el registro y/o transcripción o edición del recuento oral por un interlocutor que puede ser periodista, escritor o activista social. (Beverly and Zimmerman 1990, 173)

[A narrative of the length of a novel or short novel (nouvelle) told in first person by a narrator who, at the same time, is protagonist or witness of the events told. The unity of the narrative is one of a life or significant episode (the experience of being prisoner, for instance). As in many cases the narrator is illiterate or, if s/he knows how to read and write s/he is not a

⁹⁸ In her essay “Chasing the Butterflies” (1999a, 197-210), Álvarez explains that her involvement with the story of the Mirabal sisters did not begin until she made a trip to the Dominican Republic in 1986. Once there, she managed to find vital information about the Mirabals’ story through Patria’s daughter Noris, Minerva’s daughter Minou and Marcelo Bermúdez, a member of the underground to which the sisters belonged. She also visited “the rich agricultural valley where the girls had grown up”, “the museum that had been established in their mother’s house where the girls had spent the last few months of their lives”), and had first-hand contact with the Mirabals’ personal belongings: their clothes, jewellery, María Teresa’s hair, and the love letters Minou’s parents had written to each other during their many separations (1999a, 199-201). She says that in this trip “the past turned into the present in my imagination”. Julia Álvarez. 1999a. *Something to Declare*, New York: Plume/Penguin Books, 199.

professional writer or intellectual, in general the production of the testimony implies a register and/or transcription or edition of the oral story by an interlocutor that can be a journalist, writer or social activist.]

This definition should be taken in conjunction with Yúdice's formulation, "an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc)" (Yúdice 1991, 17).

Furthermore, Álvarez illustrates one specific kind of *testimonio*, that is, the "documentary mode of women listening to another" —according to Margarite Fernández Olmos, an essential feature of testimonial fiction (Fernández Olmos 1989, 185) — through the use of polyphonic voices in the novel, a technique that also appears in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, *¡YO!*, and *In the Name of Salomé*. In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, this reciprocity between women is achieved by the relationship between the *gringa dominicana* (the author's alter ego) and Dedé Mirabal. Both the North American interviewer and the eldest of the Mirabal sisters become the "speaking subjects" in the novel who, at the same time, allow each of the individual voices of the Mirabal sisters to enter the narrative.

The *gringa dominicana* functions as "listener" and teller of the story of the Mirabals' lives outside the borders of the island. Her position in the text grants her a role that is fundamental in *testimonio* because she is the medium for the construction of history: as a writer/reporter, she has to sift, select and piece together snippets of information in order to arrive at a fuller picture, a patchwork of human experience. Dedé Mirabal represents the voice of collective memory and identity, of which the *gringa dominicana* is a witness. Moreover, telling her family's story becomes an intensely personal act of catharsis (private life, corresponding to autobiography) and an alternative way of narrating a country's social, political and economic history (public life, equated with *testimonio*).

Julia Álvarez's use of the *gringa dominicana* to insert fact into fiction by blending

history and story has been the focus of criticism in various reviews of the novel. In his review article “Sisters in Death”, Roberto González Echevarría offers two main arguments that question the character’s credibility as storyteller. He argues that the *gringa dominicana*’s foreignness and alienation from the history of the island make it impossible for her to communicate in Spanish, so that she “would never be really able to understand the other women [i.e. the Dominican who never left], much less translate her” (Echevarría 1994, 28). In response to Echevarría’s argument, I will focus my discussion on the *gringa dominicana* (Álvarez’s alter ego) by positioning her alongside the Mirabal sisters, in particular Dedé Mirabal, to show how, within the genre of testimonial fiction, history can be reproduced as both non-objective and (in)accurate from both the perspective of a transnational identity and a Dominican islander’s point of view. Although at some points of my analysis of the novel I agree with González Echevarría’s second observation on Álvarez’s failure to delineate clear boundaries between history and fiction since “history is blurred” (Echevarría 1994, 28), I wish to re-read the text from a different angle and offer an alternative interpretation to the one suggested by him. Finally, I will explore how Álvarez’s “historiographic metafiction” challenges the position of the Mirabal sisters as “legends” and heroines of the nation, a myth that has surrounded them since their deaths (Kevane and Heredia 2000a, 28).⁹⁹ The author recognises the danger of their being “wrapped in superlatives and ascended into myths”, and she asserts that this “deification was dangerous, the same god-making impulse that had created our tyrant” (Álvarez 1995, 324).¹⁰⁰ In this respect, Echevarría also points out the

⁹⁹ I borrow Linda Hutcheon’s terminology of historiographic metafiction that refers to a literary representation that recombines the traditional separation between private and public history. Linda Hutcheon. 1989. *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 160.

¹⁰⁰ Dominican poet Carmen Natalia Martínez Bonilla offers in her poem “Oda Heroica a las Mirabal” the mythification that Álvarez tries to dismantle in her novel: “Ayúdame a subirlas al pedestal de piedra/donde graba la historia los nombres de sus mártires. Ayúdame a decir que cosa grande hicieron/estas mujeres ciclopes, estas mujeres ángeles”. [Help me to elevate them to the pedestal/where history records the names of its martyrs./Help me to tell what a great thing they did/these women cyclops, these angel women]. Quoted in Chiqui Vicioso. 1991. El “Éxito según...Hacia una Reivindicación de la Poesía Femenina en República Dominicana”, Algo que

author's impossible task of demythification because of the sisters' lack of an initial political activism and their more personal confrontation of the dictator. Similarly, critic Isabel Zarkzewski Brown describes Álvarez's fictional depiction of the historical Mirabals as "fashion stereotypes" and affirms that ultimately the author "is unable to avoid the mythification process she had professed to elude" (Brown 1999, 110). Along Álvarez's lines, I will analyse how the author succeeds in deconstructing their status as heroines by portraying their commitment to the revolution as part of their personal lives.

Referring to *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Dominican writer Chiqui Vicioso says that only Álvarez could have written the book "Because you [Julia] are *out* of here. It gave you the mental space to be able to touch what all of us know better than to touch, because we have to live here" (Caminero-Santangelo 1998, 21), to which Álvarez responds in "The Territory of the Storyteller: An Interview with Julia Álvarez" that:

I am lucky in that way. With all the losses, and everything. Living at a distance from some of the things that truly move me deeply gives me a certain kind of freedom. I'm not controlled by forces that might silence me there [the Dominican Republic]. Being outside the country allows me the freedom to reject the typical stance that I would have to adopt towards my history. (Caminero-Santangelo 1998, 21)

In order for the author to approach the Dominican Republic from a historical perspective, she must revisit the past by going back to her roots. In discussing Afro-Caribbean women writers, Carole Boyce Davies (1994, 113-29) argues that the concept of home is inextricably related to the authors' positionalities and constructed around multiple narratives. According to Davies' model, Álvarez's transnational movement between North America and the Dominican Republic places her in the position of both insider and outsider in which collective memory

Decir (Ensayos Críticos sobre la Literatura Escrita por Mujeres), Santo Domingo: Editora Búho. http://www.cielonaranja.com/alvarezjulia_chiquivicioso, Date of access 03/10/2005.

moves in-between spaces at three interrelated levels: a geographical space between here and there, a linguistic context between Spanish and English, and a historical and literary framework between fact and fiction. The tripartite revision of multicultural and transnational identities is best exemplified by the character of the *gringa dominicana* who arrives on the island to interview Dedé, the only survivor of the Mirabal sisters.

Linguistically, the barriers between the North American interviewer and Dedé Mirabal are noticeable from the beginning of the novel with the North American woman's arrival at Dedé's house in 1994. Although "she is originally from here, [Dominican Republic] she has lived many years in the States, for which she is sorry since her Spanish is not so good" (Álvarez 1995, 3). Dedé doubts the interviewer's ability to retell the story of her sisters with any degree of accuracy since the woman's absence from the Dominican Republic "renders her outside of things" in the island and her Spanish is an "imported nonsense" (Álvarez 1995, 4). Nonetheless, Dedé's accusation that the *gringa dominicana* is incapable of understanding and reproducing the story accurately because of her deficiency in speaking the Spanish language could be also applied to her own reliability as a source for her sisters' story.

More than once Dedé is assaulted by doubts about how precise her memories of her sisters and those involved with her family might be:

Nonsense, so much nonsense the memory cooks up, mixing up facts, putting in a little of this and a little of that. She might as well hang out her shingle like Fela and pretend the girls are taking possession of her. Better them than the ghost of her own young self making up stories about the past! (Álvarez 1995, 72)

Dedé's memory plays a crucial function in the elaboration of issues of identity, history and truthfulness. First of all, as the only Mirabal survivor and unlike her sisters, she does not participate in the underground movement to overthrow Trujillo, nor is she present at the

moment of her sisters' murder. Although Dedé tried to be part of the national struggle by starting her "secret rebellion [...] her little underground of one" (Álvarez 1995, 181) by listening to Fidel Castro's ideas broadcast by an outlawed radio station, she decides that she cannot "go through with this business" (Álvarez 1995, 184) only three weeks before the planned attack to overthrow the regime. Instead, she is forced by her husband, a "bossy, old-fashioned macho" (Álvarez 1995, 175), who threatens to take her children away, to break her ties with her sisters becoming then "the only one left to manage the terrible, beautiful present" (Álvarez 1995, 65). Secondly, Dedé's faded memory of her sisters' murder is revealed by her vagueness in recalling the day of their death: her own version of the events of November 27 1960 is filtered mainly through the testimonies of those who saw the girls just moments before they were assassinated. Dedé remembers that:

they would come with their stories of that afternoon [...] wanting to give me something of the girls' last moments [...] and as they spoke, *I was composing in my head* how that last afternoon went. (Álvarez 1995, 301, emphasis mine).

Details of the girls' murder are reconstructed by Dedé afterwards, creating a sense of loss, silence and uncertainty.

Memory and imagination certainly play a fundamental role in the novel, helping to re-create history and recover identity. Just as the *gringa americana's* journey back to the Dominican Republic might suggest a revisiting of her *Dominicanness*, Dedé's return to the past through the many books, articles, letters and diaries kept at the museum (Álvarez 1995, 7), and the search in her own memory for *what she remembers* (Álvarez 1995, 66, my emphasis) is a way of understanding herself as "THE SISTER WHO SURVIVED" (Álvarez 1995, 5). Apart from the many interviewers that Dedé receives every year around the same

time, Dedé's own untruthful memory, and the *gringa dominicana's* inaccurate translations, the so-called objectivity of history is also distorted through the character of the servant Fela who, possessed by the spirits of the girls (Álvarez 1995, 63), translates the sisters' voice through her body. The North American interviewer's blurred version of history proves to be as valid as the one provided by the same Mirabals.

One factor that seems to escape the critics' attention is that the figure of the *gringa dominicana* functions as more than the device of storyteller in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Dedé recalls North American women's perspective of the island as an underdeveloped country and their impression of the Dominican woman as still "riding a carriage with a mantilla over her hair" (Álvarez 1995, 172). Dedé's conversation with the North American woman about her status as a modern woman who has travelled to Spain (Álvarez 1995, 172) shows the general position of women under paternalistic societies that transcends geographies. Whilst in the Dominican Republic, as Dedé asserts, "we women followed our husbands", in North America according to the *gringa dominicana* that "is still true. I mean, most women I know, their husbands get a job in Texas, say, well, Texas it's going to be" (Álvarez, 1995, 172). By placing two women with different languages, memories and experiences alongside one other, the text points to women's common ground of shared experiences that allows the creation of alliances between them across national spaces despite differences of culture, language, and country.

Accuracy and objectivity around the lives of the Mirabal sisters is further complicated in the novel by the lack of detail and the pages missing in María Teresa's (Mate) diary, its ["pages torn out"] (Álvarez 1995, 241) and information blacked out, to which Ellen McCracken refers as a "self-censorship" of the text (McCracken 1999, 86). In prison, María Teresa describes the interrogations by the SIM as "gruff questions", and she refuses to

transcribe “a bunch of lewd comments I won’t bother to repeat here” (Álvarez 1995, 323).¹⁰¹

Indeed, the only indication of the sisters’ anguish at *La 40* is perceived through Minerva’s change of attitude as she moves from being an active and defiant weapon against Trujillo’s regime to a dedicated wife and mother once she is released from prison.

Probably, the most unclear fact that remains unresolved in the novel is the uncertainty as to whether Patria, Minerva and María Teresa were raped before being murdered. Álvarez insists through Dedé’s voice that the rape never happened:

I saw the marks on Minerva’s throat; fingerprints sure as day on Mate’s pale neck. They also clubbed them, I could see that when I went to cut her hair. They killed them good and dead. But I do not believe they violated my sisters, no. I checked as best I could. I think it is safe to say they acted like *gentlemen murderers* in that way. (Álvarez 1995, 303, my emphasis)

In his book *Trujillo: The Death of the Dictator*, Bernard Diederich describes the death of the Mirabal sisters, making particular reference to the sexual attack on María Teresa:

By a clump of sugar cane at the edge of a deep ravine, the women were dragged out of the car. Sweating, even on the cool mountain, the agents worked quickly and expertly, tying the women’s hands behind their backs [...] María Teresa shouted that she was being attacked sexually: “You can kill me but you’re not going to rape me! (Diederich 2000a, 70-71)

Also, contrary to Álvarez’s assertion, Dominican poet Pedro Mir refers to the Mirabal sisters’ violent assassination in his poem “Amén de Mariposas” (1969) mentioning Patria, Minerva and María Teresa’s sexual abuse: “roto el cráneo/despedazado el vientre/partida la plegaria” [broken the skull/broken the belly/broken the prayer] (“Primer Tiempo”). Mir’s verses reveal

¹⁰¹ Trujillo’s secret police force the SIM (Military Intelligence Service) engaged in torture and murder at Trujillo’s command. Trujillo used the SIM to control the press, bribe businessmen and to create a climate of fear among Dominicans. This climate of fear is also referred to in Angie Cruz’s novel *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005) as Don Chan and his fellow anti-revolutionaries spend whole evenings in Los Llanos plotting the death of the dictator.

a cruder reality than the one presented by Dedé, indicating the impact of the sisters' death on the Dominican people. In disbelief of the brutal attack, the whole day is full of wide open eyes, "todo el día lleno de ojos abiertos".

In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Álvarez does not set out to become a historian or to recount the real lives of the Mirabals. In her doctoral thesis (2002), Amélia Hutchinson refers to the traditionally assumed task of the historian as:

to identify those stories and narrate them in such a way as to make that narrative a "true" representation of the actual events as experienced by the actual people at the centre of those stories. (Hutchinson 2002, 100)

Referring to the relationship between content and form as interconnected and inseparable elements in narrative discourse, she suggests that fictional and historical narratives share a common ground and that:

the principal difference lies in the historian having a fixed plot, pre-established by a reality in the past and from which there can be no deviation on ethical grounds, whereas the fictionist has the freedom to represent other realities, existing or imaginary, either in the past, the present or the future. (Hutchinson 2002, 100)

Although *In the Time of the Butterflies* recovers a pivotal moment in the history of the Dominican Republic, the novel, as the author states in the postscript (Álvarez 1995, 323-4) does not manage to "adequately record" the details of the Mirabal sisters (Álvarez 1995, 324). Instead, the fictionalised account of the Butterflies is the result of the author's imagination, "made up", but hopefully "true to the spirits of the real Mirabals" (Álvarez 1995, 324). Álvarez's writing of the novel could be explained according to Frank Lough's conclusions on the relationship between the testimonial and the poetic and the intersection of history and

fiction in his article “Discurso Poético y Testimonio Histórico en *ST. Cyprien, Plage... Campo de Concentración* de Manuel Andújar” (2000, 339-347). Lough suggests that the relationship between these elements in the text should be accepted as:

“una narrativa poética testimonial” y no una narrativa testimonial con toques poéticos: es un texto en que prima el lenguaje poético (el discurso fictivo) con intención testimonial sobre lo puramente documental (el discurso no-fictivo). (Lough 2000, 347)

[“a poetic testimonial narrative” and not a testimonial narrative with poetic touches: it is a text in which poetic language (fictive discourse) with testimonial intention prevails over the strictly documentary.]

He adds that the presence of geographical references and various historical figures in the text:

funcionan como parte de un discurso no-fictivo que evoca para el lector la realidad histórica en la que se basa el texto [...] suficiente[s] para que no haya equívoco posible en cuanto a este contexto histórico. (Lough 2000, 342)

[function as a part of a non-fictive discourse which evokes for the reader the historical reality on which the text is based [...] enough to prevent any possible mistake with regard to this historical context.]

I would like to suggest that Álvarez’s novel is not an attempt to authenticate particular historical figures or an exact moment in history; rather, Álvarez’s testimonial techniques, that is, the presence of polyphonic voices, the use of the diary, the interviewer and the documentary mode, interrelate with non-fictive discourses, such as temporal and spatial narrative frames, and references to historical figures in the novel. Furthermore, I would like to propose that her representation of the Mirabals’ lives is a way of understanding her own history as a hybrid voice travelling across different geographical and temporal locations.

Rejecting González Echevarría's interpretation of the *gringa dominicana*, I suggest that this character does not attempt to appropriate history or Dedé Mirabal's own discourse. Her exploration of a particular period in the lives of many Dominicans is an effort to revisit her identity between from multipositionalities and multiple narratives. If we consider the other intermediary sources that also fail to record appropriately the Mirabals' story, and more importantly their sister Dedé, then the North American interviewer/narrator is as competent to represent the Mirabal sisters' story as the other characters in the novel.

Referring to the boundaries between history and fiction and the deconstruction of the fictionalised biography of the Mirabal sisters, Echevarría González argues that the author fails to correlate history and fiction in the novel because history is blurred. (Echevarría 1994, 28). In the next section I wish to establish an interconnected relationship between the public and private spheres in order to understand more fully how Álvarez demythifies the sisters by combining fact and fiction, the public and personal.

Throughout the novel, key historical events are echoed and present in the lives of the Mirabal sisters. The history of the island of Hispaniola is shaped by war and political struggle rooted in racial tensions between Dominicans and Haitians. Taking into account that Dominican antipathy for their Haitian neighbours goes back to Trujillo's regime, in the novel there is profound hostility from those politicians and intellectuals associated with *trujillismo*, who defined Haiti as the antithesis of the Dominican Republic:

If Dominicans were supposed to be white, Haitians were black; if Dominicans were Hispanic, Haitians were African; if Dominicans spoke Spanish, Haitians spoke Créole; and if Dominicans were Catholic, Haitians were voodoo practitioners. This binary opposition represented Haitians as the other — as inferior, foreign, and savage. (Duani 1998, 151)

Trujillo repeatedly and overtly stated his anti-Caribbean sentiments in his attempt to “whiten”

the Dominican Republic. In the novel, Minerva Mirabal addresses this issue in her mockery of Trujillo's attempt to differentiate the nation by adopting the values and manners of the white people. She makes sarcastic references to Trujillo's appearance, noting his wearing of pancake makeup and his periodic shopping trips to the States "to order his elevator shoes, his skin whiteners and creams, his satin sashes and rare bird plumes for his bicorn Napoleonic hats" (Álvarez 1995, 95-96). As a result of Trujillo's racial and tyrannical government he came under increasing international scrutiny, especially after his failed attempt to assassinate Venezuelan president Betancourt in 1960. Twenty-eight years of cooperation between Trujillo and the United States was coming to an end. The establishment of the Good Neighbour policy in 1933 left Caribbean dictators free to run their countries as long as they followed the North American line in respect of fascists and communists. Until 1958 during which Trujillo received war material and support, the United States had followed a policy of non intervention, granting the dictator absolute power for thirty years.¹⁰² Nevertheless, his despotic government caused concern to the Organisation of American States (OAS) which feared that his cruelty would provoke a revolution directed by Communist rebels or by those sympathetic to Cuban Fidel Castro. The United States was now interested in removing Trujillo from power and President Eisenhower approved a plan of intervention in which the US would immediately take political action "as soon as a suitable successor regime can be induced to take over with the assurance of US political, economic and —if necessary— military support" (cited in Diederich 2000, 41). Supported by the Dominican people, as a response to the assassination of the Mirabal sisters, the North Americans took over the

¹⁰² In 1947 Trujillo returned to the status of ally with the United States during his period of "interlude of tolerance" that lifted the ban on political dissent, called upon opposition parties to be organised and eased the repression of organised labour. The United States then provided him with weapons strengthening his relationship with the US military and the Organisation of American States. Eric Paul Roorda. 1998. *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945*, Durham: Duke University Press.

revolution and helped to end the dictatorship. Other historical events are present in the novel through the characters' being presented as witnesses, another characteristic of testimonial fiction: Patria recalls the deaths of the people near Constanza in 1959 and the massacre of Haitians by Trujillo's government and María Teresa reveals the OAS's influence in the Dominican Republic.

Álvarez proposes to explore the most personal side of the Mirabal sisters in a wider effort to connect identities and create bonds between women across nations. Recalling Zarkzewski Brown's assertion that Álvarez is unable to demythify the sisters, this is probably justified to a certain extent, because the author concludes with an image of the Mirabals as examples for other women to admire, "as models for women fighting against injustices of all kinds" (Álvarez 1995, 324). Nonetheless, Álvarez's vision of the Mirabal sisters should be interpreted as more than mere "fashion stereotypes"; their position within the national sphere calls on women to break the silence that has kept women excluded from the nation conceived as "fraternity" (Anderson 1983). In the history of the Dominican Republic, as in other Third World countries, nationhood has been understood as a man's enterprise. As Kelli Johnson says in her article "Trujillo from Both Sides of the Massacre: Collective Memory and Narrative Space in Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat", "women have been excluded from the process of nation building of traditional history, which has been focused on the lives, actions, decisions, deaths, and wars of men" (2003, 75). The idea of nationhood constructed as a "fraternity" has only been possible because of the imposition of one gender over the other through the mechanisms of silence. Thus, in his poem *Amén de Mariposas*, Mir denounces the violation of a Dominican Republic in which "todo el mundo sabe que somos el silencio" [everybody knows that we are silence] (Mir 1969, "Primer Tiempo") silenced by colonisation, slavery and imperialism:

No era una vez porque no puedo contar la historia
De este viejo país del que brotó la América Latina
[...]
de una vértebra llamada Esclavitud
de otra vértebra llamada Encomienda
de otra vértebra llamada Ingenio (Mir 1969, Primer Tiempo)

[It was not once upon a time because I cannot tell the history
of this old country from which Latin America sprang
[...]
from a vertebra called Slavery
from another vertebra called “Encomienda”
from another vertebra called Sugar Mill]

The attempt to demythify the sisters has already appeared in Pedro Mir's poem. The Dominican writer portrays the Mirabals first of all as women, as “los tres respetos del brazo y orgullo de los hombres/tres entonces madres” [the three respects of men's arm and pride/three and then mothers] (Mir 1969, “Primer Tiempo”). Similarly, Álvarez tries to de-mythify the Mirabal sisters and represent them as women, that is, as mothers, wives and daughters. According to González Echevarría, however, it is this portrayal of the sisters as too vulnerable that “clutters [her] Álvarez's novel with far too many misdeeds and misfortunes: rape, harassment, miscarriage, separation, abuse, breast cancer” (Echevarría 1994, 28). In my own view, the representation of the Mirabal sisters as entities that share experiences common to the wider reality of many other women makes their portrayal, in fact, realistic. Pedro Mir refers to the demythification of the dictator emphasising that, after the Mirabals' death “la sociedad establecida ha muerto” [established society has died] (Mir 1969, “Primer Tiempo”). Not only does Mir challenge the image of Trujillo, the national hero and “The Benefactor of the Fatherland” (Álvarez 1995, 94), whose portrait hangs up next to images of God in many Dominican houses, giving him a quasi divine status. The poet also denounces the violation of liberty, human rights and democracy practised by Trujillo's regime.

The motifs of language and silence also play a fundamental role in the novel where the private lives of the Mirabal sisters and the public sphere of Trujillo's regime intersect. On the one hand, silence becomes the mechanism through which the regime controls Dominicans; on the other hand, silence is a strategy adopted by revolutionaries to resist Trujillo's power. The Mirabal family is continuously forced to eulogise *El Jefe* in order to preserve their own lives and later ensure the survival of their imprisoned husbands. Minerva, who has been allowed to go to law school —women were not allowed to study what was considered a career for men— is required to give a speech praising *El Jefe* for his generosity and for providing women with the opportunity of a higher education in the regime (Álvarez 1995, 136); Mate, who has been voted Miss University, also writes a speech celebrating Trujillo as the “Champion of Education, Light of the Antilles, First Teacher, Enlightener of His People” (Álvarez 1995, 136); and even their mother Mercedes Reyes de Mirabal must worship the dictator by sending him letters to prove to him the family's loyalty. In the novel, the characters' freedom of speech is threatened by Trujillo's guards, who are paid to spy on the family and report their words to Security:

Words repeated, distorted, words recreated by those who might bear them a grudge, words stitched to words until they are the winding sheet the family will be buried in when their bodies are found dumped in a ditch, their tongues cut off for speaking too much. (Álvarez 1995, 10)

The Mirabal family recognises the power of language in the regime. Silence becomes a means of survival as significant as language. While in prison, María Teresa's journal is representative of this silence through its missing pages. She herself avoids giving information to the visiting North American Peace Committee investigators, blotting out the identities of those involved in prison violence. Minerva is also continuously silenced by her family to

ensure her safety because by speaking out against the government she makes the family walk around in fear (Álvarez 1995, 51). During the Discovery Day Dance, Enrique Mirabal advises Minerva to keep quiet (Álvarez 1995, 93), and Patria begs her “to keep that tongue in check tonight” (Álvarez 1995, 94). Even her mother, who generally “doesn’t say a word in public” (Álvarez 1995, 106), speaks for her when Minerva is called to police headquarters: “All my daughter wants is to be a good, loyal citizen of the regime” (Álvarez 1995, 114). Contrary to Sinita’s advice to Minerva that “people who opened their big mouths didn’t live very long” (Álvarez 1995, 18), Minerva decides to become a lawyer in the Dominican Republic to speak up for the people.

There are other examples of resistance to Trujillo’s dictatorship related to the motifs of language and silence. Once Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa become involved in the underground movement, they encode a language with defiant meanings. They say “tennis shoes” for “ammunition”, and Trujillo is referred to as “the goat”, a name used by all his detractors. While under house arrest, Patria and Minerva discover the intentions of the spies and defiantly they speak directly to them: “All night, we smelled their cigarettes in the yard and heard muffled coughs and sneezes. Sometimes, we would call out, “God Bless you!”” (Álvarez 1995, 212). Trujillo’s repressive authority permeates all levels of social life, including civil and personal liberties, which translated into gender terms means control over women’s bodies, speech and privacy. The dictator’s control, possession and repression of the Mirabal sisters are illustrated at several points in the novel, and goad the sisters, especially Minerva, towards a direct confrontation with Trujillo. Ilan Stavans refers to this conflict as a “gender battlefield”:

Three brave, subversive lives crushed by a phallocentric regime. In an openly misogynistic society, the Mirabals are initially dealt with by the

government in delicate, somewhat condescending fashion, which of course doesn't exclude the oppressive power from annihilating them in the end. (Stavans 1994a, 552)

Probably the cruellest moment for the Mirabal sisters occurs during their imprisonment. Trujillo's initial annihilation of the sisters physically and psychologically —eventually reaching its climax in 1960 when the sisters are assassinated— is translated into torture, deprivation of human rights, repression of speech, and their continuous sexual abuse by the male guards. At a more general level, Trujillo's abuse of power and control of women is exemplified by his deliberate choice of mistresses, such as the case of Lina Lovatón, Minerva's schoolmate. After finding out about Lina, Minerva feels a sense of disappointment and disgust about Trujillo, a married man with many women all over the island set up in fancy houses (Álvarez 1995, 23).¹⁰³

There are several moments in the novel that illustrate Álvarez's representation of the Mirabal sisters as more than "fashion stereotypes". They become a way "to travel through the human heart" (Álvarez 1995, 324) which is only possible through their representation as real women, that is, as subjects who speak up instead of as objects who are kept silent. The author expresses this immediacy when, in an interview with Juanita Heredia, she describes the moment when she meets Dedé and sees "the clothes that her sisters were wearing the day they were killed...They became real to me because she [Dedé] was real...Their voices became real to me in an intuitive way" (Heredia 2000, 28). By exploring the lives of the dead Mirabal sisters, not only does the author manage to de-mythify the three women but she also

¹⁰³ In his book *The Dictator Next Door*, Eric Poor Roorda alludes to Trujillo's sexual domination of women inside and outside the borders of the Dominican Republic: "The president's love life was entangled with the culture of the capital and with Dominican foreign relations [...] The question of which women would accompany Trujillo to social events was always a big to-do because he had umpteen mistresses...a couple of them so-called society". Eric Poor Roorda. 1998. *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945*, Durham: Duke University Press, 163.

demythifies the dictatorship, The Benefactor of the Fatherland.

Although the sisters are removed from their national heroic status by representing them as agents politically involved in the revolution, González Echevarría says that the Mirabal sisters “are drawn into politics by Trujillo’s intolerable wickedness rather than by any deeply felt or intellectually justified commitment” and that they “appear, on the whole, to be reactive and passive” (1994, 28).¹⁰⁴ Echevarría’s statement might refer specifically, but only partially, to María Teresa, Minerva and Patria Mirabal. María Teresa’s interest in the revolution is triggered by her admiration for Minerva and her desire to impress her sister. Moreover, as Minerva’s initial concern with the underground movement is influenced by Virgilio Morales (Lío), a revolutionary professor, María Teresa’s is occasioned by her falling in love with the revolutionary Leandro. María Teresa expresses her feelings towards the revolution by admitting that:

for me love goes deeper than the struggle. I would never be able to give up Leandro to some higher ideal the way I feel Minerva and Manolo would each other if they had to make the supreme sacrifice. (Álvarez 1995, 147)

Minerva is prompted to join the revolution when her father dies after being imprisoned and tortured as a result of her defiance of Trujillo at the Dance Discovery Ball.¹⁰⁵ Although the

¹⁰⁴ A different portrayal of the Mirabal sisters, especially of Minerva, to that of Echevarría is presented in Mario Vargas Llosa’s novel *La Fiesta del Chivo* (2000). Tony Imbert, one of the anti-Trujillistas that participates in the murder of the dictator says about Minerva Mirabal: “nunca se le pasó por la cabeza que una mujer pudiera entregarse a cosas tan viriles como preparar una revolución, conseguir ocultar armas, dinamita, cocteles molotov, cuchillos, bayonetas, hablar de atentados, estrategia y táctica, y discutir con frialdad si, en caso de caer en manos de caer en manos del SIM, los mititantes debían tragarse un veneno para no correre el riesgo de delatar a los compañeros bajo la tortura” [“He would never have imagined that a woman could become involved in such manly actions such as organising a revolution, hiding weapons, dynamite, Molotov cocktails, knives, bayonets, talking of terrorists attacks, strategies and tactics, and discussing dispassionately whether, in the case of falling into the hands of the SIM, the activists should swallow poison to avoid the risk of denouncing their fellows under torture”]. Mario Vargas Llosa. 2000. *La Fiesta Del Chivo*, Colombia: Alfaguara, 182-183.

¹⁰⁵ The Mirabal sisters’ political awakening is also related through the motif of the body as a tool that denounces the abuse of women —and the nation— as seen in chapter one. The signs of the female body symbolise the

Mirabal sisters are unlikely feminists or political revolutionaries at the beginning of the novel, a noticeable change occurs as the narrative progresses. María Teresa's coming of age is increasingly related to her progressive involvement with the underground movement, which is explicitly filtered through the motif of the diary.

While at the beginning of the novel her diary functions a tool to record events such as her first Communion, descriptions of new clothes, pictures of her bathing suits, dresses, shoes and rings, in adulthood she begins to pencil in a much more mature version of her life. She describes the ominous diagram which shows how to build a time bomb, she illustrates Minerva and Manolo's house and she sketches the structure of the prison to give a perfect account of their cell. She also demonstrates her commitment to her sisters' interests in the revolution by asking Minerva to call her Mariposa #2, and by waiting "daily, hourly, for communications from up north" (Álvarez 1995, 143). During her imprisonment at *La Victoria* with her sister Minerva, she participates, while her sister leads other political and non-political prisoners, in singing the Dominican national anthem.¹⁰⁶ María Teresa describes in her diary how on the first day the sisters entered *La Victoria* "Minerva began singing the national anthem, and everyone joined in, men and women" (Álvarez 1995, 228). This scene symbolises the reaffirmation of a national sentiment, which whilst being violated by the dictator through immoral and horrific acts of violence, becomes a significant force that

merging of politics and the personal sphere. Minerva's awakening is portrayed through the motif of menstruation when during Sinita's revelation of the secret of Trujillo, her "tummy aches" and "spills out like blood from a cut" (Álvarez 1995, 18). At the end of Sinita's story, Minerva realises that her "complications had started" referring to her blood as a signifier of her disillusionment with Trujillo and as a symbol of the blood of Sinita's family. Julia Álvarez. 1995. *In the Time of the Butterflies*, New York: Penguin Books.

¹⁰⁶ The lyrics of the Dominican National Anthem address the freedom of the Dominican nation, "*Quisqueya*", and denounces colonialism, abuse of power and autocracy: "Más Quisqueya la indómita y brava/siempre altiva la frente alzaré./Que si fuere mil veces esclava,/otras tantas ser libre sabrán. [But Quisqueya the brave and indomitable/and always proud the forehead will raise./Is a thousand times enslaved,/so many others will know how to be free"]. When Minerva is taken by the guards to La 40, she affirms this national sentiment saying: "*Mariposa does not belong to herself alone. She belongs to Quisqueya!*" (Álvarez 1995, 238). And her husband Manolo stands up for his sense of patriotism shouting *Liberty or Death!* (Álvarez 1995, 232), words that allude to the national anthem: "¡Libertad! que los ecos se agiten,/mientras llenos de noble ansiedad,/nuestros campos de gloria repiten:/¡Libertad! ¡Libertad! ¡Libertad! [Freedom! Let the echoes be shaken,/while full of noble anxiety,/our fields of glory repeat:/Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!"]".

projects pride, transforms and sustains the national sentiment and fosters identification with the Dominican Republic across cultural, racial and social differences. As María Teresa describes it, it means that “the real connection between people” is not race, culture or class, but “love among us women” (Álvarez 1995, 239). María Teresa is also part of the classes organised by Minerva that open up discussions for her cellmates and, in agreement with her sister, she also refuses to be released from prison in order to affirm her position against Trujillo and to set an example of loyalty to the cause of other prisoners. Ruth Behar credits the author for joining other Latina writers:

in the feminist quest to bring Latin American women into the nation and into history as agents, out from under the shadows of those larger-than-life men who, too often, have treated the countries under their rule as their personal fiefdoms. (1995, 6-7)

Both *La 40* —as an infamous location for torturing political prisoners— and *La Victoria* become locations for women’s empowerment, spaces in which the Mirabal sisters and their fellow prisoners reclaim their independence. María Teresa’s torture at *La 40* in front of her husband to force him to confess, for instance, exposes the horrific measures used by Trujillo’s police to persuade his opponents to reveal information. Despite María Teresa’s sexual and physical torture she shows her commitment to the revolution and the other political and non-political prisoners by resisting Trujillo’s methods. Most important to the Mirabals’ experience in prison is the breaking of racial, class, and social demarcations. Class and race boundaries are overcome by a feeling of collective identification. María Teresa writes in her diary of how prison has created a kind of community among women, which is not only formed by “nonpoliticals”, but of “prostitutes, thieves, and murderers” (Álvarez 1995, 228). She is shocked by the “generosity of these girls I once thought were below me” (Álvarez 1995, 230)

and she admits that “the more time I spend with them, the less I care what they’ve done or where they come from. What matters is the quality of a person. What someone is inside themselves” (Álvarez 1995, 230). The prison —a locus of social hierarchies among guards, prisoners and among prisoners themselves— transcends all socio-political differences and instead becomes a space where gender prevails as a force that unites women in the same struggle.

Minerva Mirabal, the most blatantly political of the four, also demonstrates her commitment to the revolution. Educated in a society where Dominicans had to respect and honour the dictator, Minerva experiences her first political awakening at Immaculada Concepción School when Sinita reveals to her “the secret of Trujillo” (Álvarez 1995, 17), that is, how the dictator killed her father, brothers and uncle. Initially, Minerva finds it difficult to believe Sinita’s revelations since they position the venerated figure of Trujillo as an unscrupulous man and assassin: “It was as if I had just heard Jesus had slapped a baby or Our Blessed Mother had not conceived Him the immaculate conception way” (Álvarez 1995, 17). However, her doubts dissipate after a series of events that will foreground her hatred for the dictator and activate her awareness of the need for a democratic Dominican Republic: she finds out about the mysterious disappearance of her schoolmate Lina Lovatón, who had become one of the many girlfriends of Trujillo; she herself is victim of Trujillo’s sexual harassment at the Discovery Dance Day; she sees her father die as a result of Trujillo’s guards’ abuse during his imprisonment; she is unable to practise law after years of studying; and she is tortured, like her husband and her sisters while in prison. Echevarría’s reference to the Mirabal sisters as “passive” seems to elaborate a gender discourse of paternalistic societies that prefer women as wives and mothers, confined to the domestic sphere. It is this role, nonetheless, that Álvarez exploits in the novel as the mechanism to demythify the sisters.

Echevarría's assertion ignores the courage and self-determination necessary for these middle-class women to oppose the regime and to be recognised and accepted in male spaces. Minerva, for instance, is determined to study law because "[i]t's about time we women had a voice in running our country" (Álvarez 1995, 10). Her revolutionary political ideas conflict with the rest of her family's, especially with her mother's, who has always considered "sports—like politics— something for men" (Álvarez 1995, 70) and just sees "skirts in the law" as the last thing needed in society (Álvarez 1995, 10). It is not until the Discovery Day Dance that Minerva openly confronts the tyrant. Minerva's family is invited personally by Trujillo to a gathering to celebrate Christopher Columbus' first landing on the island. Minerva happens to be the object of Trujillo's desire, and he becomes sexually aggressive towards her. Like Columbus' occupation of the island, Trujillo also attempts to colonise Minerva by repeating his longing to conquer "the national treasure" (Álvarez 1995, 98) just as the conqueror subjugated Hispaniola. However, Minerva rejects him in public and instinctively slaps him across the face. At this moment, a torrential downpour begins, a sign of how "the god of thunder Huracán always acts up around the holiday of the Conquistador, who killed off all his Taíno devotees" (Álvarez 1995, 93), and the family evacuates the place leaving behind Minerva's purse which contains incriminating letters from Lío. The next day after the ball, her father is arrested, imprisoned and severely punished, which precipitates his death. Minerva is forced to attend a private talk with *El Jefe* to ensure her father's freedom and once more she defies Trujillo, "his will on one side, mine on the other" (Álvarez 1995, 115). Minerva's confrontation of *El Jefe* marks the beginning of an antagonism that reaches its climax with the sisters' death.

Trujillo places the Mirabal sisters on the same level as the Church, as being his two main problems (Álvarez 1995, 281). The Catholic Church, which for centuries had been in

collusion with governments and the ruling classes, begins overtly to criticise Trujillo's regime. Bishops and priests commit themselves to the cause from the pulpit becoming Trujillo's worst nightmare. In response, bloodshed ensues as Trujillo's police start attacking the Church and Patria Mirabal commits herself to the revolution.

Of all the sisters, Patria is probably the least likely to become a political rebel. "The easiest, friendliest, simplest of the Mirabal sisters" (Álvarez 1995, 51) is a loyally religious young woman who, married at sixteen, flourishes in her compliant domestic role as a wife and mother. After eighteen years of marriage to Pedrito, she feels empty. While her husband has become an important man around the village, she is confined to the house like every other woman, just doing an "overnight trip by myself to a girlfriend's, a special set to my hair, and maybe a yellow dress" (Álvarez 1995, 148). She is constantly reminded by him of her responsibilities to her *children*, her *husband* and her *home* (Álvarez 1995, 166). Her first revolutionary step against the regime is the naming of her unborn baby Ernesto Raúl, after Cuban revolutionaries, Raúl Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara:

I looked down at my belly as if Our Lord might write out the name on my cotton housedress. And suddenly it was as if His tongue spoke in my mouth. On my own, I would never have thought of naming my son after revolutionaries. (Álvarez 1995, 151)

By this time, 1954, the nation is extremely impressed and delighted by Cuban Fidel Castro's move to overthrow Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship, which succeeds in 1959. Castro becomes the example and the model for the Dominican revolutionary underground. However, the real catalyst for Patria that thrusts her into the revolution comes during a religious retreat in the mountains when she witnesses the slaughter of people who have participated in a failed rebellion. The retreat is bombed when Trujillo's forces attack underground soldiers who were

hiding in Constanza. As she watches injured revolutionaries run toward them, seeking refuge, she sees a boy no older than her son and thinks, “Oh my God, he’s one of mine!” (Álvarez 1995, 162). At this particular moment, Patria, conscious of Trujillo’s attacks two of the most important aspects of her life —the Church and her family— finally commits herself to the revolution: “I’m not going to sit back and watch my babies die, Lord, even if that’s what You in Your great wisdom decide” (Álvarez 1995, 162). She decides to join the ACC (Acción Clero-Cultural) whose mission was “only to organize a powerful national underground” (Álvarez 1995, 164). The split between Patria’s original veneration of Trujillo and her loyalty to the Catholic Church is best illustrated when the portraits of Jesus and Trujillo, that have been hanging side by side in her mother’s home for years, are separated, one placed far from the other. Patria, the Catholic wife and mother loses her faith. She becomes aware of the fact that both God and Trujillo are to be blamed for the country’s great losses: families murdered “and thousands of Haitians massacred at the border, making the river, they say, still run red” (Álvarez 1995, 53). Patria, who had heard but not believed, sees the need to help women to emerge from the dark ages (Álvarez 1995, 51). After most of the “The Fourteenth of June Movement” had been murdered or imprisoned, Patria tries another strategy, that of resistance through religion. Instead of addressing God the Shepherd in her prayers for her family, she conjures the evil image of Trujillo, who now hangs up not next to the portrait of God but “out as far as she could get it from the rest of the house” (Álvarez 1995, 202). She prays to Trujillo to give her back her family that has been taken away by the SIM. She believes that she can “turn him towards his better nature” (Álvarez 1995, 203), but she immediately realises the impossibility of the task. Despite her noble intentions she feels only fear and disgust for the man:

The more I tried to concentrate on the good side of him, the more I saw a vain, greedy, unredeemed creature. Maybe the evil one had become flesh like Jesus! (Álvarez 1995, 224).

Patria's attempts to save Trujillo spiritually cease when she hears about his offer to Pedrito. The dictatorship promises to give Patria's husband's land back to him as long as he divorces his Mirabal wife. Failing to convince him, Trujillo moves Manolo and Leandro (María Teresa's husband) to Puerto Plata prison, planning at the same time the assassination of Patria, Minerva and María Teresa on their way to visit their husbands. Patria's narrative symbolises her growth from submissiveness and fear to defiance and taking part in a movement that she would never have imagined herself joining. Although the sisters are not at first politically or intellectually moved, their later commitment to the revolution, which culminates with their deaths, strengthens the people's need to fight for a democratic Dominican Republic; moreover, their story had served to put an end to Dominicans' support by the United States, who had shored up Trujillo's regime for so long through the Monroe Doctrine. As Ilan Stavans has noted in the *Nation* 259, (1994, 52) the Mirabals' political struggle is "an attack against phallocentrism as an accepted way of life in Hispanic societies".

By centring the interest on the lives of the Mirabal sisters, *In the Time of the Butterflies* challenges the genre of the novel of the dictator which positions the character of the tyrant as the central figure that moves the plot. While many works of reference, historical information and literature focus on the Dominican Republic during Trujillo's despotic regime focus on the autocrat, only mentioning the Mirabal sisters in passing, Álvarez's novel opens a new narrative space through feminist forms of expression. Through the *gringa dominicana's* revision of the past, I would suggest that transnational identities are re-thought: the *gringa* represents many exiled Dominicans in the United States who in the process of assimilation forget about their language, their culture, and their home. The return of the North American

woman to the Dominican Republic to explore and retell the lives of the Mirabal sisters is a way of coming back to the roots and an attempt at sharing and being part of the experiences of many Dominicans during Trujillo's regime. Memory, as the mechanism that activates history and identity through a revisiting of the past, acquires a wider function as the preserver of the sisters' voices across geographical boundaries. Dedé recognises in the *gringa dominicana* that "The Mirabal sisters are not known there [the United States], for which she [*gringa dominicana*] feels sorry for it is a crime that they should be forgotten" (Álvarez 1995, 3). The *gringa dominicana* becomes the spokesperson for a crucial part of the history of the Dominican Republic and the United States, which for many North Americans remains unknown. As Linda Fregoso asserts:

In the Time of the Butterflies is oriented toward the project of historical recovery, chronicling the contributions by women that are so often hidden from official state histories or accounts of socio-political movements for national independence, liberation, and decolonisation. Developing discrete voices and persons for each of the Mirabal sisters, Álvarez explores the relationship between gender and nation. (Fregoso 2003, 9)

Furthermore, because the text is originally written in English —and later translated into Spanish— history makes itself available to a wider North American audience deconstructing stereotypes of the Mirabal sisters as superwomen in the Dominican Republic and helping to dissolve the tropicalised idea of the island as imagined by many North Americans:

To Dominicans separated by language from the world I have created, I hope this book deepens North American's understanding of the nightmare you endured and the heavy losses you suffered—of which this story tells only a few. (Álvarez 1995, 324)

Álvarez expresses her concern with making the history of the island a broader phenomenon

by explaining in the postscript that the reason for writing in English is to offer a wider knowledge of Dominican history outside the borders of the island thus building a bridge between the Dominicans in the island and those living in the United States.

Recovering the Spirit: The search for a Feminist Voice in *In the Name of Salomé*

In the “Acknowledgements” to the novel *In the Name of Salomé*, Julia Álvarez recalls the many “padrinos” and “madrinas” who through their books, memories, and insights into the figures of the past made possible the author’s difficult task of becoming, once again, the chronicler of one of the most famous families in the Dominican Republic, the Henríquez Ureña (Álvarez 2001, 354-7). In a similar way to the Mirabals’ story, the Dominican Henríquez Ureña family is little known outside the borders of the island, especially the figure of the renowned “Muse of the Country” Salomé Ureña and even less her daughter Camila. In the introduction to his analysis of the novel, Silvio Sirias stresses Camila’s anonymity saying that, whilst her brothers Pedro and Max Henríquez Ureña are acknowledged around the world among students and scholars of Latin American literature, most of these “scholars of Latin American culture are unaware that the Henríquez Ureña brothers had a sister” (Sirias 2001, 119). The obscurity of the existence of Camila Salomé and ignorance of her political and feminist involvement in the Dominican Republic, Cuba and the United States parallels that of her mother Salomé’s appreciation outside the borders of the island, especially in North America. Álvarez acknowledges both women’s anonymity, admitting that she, herself, as a Dominican American living in the United States, had to travel back to the roots to discover these women and had to “read and reread Salomé Ureña’s poems, gathered together in several editions” (Álvarez 2001, 356). Only then could she “recover the history and poetry and presences of the past” and “understand the great silence from which these two women emerged and into which they have disappeared” (Álvarez 2001, 357). Similarly, Sherezada

(Chiqui) Vicioso recalls her conversation with Daisy Cocco de Filippis when she suggested to Vicioso that the English version of *En el Nombre de Salomé*:

ha sacado (como en el caso de las hermanas Mirabal) a Camila y Salomé de los barros de esta isla, y [que] debía ser material obligatorio de lectura de todos los programas de estudio del Caribe de las universidades norteamericanas, porque tiende el Puente necesario entre los y las jóvenes de nuestras islas en Norteamérica y su tierra natal: el Caribe.

También porque tiende un puente entre nuestros jóvenes y nuestras grandes figuras femeninas; piedras fundacionales de esa gran nación que se construye haciendo por debajo y encima de la mar lo que Eugenio María de Hostos, José Martí y Máximo Gómez comenzaron a conformar como la Gran Patria de las Antillas Mayores. (Vicioso 2002)

[has taken (like in the case of the Mirabal sisters) Camila and Salomé out of the bars of this island, and [that] it should be compulsory reading material in all Caribbean programmes of study in North American universities because it builds the necessary bridge between those young people of our islands in North America and their homeland: the Caribbean.

Also, because it builds a bridge between our young people and our great females; foundation stones of that great nation that is built doing over and under the sea what Eugenio María de Hostos, José Martí and Máximo Gómez started to construct as the Great Patria of the Great Antilles.]

As with *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the effort to recover a historical legacy and make it available to a wider audience outside the borders of the Dominican Republic is one of the author's main intentions in writing the novel. In order to make silence and absence present, Álvarez recreates in fiction the historical figures of Salomé Ureña and her daughter Camila Salomé. She emphasises once again the importance of acknowledging a history of North American intervention in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. She does not try to transform the novel into a historical document; rather, by intertwining history with the most intimate lives of the female characters, Álvarez attempts to address and recognise the presence of women in the nation building project. This reverses the relegation of these female figures to the periphery of the public sphere.

Probably the most interesting character to achieve entry into the male sphere at both literary and national levels is Salomé Ureña. In the history of the Dominican Republic, and the Spanish Caribbean in general, conspiring against the regime was extremely dangerous for any woman (and man) who dared to write, and even publish, since political activism was reserved only for men. Sherezada (Chiqui) Vicioso addresses women's struggle to be recognised as writers saying that:

Para las mujeres la situación es diferente. No se trata tan sólo de entender la comprensión masculina de su mundo. Es la doble tarea de primero hacerse entender en un lenguaje aceptable a los standards masculinos para luego poder crear los propios, siempre con el riesgo de quedarse al margen. (Vicioso 1991)

[The situation for women is different It is not just a matter of understanding the way men apprehend their world. First, it is the double task of making themselves understood in a language acceptable to masculine standards, then being able to create their own standards, always running the risk of remaining in the margin.]

In her fictional account Álvarez depicts Salomé as a woman unafraid of putting into words “what everyone else in the whole capital had been thinking” (Álvarez 2001, 53), and she uses her “sharp quill and bottle of ink” (Álvarez 2001, 50) as a tool against both North American imperialism and Trujillo's dictatorship. According to feminist lesbian Audre Lorde:

[poetry] is a vital necessity of [our] existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams towards survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (Lorde 1984, 37)

In his *Historia de la Literatura Dominicana*, Joaquín Balaguer asserts that:

Salomé Ureña fue la primera mujer con sentimiento de la “gran poesía” de la

“única verdaderamente grande”, porque “LEJOS” de recluirse en la intimidad de quien la escribe, para recoger sólo el eco de sus propias angustias, se levanta para dominar el espectáculo entero de la vida a hacerse intérprete de zonas más amplias y a la vez más fecundas de la sensibilidad humana. (Balaguer 1972, 119)

[Salomé Ureña was the first woman with an understanding of the “great poetry” of the “only truly great”, because “FAR” from confining herself to the intimacy of whoever writes it, to gather only the echo of her own anguish, she rises up to dominate the entire spectacle of life making herself the interpreter of broader and at the same time more fertile areas of human sensibility.]

Álvarez portrays Salomé’s devotion to the *patria* in the novel by recalling her life since childhood, when she starts writing. Salomé writes a poetry from within an environment of political activism in which she witnesses her nation’s instability, suffers from her father’s exile and explores the meaning of *la patria*. She first starts writing poems under the nickname of Herminia, collaborating in the strengthening of an anonymous revolutionary literature which denounces the continuous subordination of the island to external forces. Her poetry becomes a source of inspiration and power for those who dream of and fight for national independence. She writes a literature addressed and dedicated to those who love freedom, believe in the rights of the Republic as a nation and yearn for national liberty. In the novel, Salomé manifests her interest in letters from a very early age. Whilst girls are taught domestic duties and good manners, Salomé receives instruction from her father on writing and reading and starts to create her own pieces of poetry. She is profoundly marked by her parents’ separation, especially by the absence of her father, who due to his political interests is sent into exile. In fact, the influence that her father Nicolás (nicknamed Nísidas) who works for *La República* —the newspaper where he and other activists publish their revolutionary poems— has on Salomé is a constant motif of remembrance into which she divides her life:

I begin dividing my life into B.N. and A.N.: Before Nísidas and After Nísidas. And if Before Nísidas is a dark and dreary feeling of being confined to a well with a cranky aunt and sighing mother and a sister whose idea of fun is combing the yellow hair of a porcelain doll, then After Nísidas is a sunny, flowery feeling of sitting in the lap of a charming man, rocking to the music of a language that can sometimes sound like the low cooing of doves and sometimes like the piping shrillness of the Danish whistles our Papá once sent us from St. Thomas. (Álvarez 1995, 24)

Salomé's poetry—in the main profoundly patriotic—also struggles against social stereotypes of behaviour like “the foolish dictates of her [my] elders” (Álvarez 2001, 60) that restrict women's self-sufficiency. While some support the government with political actions, others like the poet Josefa Perdomo write a sentimental, “ingratiating” style of poetry; the sisters Bobadilla hold “teas for the Spanish soldiers and dignitaries, flying a Spanish flag from their roof—their fine, Spanish—tile roof” (Álvarez 2001, 56), and Mamá instructs Ramona and Salomé by reading them the “DO NOT EVER DO!” (Álvarez 2001, 59) in *Doña Bernardita's Manual of Instruction for Young Ladies*. Salomé instead tries in her first poem “A la Patria” [“To the Patria”] to raise the spirits of her people who suffer the constant dictatorships that beset the country: “And so I resolved to do my work, which was to write poems that would keep the love of liberty alive in the hearts of my countrymen and women during these hard times” (Álvarez 2001, 133).

It is interesting to note that in the novel Salomé's literary production is reduced to a handful of poems. Álvarez explains in a radio interview that the intention of the novel was not to portray Salomé Ureña's work, but to focus more on the woman; the figure of a woman writing national poems at a time when writing literature was circumscribed to men.¹⁰⁷ Álvarez achieves this by presenting Salomé's writing as a strategy of resistance: she re-creates her experience of emotional oppression in her room, in her words, and from her perspective.

¹⁰⁷ “Julia Alvarez in the Name of Salomé”. 2000. The Diane Rhem Show, WAMU 88.5FM, American University Radio. Available: <http://www.wamu.org>. Tuesday, June 27. Date of access 13/11/2002.

Writing allows her to find a connection between her inner self and her country, and helps her to establish a bond of loyalty with the other poets who also fight for the nation through their activist literature. As a feminist and influenced by Puerto Rican Eugenio María de Hostos's ideas on Positivism, Salomé wrote a wide array of literary works that emphasised the need for women's liberation for the sake of the nation's progress. Writing is also a way of expressing her most private feelings as woman, wife and mother under the skin of *poetisa*. Her neat and spontaneous style is sometimes manifested through an affectionate tone ("El Ave y el Nido" ["Bird and Nest"]); in others it becomes tragic ("En Horas de Angustia" ["In Time of Anguish"]); and on other occasions her verses become virile and patriotic ("A la Patria" ["To the Native Land"] and "Ruinas" ["Ruins"]). She sings to her country, its beautiful landscape, her children, her husband and the island ("La llegada del Invierno" ["The Arrival of Winter"]).

Álvarez depicts Salomé's empathy with other women's painful experiences in matters of love and marriage by including a series of tender, personal verses "for a love that would go beyond the poems to the wild silence of her [my] heart", such as "Vespertina" ["Evening"] and "Quejas" ["Complaints"] (Álvarez 1995, 92). The letters she writes to her husband during his absence reveal a more intimate side of Salomé that differs from her role as the patriot. On the one hand, they reflect the pain of separation, loneliness, and, ultimately, betrayal; on the other hand, they reveal the loyalty, love and respect that Salomé has for Pancho. Her literary production and her political activism in the novel are not only portrayed through her efforts to awaken a national consciousness; her artistic production also has the purpose of constructing her 'self' as a human being. The structure of the text plays an important role in explaining the process of nation building together with the construction of personhood. Salomé's interlacing of her personal and intimate poems with the more patriotic ones permits her, as a historical

figure, to occupy a position in which she manifests herself as both woman, with worries, insecurities and fears, and as a political force. Salomé's challenge through her activist poetry to the political life of the island and the many dictatorships the Dominican Republic underwent is explained in José Alcántara's words from *Estudios de Poesía Dominicana*:

Salomé Ureña fue la primera mujer que produjo una poesía que LEJOS de ceñir su canto a sentimientos y problemas íntimos, trató temas ajenos a su condición de hija, madre y esposa.

No es que no escribiera acerca de la familia y los amigos —ella no podía sustraerse por completo a la intimidad del hogar— pues fue una mujer atenta al cuidado de su esposo e hijos. Esa función tradicional no le impidió realizar otras que hubieren requerido de cualquiera hombre o mujer, empeño, dedicación y capacidad intelectual a toda prueba. (Alcántara 1979, 51)

[Salomé Ureña was the first woman to produce poetry that FAR from restricting it to her intimate feelings and problems, dealt with themes quite unrelated to her condition of daughter, mother and wife.

It is not that she did not write about her family and friends —she could not detach herself completely from the intimacy of the home— as she was a woman who paid attention to the care of her husband and children. That traditional role did not prevent her from carrying out others that would have demanded of any other man or woman determination, dedication and unflinching intellectual capacity.]

The historical Salomé Ureña as well as Álvarez's fictional character is both admired for her role as being the first teacher in the Dominican Republic, for founding the first school for women in an effort to emancipate women intellectually and for her active role as a regular publisher in several national and international magazines. Moreover, the admiration from the Dominican people derives from her role as mother, wife and woman of her house. Eugenio María de Hostos summarises Salomé's greatness in a letter of condolence to the poet's brother-in-law, Federico Henríquez y Carvajal:

¡Hay que llorarla! Son muchos los que estaban interesados en su vida: la patria, que no tuvo corazón más devoto; su discipulado, que no tuvo mejor

luz; la mujer quisqueyana, que no ha tenido reformadora más concienzuda de la educación de la mujer; su familia, que no tenía mejor ambiente que el de aquellas virtudes morales y sociales tan sencillas; sus coetáneos, que no pudieron tener centro mejor en donde confluyeran tantas admiraciones motivadas, como en aquel cuerpo débil y alma fuerte, que era a la vez una sacerdotisa en el aula, una pitonisa en el arte, un mentor en el hogar. (De Hostos 1960, 320-1)

[We have to mourn her! Many are those who were interested in her life: the *patria*, that did not have a more devoted heart; her pupils, who did not have a better guiding light; the *quisqueyana* woman, who has not had a more conscientious reformer of the education of women; her family, that did not have a better environment than that of those simple social and moral virtues; her contemporaries, who could not have a better centre in which so many motivated admirations could flow, as in that weak body and strong soul, which was at the same time a priestess in the classroom, an oracle in art, a mentor in the home.]

Salomé's relevance as a historical figure is more interesting given her role as a feminist, not only in the Dominican Republic, but also beyond the borders of the island. Although Salomé never left her country of birth her name echoed "from the Antillean Corinne/from the Gulf to the Andean heights/from one to another sea" (De Filippis 2000, 30). Her influence on the lives of many women (and men) across Latin America and the Caribbean is a crucial contribution to the struggle to integrate women in the national sphere as active political agents. Her commitment to fight for *la patria* transformed her into a key member of literary societies such as "Amigos del País" in Santo Domingo, "Fe en el Porvenir" in Puerto Plata (the name that gives title to one of her patriotic poems), "El Liceo de Puerto Príncipe" in Cuba and "Alegria" in Venezuela.

Salomé introduced her ideas of Positivism and rational thinking with a focus on the education of women in science, arithmetic and the catechism after founding her first school for women, "La Escuela de Señoritas", in 1881 in the Dominican Republic. Although Salomé attempted to take the role of women to greater heights of self-sufficiency, independence and autonomy, she also experienced disillusionment with education, which Álvarez also depicts in

her novel. Conservative mothers opposed to the idea of their daughters attending Salomé's school for fear of their being on the streets instead of at the home attending to their duties as women; and the lack of resources to maintain the school, which worsened with her later illness of tuberculosis, provoked the closure of the school. In her essays "Ideas pedagógicas de Hostos" [Hostos' Pedagogic Ideas], her daughter Camila Salomé recalls the difficult times her mother endured in trying to keep the school afloat:

In my mother's day, when she founded the first secondary school for women in her country, in collaboration with the wise maestro Eugenio María de Hostos, she was harshly censured for wanting to take women from the protected bosom of their home and form the ignorance which was imposed on them as a virtue inherent to their sex. (Cited in De Filippis 2000, 15)

Despite the fact that Salomé's attempts to educate women in a society where they were denied all aspirations outside the boundaries of home and family and when literacy for women was perceived as a threat to their virtue, Salomé's role as a feminist in the Dominican Republic meant the first steps towards equal rights for women in education and society in general.

In *In the Name of Salomé*, the interlacing narration of the lives of the Henríquez Ureña family between the two main characters (Salomé and Camila) conveys the different political governments the Caribbean underwent over the last half century and reconstructs mother-daughter relationships. In fact, the two personal stories of Salomé Ureña and her daughter Camila span the period from 1850 to 1973 and coincide in Salomé's Santo Domingo and Camila's dwelling between the United States, her adoptive Cuba and her Dominican homeland. Rejecting a neat linear structure in the plot, the author strategically introduces other historical events which she weaves into the saga of the Henríquez Ureña from within

and outside of the borders of the Caribbean archipelago.¹⁰⁸

The first part of the novel recounts Salomé's life in the island in Santo Domingo from 1856 to 1879. Parallel to these twenty-three years of the *poetisa's* life, the story of her daughter Camila is told beginning in 1960 in the city of Poughkeepsie in New York State. In juxtaposition with Camila's report in the second part of the novel, extending from 1923 in Washington D.C. to 1973 in Santo Domingo, Salomé begins her narration in Santo Domingo from 1880 to 1894. The forward and backward temporal shifts as well as the alternating geographic spaces in where both stories take place have a significant function in the novel. While Salomé's life is told diachronically from her earliest memories moving forward to her death in the Dominican Republic, Camila's story is inverted, beginning in the Prologue in Poughkeepsie and moving backwards to end with her earliest memories before leaving her homeland for her adoptive country. Consequently, the chapters, like the narrative, move in opposite directions: while Salomé advances towards death, Camila moves closer to birth in Santo Domingo, in the same city where her mother dies. The Prologue in the first part is equivalent to the Epilogue in the second part. By making the stories run parallel in the first and third persons the two separate plots meet at the end consolidating Camila's life through her mother's story, and the other Ureña family members, giving meaning to her own existence: "I learned her story. I put it side by side with my own. I wove our two lives together as strong as rope and with it I pulled myself out of the pit of depression and self-doubt" (Álvarez 2001, 335). The account of both stories in different geographical places makes it possible to acknowledge the history of both the Henríquez Ureña family and the Dominican Republic, and in the wider context, the Caribbean region. Santo Domingo is

¹⁰⁸ The historical events that intertwine in the novel with the Ureña's (hi)story and which offer a complete overview of the history of the Caribbean archipelago are Lincoln's assassination, the US occupation, Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone, President Garfield's assassination, World War I, the Soviet Union's development of the atom bomb and the Cuban Revolution.

Salomé's home place from the beginning of the novel until the end. The chapters dedicated to Salomé are narrated in the first person and thus from Salomé's perspective. The reader travels through the different political events of revolutions and dictatorships in the same physical environment. However, outside the boundaries of the Island, Camila Henríquez Ureña represents, from a third person perspective, the voice of the Ureña family's experiences moving between the United States, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Whilst Salomé's characterisation in the novel evolves around her main role as a poet, her daughter Camila is more interesting for the purposes of this study because she embodies issues of national belonging and identity. Although Camila "on the surface, is the least remarkable, the least interesting of any of the Henríquez Ureña" (Sirias 2001, 120) surprisingly, her being chosen by the author as the main narrator in the novel makes her the focus of attention. Álvarez attempts to explore her own identity as both outsider and insider by establishing her hybrid position in parallel with that of Camila's experience of Diaspora. Therefore, the multipositionality of the author as well as that of Camila—and Álvarez's alter ego, the *gringa dominicana* in *In the Time of the Butterflies*— is an effort to understand how the meaning of *patria* and home may be perceived from a Diasporic perspective.

From the beginning Camila's representation is that of a fragmented entity struggling to come to terms with her identity and to find her place within her family. Her feelings of isolation, confusion, and alienation are intricately connected to what African American cultural critic bell hooks refers as "the breaking of the spirit", that is, the voices that are not heard, the voices of those wounded and/or oppressed individuals who do not speak or write (hooks 1989, 7-8). Camila's lack of voice is the result of her personality being diminished by the power that the male figures of her family exercise over her. Her identity crisis results from her lack of confidence in her ability to re-create a space of her own where she can express

first her innermost feelings through the craft of writing as a way of healing and self-representation, and second, her need to recognise and accept her sexuality.

In the novel, voice is given to women through the literary device of writing letters.

Referring to the function of letters in literature, Ellen McCracken says that:

the private and the public spheres become inseparable, foregrounding the politics of romance, gender, and history within the form of the love letter that no longer functions simply as a pleasurable product of narrative experimentation. (McCracken 1999, 25)

Camila's letters are the mechanism through which the character's most intimate self is explored, since the letters she writes to Marion are read as natural, more personal and authentic. Camila writes the letters in isolation revealing her feelings of loneliness, her longing for a home and love. Writing becomes the gateway to her dealing with her fears and insecurities. As writer Gloria Anzaldúa notes in her article "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers", "to write is to confront one's demons, look them in the face and live to write about them" (Anzaldúa 2003, 87). Camila's departure from the United States is expressed through a series of unsent letters that she writes to her North American friend Marion in 1923 when living in Washington with Papancho.¹⁰⁹ The letters, apart from moving the plot forward in a swift manner, lend meaning to Camila's sacrifice since she puts her life on hold for her father's hopeless quest to regain his presidency of the Dominican Republic after the North American invasion in 1916 sent the family into exile in Cuba. The act of writing helps Camila to negotiate her displaced identity as well as serve as a strategy of resistance by re-creating her experience of emotional oppression in her room, in her words

¹⁰⁹ Camila's unsent letters recall those of Celia to Gustavo in which she laments living in pre-revolutionary Cuba, her unhappiness in her marriage with Jorge, her longing for Gustavo's love and return and the fragmentation of her family.

and from her own perspective.¹¹⁰ Camila's attempt to break the silence that has always been imposed on her by her family acquires political significance in gendered terms when she decides to start writing poetry, following the example of her mother, as a way of freeing her spirit. When she travels from Massachusetts to Cuba to visit her much loved brother Pedro in 1941, she is, however, criticised for the poetry that she had been writing in secret. Her act of self-liberation through writing becomes, as Gloria Anzaldúa suggests in a different context "dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a women under a triple or quadruple oppression" (Anzaldúa 2003, 87). Her brother excludes Camila, as he had deliberately excluded the personal poems of their mother when editing an anthology of her work in 1920, from those poets and intellectuals who defend poetry "against the bought pens, the dictators, the impersonators, the well-meaning but lacking in talent" (Álvarez 2001, 125). Pedro suggests that she "should keep writing for her own pleasure" and belittles her attempts to construct her own voice as a woman (Álvarez 2001, 124). This devastates Camila who immediately ceases to write. Camila's exclusion from writing echoes the position of women in the national realm, or as Roland Méndez-Clark states in reference to the art of writing in his essay entitled "La Pasión y la Marginalidad en (de) la Escritura: Rosario Ferré", this exclusion is "una confirmación de que las mujeres no tienen "discurso propio" (la escritura de las mujeres está siempre vinculada a otra escritura)" (Méndez-Clark 1985, 121) [a confirmation of women's lack of their "own speech" (women's writing is always attached to other writing)].¹¹¹ Although Camila finds a room of her own, a

¹¹⁰ Camila's search for a place of her own and for a space where she can create and write recalls Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in which Woolf considers the achievements of the major women novelists of the nineteenth century and reflects on the importance of tradition to an aspiring writer as well as having a space for creativity. Virginia Woolf. 1995. *A Room of One's Own*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹¹ Note that during the literary gatherings which Salomé attended women were not allowed to give their opinions except when called upon: "Of course, women guests were not allowed to participate in the discussions. "I've been told to keep our mouths shut," Ramona told me, "unless the master of memories should turn to us and say 'And what does the fair sex have to say about the future of fatalism?'" Julia Álvarez. 2001. *In the Name of Salomé*. New York: Plume, 128-9.

space to write and create at Vassar College, she goes through an inner struggle in her efforts to acquire the necessary confidence to write.

The spaces in which Camila's voice is silenced are multidimensional. Not only is she annihilated and voiceless as a poet, but her voice is suppressed once again by her brother and father when she decides to involve herself politically in the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba.

Camila joins a revolutionary group and feminist society under the name of the Lyceum Lawn and Tennis Club in 1935, founded in 1928 and known as the Lyceum.¹¹² According to K. Lynn Stoner the Lyceum was the most cultural and intellectual of the feminist associations in Cuba during the 1930s. Its objectives were "to foment a collective spirit among women, to facilitate an interchange of ideas and to generate beneficiary activities" (Stoner 1991, 74). For Camila the Lyceum is an important place to develop her feminist ideas and, like her mother, to educate women in all sorts of activities by disseminating culture: cinema sessions were held, conferences were delivered on diverse aspects of knowledge and current problems in society, and art exhibitions and concerts were among the many activities organised for women. Camila was one of the presidents of the Lyceum and, according to Mirta Yáñez, "En sus estudios se exaltaba como objetivo el elevar el espíritu de la mujer a partir de actividades de orden cultural, social y deportivo" (Yáñez 2004, 56) [In her studies, there was a special emphasis on elevating women's spirits through cultural, social and sports activities"].¹¹³ In the novel, Camila's role is to lead other women in open defiance of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship and demand the vote and literacy for

¹¹² For a detailed discussion on the role of the Lyceum see Lynn Stoner. 1991. *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940*, Durham: Duke University Press. Stoner documents the four main women's organisations in Cuba from 1898 to 1940 by using a wide variety of written sources, such as personal correspondence, memoirs, and interviews of the surviving leaders of the feminist movement. Also see Catherine Davies. 1997. *A Place in the Sun?: Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, London: Zed Books, which offers an account of women's writing in Cuba throughout the twentieth century.

¹¹³ During the 1940s and 1950s Camila lived in the United States, by this time when her North American feminist counterparts were reading about feminism, she was already ahead of her time in Cuba.

women. Her brother Max, like her father, tries to dissuade her from this path. Max cannot understand why Camila would fight for a nation which is not even her country, and Camila can already imagine the deepest regrets of her father, “the peace-love former president of the Dominican Republic, (who presently resides as our guest in Santiago de Cuba)”, at the behaviour of his rebel daughter (Álvarez 2001, 152). Both Pancho and Max are potential agents in diminishing Camila’s personality by reducing her to the status of a child. But her political consciousness obviously goes beyond theirs.¹¹⁴ She has a sense of justice which is not just local but global. They try to curtail her political activism by arguing that she does not take her own decisions, but is influenced by others: “How else to explain why his shy, withdrawn sister who has always stayed out of everyone’s way would suddenly become so brazen, so political” (Álvarez 2001, 164). Whenever Camila tries to embrace the revolutionary cause, her efforts are thwarted by her father and brothers. Shortly after Camila’s failed attempt in the Cuban underground struggle against Batista—for which she spends two weeks in jail—she flees Cuba for the United States.

While she is studying in the United States, Pedro spies on Camila thinking that she is having an affair with a North American man. Like her mother Salomé, who during her husband’s absence in Paris is constantly under the watchful eye of Pancho’s brother observing the men who enter the house, back in Cuba Camila is accused by her brother of enjoying a lifestyle of perversion and immorality with her friend Marion. Pedro even advises Pancho that the North American woman is a bad influence on his sister. In order to conform to the

¹¹⁴ The fact that Camila is being reduced to the position of a child by the male members of her family recalls the infantilisation already present in novels such as Esmeralda Santiago’s *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *The Turkish Lover*. Ramona, Negi’s mother, coerces her daughter’s freedom in the United States to prevent her from becoming a spoiled American girl, and Ulvi develops a patronising attitude towards her by calling her innocent and naïve. Also in Julia Álvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, Carlos García refers to his daughters as his “harem” and refuses to invite their husbands to his house as a way of keeping his daughters for himself, giving them money on his birthday, and Laura García dresses the sisters alike. In Loida Maritza Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* there are also instances of Papi and Mami treating the girls as children with no self-sufficiency, which Pérez illustrates through a series of sick jokes from Papito to the girls.

paternalistic social conventions that her elders impose on her, Camila denies her sexuality and instead adopts an alien one. She embarks on two heterosexual relationships with the Dominican sculptor Domingo and the North American Andrew Scott, both of which fail. Her homosexuality becomes a burden she must deal with in secret. She experiences what Paul Allatson has referred to, in a different context, as “forced closeting” (Allatson 2002, 169). Camila’s body becomes, like that of her mother, a territory conquered by the authority of her male elders. Although Julia Álvarez depicts the character of Camila in the novel with a focus on her journey of self-discovery and coming to terms with her sexuality, perhaps the main interest in Camila as a character is her importance in history as a feminist in Cuba and the United States.

The intellectual atmosphere in which she moved and the emergence of liberal ideals concerning the role of women in society were decisive for Camila’s construction of a feminist consciousness, not to mention the influence her mother’s role as educator and poet had on her. Mirta Yáñez writes about Camila’s feminist attitude: “En la organización de mujeres, muchas de ellas, como la propia Camila, [eran] militantes distinguidas y orgullosas del movimiento feminista Cubano” (Yáñez 2004, 57) [In the women’s organisation, most of them like Camila, [were] notable and proud activists of the Cuban feminist movement]. Camila’s ideas on women’s emancipation were disseminated in the United States and across Latin America. She founded the “Institución Hispano-Cubano de Cultura” in Havana in 1932.

The importance of Camila’s work in the United States and particularly in Cuba during the 1930s is of crucial importance to understand her strong feminist ideas and her commitment to the struggle for independence of women in Cuba. Between 1902 and 1940 the first feminist organisations started to demand equal rights for women in Cuba. However, in some respects these attempts failed. Cuban feminists in the 1920s and 1930s did not directly

attack patriarchy as the source of women's oppression. Instead, they used their status of mothers to pursue their goals. Motherhood justified their right to exercise political authority in nationalist Cuba as "reproducers of the nation" and thus they focused on seeking women's rights in motherhood, welfare and employment rights. They saw and used their femininity as a stepping stone to power and more particularly to create a space for women in the national system, whilst men still kept their positions in business, international politics and other matters of state. At the 1923, 1925, and 1939 National Women's Congresses, Cuban feminists stressed their emphasis on "family laws, suffrage, equal rights guarantees, education and social welfare laws, rights for illegitimate children and labor legislation" (Stoner 1991, 193). Although they were successful in accomplishing these aims because their feminist ideas were based on being pro-women, pro-family and pro-children, they did not succeed in deconstructing patriarchal notions of family and social structures. As Lynn Stoner says in her book referring to Cuban feminists, they "did not strive to eliminate the patriarchy", but rather "they remained dependent upon the patriarchy to achieve their goals. As a result they had no philosophy to guide them away from a paternalistic society" (Stoner 1991, 194).

Another reason why Cuban feminists in the 1920s and 1930s were unsuccessful in transforming Hispanic society is that, as organisations primarily formed by white-upper and middle-class women, differentiation by class and ethnicity prevailed as a means of social discrimination. Also, their opposition to North American feminism and feminists narrowed their struggle for women's rights in Cuba. Given the history of Cuba's occupation by the United States and loss of sovereignty, some Cuban feminists viewed collaboration with North American feminists as a way of supporting imperialism. Despite the fact that the acceptance of North American feminism could have had a positive impact, given their embracing of North Americans' struggle for individual rights and principles such as gender equality and

attacks on patriarchy, most Cubans refused to accept these aspects. Within this context, Camila's feminist ideas, which could be seen as revolutionary even for her North American counterparts at the time, presented a different view of women's liberation: "No podemos pretender seguir a través de la vida con fórmulas de sustitución. Tenemos que hayar (sic) nuestra fórmula de realización" (cited in Yañiz 2004, 58) [We cannot pretend to go through life with formulas of substitution. We must find our own formula of self-realisation].¹¹⁵

Camila understood the role of feminism as a basic and direct attack on patriarchy. Her work *Feminismo*, a conference given in 1939 in "La Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura" was one of her most important contributions to contemporary feminist thought.¹¹⁶ Camila expresses the need for a feminism that goes beyond concepts of motherhood to dismantle patriarchy and the inequality between sexes. She expresses the understanding of the history and ideology of feminism as:

The history of feminism is but the feminine side of that eternal question, and therefore, it is the history of struggle between two very uneven parts, because however we consider the problem, we have to take as a point of departure the inconvertible fact that the feminine half of the world has found herself always in a condition of inferiority with respect to the masculine half. (De Filippis 2000, 64)¹¹⁷

In her essay *Feminismo*, Camila revisits the position of women throughout history —from

¹¹⁵ The feminist movement in the United States were separated into feminists who pursued issues such as women's rights in motherhood, welfare and work rights and suffragists who narrowed their demands to the vote. Lynn K. Stoner. 1991. *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940*, Durham: Duke University Press

¹¹⁶ In her essay "Camila Henríquez Ureña, La Hermana Menor de Shakespeare", writer Chiqui Vicioso quotes Camila's brother Pedro's words when referring to Salomé's essay *Feminismo*, described as: "el primer trabajo tuyo de absoluto primer orden" [Your first work of absolute first order]. Chiqui Vicioso. 2002. Suplemento Ventana del Listín Diario 21 de Abril del 2002. <http://www.cielonaranja.com/heriquezcamila-chiqui.htm>. Date of access 07/09/2003.

¹¹⁷ Julia Álvarez echoes the role of patriarchy as the roots of women's oppression and stereotypes of women in society in her essay "First Muse", in the collection *Something to Declare* (1999a): "It's always the boy cousins who are asked what they want to do with their lives. Girls are told we are going to be wives and mothers. If we're asked at all, it's usually how many children we want and whom we might want to marry". Julia Álvarez. 1999a. "First Muse", *Something to Declare*, New York: Plume/Penguin Books, 133-46: 135.

Ancient times to the twentieth century— as objects reduced to sexual activity, as men's property and, therefore, as slaves of an individual master, whose highest function was maternity. By presenting women from the status of slaves to victims (nuns or religious women, spinsters, prostitutes, and matrons or widows), Camila condemns patriarchy, maternity, love and marriage. Patriarchy—which she identifies as the root of women's oppression—is a restrictive and authoritarian system which sets institutions such as marriage and family as oppressive agents that act upon women's identity and freedom and love as the only reason for women to live.

When referring to maternity, for instance, Camila emphasises the role of the mother as an instinctive impulse, a duty and even a sin and shame. She denounces maternity as a vehicle for men's exercising of power and within the family as institution, and marriage as a contract that deprives women of their independence: "Marriage constituted legally the absolute annulment of the personality of the woman" (De Filippis 2000, 71). Camila's feminist ideas demand women's emancipation at all levels: economic, complete legal rights regarding laws favourable to motherhood, obtaining political rights, complete education and the revision of discourses on sexual morality, that is, the need for a change in mental attitude towards women's sexuality (De Filippis 2000, 75-6).

In 1960 Camila finally returns to Cuba to engage in the "wonderful things" taking place in the new *patria* which is being created by Castro and his bearded boys (Álvarez 2001, 2). Like her mother Salomé in the Dominican Republic, she becomes an educator during the years of the Revolution struggling with others "to build the kind of country my mother [she] had dreamed of" (Álvarez 2001, 335). Camila's final reconciliation with her country of birth the Dominican Republic offers her possibilities of self-identification. At the end of the novel, she chooses not to be buried alongside her mother, but next to her half-family. She finally

moves from silence to speech, she recovers her hidden voice from behind the male figures of her family and talks back, being at peace with her self.

Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *In the Name of Salomé* portray —like the other novels analysed in this thesis— the struggle of women who, trapped in-between public and private spaces and subjected to misogynistic discourses, move from being silent, submissive and passive to becoming the “speaking subjects” of the stories of their lives. By using the literary technique of testimonial fiction in *In the Time of the Butterflies* and by acknowledging the position of women in the national building project through literature in *In the Name of Salomé*, Álvarez succeeds in recovering women's voices and makes them resound across transnational contexts.

CONCLUSION

RESHAPING DISCOURSES ON LATINAS' SELF-REPRESENTATION

The divergent manifestations and representations of the processes of Latinas' constructions of identity have been analysed in this thesis in respect of several literary motifs that express the preoccupations common to US/Caribbean women's writing.

Strategies of self-mutilation portrayed in the works of Cristina García, Julia Álvarez, Loida Maritza Pérez and Angie Cruz show how the Diasporic experience in North America of Cuban and Dominican women (also common to Puerto Rican American women) calls for a (re)negotiation of the private and public self by changing, accepting, rejecting, and transforming self perceptions and others' perceptions of 'selfhood'. *Soledad* and *The Agüero Sisters* locate the processes of identity formation in stereotypical discourses on images of womanhood such as delicacy, self-effacing behaviour, sexual innocence, and social grace. Prevailing standards of beauty —related to skin colour, facial features and hair texture— remain powerful instruments for Latinas' social and cultural (dis)empowerment and the adherence to white aesthetic values becomes “the principal mechanism of conflict resolution and the guarantee of political integration and stability” (Allahar 2003, 63). These values underpin the racial prejudice of which they are victims in the United States; opportunities for advancement arise only if one conforms to North American cultural, social and political expectations. Other characters like Felicia, Lourdes and Celia del Pino in *Dreaming in Cuban* function as devices that focus attention on the exploitative patriarchal and capitalist systems of power that lead to the violation and mutilation of Latinas' bodies through abuse, disfigurement, abortion, eating disorders, and illness transmitted from husband to wife, scars

from sexual assaults, rapes and mastectomies. Similarly, *Geographies of Home* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* illustrate how the effects of diminished self-esteem and increased public self-consciousness heighten social anxiety. The effort to reconcile the self in two conflicting societies results in a loss of physical control and mental stability. The women in these novels do not represent socially passive and docile bodies, but they choose some of the most self-destructive ways to confront racism, sexism, class discrimination and ethnocentrism: their ways of protesting are counterproductive and self-defeating. They look at themselves through the lenses of aristocratic patriarchal values, and at the same time, are confronted with the reality of living as outsiders in North America. Although the effects of exile are lived individually and marked by specific experiences, the female characters share an awareness of physical and psychological mutilation that suggests the gradual fragmentation of their identities.

The novels of Cristina García, Julia Álvarez, Loida Maritza Pérez and Angie Cruz underscore the politics of negotiation of Cuban and Dominican hybrid identities in the Diaspora, where Latinas try to resist —not always successfully— North American racial and gender prejudices. Despite attempts to “pass”, Latinas are relegated to the margins of society. Moreover, Latinas’ negotiation of the self is problematised as they are subjugated to paternalistic discourses on gender roles that strip them of self-sufficiency and independence.

Themes of uprooting, the Diasporic experience, maternal loss and conflictive family relationships are inextricably related to the political history of Cuba and the Dominican Republic in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* and Julia Álvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*. They portray, respectively, the lives of different generations of Cuban and Dominican families divided geographically and culturally by the political unrest of Fidel Castro’s Cuba and Rafael Trujillo’s regime in the Dominican Republic. The metaphorical

association between women and nation as sites of reproduction positions women and homeland in a paradoxical interrelationship of domination, subversion, submission and violation. The separation of family members is not so much the result of differences between generations as the direct consequence of the political and cultural realities that place and misplace women in one national context or the other: Lourdes wants to be accepted in North American society while Celia stays in Cuba supporting Castro's Communist regime. Pilar, like Yolanda, moves between the uncertainty of one political system and the other as a way of maintaining family ties until finally both ally with the North American space.

Family liaisons acquire another dimension in *Geographies of Home*, *Song of the Water Saints*, and *Soledad* through the thematic thread of motherhood which reveals how the continuum between patriarchal oppression within the nuclear family and oppression perpetuated by authoritarian nationalism based on paternalist principles constructs definitions of women within the nation. Rebecca, Graciela, and Olivia are the means by which the authors attempt to deconstruct the patriarchal sexual economies of the female body. They attempt to challenge hegemonic cultural discourses by portraying a totalitarian state that exploits the basic tenets of the family —ideological reproduction, law and order, protection from harmful outsiders— in order to justify and enforce its regime of political repression.

The journey motif as a repeated pattern functions as a device for the reconciliation and negotiation of Latinas' hybrid and bicultural identities across transnational spaces. The characters' journey of discovery involves a negotiation of themselves through the recovery of lost language and memory in *The García Girls*, *Dreaming in Cuban*, and *Song of the Water Saints* as a means of rethinking their past as Dominicans and Cuban-Americans; it offers an understanding of home and belonging as a fluid movement across the different realities of exile and home in *When I Was Puerto Rican*; it provides possibilities of going back to one's

roots in *Soledad*, and opportunities of constructing alternative spaces of relocation in *Geographies of Home*. The negotiation of identities is filtered through the journey motif as “travelling cultures” —simultaneously in geographical and emotional spaces— through a backwards and forward movement of the female characters between the axis of home in the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico, and the Diaspora experience in the United States. Both “home” and Diaspora become geographical and emotional spaces in which to explore different cultural realities that open new discussions about belonging, family relationships, and national identity.

The politics of forming gendered subjectivities within traditional and conservative societies is explored in *Monkey Hunting* through an examination of despotic institutions which perpetuate the practices of footbinding, arranged marriages, women’s illiteracy, seclusion and female submission to paternalistic authorities. Since nations have been so largely masculine in orientation and constructed according to divisive moral codes and norms of behaviour attributed by gender, forms of identity, representation and their manifestations depend on modes of authority that question and invalidate gender formations of subjectivity. Chen Fang’s life in rural and urban China illustrates how identities and subjectivities displaced from a national community are negotiated through a constant questioning of moral, cultural and political values. She is a figure through whom definitions of gender and the nation formulate the position of transgressive identities, the subaltern, and the other. Agents of socio-political and cultural fragmentation, such as the migrant experience, problematise gender forms of identity since national discourses are to be negotiated in-between and across multiple locations. Although Chen Fang’s possibilities of reinvention are increased in urban Shanghai, the experience of uprootedness and displacement becomes part of constant struggle between the negotiation of past and present multi-located identities. Chen Fang’s gendered

identity is negotiated through the paradoxical articulation of homeland, hope and loss of family which she lives as a “defining tension” (Clifford 1997, 257). Through the Chinese (im)migrant experience, Cristina García offers new possibilities for rewriting the meaning of home and reconstructing multilayered identities.

Like the previous novels, Julia Álvarez’s two works *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *In the Name of Salomé* defy literary traditions which place the female character outside the male narrative of history, politics and literature. In contrast to the other novels, however, Álvarez’s texts offer an innovative narrative technique by reproducing some of the elements common to testimonial fiction in which the boundaries between fiction and history become indistinct. Julia Álvarez elevates the national role of women as active participants on a political stage that for many years had been occupied exclusively by men. By exploring the lives of historical Dominican figures the novels chronicle the contributions by women that are so often hidden from official state histories or accounts of socio-political movements for national independence, liberation, and decolonisation (Fregoso 2003, 7-14). *In the Time of the Butterflies* offers a feminist narrative space that includes the experiences of women and revalues their role in the preservation of a collective memory and the construction of a national identity through *testimonio* and polyphonic voices. In the same vein, by positioning Camila Salomé Ureña as the focal point in the narration of *In the Name of Salomé* the author reconstructs feminist discourses across transnational geographies.

As demonstrated by my selection of texts, Latinas’ writing is characterised by its heterogeneity given their different historical and personal experiences in the Spanish Caribbean and the Diaspora and the wide array of their narrative techniques. However, US/Caribbean women’s writing can also offer insights into what they do have in common, namely the difficult processes of forging national and individual identities when social,

political and personal spaces become intimately related in the complex relationship between gender, race, class and nation. The opportunities for women to become agents of their own lives are possible only when they decide to break the silence that oppresses their spirits in an act of speech, which according to bell hooks (1989, 9) is no mere gesture of empty words but an expression of women's movement from object to subject —the liberated voice— that makes new life and new growth possible.

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