



AGUEDA COLLADO, ALICIA RITA

La Reconstrucción de la Identidad Juvenil en la Librería Poesía

2014 74407



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**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE RÍO CUARTO
ESCUELA DE POSTGRADUACIÓN
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS HUMANAS**

**MAESTRÍA EN INGLÉS
MENCIÓN LITERATURA ANGLOAMERICANA**

TESIS DE MAESTRÍA

La (Re)Construcción de la Identidad Femenina en la Literatura Poscolonial
Estadounidense Contemporánea: Exilio, Memoria, y Lenguaje en *Cómo las
Muchachas García Perdieron su Acento y Soñar en Cubano.*

de

Alicia Rita Agueda COLLADO

Directora: Ana Celi, MA.

Agosto, 2014

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Female Identity (Re)Construction in Contemporary Postcolonial American
Literature: Exile, Memory, and Language in *How the García Girls Lost
Their Accents* and *Dreaming in Cuban*

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Abstract

The present work explores contemporary female postcolonial literature in the USA, particularly the literature written by Dominican-American and Cuban-American authors, and focuses on the (re)construction of female identity in a context of exile and identity crisis. This study also concentrates on the role played by memory, language and the female body in such process. The empiric corpus is composed of the novels *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) by Julia Álvarez and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) by Cristina García. The issue of the (re)construction of female identity is approached from postcolonial and feminist criticism, exploring the different factors that contribute to identity transformation and cultural synthesis, such as Otherness and hybridity. This research follows a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive approach to the corpus and the analysis of data is conducted through the technique of content analysis. This work attempts to describe, thus, the process of identity (re)construction undergone by women who struggle to adapt to the host culture and preserve their heritage in the process.

Resumen

El presente trabajo explora la literatura femenina poscolonial contemporánea de los Estados Unidos, en particular, las obras de autoras estadounidenses de origen dominicano y cubano, y se focaliza en la (re)construcción de la identidad femenina en un contexto de exilio y crisis de identidad. Este estudio se concentra, además, en el rol que juegan la memoria, el lenguaje y el cuerpo femenino en dicho proceso. El corpus empírico se compone de las obras *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) de Julia Álvarez and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) de Cristina García. El tema de la (re)construcción de la identidad femenina es enfocado desde la crítica poscolonial y la crítica feminista, y los factores que contribuyen a los procesos de transformación identitaria y síntesis cultural, tales como la otredad y la hibridez. Este trabajo sigue una lógica cualitativa, exploratorio-descriptiva, utilizándose como técnica de análisis el análisis de contenido. Este estudio intenta examinar, entonces, el proceso de reconstrucción de la identidad experimentado por mujeres que luchan por adaptarse a la nueva cultura y preservar su herencia cultural en el proceso.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to my family, especially to my husband and my children. This thesis was born with my first daughter and grew up with her and then with my son. It has become part of our lives, and a common element over the kitchen table. Forever grateful with you all for being so understanding.....

Jesús

Guadalupe,

Joaquín.

Mom and dad, thanks for your unconditional love.

I would like to thank Ana Celi for her advice, patience and encouragement. Thanks for answering emails on weekends and holidays and being always so eager to help. This wouldn't have been possible without your help and expertise.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States of America (USA) and immigration have been bound together since the settlement of the colonies in the 17th century and the birth of the nation the following century. The country has been idealized as the “mother of exiles” (Lazarus, 1883, line 6) or “the asylum for mankind” (Paine, 1776), the place where immigrants from different parts of the world could find freedom from oppression, equality and opportunities. The poem “The New Colossus” (1883) by Emma Lazarus, which is engraved in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me” (lines 10-13), reflects the spirit of immigration and the meaning the USA has had in the popular imaginary. Immigration to the country corresponds to different patterns and parameters. Unemployment and poverty in the countries of origin have encouraged immigrants to leave their homelands in search of opportunities and a better life, idea based on the myth of the American Dream. Other immigrants have exiled to the USA seeking refuge against the persecution and brutality in their home countries. Although immigration from all over the world has turned the USA into a “nation of nations”, large surges of immigration have historically created social strains along with economic and cultural dividends, transforming communities and originating ethnic minorities throughout the nation (Hamby, 2005, p. 201).

The culture, history and literature of ethnic minorities in the USA have been explored in several graduate courses and seminars which compose the *Maestría en Inglés*, such as Ethnic Literature of the USA, Contemporary Female Literature, Literary Criticism and Postwar American Literature. Besides, this literature has been the subject of undergraduate courses, for instance Literature and Culture of the Ethnic and Racial Minorities in the USA and Contemporary African American Female Writers, taken in the United States as a requirement of the Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program (FLTA), part of the bilateral exchange program mediated by the Fulbright Commission between the Ministry of Education (Argentina) and the Department of State (USA), of which I was a grantee during the 2008-2009 cohort. Both academic experiences provided the scenario for debating about the present status of immigration in the USA and the role of ethnic minorities in society. At the same time, the contact with a wide

variety of authors, works and articles about the topic certainly contributed to increase my interest in the exploration of the reality experienced by such immigrants and their descendants in the USA.

Together with the exploration of the matter of immigration in undergraduate and graduate contexts, my interest in the topic corresponds directly with the History and Culture of the English-speaking Peoples II chair, of which I am in charge, at the English Teaching Training Program (*Instituto de Formación Docente Continua, IFDC San Luis*). This subject develops, among other topics, the complexities of immigration in the USA, particularly Latin American, merging historic and literary analysis of its causes and consequences, as well as the conflicts that emerge out of migration: rootlessness, clash of cultures, assimilation, and the (re)construction of identity.

Latin American immigration to the USA is complex due to the diversity and differences among the various ethnic groups that migrate in terms of language, history, culture, reasons for migration, needs and resources to adapt to the host society. This study concentrates particularly the exile of Cuban and Dominican citizens during the decades of 1960s and 1970s. At that time, Cuba was subjected to the beginning of the communist regime under the leadership of Fidel Castro, after the success of the Cuban revolution and the downfall of Fulgencio Batista, while the Dominican Republic was still dominated by the dictatorial regime of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. Those who opposed the regimes in both countries were experiencing persecution and oppression, which inevitably led to exile and social rupture.

The novels of the corpus, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) by the Dominican American writer Julia Álvarez, and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) by the Cuban American author Cristina García, focus on the experiences of two families from the Dominican Republic and Cuba, respectively, who moved to the USA pushed by the exilic migrations which characterized both countries in the decades of 1960s and 1970s. This study concentrates primarily on the experiences of the exiled Dominican and Cuban female characters described by Álvarez and García, the effects of exile, and the role of memory and language in their identity (re)construction process. Female exiles, who are constrained not only by their ethnicity, race or social class, but also by their gender, go through an identity crisis characterized by the feelings of being caught between two completely dissimilar worlds, the need to adapt to the host culture and, at

the same time, keep their roots; the internal conflict originated by language choice, and the alienation caused by their new position as the Other.

The personal experiences of the authors of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), Julia Álvarez and Cristina García, respectively, reflect the problematic and traumatic experiences of the Dominican and Cuban exile communities, enriching the texts with their representation of the feelings of duality and fragmentation the female characters go through. Julia Álvarez was born in New York but moved to the Dominican Republic with her family when she was a child. Álvarez and her family migrated to the USA again after her father faced charges of participating in a plan to overthrow Trujillo (Schaefer, 2001). García was born in Cuba and experienced the conflicts of immigration to the USA after the Cuban revolution in the 1960s (Persis, 2004).

In this context of exile, Kunz states that “it is the reluctance to uproot oneself, and the absence of positive original motivations to settle elsewhere, which characterizes all refugee decisions and distinguishes the refugee from the voluntary migrants” (as cited in Pedraza-Bailey, 1985, p. 8). Refugees are not pulled out of their homeland by the possibilities of having a better life and the idealization of the USA as the land of opportunity. Instead, they are pushed out by external forces and the political events affecting their countries. In order to understand the complex situation of exiles, it is necessary to consider that they “do not live in a vacuum”, but they are part of “an intricate sociopolitical web that must be seen as the background against which any portraits of their travails must be painted and any dissection of their innermost thoughts and feelings must be pinned” (Rose as cited in Pedraza-Bailey, 1985, p. 4). Because the experiences and identity of exiles are shaped and conditioned by the external socio-political forces in their environment, exile is explored in terms of the socio-political conditions originating it.

Cuba and the Dominican Republic, thus, correspond with different migration patterns during the 1960s and 1970s. After 1959, the Cuban revolution caused the migration of people from different ages, social classes and expectations to the USA, where immigration was encouraged for political reasons because of American opposition to communism. Cuban immigrants experienced a certain degree of success in the USA, mainly as a result of political interests related to the “hostile relationship

with Fidel Castro's government" (Araujo, 2000, p. 93). This placed them in a position of privilege over the other ethnic minority groups, increased by "the networking abilities of the Cuban family and community", which also contributed to the success of the Cuban diaspora (Araujo, 2000, p. 93).

Cuban political immigration changed over time, based on exiles' motivation to leave the island. The first wave of Cuban immigration was composed by upper and upper-middle class executives, owners of firms, merchants, sugar mill owners and established professionals, who were more acquainted with the United States political and economic guardianship of Cuba, under which they had created and maintained their position, and who saw their status in Cuban society threatened by the emergence and progressive growth of communism (Amaro & Portes as cited in Pedraza-Bailey, 1985, p. 10).

Dominicans, on the other hand, began to migrate to the USA in large numbers after 1965. Following the invasion of the island that year, the United States began to accept Dominican migration as a way to lower the social tensions in the country. Dominican migration has been primarily directed to the New York/ New Jersey area and, after Mexicans and Cubans, they constitute the third largest immigrant group from Latin America (Ugalde, Bean, & Cardenas, 1979, p. 235). The early migrants, mostly urban, lower middle-class people, who entered the USA labor market mostly as low-wage manual workers, were followed by a wave of professional exiles (Grasmuck & Pessar, and Hernandez et al. as cited in Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral, 2000, p. 230). Professional people, who usually enjoyed an upright position, left the island persecuted and intimidated.

One of the main dilemmas faced by Dominicans is related to ethnic and racial awareness (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral, 2000). Upon entering the United States, Dominicans discovered that they are part of an ethnic group, Latinos or Hispanics, whose existence they did not know before arriving. Dominicans also encountered a dichotomous racial classification system in which whiteness and blackness are seen as a binary division, which is different from the racial classification systems prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean, where race is organized along a continuum of categories denoting different degrees of racial mixture (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral, 2000, p. 226). This dissimilar environment increases the feelings of dislocation,

alienation and fragmentation in the immigrant subjects. In spite of the economic hardships, Dominican immigrants in the USA maintain a vibrant Dominican cultural life. Duany (as cited in Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral, 2000) argues that Dominicans in New York create a transnational hybrid identity that encompasses elements from the home country and the host culture (p. 231). The main orientation of this identity is towards the Dominican Republic, since they attempt to reproduce their life on the island in the streets of New York City. Second-generation Dominican youngsters are creating a differentiated version of this transnational identity incorporating more American cultural elements. Although they try to reconcile the two cultures by creating a cultural bridge between them, they are stigmatized by large segments of Dominican society, called pejoratively *Dominicanyork* (Duany & Guarnizo as cited in Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral, 2000).

Exile constitutes a central, recurring theme in US Latina literature since it works as the context of these narratives of displacement and exile. Mujcinovic (2003), for instance, proposes three categories to describe exile: the experience of exile in terms of loss and erasure, the transcendence of this absence through the transformation of exile into a site of self-affirmation, and finally the embrace of exilic absence as a comforting distance from the source of pain and trauma (p. 169). The role played by exile in female identity (re)construction is also explored by Acosta Hess (2001), Castells (2001), Chandra (2008), Esteban Zamora (2002), Nas (2003), Payant (2001) and Yitah (2003). Castells (2001), Esplin (2005) and Kandiyoti (2006) refer to the categorization of Cuban exiles proposed by Gustavo Pérez Firmat: the Cubans who left Cuba during their adulthood and remain Cuban no matter what; those who left Cuba for the USA at some time during their childhoods; and the Cuban-bred Americans who are more Americans than Cuban and know about Cuba through the narratives of other people. The one-and-a-half immigrant generation, concept developed by sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut used to describe “young refugees who were born abroad and raised in the USA and find themselves stuck between first and second generations of American immigrants” is referred to by these authors as well.

Exile and memory are intertwined as central components in the (re)construction of female identity, given that memory and identity are two phenomena that do not exist without each other: “There is no identity quest without memory and, inversely, memory

is always accompanied by a feeling of identity¹” (Candau, 2008, p. 16). Identity is seen as a dynamic and flexible process that is built through time and in a constant interaction with the surrounding reality, its space and actors, process in which memory plays a fundamental role (Acosta Hess, 2001; Esplin, 2005; Payant, 2001; Socolovsky, 2000; Yitah, 2003; Zubiaurre, 1999). Leonard (2004) and Socolovsky (2000) also discuss about the role of the imagination and dreaming in the construction and preservation of memory.

Intricately intertwined with the idea of identity (re)construction is the role played by language (developed in Acosta Hess, 2001; Castells, 2001; Luis, 2000; Nas, 2003; Rich, 2002; Urciuoli, 1995; Yitah, 2003). In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992), having a language is equated to belonging to an origin group (Urciuoli, 1995). In this context, language and identity are connected in a relationship in which language lies on the borderline between self and other, space where Álvarez situates the female characters in the novel (Barak, 1998). As regards identity (re)construction in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), it is the female body that becomes the crucial vehicle of thought, desire and interaction (Furman, n.d). Identity in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) comes to be associated with the issues of nations as narratives (Mitchell, 1996), madness (López, 1996), and the mother-daughter relationship (Davis, 2000).

The problem of how exile and its consequences (fragmentation, dislocation, and alienation) affect the (re)creation of memory and the (re)construction of female identity is central to the understanding of the experiences of the female characters in the novels of the corpus, at the same time that provides a glance into the myriad of experiences of Cuban and Dominican immigrants in the USA². Consequently, the hypotheses of this study pose that the exilic transgression of borders and boundaries (physical, geographical and social) generates dislocation and fragmentation at geographic, psychological and cultural levels, producing an identity transformation. Contextual elements, such as exile, migration, assimilation and language affect the (re)construction of female identity, turning it hybrid and transcultural. These dislocating forces also

¹ All the quotes referring to the work of Joël Candau (2008) are translated by the author.

² The aim of this work is not to draw generalizations about the experiences of Cuban and Dominican exiles in the USA, but to obtain an approximation to the kaleidoscope of experiences and the complexity of the identity (re)construction processes.

affect memory, being the representation of female identity and the individual memory of the female characters in the novels of the corpus a representation of social memory. Female identity, thus, is represented and reconstructed through literary discourse. The main objectives that guide this work are the following:

- To analyze the literary discourse related to the (re)construction of female identity in literary works written by female Dominican American and Cuban American authors, produced in multicultural, postcolonial contexts.
- To observe the incidence of the tempo-spatial dimensions (history, borders and boundaries, dislocation and fragmentation) in the process of female identity (re)construction.
- To examine the role played by exile, memory, and language in such process.

These main objectives are complemented by specific objectives, which delimit the procedures and the main path of the study:

- To corroborate if social factors, namely exile, assimilation/acculturation, transgression of borders and boundaries, and linguistic choice, affect the (re)construction of female identity.
- To demonstrate if the fictional stories of the female characters in the novels contribute to the representation of the social history of the countries of origin.
- To verify if the literary discourses of female Dominican-American and Cuban-American authors contribute to the recreation of individual and social memory.

The research methodology adopted in this work follows a qualitative descriptive approach to the corpus due to the nature of the object of study: the (re)construction of female identity in a context of exile. It is qualitative since it takes a comprehensive, holistic and contextualized study of the phenomenon from the perspective of the female subjects and their context. It is characterized by the flexibility and inductive logic, which lead to a spiral process moving from the theory to the text, and from the text to the theory, allowing the theoretical foundation of the research practice (Taylor & Bogdan, 1987). This work is descriptive since it is intended to characterize and understand the role played by exile, memory and language in the (re)construction of female identity. According to this approach, “all perspectives are valid”, that is, the emphasis is placed upon a detailed comprehension of other perspectives, providing those people to whom society ignores with a site to expose their viewpoints (Taylor &

Bogdan, 1987, p. 21). And it is holistic because it aims at obtaining an integrative vision of the problem as object of study, that is, the factors affecting and determining the (re)construction of female identity in a context framed by exile (Yuni & Urbano, 2003).

This work is framed by concepts belonging to postcolonial and feminist criticism, given that its focus is precisely the (re)construction of female identity in a host society, where the female characters are represented as the Other. The analysis of data, understood in this study as the combination between analysis and interpretation contained in the same movement, is conducted through the technique of content analysis, which consists of analyzing different aspects of what is included in a text with the objective of unraveling the underlying content of what is expressed in that text (Gomes as cited in Souza Minayo, 2004, p. 59). The analysis of content is structured around categories established a priori according to the theoretical frameworks, "concepts covering elements or aspects with common or related characteristics", process which implies grouping elements, ideas or expressions around a global concept (Gomes as cited in Souza Minayo, 2004, p. 55). The categories of analysis, defined a priori are: the experience of exile and its inference in the identity crisis: Otherness and hybridity, the role of memory in the (re)construction of female identity, the role of language and the female body in the process of identity (re)construction, and literary discourse as a strategy for female representation.

The discussion is organized in five chapters. Chapter 1, the theoretical framework, develops some of the theoretical concepts from postcolonial and feminist criticism. Chapter 2 analyzes the role played by exile in the fragmentation and dislocation of the female characters' identity and the different reactions they have towards exile. Chapter 3 explores the relationship between memory and identity (re)construction in a context of exile. Chapter 4 studies the role of language and the female body in the process of identity (re)construction and chapter 5 includes the concluding remarks.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Some Concepts of Postcolonial Criticism

The (re)construction of female identity is approached in this work from the perspective of postcolonial criticism, focusing on the process of migration of the female characters, their adaptation to the new world and the frictions that this produces with their cultural baggage. As a domain within literary studies, postcolonial criticism is both a subject matter (analyzing the literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination) and a theoretical framework (seeking to understand the political, social, cultural and psychological operations of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies) (Tyson, 1999, p. 365). Both perceptions on postcolonial criticism are relevant for this study in order to analyze the ideological message of the literary works and the socio-cultural, economic and political contextual influences that, directly or indirectly, affect the (re)construction of female identity. Postcolonial criticism developed as a response to the inability of European theories “to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 11). Although it did not become a major force in literary studies until the 1990s, its cultural analysis of colonialism has played an important role in the anti-colonial political movements after the Second World War (Tyson, 1999, p. 364). Postcolonial criticism developed, then, through several stages corresponding with the stages of national and regional consciousness and the project of asserting difference between the periphery and the imperial center (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 11).

The term postcolonial, thus, refers to “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 2). Tyson (1999) adds that this colonization involves “any population that has been subjected to the political domination of another population” (p. 364), introducing in this way the variety, multiplicity and complexity of postcolonial cultures. Due to the diverse nature of postcolonial texts, four models of analysis have emerged: national or regional models, racial models, comparative models of varying complexity and more comprehensive comparative models. According to the authors, “the first post-colonial society to develop a ‘national literature’ was the USA”, whose emergence in the late 18th century raised questions about the relationship between literature and place

and between literature and nationality (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 16). In contrast to the national model, “larger geographical models which cross the boundaries of language, nationality, or race” generate the concept of regional literatures (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 17). Postcolonial criticism, then, is used in this study as the framework to analyze the situation of immigrants belonging to ethnic minority groups in the USA, particularly, Dominicans and Cubans, ethnic minorities affected by the neo imperialistic forces of the environment in which they are inserted. Considering the current role of the USA as dominating power, regional literatures can be understood in a similar way to the ethnic minorities’ literatures and cultures, which compose the corpus of the study.

In the context of postcolonial criticism, and the study of female ethnic literature, the issues of postcolonial identities and identity (re)construction undoubtedly emerge as central concepts. Postcolonial identities and cultures include both “a merger of and an antagonism between the culture of the colonized and that of the colonizer” which are difficult to identify and separate as discrete entities due to the degree of cultural colonization, or “psychological inheritance of a negative self-image and alienation from their own indigenous cultures, which have been forbidden or devalued” (Tyson, 1999, p. 366). Tyson (1999) relates cultural colonization and cultural identity to the notions of colonialist discourse and language. She explains that ideology, discourse, and language are closely intertwined in the expression of colonialist thinking and in the assumption of the colonialist superiority over the alleged inferiority of the colonized, characterized in binary terms as the civilized, sophisticated and metropolitan versus the savage, undeveloped and peripheral or marginal. Thus, this colonialist ideology, inherently Eurocentric, becomes an invasive force of colonial subjugation which creates in postcolonial subjects a double consciousness or double vision, that is, “a consciousness or a way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures”, that of the dominant culture and that of the motherland (Tyson, 1999, p. 368). Double consciousness¹ becomes a central concept to understand the (re)construction of female identity because it produces an unstable sense of the self, heightened for example by forced migration; and the feeling of being caught between

¹ The term double consciousness was developed by the African-American author, historian and activist W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903). In this study, the term is addressed in the work of Lois Tyson, 1999, pp. 368-448).

cultures, belonging to neither rather than both, finding oneself arrested in a sort of psychological limbo, referred to by Bhabha as unhomeliness (1994, p. 9). In this context, postcolonial identity becomes a dynamic, “constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures” (Tyson, 1999, p. 369).

In relation to the social processes of identity (re)construction, Mato (2003) explores identity making in the age of globalization, defined as the worldwide tendency towards the interconnection of people, their cultures and institutions resulting from different social processes, and draws special attention to the Latin American case in the USA. In relation to this, Mato (2003) states that “identities are not legacies passively received but representations socially produced”, and as a result, they are under social dispute (p. 283). Mato (2003) builds up on the idea of an imagined transnational community, that is, mental representations elaborated by different types of public image-makers, varied types of individuals and multiple social actors, which promote their production and circulation, idea which brings together different Latin American countries, constituting a united race (pp. 282-283).

However, Mato’s idea does not imply the homogenization of Latin American societies and cultures. In his view, there is a tendency towards the homogenization of Latinos, based on the idea of collective identity representation, the emphasis on similarities and the consequent eclipsing of differences. This disregarding of historical contexts and histories obscures the processes of identity construction through the oversimplification of each particular situation and the overseeing of elements like ethnicity, race, gender, class, cultural and historical background (Mato, 2003, p. 283). Similarly complex and problematic is the concept of nation, which tends to be used as the equivalent of the terms country and nation-state. This assumption carries out the implication, similarly problematic, that nations are composed of homogeneous populations, equally represented by their governments, disregarding the ethnic component of nations. Thus, the representation of Latin American identity is understood in this study as representations of difference (Mato, 2003, p. 283).

Identities are then social constructs whose representations are constantly (re)produced by individual and collective social actors who, at the same time, constitute and transform themselves (Mato, 2003, p. 284). These actors participate in the processes of globalization and identity-construction either consciously or unconsciously

through the advancement and transformation of their own representations (Mato, 2003, p. 284). Identities are not socially isolated units and all identities are constructed in transnational and internally connected social fields (Mato, 2003, p. 285). Consequently, the processes of identity (re)construction are perceived as dynamic, evolving, relative, metamorphosing and socially interconnected.

This process of globalization referred to by Mato (2003) certainly brings language at the center of the stage as one of the key issues in the process of identity (re)construction. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), “imperialism results in a profound linguistic alienation”, causing fragmentation and increasing the identity crisis since “one of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language” which becomes the medium of hierarchical power perpetuation, establishing the universal conceptions of truth, order and reality (pp. 7-10). The use of language in the hands of the Other has marked the distinction between English and englishes, that is to say, the tension between the powerful center and its dominant language and the intersecting peripheries with their unprivileged fading mother tongues (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989; Tyson, 1999). In the case of ethnic minorities in the USA, the alien nature of the migrant subjects is heightened by the cultural imposition of a new language, which they need to master in order to survive. The imposition of English as the dominant language causes linguistic dislocation and alienation, marginalizes their world-views, and contributes to the identity crisis (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 25).

Castillo (2005), Katak (2006) and Tyson (1999) refer to a problematic situation that is at the center of identity (re)construction in postcolonial societies: “For colonized peoples, a key question every time one holds a pen is, which language to use? English or one’s mother tongue?” (Katak, 2006, p. 27). Colonization⁴ has imposed a severe linguistic violence in disrupting integral links between language and culture (Katak, 2006; Tyson, 1999). In Castillo’s view (2005), aside from skin color, language adds to the trauma of identity (re)construction, because English is the language of education and

⁴ Katak’s theory is based on the experiences of postcolonial societies deriving from the British Empire, particularly Africa, India and the British West Indies. Nevertheless, the notions developed can be applied to the experiences of female immigrants into the United States, without attempting to oversimplify their unique experiences.

the only acceptable language in society, whereas Spanish embodies the language of childhood, family and community. At the same time that it may not be possible to get rid of the accent, “society has denigrated her first language” (p. 39). This denigration has severe cultural and psychological impacts on people’s self-respect, identities and values, since:

Women may also become anxious and self-conscious in later years if they have no or little facility in Spanish. They may feel that they have been forced to forfeit an important part of their personal identity and still never found acceptability by white society. (Castillo, 1995, p. 39)

The loss of mother tongues is recognized and bemoaned by many postcolonial writers, most of whom are multilingual, signaling that they inhabit different emotional and mental spaces when they speak their own languages. In this way, language becomes a tool for resistance. The type of English one is equipped to use often shapes one’s position in postcolonial society, since English language/s exist in standard (the norm), but also in creole, and other manifestations (the periphery, the silenced, fading englishes). In relation to this idea, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) describe three types of linguistic groups within postcolonial societies: monoglossic, “single-language societies using English as a native tongue”, diglossic, where bilingualism is present, and polyglossic, “where a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum” (pp. 30-40). Thus, the USA emerges as a monoglossic society, despite the multiplicity and variety of languages and dialects that characterize the diverse ethnic communities that compose it.

Ethnic minorities’ literatures, then, are composed of the existing tension between the abrogation (a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture over the means of communication, against the assumption of meaning being fixed and traditional) and the act of appropriation (the reconstitution of the language of the center, creating new meanings) leading to a reconstruction of a new language (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 39). This (re)construction contributes to the dismantling of the binary structure that the dominant culture imposes through language. Language in ethnic minorities’ literatures has to be read through the social, cultural and political forces which transverse it and thus, through the words, sounds and textures of language, and the power and culture which they signify. In this way, the text is a carrier of identity and an inscriber of difference (1989, p. 52).

1.1.1. Notions on place and displacement: Exile and the transgression of borders and boundaries

Place and displacement emerge as central categories when studying identity (re)construction processes in migrant subjects, and within these notions, exile materializes as a category that traverses the experiences of immigrants to the USA. This age of globalization is characterized as having produced “more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history” as a result of the struggle for independence which produced new states and new boundaries, and also “homeless wanderers, nomads, and vagrants, unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional power, rejected by the established order for their intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness” (Said, 1993, p. 332). These people exist between the old and the new, between the old empire and the new state, or in this case, between the motherland and the host culture, articulating “the tensions, irresolutions, and contradictions in the overlapping territories shown on the cultural map of imperialism”, which constitute, undoubtedly, just one of the many problematic facets of migration by exile (Said, 1993, p. 332).

The crisis of identity and the feelings of dislocation and displacement experienced by exiled postcolonial subjects originate in the complex relationship between the self and a certain place. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) explain that the (re)construction of identity is intimately connected to the notions of place and displacement and the mental (re)construction of the lost place:

A valid and active sense of the self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration (...) or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (p. 9)

Thus, language becomes the third element in this triangular relationship given that a gap opens between the experience of the new place and the language available to describe it and to express their sense of Otherness (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, pp. 9-11). This linguistic dislocation rises particularly from the “complex material circumstances implicit in the transportation of language from its place of origin and its imposed and imposing relationship on and with the new environment” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 29). Exile, then, becomes a synonym for the problem of defining and finding



home, the physical and emotional confrontations between the new land and the homeland, and the struggle for independence from the dominating influence of a foreign culture, representing one of the thematic parallels among literary works in different postcolonial societies (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, pp. 27-28). Exile becomes indissolubly associated with a feeling of loss and unhomeliness. As Said (1993) says, “the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss” (p. 336), a feeling that certainly contributes to the identity crisis and affects the process of identity (re)construction.

The physical displacement and dislocation experienced by exiles are increased by a world that is constantly moving, migrating, “surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, to the temporary and the ephemeral” (Augé, 1995, p. 78). In the introduction of *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) refers to the overlapping of the tempo-spatial coordinates and their role in the (re)construction of identity, stating that “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where time and space cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (p. 2). This overlapping produces a sense of disturbance and disorientation caused by fragmentation and dislocation, illustrated by the concepts *au-delà* (here and there, on all sides), *fort/da* (hither and thither, back and forth)⁵ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). These seemingly contradictory categories stand in a state of dialogical tension affecting the identity (re)construction processes.

In this context of disturbance, overlapping and constant transit, Augé proposes a theory of places and non-places to describe reality. According to this theory, a place is “relational, historical and concerned with identity” and a non-place is, by opposition, a space which “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity”, spaces which do not form part of earlier places but that are “listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position” (Augé, 1995, pp. 77-78). Two aspects of the word non-place overlap: physical space or spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations individuals have with these spaces (Augé, 1995, p. 94). While the notions of places and non-places are opposed, they coexist, like a pair of binaries,

⁵ *Fort/da*= in psychoanalysis, a constitutive moment in a subject’s life, and personal history, related to the acquisition and use of language. The word *fort* is German and means ‘far’ and *da*, also German, means ‘here’.

through the realities of transit versus residence; interchange (where nobody crosses anyone else's path) versus the crossroads (where people meet); the passenger (defined by his destination) versus the traveler (strolling along his route) (Augé, 1995, p. 107). The confluence of places and non-places certainly has a central role affecting the identity (re)construction process as the centers of spatial dislocation and fragmentation caused by exile.

Closely connected to the fluctuation between places and non-places produced by the moving nature of our society and the effects of the globalization of culture, or cultural colonization, is the re-definition of the meaning assigned to borders and boundaries. Borders, literally and figuratively, exist everywhere, and their transgression certainly plays a central role in the feelings of dislocation, fragmentation and displacement that characterize the identity (re)construction process in a context of exile (Morales as cited in Lugo, 1997). In Anzaldúa's view, borders and boundaries are rigid, fixed entities, constricting ideas, thoughts and beliefs; they can be walls, either physical or psychological, and in both cases they are negative (1987, p. 79). Besides physical borders there are social boundaries and frontiers that are not easily dissolved because they are settled in the social imaginary. As Walter Mignolo claims, the local histories and the global design are intimately related as part of the debate between the particular and the universal, what implies to be different and, at the same time, belong to a homogeneous whole (2000, p. 19). This contradiction constitutes one of the more relevant internal conflicts in the process of identity (re)construction since the female characters fight to (re)construct their identities and protect their personal histories, and their language, at the same time that struggle to assimilate and become part of the host culture.

The only way to survive within rigidity and limitations, according to Anzaldúa (1987), is through flexibility, to move from the Western mode of thinking, rational and analytical, towards divergent thinking, inclusive, tolerant, ambiguous, plural, and ambivalent. In this context, Anzaldúa (1987) introduces the concept of the borderlands as a place of (re)signification and (re)construction, the creation of a synthesis, in order to break down the paradigms and create a new mythos, a new way to perceive reality (p. 79).

A similar conception is proposed by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who defines border culture as a polysemic term implying dissimilar meanings which are not exclusive but work together creating a network of signification (as cited in Soja, 1996, p. 132). Border culture implies at the same time “boycott, complot, ilegalidad, clandestinidad, transgression” and also “to be fluid in English, Spanish, Spanglish, and Ingleñol (...) transcultural friendship and collaboration among races, sexes, and generations...creative appropriation, expropriation, and subversion of cultural dominant forms”. Border culture involves “a new cartography: a brand new map” which reverts the order and status of the world, constructing “the democratization of the East; the socialization of the West; Third-Wordlization of the North and the First-Wordlization of the South”. It entails “a multiplicity of voices away from the center, different geo-cultural relations among more cultural akin regions”, that is “a new internationalism ex centris” (...) “a new terminology for new hybrid identities” (Gómez-Peña as cited in Soja, 1996, pp. 132-133). In this definition Gómez-Peña encourages the development of new models to interpret the world, to move beyond the limitations of the borders and the barriers created by languages, “to find new languages to express the fluctuating borders”, to move between “legalidad and illegality, English and español, male and female, North and South, self and other” subverting these relationships (as cited in Soja, 1996, pp. 132-133). In this context of contradiction, ambivalence and overlapping or heterotopia⁶, border thinking becomes the space where the new logics and the deconstruction of fixed binaries take place. According to Lugo (1997), this theory can erode the hegemony from the privileged center by denationalizing and deterritorializing the nation-state, and in this way, other binary opposites (p. 45).

Similarly to the notions developed by Anzaldúa (1987) and Gómez-Peña, Soja (1996) proposes the concept of thirding or thirdspace and develops on the importance of the appropriation of a place in the context of displacement and dislocation, places and non-places, in which exiles are immersed. Thirding derives from the disordering, deconstruction and tentative reconstruction which produces “a cumulative trialectics

⁶ In Foucault’s terms, heterotopia is a “disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry. In such a state, things are laid, placed, arranged in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them” (in Lugo, 1997, p. 43).

that is radically open to additional Otherness” (1996, p. 61). This is, precisely, an alternative space from where to position oneself and speak up. Thirdspace can be interpreted, thus, as the re-creation of the periphery into a dialogic new space, or as Bhabha (1994) calls it, a cultural “in-between” where voice and identity freely emerge as an option besides the dual nature of center versus periphery, and where other spaces of subaltern signification are produced (p. 2).

The notion of thirdspace has been approached from the perspective of postcolonial criticism and feminist criticism as well. Soja (1996), for instance, understands postcolonialism as a product of a critical “thirthing-as-Othering, an assertively different and intentionally disruptive way of (re)interpreting the relation between colonizer and colonized, the center and the periphery, Firstworlds and Thirdworlds”, a space where all, the totalizing Eurocentered metanarratives, their hegemonic power and the silencing of peripheral voices have to be exposed due to the fact that “allowing the subaltern to speak, to assert an-Other voice, pushes the discourse to a different plane and into a recreative space of radical openness” (p. 126). In this context, feminist criticism also points out to the imagination of “new sites and spaces of resistance from which to redesign cityspace for women” to escape from the geography of patriarchy (Soja, 1996). According to Soja (1996), these new sites of resistance aim at the remapping of the city as a space of radical openness, a space where “a strategic location for recovery and resistance, a meeting place where new and radical happenings can occur beyond the centered domain of the patriarchal urban order” (pp. 108-110). Similarly, bell hooks (2000) refers to the use of the marginality resulting from spatial displacement as a source of creative energy and as an open space of expression and communication. That is to say, the notion of thirdspace rises as a key element in the process of identity (re)construction, transforming negative interpretations of the periphery and the borderlands as a place for exclusion and isolation, into a hybrid place to (re)construct identity. The border represents, thus, a space where binary relationships which used to be mutually exclusive can be subverted and challenged. It is a place of encounter, not separation, “the juncture, not the edge” (Gómez Peña as cited in Soja, 1996, pp. 132-133).

1.1.2. Otherness and hybridity

It can be argued that the notion of Otherness has always been part of humanity, since history is characterized by dominating cultures and subjugated peoples. Nevertheless, with the rise of imperialism, particularly the British Empire, Otherness became a concept and category to classify and label all those, the Others, who were not born in Britain (the metropolis), and thus, should be brought into the blessings of civilization by the powerful Western nations that dominated sea trade and colonization during the 19th and first half of the 20th century. By definition, Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group constructs one or many dominated out-groups by stigmatizing a difference (real or imagined), presented as a negation of identity, and thus, a potential for discrimination and justified subjugation (Staszak, 2008, p. 2). The creation of Otherness consists basically of classifying individuals into two groups: them (the out-group) and us (the in-group), creating, due to an asymmetry in power relations, a set of binary opposites, mutually exclusive and at the same time, mutually dependent.

These binaries, constructed and perpetuated by ethnocentric views, are essentially, social constructs that have been practiced throughout history due to colonization, which allowed Western societies to export its values, categories, language and world views around the globe legitimizing its position as the dominant culture and emphasizing difference, and thus, Otherness. Otherness, then, comprises a geographical dimension which connects it with spaces and distance. Staszak (2008) proposes two forms of geographical Otherness: One is based on the idea of the civilized versus the inhuman/uncivilized/barbarian perpetuated in the 19th century by the application of social Darwinism to the understanding of the world order, and used as a strategy for colonization and enslavement. The other one is based on a hierarchy of civilizations and cultures, which entails language and religion. Both manifestations of geographical Otherness apply the same principle: the division of the world in sets of binaries where one part is privileged over the other: white/colored, Europeans/barbarians, believers/non-believers, colonist/native, among others. Staszak (2008) exemplifies with the term "Orientalism", coined by Edward Said, by stating that since the Orient is a geographical place, the constructs of Otherness emerge from geographical basis, characterizing the Oriental by his alleged barbarity, savageness, race, and exotism;

creating in this way stigmatizing stereotypes disseminated by the media, and giving the West the right to dominate the Orient.

It is in this context of Otherness where the idea of hybridity materializes. The various postcolonial cultures have produced a range of hybridizations or cultural syncreticity, quality that is considered as a “valuable as well as an inescapable and characteristic feature of all post-colonial societies” and a source of their strength (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, pp. 30-34). Hybridity “replaces a temporal linearity with a spatial plurality” creating a cross-cultural mosaic and attempts to change a “destructive cultural encounter” to the “acceptance of difference on equal terms” (Harris as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 36). In other words, hybridity is associated to the idea of synthesis developed in the previous sections, the synthesis of past and present, old and new, motherland and host land culture, different languages and forms of expression. The result is, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin claim, a cross-cultural mosaic, a sort of cultural quilt that synthesizes and re-organizes the heterotopia of their world meaningfully.

Homi Bhabha’s view of hybridity is against this idea of cultural diversity containment and can be associated with the notion of thirding-as-Othering developed by Soja. The thirdspace Bhabha talks about resembles the one described by bell hooks, a space that challenges the essentialism and hegemony in society. Bhabha (1990) says that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (p. 211). Hybridity represents “the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” because it challenges the existing order and “sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives giving rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (1990, p. 211). By exploring this thirdspace, Bhabha thinks, “we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of our selves” (1994, pp. 38-39). The works produced by ethnic minority cultures can also be considered cross-cultural hybrids. This literary hybridity emerges from the mixing of past, present and future, plus imperial culture and colonial culture, into the writing, what creates a new language and thus, a new way of seeing and interpreting the world (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 35).

Néstor García Canclini develops on the notion of hybridity in his book *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (2001) as a tentative answer to

what he calls the uncertainty of the meaning and value assigned to modernity, which derives, not only from the obvious differences in terms of nations, class, ethnicity, to mention some, but also from the socio-cultural hybrids in which the opposite categories of the traditional and the modern mix. Hence, the difficulty in defining this concept originates in the multiplication of hybrid phenomena during the 20th century and the variety and heterogeneity of processes and actors that it involves. García Canclini (2001) defines hybridity applying Bhabha's idea of hybridization process constantly in motion, as the "sociocultural processes in which discrete⁷ structures or practices, that existed separately, combine to generate new structures, objects and practices" (p. 14). In his perspective, this fusion is not always planned; sometimes it is the result of touristic or migratory processes, processes of economic-communicational exchange, or the result of individual or collective creativity (García Canclini, 2001, p. 16).

In his work, García Canclini establishes a relation between hybridity and identity, and explains it is not possible to talk about identities neither in terms of a fixed set of features nor the essence of an ethnic group or nation. Instead, he proposes to focus on intercultural hybridity, identity sedimentations organized in historical groups relatively stable (ethnic groups, nations, classes) are re-structured amid interethnic, transclassist, and transnational bodies (2001, p. 18). The concept does not suggest an easy and harmonious integration and fusion of cultures but ambivalence, contradiction, massification, and all that does not let to be hybridized. In his words, the oscillation between the identity of origin and the identity of destination should take us to explore not only the "cohesion, the osmosis", but also the contradictions that emerge, and at the same time, the dialogical relationship between them, allowing the immigrant to talk spontaneously from various places (2001, p. 20).

Another view of hybridity is developed by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), where the author refers to the identity crisis experienced by female migrant subjects, and like García Canclini, connects the concepts of identity and hybridity. In her view, it is difficult to differentiate between what is inherited, what is

⁷ García Canclini explains that by "discrete" he does not mean pure, but that these were the result of former hybridation processes or cycles, referring to the term coined by Brian Stross, according to whom we move from some heterogeneous forms to other more homogeneous; and then to other more heterogeneous, none of them being purer than the rest.

acquired and what is imposed in relation to the construction of female identity and the definition of the self. This might lead to an internal rupture until the female subject is able to deconstruct and reconstruct herself, able to transform herself (1987, p. 83). This idea of transformation relates to the concept of hybridity (Bhabha, 1990; García Canclini, 2001). In this context, Anzaldúa presents the reader with her own understanding and conceptualization of hybridity, or as she calls it, *mestizaje*⁸: a mixture of races, a colored race, the first synthesis of races in the world, what the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos termed the cosmic race, the “fifth race embracing the four major races of the world” (as cited in Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 77). This synthesis, encompassing the mixing of races and cultures or the “crossing over” of chromosomes, generates a hybrid, mutable, malleable being who is not inferior, contrary to racist beliefs, but rather strong and adaptable (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 77). The status and role of female migrant subjects can be symbolized, thus, as a quilt, composed of dissimilar fragments with different colors and forms, that are put together to create a new entity, hybrid, complex and contradictory.

In Anzaldúa’s view, a mestiza is “the product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another”, complicated by the state of being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, by which the female subject does not know to which collectivity she has to respond (1987, p. 78). The conflict of identity construction in female subjects arises from “the ambivalence from the clash of voices” which “results in mental and emotional states of perplexity” and “in insecurity and indecisiveness”, an inner war or conflict of cultures, identities and voices results in a sort of dual or multiple personality in the mestiza (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). The causes of this internal conflict are related, in Anzaldúa’s perspective, to the version of reality that the culture in which we live communicates, or even more, if the messages sent by these cultures, the culture of origin and the new culture, present opposing messages and incompatible frames of reference (1987, p. 78). Anzaldúa (1987), as well as Bhabha (1990), García Canclini (2011) and Vasconcelos (as cited in Anzaldúa, 1987) emphasize on the positive facets of being hybrid/mestiza, strong and adaptable, opposite to the traditional disapproving and derogatory views perpetuated by the dominant culture.

⁸ García Canclini (2001) also associates hybridity with a web of concepts like *mestizaje*, creolization, transculturation and syncretism (p. 20).

1.1.3. Exile and memory

“The essence of modernity lies in the presence of the past in a present that supersedes it but still lays claims to it” (Augé, 1995, p. 75).

The sense of loss experienced by exiles, increased by spatial dislocation and displacement, is closely intertwined with the issue of preserving memory, specifically which cultural aspects the exiles would give up in order to adapt to the new country and which ones they would try to preserve. Memory, then, plays a vital role in the (re)construction of female identity (Augé, 1995; Bhabha, 1994).

The working of memory is the operator of the identity in the subject; and it is the working of re-appropriation and negotiation that everyone must do with his/her past in order to (re)create its own individuality (Muxel as cited in Candau, 2008, p. 14). Memory guarantees that something (an event in our lives) happened or existed, and consequently, it is possible to create a memory out of it (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 23). Memory and identity are presented, then, in a complex dialogical relationship. Within this dialogism controversy has emerged over if memory precedes the identity quest. That is to say, memory might antecede identity construction, or the identity quest might work as an activator of memory. Whereas memory might work as the generator of identity, this identity will also determine which particular aspects of the past will be incorporated by the subject, a sort of selection of memories that will constitute part of the individuality of the subject (Candau, 2008, p. 16). This constant dialogism between memory and identity signals that there is no search for identity without memory, and that the memory quest is always accompanied by a feeling of identity; and the term *memoria identitaria* or identity memory shows the difficulty in the attempt to dissociate them and analyze them separately, since they compose a dialogical set of mutually dependent elements (Candau, 2008, p. 16). In this context, memory is understood as a component of identity, a trigger of identity.

Following Candau (2008) and Ricoeur (2004), Montesperelli (2005) associates memory to the construction of individual and collective meanings, that is to say, to the activity of attributing meaning from the past to the present and also the other way round, giving to the past a meaning that coincides with the present needs of the subject. In this way, memory becomes an important instrument to interpret the past, to give

meaning to the present, and consequently, to shape the future (p.8). Memory refers, then, to the representation of the past or, as Plato suggested, the present representation of something absent (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 33-34). In this way, the author establishes a connection between the past and its representation, adding an interesting element into consideration: the idea of a present representation of past which implies the possibility of a manipulation or alteration of that representation. To explain this, Ricoeur suggests that memory belongs to one region of imagination, what constitutes part of the problematic nature of memory. Nevertheless, whereas the imagination is related to the fantastic, fiction, the utopias; memory is related to anterior reality (2004, p. 22). According to this last perspective, the limits of memory and its errors represent potentially the opportunity to reread the past, and (re)construct identity (p. 8). Similarly, Candau (2008) defines memory as a continuously updated reconstruction of the past (p. 9), implying that memory offers an illusion, the possibility that what has happened has not yet definitely banished because it is possible to experience it through memories. It is through this retrospection that human beings learn to deal with temporality; by gathering glimpses of what has been, it is possible to construct a new image of what it is (Candau, 2008, p. 13).

In the exploration of the (re)construction of identity and its dialogical relationship with memory, the concepts of forgetting and remembering come along. In Ricoeur's view, the main purposes of the act of remembering are to fight against forgetting and the search for a memory. This fight is generated by the fear of forgetting, not remembering, or forgetting even more, what in this context might resemble the lost or the fragmentation of identity (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 50). The fear of forgetting is associated, according to Candau, to the mere notions of identity and ethnic identity. In Candau's words, identity is a social construction perfectly redefined on the basis of a dialogical relationship with the Other, and ethnic identity illustrates both the relationship between the self and the Other (p. 9). As a result of this relationship, the complete assimilation of a certain group to the dominant culture might be hindered by the host society until the forgetting of the origins of these individuals has taken place (p. 15). Assimilating is interpreted in this way as the forgetting of the roots, the erasure of the past, and the creation of a blank space to be filled in with the new values and beliefs of the dominant culture.

Out of this conflictive and dialogical connection between memory and identity, there are several aspects that come into discussion. The first aspect is the temporal and spatial nature of memory and identity. In relation to this, Ricoeur states that a “personal identity is a temporal identity” (p. 138). Identity, then, varies according to the actions in our life and the effects the past exercises on our lives, present and future. In this context, Ricoeur introduces the concept of corporeal memory, a sort of memory composed of memories affected by different degrees of temporal distance, what might be seen and perceived as nostalgia. In other words, temporal distance exercises a powerful effect over memory, and thus, identity. Corporeal memory is closely related to another concept: the memory of places. This memory refers to the act of moving, travelling and having lived in a certain place. In this view, the things we remember are intimately associated to physical or geographic places (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 62-63). As a consequence, the process of identity (re)construction of the female characters in the novels of the corpus, marked by a context of exile and temporal/spatial dislocation, needs to be understood in terms of their temporal and geographic nature.

The second aspect to consider is related to the difference between collective and individual memory. In relation to this issue, Ricoeur departs from the writings of St. Augustine, who sees memory as purely individual. According to St. Augustine, memories are exclusively personal and cannot be transferred to another being, assigning memory the quality of being private and thus unique (as cited in Ricoeur, 2004, p. 128). Ricoeur sees memory in relation to consciousness and the self, as something that can be invented, and like identity, (re)constructed (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 135). Opposite to the representation of memory as an individual and unique quality of each human being, Ricoeur (2004) draws on the notion of collective memory. He asserts that no one remembers alone since we are affected by the social framework in which we are inserted and we cannot deny the collective representations that explain the logics guiding the perception of the world (p. 159). Nevertheless, this idea of collectivity does not necessarily mean homogeneity. Whereas collective memory obtains its strength and durability from the support of a certain group, these individuals represent only a point of view over collective memory, which changes according to the place each has in society and the relations with other actors in the medium (Halbwachs as cited in Ricoeur, 2004, 161).

1.2. Some Concepts of Feminist Criticism

1.2.1. The origins of feminist criticism in the USA

“I try to speak because we've been silent as women for so long,
 especially Latinas, to the point of self-destruction.
 I speak because to not speak is to be complicit in this pain.
 I was silent as a child, and silenced as a young woman;
 I am taking my lumps and bumps for being a big mouth, now,
 but usually from those whose opinion I don't respect.
 My feminism is humanism, with the weakest being those who I represent,
 and that includes many beings and life forms, including some men”
 Sandra Cisneros⁹.

A discussion about the origins of feminist criticism in the USA should start with a definition of what feminism stands for. According to the American author, feminist and social activist bell hooks (2000), “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. 1). This simple definition reaches the heart of the matter: hooks’ definition implies that sexism can be exercised by diverse sectors of society, including men and women alike.

Even when feminism as a type of literary criticism became dominant in the 1970s, its origins can be traced back as early as the abolitionist movement that characterized the 19th century. The most notable American feminists of the period, Elizabeth Cady Stanton¹⁰ and Susan B. Antony, were fighting for women’s rights at the same time that were deeply involved in the struggle against slavery. At those times, the women’s liberation movement was closely associated to anti-male domination sentiments and a great degree of anger at the injustice produced by male domination rather than to the end of sexism (hooks, 2000).

⁹ The quote was taken from an interview made by Maria-Antónia Oliver-Rotger to Sandra Cisneros in 2009. It is published in the section Voices from the Gaps from the University of Minnesota. (Retrieved from: http://voices.cla.umn.edu/readings/cisneros_sandra.html)

¹⁰ Stanton was one of the several women who held the famous Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, the first convention on women’s rights in the USA. During the Civil War era, Stanton concentrated on the abolition of slavery. Antony and Stanton later worked together in the promotion of suffrage through the publication of “Revolution”, a militant weekly newspaper. Both women founded in 1869 the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), of which Stanton was the first president.

While white women were challenging their role in society and fighting for the right to suffrage, colored women also started to question social conceptions and class stratification based on race. In the 1850s, a colored woman known as Sojourner Truth¹¹ delivered a famous speech entitled “Ain’t I a Woman?” in the Women’s Convention (Akron, OH, 1851), acknowledging that while white women in the North were fighting for their rights alongside colored men in the South and abolitionists, colored women were being forgotten and excluded from the struggle. In the speech, Truth describes all the hardships endured by slave women while she wonders if she, because of her skin color, is not a woman just like white women in the North:

I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?
(para. 2)

With these words, Truth brought to light the issue of sexism by exposing the place occupied by colored women in society. Truth also remarked the double oppression endured by colored women due to their gender, race, class and lack of education; an oppression perpetuated not only by white and colored men, but also by white women. However, even when the reality of colored women was being exposed, the focus of the emancipation movement was the right to suffrage, what was accomplished in the 1920s, when the 19th Amendment was passed.

The question of women’s (lack of) union was even more evident in the 1940s. In the introduction to *The Second Sex* (1949), the French critic Simone de Beauvoir noticed the lack of unity in the liberation movement and stated that the reason why women had accomplished only what men had been willing to give was precisely because women did not have concrete means of organizing themselves to stand face to face with the correlative unit; they lacked the sense of community. Instead:

They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands –

¹¹ Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) was the self-given name, from 1843 onward, of Isabella Baumfree, an African-American abolitionist and women’s rights activist. Truth was born into slavery in New York, but escaped with her infant daughter to freedom in 1826. After going to court to recover her son, she became the first black woman to win such a case against a white man.

more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women. (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 5)

Through this text, Beauvoir associated women's liberation movement with the interests of white women, at the same time that acknowledged the existing remarkable lack of solidarity among women in terms of their class and race.

Later in the century, the signs of unhappiness as regards women's role in society reached their peak in the 1960s, embedded in the social issues of the time, the Civil Rights Movement and the protests against the Vietnam War (Moi, 2002, p. 21). Betty Friedan's¹² book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is seen as one of the first indications of women's unhappiness with the system and the ascendance of feminism as a political force in Western society (Moi, 2002, p. 21). In the 1960s, women realized that the social values and strategies used to keep blacks subjugated and oppressed paralleled the social values, stereotypes and ideas used to keep women under male control; and they found a great discrepancy between male support for civil rights, equality and peace, and their sexist attitudes against their female counterparts, what led to the creation of alternative female liberation groups (Moi, 2002, pp. 21-22). As contemporary women's liberation progressed, the focus of the feminist movement shifted. Like Sojourner Truth discussed it a century earlier, colored women realized that men were not the only group in society that sustained sexist practices and ideas, but that sexism was exercised within the female spheres as well. The focus of the movement changed, then, towards the creation of gender justice. In this context, the conception of feminism as a sisterhood among all women was challenged and intersected by the notions of race and class. According to bell hooks (2000), women could not fight against sexism if they were "competitively at war with one another" (p. 3). That is to say, women could only become sisters, struggling against sexism and patriarchal oppression if the diverse ways in which women dominated and exploited other women (through sex, class, and race)

¹² Betty Friedan was also an activist and feminist. Her book *The Feminine Mystique* is credited with sparking the "second wave" of feminism. Friedan cofounded National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 and in 1970 she organized the nation-wide Women's Strike for Equality. She supported the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution as well as many women's laws.

were addressed. These ideas led to the emergence of different branches within the field of feminist theory.

The following decade, the 1970s, evidenced the presence of different strands of political thought within the new women's movement with the creation of the National Organization of Women (NOW), a middle-class, liberal and reformist organization (Moi, 2002, p. 22). Nevertheless, most women, especially privileged white women, ceased to consider revolutionary feminist visions once they began to gain economic power within the existing social structure. It made sense that white men would be more willing to consider women's rights when the granting of those rights could serve to maintain and perpetuate white supremacy (hooks, 2000, p. 4).

At the beginning of this decade, two phases in the development of feminist theory become evident in the USA, particularly within the academic arena. The first phase is characterized by the emergence of a different perspective to the study of women in literature, originating as a response to the nature of the courses on women in literature offered by American colleges, which focused on the study of female stereotypes in male writing, and which were characterized by the portrayal of unreal female characters. This new perspective, *Images of Women*¹³, presented feminist literary studies as a new field concerned with personal growth and the raising of awareness by connecting literature to life, in which the act of reading is considered as a sort of communication process between the life of the author and the life of the reader (Moi, 2002, p. 43). The second phase, by 1975, is characterized by an interest shift towards a woman-centered approach focusing on the works of female writers. This second phase in the development of feminist theory produced the works which represent the coming-of-age of American feminist criticism: *Literary Women* (1976) by Ellen Moers¹⁴, *A Literature of their Own* (1977) by Elaine Showalter and *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. For these writers, who saw the need to cast women writers as a distinct group, it was society, not biology that shaped and conditioned women's different literary perception of the world and role in society.

¹³ Moi names this approach to literature (within the branch of feminist criticism) Images of women criticism after the publication of *Images of Women in Fiction* (1972), a collection of essays edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon.

¹⁴ Moers's and Showalter's works are not addressed in this discussion.

Similarly to the entrance of white women in the academic world, after the liberation movements of the 1960s, a limited generation of people of color gained entrance to the university; however, being most of them male, the stories of women of color remained untold. At the same time that Moers, Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar published their works, a colored feminist, Alice Walker, published her criticism towards white feminism. In the collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), Walker describes women in the South during the 1920s as women highly abused, mutilated and in pain, but “whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held”, or as the poet Jean Toomer saw them “exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey” (p. 232). According to Walker, these women, who were the mothers and grandmothers of colored women, were artists; and art came out of daily life and work: gardens, quilts, clothes. Through one of the last phrases of the essay: “Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength- in search of my mother’s garden, I found my own”, Walker (1983) shows that colored women had been silenced, and most of their lives’ experiences had been lost (p. 243).

In the same collection of essays, Walker coined the term womanist, which means “a black feminist or feminist of color” (p. xi). This concept constitutes a central concept in her understanding of feminism since, as Walker writes: “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (p. xii). The term womanist then is a reaction to the realization that feminism does not encompass the experiences and needs of black women. It is a feminism that is “stronger in color” and implies that women love women and appreciate women’s culture and power (Walker, 1983). The notion of womanism addresses the racist and classist aspects of white feminism and marks the place where race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect.

The decades of 1980 and 1990 also brought into question the legitimacy of the notion of feminism as monolithic and homogeneous. Following Walker’s criticism, Sonia Saldívar-Hull (1993) wonders if Chicanas can consider themselves part of the sisterhood called feminism. Saldívar-Hull (1993) emphasizes the need to add the notions of race and ethnicity to the discussion about feminism, due to the specific history of racial, sexual, and class exploitation experienced by Chicanas. In her view, black women have been used as a symbol of all dispossessed women in the USA,

ignoring the intersection of multiple systems of exploitation: capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy. In this way, Chicanas, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Third World feminisms¹⁵, have been labeled within the colored feminists without addressing their problems and difficulties particularly, rendering them invisible and silencing their discourse (Saldívar-Hull, 1993, p. 2). In order to recover their silenced voices, Third World feminists started to create a site for Chicana and Latina theory. Alma Gómez, Cherrie Moraga, and Mariana Romo-Carmona, who describe themselves as “Latina writers and activists who identify as U.S. Third World women” cooperated in the creation of such a site through the preface to *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*¹⁶ (1983), which they wrote collectively. In the preface, Gómez, Moraga and Romo-Carmona trace the origins of Latinas’ literary tradition back to the *cuentos* told by mothers and grandmothers, that is to say, an oral tradition that heavily relied on close family networks and generation after generation of people living in the same *barrio*. They realized, likewise Walker had done before in relation to the stories of African American women, that the volumes of anthologies of literature, both American and Latin American, did not contain a single name or line by a Latina writer speaking accurately about their experiences. In this context, they remarked the need of a literature that could testify about their lives, and provide recognition of who they are: “an exiled people, a migrant people, *mujeres en lucha*” (1983, p. VII). Throughout the preface, the authors discuss about the idea that Latin American women are the heirs of a culture of silence, given the constriction perpetuated by the intersection of class, race, education, and sex, which have been critical in silencing the Latina writer. Their lost voice can be recovered through words, that is, through the recollection of writings narrating the concerns and struggles of Latinas.

During these last decades of the 20th century, the nature of women’s liberation has changed (Castillo, 2005). There is now a kaleidoscopic notion of feminism advocating the idea that there can be as many versions of feminism as there were women (hooks, 2000). This notion of feminisms, with small f, illustrates the differences among women, the diverse struggles they go through and the diverse needs they might

¹⁵ Term coined by Saldívar-Hull, 1993.

¹⁶ *Cuentos* was the first collection of short fiction to bring together writings by Latinas, from both the USA and Latin America.

have. As hooks (2000) points out, there cannot be such a thing as feminism if the term evokes the exploitation and oppression of others.

When discussing the experiences of Latinas and Third World women in the USA, who are the focus of this work, there are some central concepts within the field of feminist criticism that need to be addressed. The notions of patriarchy, Otherness and female identity are explored in the following sections considering the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity.

1.2.2. Patriarchy

The analysis of patriarchy becomes essential to understand and discuss its effects on the role of women in society and in the (re)construction of their identity. In *Sexual Politics*¹⁷, Kate Millett (1969) discusses patriarchy and its implications on society, literature and the construction of female identity, and points out that the power structures which form part of politics are related to the contact and interaction of diverse groups composed of different subjects, belonging to different races, social classes, castes and sexes (p. 24). Some of these groups do not have political representation and tend to be stable but oppressed at the same time, increasing their identity crisis, particularly when the oppression is double, such is the case of colored women whose historical and cultural backgrounds are characterized by patriarchal ideologies and practices. Anzaldúa (1987) describes these historically patriarchal cultural backgrounds as a form of cultural tyranny. She points out that it is the culture that shapes our beliefs and the version of reality we perceive, at the same time that it transmits the dominant paradigms that are impossible to challenge. She highlights the fact that even when culture is constructed by those in the power position (that is, men); it is actually transmitted by women, and perpetuated by the Church (Anzaldúa, 1987).

While explaining the nature of patriarchy, Millett (1969) compares the political dilemma originated in the USA due to the kaleidoscope of races that compose it as a parallel to the problem between the different sexes. The conflict of races, Millett (1969) says, represents one collectivity exercising control and oppression over another one on the basis of birth. The same scheme prevails in the area of different sexes, that is a

¹⁷ Millett (1969) defines the phrase 'sexual politics' by stating that politics refers to "power-structured relationships", in which one group is controlled by another, and sex is a "category with political implications" (pp. 23-24).

relationship of dominance and subordination in which the birthright-priority of being male prevails over being female, just like being white prevails over being black (Millett, 1969). Millett (1969) suggests that this system of sexual oppression is a form of “interior colonization”, similar in its segregation, class stratification, abuse of power, and subjugation to other forms of oppression (p. 25). Thus, patriarchy as a system is embedded in the core of society, economy, political structures and religion and so it has become a social institution. As such, it has ideological, biological, sociological, economic, educational, class, and psychological nuances, which interact actively (Anzaldúa, 1987; Millet, 1969).

Ideologically, the sexes are socialized according to patriarchal models derived from socially constructed and historically perpetuated stereotypes representing the role and status of each sex. These stereotypes originate in the biological conception of sex¹⁸ differences and in the notion that both sexes constitute a set of mutually dependent binary oppositions. Thus, aggression, intelligence, force and efficacy characterize the male, whereas passivity, ignorance, docility, virtue and inefficacy categorize the female component of the binary. In this way, for example, sex roles limit females to reproduction, domestic activities and dependence; perpetuating male domination (Anzaldúa, 1987). Male supremacy resides in the acceptance of a value system, socially-dominant. In other words, the differences between sexes are essentially cultural (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; hooks, 2000; Millett, 1969).

Sociologically speaking, the gender-based expectations of society determine and restrict who we are, and how we behave in terms of what society considers acceptable or appropriate for each sex. We learn to behave as male or female according to the process of socialization determined by the ideology of the society where we are immersed, process in which the family¹⁹ becomes one of the main institutions of

¹⁸ Whereas the distinction between sexes seems to be biological, gender is a psychological and cultural category. Thus, when we talk about sex, the proper categories are male and female, but when the discussion is about gender, the proper terms are masculine and feminine (Millett, 1969, p. 30).

¹⁹ One of the main contributions of the family to the patriarchal system is the socialization of the young through the transmission of the dominant ideology and the culturally accepted gender roles for each sex, reinforced by other social forces, like education, the media, and also, by women themselves (Anzaldúa, 1987; Millett, 1969).

patriarchy, working as a mediator between the individual and the state (Anzaldúa, 1987; Millett, 1969).

Another factor that determines the condition of women in society is the interplay of class, race and sexual status. Class works as the force which brings about the assimilation of values from the upper and middle classes into the lower ranks of society, particularly sexual values which promote the subjugation of women. Class is constrained by another variable in the system, which subdues it: race (hooks, 2000; Millett, 1969; Walker, 1983). Both, class and race constitute central elements in the double oppression experienced by colored women, who find in their race (as well as in their gender) the roots of class stratification and sexual oppression.

These class distinctions on the basis of sex are narrowly related to economy and education opportunities. Since we are part of a “money economy” in which capitalism rules, economy and the labor force are also sexist (Millett, 1969, p. 40). This becomes evident in the average wages between male and female subjects doing the same job, which decrease on account of the combination of sex and race. Concerning education, it is imperative to refer to the relationship between knowledge and power. Patriarchy imposes a division between masculine and feminine in certain areas of cultural/educational development. For instance, traditionally women have been imposed minimum literacy, associated to the status and temperament of the sex; have been restricted to the humanities, and neglected from the typically male fields of science, medicine or engineering (Millett, 1969).

Female identity is also intersected by religious representations, which are the result of a culture based on male design. Millett (1969) points out that “the image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs”, since men have set themselves as the norm (p. 46). In order to suit their needs, society has manipulated the understanding of certain female sexual functions, especially menstruation and virginity. These two components of female sexuality and identity, the latter exalted by religion and society, have become taboos, euphemisms and slang, “poisoning the female’s own sense of physical self until it often becomes the burden it is said to be” (Millett, 1969, p.

47). Anzaldúa (1987) adds that culture and the church insist in bringing women under the dominance of men, for example, through the glorification of the role of motherhood and virginity. In her words, if a woman remains a virgin till marriage, she is a good woman. In her culture, religion and society only endowed women with three options: to become a nun, to become a prostitute, or to become a mother, leaving women without a fourth option, like becoming autonomous, and financially independent through education and a professional career (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 73). The effects of patriarchy in the psychology of both sexes result mainly in the internalization, and socialization of patriarchal ideology as the norm since it is expected that women show acceptance and compromise with the system of values created by men and perpetuated generation after generation by society (Anzaldúa, 1987; Millet, 1969).

1.2.3. Otherness

The following discussion focuses on the concept of Otherness, one of the central concepts in the field of feminist theory. Otherness derives from the already-discussed notion of patriarchy, and as such affects and conditions the (re)construction of female identity. As it was discussed in the previous section, women have been represented as part of a complex web of binary oppositions, which have been the basis of patriarchal domination. This dichotomy has represented women as the weak, irrational, dominated counterpart of male strength, rationality and domination, based on biological assumptions which no longer can be sustained (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; Millet, 1969). As a consequence, women have been relegated to the position of the second sex, position which has imprisoned them in the fixed roles of daughter, mother and wife (Anzaldúa, 1987; Beauvoir, 1949).

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir compares the experiences of women to those of ethnic minorities, given that women share oppression and subjugation with, for example, black people or the Jews who have been regarded as inferior on the bases of supposedly inherent biological differences (p.1). Minorities, then, are not defined according to the numerical size of the group but according to their status as “any group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment” (Wirth as

cited in Millet, 1969, p. 55).²⁰ Like ethnic minorities, women experience feelings of self-hatred and self-rejection, and the acceptance of their socially-imposed inferiority. Women and minority groups also share their Otherness, in other words, the binary oppositions that determine the social order have positioned women as “the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He [man] is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beauvoir 1949, p. 3).

In order to construct the figure of the Other, two elements stand out: the assertion of supremacy of the dominant side and the acceptance of the position of inferiority in the hands of the oppressed. In each pair of oppositions there is always one element which is privileged over the other, and that both are linked in a conflictive relation of repression and magnetism, for example, men is privileged over women, as white is privileged over colored (Beauvoir, 1949; Cixous, 1976). Although no subject will position itself as the Other, he/she “is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One”, however, “if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view”(Beauvoir, 1949, p. 4). That is to say, becoming the Other is the result of the socialization of dominant ideologies that position the concepts of male and white as the norm. In the case of women, their status as the Other is the result of centuries of impositions and social representations, precisely, as the weak/second sex. According to Beauvoir (1949), a woman:

May fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other. (p. 7)

The sexual difference created and perpetuated by the social acceptance of the dualisms, represent the structure of power operating in society, in which Otherness is tolerated only when it is repressed (Sarup, 1993, p. 110). By stating that “in small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are ‘strangers’ and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are ‘foreigners’”, Beauvoir (1949) brings into question the issue of the double oppression experienced by colored women, who are constrained by their gender, their class and their race or ethnicity (p. 4). As regards this

²⁰ Even though we can compare the role of women and their position in society with other minority groups, we must consider that women, actually, are not a minority (Beauvoir, 1949, pp. 4-5).

double oppression, Anzaldúa (1987) explains that it leads women to inhabit the borderlands, meaning that women feel locked down when criticized by both their own culture and white culture or when women are hunted down like a prey by the men of different races. Within the context of this double oppression, Anzaldúa (1987) introduces the concept of alienation, implying that being alienated from her mother culture, and being an alien in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe even in the deepest section of her inner self; but is petrified, and trapped in the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits (p. 77). It is precisely in this setting, the borderlands, where these colored women go through the process of (re)constructing their female identities.

1.2.4. On identity and identity (re)construction

The concept of identity is a complex, problematic one, since it is determined, and influenced, by internal factors (individual characteristics, personal history); and external ones (family dynamics, historical factors, social and political contexts). In other words, the answer to the question *who am I?* not only depends on the interplay of the internal factors mentioned above, but also on what the surrounding world says. This mirror effect, also called the “looking glass self”, in which the image reflected in the mirror illustrates society’s perception, exhibits that the reflection is multi-dimensional (Tatum, 2000, p. 18). The multiplicity of identity originates in the perception of individual identity as the product of combining and amalgamating specifically the different identities that a person might comprise (Del Olmo as cited in Esteban Zamora, 2002, para. 18). Consequently, the exploration of the process of female identity (re)construction needs to consider the complexity, plurality, and multiplicity of female identity, given that it is also intersected by the notions of race, class and ethnicity.

As it has been developed in the previous sections, female identity has been constrained by external factors, such as patriarchy and the consequent categorization of women as the Other. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) state that patriarchy produces texts which in turn help perpetuate the subjugation of women in society. For example, the major literary representations of women, femininity

and femaleness have been basically male, and it was the prohibition to create and construct their own images of femaleness and femininity which has led women writers to accept male standards and consequently construct women's images on the basis of patriarchal society. As the 20th century progressed, the image of women as passive, docile, selfless, a "vision of angelic beauty and sweetness", was replaced by the notion of the madwoman, the monster behind the angel (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 25). Women who deviate from the norm or rebel from the social impositions are bad women. Different cultures condemn those who deviate from the standard, because, as Alzaldúa (1987) points out, deviation represents the mirror that reflects the fears of society: "to be different, to be the other, and hence, inferior, sub-human, in-human, no-human" (p. 75).

According to Gilbert and Gubar (1979), the image of the madwoman epitomizes the author's double or the "female schizophrenia of authorship" (p. 78). This notion implies that female voice, and thus the female being, is duplicitous. The projection of the woman into the image of the monster creates a dark double for both, the heroines of the stories they write and themselves, which enables the woman writer to revise and reconstruct the definitions of femininity, femaleness and woman imposed on them by the dominant patriarchal culture. Like Millett (2000), Gilbert and Gubar (1979) insist that the identity of the character and the identity of the author are parallels, the madwoman character being the author's double²¹. What Gilbert and Gubar (1979) call "the anxiety of authorship" is the result of a complex identity crisis produced by the clash between the process of self-definition and patriarchal representation of women (p. 17). This identity crisis creates one of the fundamental problems in feminism: Should women imitate the discourse of men and surrender their identity? Or should they speak by their own voice, retelling their own stories? (Gilbert and

²¹ Barthes proposes in *The Death of the Author*, that "once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text" (as cited in Moi, 2002, p. 63). He suggests that the alternative to the author-centered approach described in *The Madwoman in the Attic* might be replaced by the acceptance of the multiplicity of writing, the idea of refusing the allotment of only one ultimate meaning to the text, the refusal to the ideas of fix meanings based on reason, science and law. Barthes's notion opposes the idea of wholeness developed by Gilbert and Gubar, according to which the woman writer would become the text's meaning.

Gubar, 1979, p. 46). The answer lies in authors like Emily Bronte, Emily Dickinson, Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, for instance, who achieved female literary authority by “simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards”, by assaulting, revising, deconstructing and reconstructing the female images inherited from male literary standards (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 73).

In *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), Cixous develops several notions that are central to analyze the process of female identity (re)construction and female liberation. One of the notions developed by Cixous is related to her view of writing as a form of resistance against patriarchy and the silence imposed on women from different backgrounds, classes and ethnicities. In order to achieve liberation, women must write themselves, since this form of writing will allow women to deconstruct and transform themselves and their history at two levels: individually and collectively (Cixous, 1976). According to Cixous (1976), individually:

A woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display-the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. (p. 880)

Cixous urges women to write and take control of their bodies by asserting that women must write about women and men about men, and this way, move away from the typical representations of women constructed by patriarchy. In this way, writing works as a liberating force, opening the path for the *new woman*, a woman who would move beyond the Old, getting to know and love her self (Cixous, 1976, p. 878). In her view:

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. (p. 881)

This positions women in a different role other than the margins (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gómez et al., 1983).

It is within the idea of writing as a liberating force and voice for women that the concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia and poliphony, developed by Mijail Bakhtin (1998), are introduced. These concepts have proved relevant for the study of the problematic nature of identity (re)construction since they provide the framework to analyze ethnic literature as an element of voice and resistance for colored women.

According to Bakhtin (1998), the novel is a multiform phenomenon in style and variform in terms of discourse and voice, that can be defined as “a diversity of types of social discourse (sometimes a diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, organized artistically” (pp. 261-262). Consequently, the novel presents a heteroglossia, that is to say, a multiplicity of voices, a real language that can be associated with the idea of polyphony. This multiplicity of voices originates a dialogism, in which diverse points of view, different languages or systems of beliefs and values, sometimes mutually opposite, coexist in a state of dialogical tension. This state of dialogism exists in direct opposition to the monologic system that represents only one ideology and one viewpoint without allowing for dialogue, a sort of single monologue that parallels the hegemonic language of the dominant culture.

In relation to the image of a hegemonic language within a monologic system described by Bakhtin, Cixous (1976) emphasizes the role of language to move beyond the hierarchies of dual opposition. According to the author, women have always functioned within the discourse of men, using men’s language to write about their experiences, that is, the language of the dominant culture. In Cixous’s perspective, in order to find their voice women should dislocate the within, deconstruct and reconstruct it making it “hers”, that means to invent a language of her own (1976, p.887). In other words, women can use the language that has subjugated and stereotyped them, to create a rupture and reconstruct the broken pieces into a new product. Given that women are also constrained by their ethnicity, and as a consequence their mother tongue is silenced by the dominant culture, the re-appropriation of that foreign language into a language on their own is essential in order to (re)construct their identity and be heard.

Julia Kristeva, who interprets language as a complex, heterogeneous and productive process instead of a monolithic system, opposes Cixous’s notion of a feminine/female writing or language (Sarup, 1993, p. 123). Instead, Kristeva has a theory of marginality, subversion and dissidence, particularly in relation to the revolutionary potential of the marginal/repressed aspects of language, and talks about “feminine forms of signification which cannot be contained by the rational structure of the symbolic order” and, because of their subversive nature, they threaten the sovereignty of the dominant discourse, locating them in the margins (as cited in Sarup, 1993, p. 123). By the words “symbolic order”, Kristeva means one of the two forms of

building up identity besides mother identification (the semiotic): father identification, which refers to the patriarchal dominating system. Kristeva explains that mother identification represents “the raw material of signification” that defines and structures the limits of the child’s body and its identity as a subject, a feminine phase dominated by the mother, a pre-Oedipal primary process which will render women to the marginal, to the domination of the oedipal phase whereas father identification represents a system regulated by secondary systems whose order is superimposed on the semiotic (as cited in Sarup, 1993, pp. 123-124). In her view, all texts and cultural productions result from the interaction of these two dialectical processes which modify themselves mutually: the symbolic (the setting, the establishment of the system) and the semiotic, which subverts the system, breaking down unities and challenging its limits, creating “rupture, renovation and revolution” (as cited in Sarup, 1993, p. 126). From this perspective, the (re)construction of female identity results from the combination and transformation of these two processes into a synthesis, as Kristeva proposes, not in the exclusive application of one over another.

It is in this context of female writing where the female body emerges as a central element in female identity (re)construction. Cixous (1976), for instance, connected naturally women’s bodies, whose sexual pleasure had been repressed, with women’s writing, urging women to “write your self. Your body must be heard” (p. 880). The problematic, complex nature of the female body emerges out of the tension between the cultural meanings inscribed into it, and the bodily experiences it mediates. In the introduction to *Writing on the body*, Conboy, Medina and Stanbury (1997) symbolize men and masculinity as a sort of colonizing power over women: “Just as man’s civilizing impetus transforms wildlife, land, and vegetation into territories to tame and control, so too does it render women a form of nature to apprehend, dominate and defeat” (p. 2). In this context of colonizing domination, Conboy et al. refer to different ways in which the female body is dominated, molded and silenced. Firstly, through the valued natural feminine bodily characteristics (narrow waists, small feet, long hair) that demanded the most unnatural maintenance (corsets, foot-binding, products for straightening or de-tangling). Secondly, due to the denial of women’s appetites and the transformation of female body into a non-threatening, docile body achieved through the internalization of the values of domesticity. Thirdly, the image of a universal female

body implemented by feminists to achieve political consensus works as a silencing tool, leaving some women, especially colored, in the borderlands. Finally, the representation of the female body as passive, helpless, or in danger of violation; and the female burden to embody eternal youth, function as constraining forces for women.

This colonizing force exercised by patriarchy becomes evident in texts written by postcolonial women, in which the female body is in a state of exile including self-exile and self-censorship, outsider-ness, and un-belonging to itself (Katrak, 2006). This idea of self-exile or internalized exile, meaning that the body feels disconnected from itself, as though it does not belong to it and has no agency, is related to education and its linguistic and cultural alienations, the pressures of motherhood, migration and geographical relocation (Katrak, 2006). Sometimes this female corporeal exile results from forgetting one's native language and cultural ways supplanted by English language and mores; from breaking "tradition"; or for resisting the patriarchal authority of fathers and husbands" (Katrak, 2006, p. 2). The attempt to reconnect their bodies and communities leads women to use their female bodies via speech, silence starvation or illness (Katrak, 2006). In this way, traditional gendered roles attached to the female body are demystified, and the body becomes a medium of expression, a voice for female identity.

The saying that the female body "is a text to be read" illustrates the relationship between the body, language and female voice. The female body is seen as "text of culture", that is to say, a site of social control where the female becomes a performance artist gives voice to social dramas and illustrates oppression (Bordo, 1993, p. 3). Accordingly, when the female body comes into play, questions about the similarities between women who are so differently embodied emerge, together with the issue of the uneven construction of the category of woman, and the issue of female sexuality and its projection onto the bodies of women (Conboy et al., 1997). The authors argue that whereas the category *woman* applies to all that are embodied female, the privileges are directed to certain features of female anatomy that emerge from the grounds of race, class, heterosexual orientation and physical ability (1997, p. 5). Although the cultural construction of what society sees as a real woman is determined by external factors, the many voices emerging from these various sectors (bodies of color, unclassed bodies, lesbian bodies, disabled bodies, bodies of transsexuals) share the same question asked

by Sojourner Truth more than a century ago: "Ain't I a woman?" (p. 5). While these *bodily* distinctions serve to separate women from one another, Judith Butler (1993) proposes a different view of the body as "a site for play with categories" (p. 6). In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), Butler develops a conception of (sexual) construction that returns to the notion of matter, and that can certainly be applied to the (re)construction of female identity, in which she sees construction "not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (p. 9). Construction, then, should not be understood neither as "a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects", since it "not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration" (Butler, 1993, p. 10). Butler, then, perceives sexual identification as central for female identity.

Another form of female identity (re)construction emerges from the notions of spirituality and religiosity. In relation to this, Castillo (1995) explains that, traditionally, cults have been designed by men of Western culture, and, consequently, women have been relegated to the task of preserving those cults, mainly through daily rituals and spiritual cleansings. However, in an attempt to "return to long lost and non-Western ways in search of new direction for our lives", these women have returned to the ways of their ancestors (Castillo, 1995, p. 145). This synthesis of beliefs systems for *mestiza* consciousness represents "a strategy women apply in order to cope in a society that does not give her humanity a substantial value given that by recalling her blood-tie memories to the Americas and relying upon the guidance of her dreams and institutions, she gradually reawakens her female indigenous energies" (Castillo, 1995, p. 146). Therefore, a woman's self-acceptance and reconciliation with her spirituality represent the maintenance of her well being, since it helps determine what makes us feel whole, the sources of our strength, courage, and fulfillment as human beings (Castillo, 1995, p. 147). In other words, the objective in understanding and affirming ourselves, integrating our fragmented identities, believing in the wisdom of ancient knowledge is, as Castillo (1995) says, "to bring the rest of humanity to the fold", that is, to struggle with the need to understand who we are, believing in our worthiness, beauty and talents,

“while having to survive within the constructs of a world antithetical to our intuition and knowledge regarding life’s meaning” (p. 149).

One way of expressing this spirituality is through the roles of *brujas*²² “a spiritual healer or psychic” and *curanderas* “a specialized healer, learned in the knowledge of specifically healing the body” (Castillo, 2005, p. 156). *Curanderismo* involves the supernatural realm of our reality, that is, the conception that “the supernatural is a reality based on the natural forces of the universe”, for instance, the belief that “persons can cause physical and emotional illnesses in others by use of personal power or with the help of non-corporeal beings” or the work with herbal and massage treatments (Castillo, 2005, p. 155).

Both roles, which imply the representation of women endowed with a range of wisdom, are represented as a betrayal of the church, womanhood and the devout Catholic mother, showing inclination towards the grandmother’s belief or the community elder (Castillo, 2005). This woman creates some distance from the last generation through the unlearning of those lessons felt as harmful to her well-being, a sort of deconstruction which allows her to re-capture of her spiritual orientation, and to adapt it to her needs. In Castillo’s view, this leads to the (re)affirmation and resurrection of womanhood, a process of self-empowerment and self-healing (2005, p. 152). By healing, Castillo (2005) means “recovering from the devastating blows we receive from society for having been born poor, non-white, and female in a hierarchical society” (p. 153). One of the healing methods is ritual, that is, a form to calm oneself and/or to reassure when chaos seems at hand, for instance, thought an aura sweeping, tarot card reading, the construction of altars, or “channel sessions”, the use material objects like candles incense and oils or *baños* (Castillo, 2005, pp. 153-160).

In conclusion, the personal traumas experienced by women as a direct result of their femaleness, brown skin, and economic hardships should be understood as “being part of a degenerating system we are obliged to live under”, where spirituality, the state of being and living as a unified self, works as a way of re-constructing identity (Castillo, 2005, p. 160). Anzaldúa (1987) also addresses the issue of identity construction by

²² The word *bruja* usually implies a negative connotation, associated with fear and hatred. Castillo (2005) suggests that the term should be used to refer to women who “are in tune with their psyches, allow their lives to be informed by them, and offer intuitive gifts to their communities without fear of being as loathsome or mad” (p. 157).

urging women to break free from the ties that keep them trapped; and rebel, protest against the constraints of their own culture. Rebelling and protesting against one's own culture do not imply treason or rejection towards the mother culture; but rather to separate from the culture, live your own life, and keep in contact with that culture, because it is indissolubly, part of your own self. As Anzaldúa clearly states, "I am like a tortoise, there where I come I take my home on my back" (1987, p. 78).

2. EXILE AND FEMALE IDENTITY (RE)CONSTRUCTION

The sudden dispossession accompanying a refugee flight is much more than the loss of a permanent home and a traditional occupation or than the parting from close friends and familiar places. It is also the death of the person one has become in a particular context, and every refugee must be his or her own midwife at the painful process of rebirth. (Murphy, 1966, p. 191)

Exile crosses over the experiences of the female characters in the novels of the corpus. It is the trigger of the change that dislocates them, displaces them from their motherland and re-places them in a different, foreign, context, the host land. These narratives of displacement and exile (Mujcinovic, 2003) correspond with the experience of the dictatorships and military regimes which dominated Central America and the Caribbean between the 1950s and the 1980s; and provide a snapshot to explore the situation of women and whole families during these regimes. At those times, thousands of Latin Americans were pushed to search for refuge in the United States in order to escape from the evils of dictatorship, particularly about 900,000 Cubans and 300,000 Dominicans (Pastor as cited in Mujcinovic, 2003, p. 167). *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), thus, are framed in exilic contexts, and mirror a small fraction of the people who left their homelands escaping from the oppressive regimes that affected the islands of Cuba and the Dominican Republic during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s.

To start with, it is necessary to define exile. Acosta Hess²³ (2001) defines it as “a forced separation from the country of origin, the expulsion of home, or the state of being expelled, sometimes voluntarily” (p. 221). On the one hand, it refers to the separation of one person from their homeland, idea that implies dislocation and displacement. On the other hand, it refers to the notion of expatriation, generally for political reasons, idea that denotes uprooting, loss and disruption. Acosta Hess differentiates the act of migration, defined as “leaving the motherland with the intention of settling down in another country”, from the forced separation/expulsion/banishment of exile (2001, p. 221). Exile, then, implies a form of de-contextualization or temporal/spatial displacement which fractures social and cultural identity, and at the same time, national and individual identity. Since identity is constructed through the

²³ All the quotes from the work of Acosta Hess (2001) are translated by the author.

social processes in which symbolic interaction and collective memory are determining elements, exile constitutes one of the social processes destabilizing identity and influencing its (re)construction (Sandoval as cited in Esteban Zamora, 2002, para. 9).

Exile deeply influences the adaptation process to mainstream society, mainly because exiles are confined to “a perilous territory of not-belonging”, that is to say, a space of absence and loss, through the denial of home and integrity in both the homeland and the new land (Said, 1993). In this space of not-belonging is where the first clash between cultures occurs. At home, both families (García and Puente) belonged to the upper class, status that was not kept in the host land. In this context, they have to (re)accommodate themselves into the new setting, and into a different categorization determined by class, ethnicity and, last but not least, gender. This clash also signals the beginning of a dilemma: Whereas it is hard to integrate completely to the new culture, it is equally hard to break the ties with their motherlands (Acosta Hess, 2001). The dualism generated through this clash accompanies the female characters throughout their quest for identity.

Even when the displacement of exile is present in both novels, there are differences in terms of the forces moving each family to leave their homelands behind; and the feelings and representations of the homeland (re)created by exiles. As a result, it is necessary to explore, firstly, those forces leading to the exile of the different characters in the novels. Secondly, exile is studied in relation to the effects it produces on the female characters, particularly in terms of the (re)construction of their identities.

2.1. Exile in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

Exile in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) is framed by the dictatorship that affected the Dominican Republic for 31 years, period through which *El Generalissimo* or *el Jefe*, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, ran the country (1930-1961). The story is embedded in situations of abductions, violence, fear and surveillance experienced by the main characters, their parents and relatives. The main cause behind the exile of the García family is the involvement of Carlos García, a respected upper-class doctor, in a plot to overthrow Trujillo supported by the State Department and the CIA (pp. 204-205). As a result, the family leaves everything behind and arrange a

quick escape into the United States in order to save their lives. Similarly, though no surprisingly, Julia Álvarez and her family emigrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States in 1960, when she was 10 years old, as a result of her father's involvement in the underground movement against Trujillo (Rich, 2002, p.165). Therefore, one of the main symbols of exile is Trujillo himself. During Trujillo's dictatorship, "he had absolute control over the military, the economy, and the people and, except for a select group, he prevented anyone from leaving the island" (Luis, 2000, p. 839). Then, Trujillo²⁴ not only represents patriarchal control but also a totalitarian force sweeping away with all that was considered either subversive or a threat to his position of power. Sudden visits from the secret police (SIM) with guns and their black VWs, interrogations, and the constant presence of Trujillo in every aspect of life, such as streets named after Trujillo and his family, the saying "Grace to God and Trujillo", his portrait on every house's wall, abductions in the middle of the night, and tortures, were characteristic of this regime which bears some similitude to the other dictatorships that affected Latin American countries, including our own, in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) the role played by exile in the initial displacement, dislocation and fragmentation of the female characters, and their consequent identity (re)construction processes are explored through diverse images and recreations of dictatorship and exile recollected by the female characters. They provide a variety of views and perspectives and a myriad of voices that, in combination, form a kaleidoscope of exilic experiences. Interestingly, Álvarez presents these views and voices from the perspective of both, adults and children. Through this strategy, the reader is able to experience exile from the perspective of adults, Laura and Chucha, and also from the perspective of children for whom dictatorship and exile meddled into everyday affairs. Exile, thus, cannot be understood as a homogeneous experience but as one dependant on the personal backgrounds and experiences of each female character.

In the case of the García family, exile is framed by the oppression and violence of Trujillo's regime. The moment previous to the exile of the family is charged with

²⁴ The image of Trujillo as totalitarian leader and patriarchal oppressor is developed in depth in *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994). Dictatorship, exile and Trujillo are also mentioned in other works written by Julia Álvarez, such as *The Other Side/El otro lado* (1996), *¡Yo!* (1997) and *Something to Declare* (1998).

tension and uncertainty, precisely, when two men dressed in khaki and wearing reflector sunglasses and holsters, approach the house asking for Doctor García to ask him “a few questions” (p. 201). Carlos escapes silently to a secret closet where he hides a revolver. Immediately, the family starts to operate as a sort of secret organization: while the men are seated in the living room, tormenting the children, letting them hold the revolver and intimidating them through questions, the maids, servants and rest of the family try to communicate with Victor Hubbard, the American consul. At the same time, they try to hide their fears and nervousness by entertaining, distracting the *guardias*, and doing the immensely difficult job of staying calm and sounding polite (pp. 195-211).

One of the events that provides an insight into the exilic experience is the moment when Laura, having been interrogated for many hours, and feeling terrified about having said something she mustn't, receives the news that Carlos has been granted a fellowship at a hospital in the United States and that the papers have received clearance from the head of immigration (p. 212). Immediately, she realizes they are leaving. Her first thoughts associate exile with a sense of loss, and acquire a melancholic tone:

Now everything she sees sharpens as if through the lens of loss- the orchids in their hanging straw baskets, the row of apothecary jars Carlos has found for her in old druggists' throughout the countryside, the rich light shafts swarming with a golden pollen. She will miss this glorious light warming the inside of her skin and jewelling the trees, the grass, the lily pond beyond the hedge. (p. 212)

It is the mere closeness of exile and its tangibility which produce in Laura an anticipated, unexpected and unwelcome sense of loss, producing in her a first instance of dislocation. In this moment, Laura thinks of her ancestors, the *conquistadores* who came to the New World looking for gold, and somehow compares them to the *guardias*: “And look at what they [the conquistadores] started, Laura thinks, looking up and seeing gold flash in the mouth of one of the *guardias* as it spreads open in a scared smile” (p. 212). The greed and cruelty of the *conquistadores* taking the natives' land and gold, pushing them from their lands and subjugating them can be compared to the poisonous effect of the regime, which spreads its corruption and violence like the conquistadores spread their diseases, and their thirst for gold, power and dominance exterminated the natives. Just like these natives lost their land and their freedom, corruption, violence and subjugation extended over the García family, and many other

Dominican families, and dispossessed them of their freedom by forcing them to leave their homeland.

Chucha, the Haitian maid, is clearly concerned about the family's future and well-being in "a nation of zombies", inhabited by people "too pale to be the living" (p. 221). She provides a vivid description of the situation: "the girls all cried, especially the little one, clutching onto my skirts, Doña Laura weeping so hard into her handkerchief" (p. 222). When the family leaves, "only silence remains", and the air is filled with feelings of abandonment, desolation, and emptiness. The maid imagines how the house will be closed and deserted, full of dust: the birdcages will be emptied, the swimming pools filled with trash and leaves and the orchids will burst their baskets and their blossoms eaten by bugs. In Chucha's mind, the place will be left alone, and the workers dismissed, except for the visit of the *guardias* who will smash the windows, take the silver and plates and strip the girls' shelves of the toys (pp. 222-223). This description illustrates the desolation and disruption caused by exile, a situation that not only affects and fragments those who leave, but also those who are left behind. Apart from the feelings of emptiness and solitude, the maid's narration portrays the sense of invasion and infringement perpetuated by the guards, perverting the silence and privacy of the house.²⁵

Besides her narration and vivid portrayals of the García family's exile, Chucha herself embodies the experience of exile. The fact that Chucha fled from Haiti to save her life at the hands of Trujillo becomes a subplot that provides another perspective into the experience of exiles. When the moment of leaving the homeland is approaching, Chucha narrates her own painful exile story: "When I was a girl, I left my country²⁶ too and never went back. Never saw father or mother or sisters or brothers. I brought only this along" she said, unwrapping a wooden carved statue (p. 221). In that mystic

²⁵ In this context, the García family's house stands as a sort of sanctuary, a holy place where the maid prays to her *santos* and *loas* in order to protect the spirit of the family. The house, together with family ties, will represent then a link the Garcías have with their motherland, a link (sanctuary-like) that has to be guarded from the contamination produced by the guards.

²⁶ According to the story, Chucha is a Haitian maid who appears out of a sudden, in the middle of the night, begging Carlos to let her in and give her a job, on the same date (October 1937) when Trujillo, determined to expand his influence over all of Hispaniola, orders the indiscriminate butchery by the Dominican army of an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Haitians on the Dominican side of the Massacre River.

moment, Chucha performs one of her rituals, and all of them, even the carved figure, start crying, maybe because they could perceive “an ending in the air”, as if Chucha “finally released her own tears” in each of the girls (p. 221). It is this hurting familiar experience which makes her the best narrator to describe vividly the exile of the García family, and explain through words and images the loss and fragmentation caused by the forced departure from the homeland into a foreign host land. Exile, consequently, strikes Chucha’s life again, leaving her alone, dispossessed of the new family she has adopted.

The myriad of exilic experiences is also composed of the memories of the girls, who through recollections of everyday affairs are able to illustrate the trauma and fragmentation caused by exile. Different aspects of exile, thus, are present in the girls’ memories: violence, sense of loss and a sort of amnesia, a blockage of painful memories of the past. Sandra, for instance, remembers her inability to pick one toy to take to the United States, event that produces a hole inside her. For Sandi,

Nothing would quite fill that need, even years after, not the pretty woman she would surprise herself by becoming, not the prizes for her schoolwork and scholarships to study now this and now that she couldn’t decide to stay with, not the men that held her close and almost convinced her when their mouths came down hard on her lips that this, this was what Sandi had been missing. (p. 215)

The fact that this hole remains unfilled illustrates how the experience of exile endures inside of person’s head, heart and soul, and how it affects this person’s life, and consequently, the (re)construction of identity. In Sandi’s experience, then, exile not only works as a disruptive and dislocating force but also as a destabilizing energy that fills her life of uncertainty and sense of incompleteness and emptiness.

Given the same task of choosing the one toy she really wanted, Yolanda picks a revolver. This exemplifies the level of tension and violence embedded in the context. Yolanda notices men walking up in the driveway with guns, and frequent interrogatories of children and servants (p. 196); her father hiding and taking a revolver; the possibility of a escaping at night (p. 196); and the verbal and psychological abuse on the children (p.199). She also recalls, for example, about Victor Hubbard grooming a revolution, hiding in a secret closet, and using a code language to communicate (pp. 207-208). These memories illustrate how, even out of innocence, the violence of the regime is ingrained in the children’s minds. Carla, for instance, remembers “smelling a rat”,

when having lunch at *Tía* Carmen's house. At that moment, she notices tension in the air: the two men at her house, the *guardia* outside, her mother's nervousness, *Tía* Carmen jumping every time the doorbell rang, and shivering when Mundín tells her about the gun he got to hold when they were playing statues. Carla clearly remembers that:

Every once in a while *guardias* roar in on their jeeps, jump out, and surround Papito's house, and then Chino always comes running and tells Mami, who calls Tío Vic to tell him to come pick up his tennis shoes. (p. 209)

Even from her childhood perspective, Carla is able to perceive that something is wrong by analysing what the adults do and what they say. For instance, she recalls she has never seen Tío Vic bring these tennis shoes into the house.

Sofía, instead, emphasises her lack of memories from their last day on the island arguing that she was too little to remember. In her own words:

I'm the one who doesn't remember anything from that last day on the Island because I'm the youngest and so the other three are always telling me what happened that last day. ... Like we're all competing, right? for the most haunted past. (p. 217)

The fact that Fifi claims not remembering about the-last-day-on-the-island-memories reveals the trauma generated by exile. Instead of sharing her memories, Fifi chooses to create an amnesic context. Nevertheless, Fifi is able to provide a detailed narration of Chucha's words and ritual on that last day. This only memory she asserts to possess re-directs the pain, trauma and fragmentation caused by exile to the figure of Chucha. Fifi takes distance from the painful context of her departure by narrating a scene in which Chucha, and not her, is the protagonist, and in this way, she is able to take refuge in a memory that does not reveal, explicitly, all the pain she experienced.

In Fifi's life, the experience of exile repeats itself, though in a different context, when she is repatriated. Fifi decides to stay on the island after a decade in the USA in order to recover her lost happiness. She, the youngest, "had had the least chance to bond to the island" before their abrupt exile, and this idea seemed the best to try to find her place in the world (p. 116). During the repatriation, Fifi adapts to the life on the island and starts dating someone, what represents a danger for the other sisters who fear that after a successful repatriation they will end up with the same fate. Besides, Fifi changes her appearance from an Austrian milkmaid-look to "a jangle of bangles and a

cascade of beauty parlor curls”, full of makeup (p. 117). This change is explained by her sisters as “a borderline schizoid response to traumatic cultural displacement” (p. 117), that is, Fifi’s attempt to return to her roots and recover what she lost through the experience of exile.

Consequently, Fifi’s repatriation works as a sort of reversal exile, paralleling the exile from the island to the USA. The fact that the girls refer to Fifi’s repatriation as her “exile” has several implications. Firstly, in order to be exiled one must be forced to leave their homeland. This implies that for the girls, paradoxically, at this point in the story, the island is no longer felt as home, but as a foreign place where their youngest sister is sent as an exile. As the dislocation caused by exile happens at physical level, and also at psychic level, the girls are unable to see themselves as Dominican any longer. Secondly, it is evident that the girls have already adopted certain values and ideas from the host land. They perceive Fifi’s metamorphosis as a sort of “interior colonization” (Millet, 1969, p. 24), one of the basis of the patriarchal system operating in the Dominican Republic.

It is important to mention that Fifi’s rebellious life after her repatriation can be understood as her rejection towards the patriarchal standards operating on the island and in her family. The daughters grow up during the 1960s, an era when revolution, rebellion, “wearing jeans and hoop earrings, smoking little dope, and sleeping with their classmates” are considered political acts. But they have to deal with their father’s values: “I don’t want loose women in my family”, Carlos states (p. 28). Sofia (Fifi), the one without degrees and the only one who drops out of college, in love, the one who has always gone her own way, with non-stop boyfriends and the first to leave home, is the one who defies her father and the patriarchal values he represents and praises. She leaves in a sort of voluntary exile towards Germany where she marries Otto, with whom she has had an adventure in Colombia. Sofia’s unruly and insubordinate nature stands in opposition to the version of herself during her repatriation, and also, in relation to the role played by women in chauvinistic societies like the Dominican Republic. Sofia’s voluntary exile works as a liberating force and represents her attempts to free herself from the imposing and restricting patriarchal family values.

Through these experiences, exile emerges as two different forces. On the one hand, exile appears as a strong dislocating and fragmenting force. The female

characters are geographically displaced and re-placed into a new context, into which they must assimilate and acculturate. This displacement produces the initial clash of cultures, and fragments their identities into past and present and the constant confrontation between the homeland and the dominant culture. The feelings of displacement and fragmentation are illustrated, for instance, in the linguistic dislocation and alienation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989) that affect and torment Carla, attacked and insulted (p. 171) and Yolanda, alienated and unable to find her true voice (p. 88).

Nonetheless, after some time living in the country, the girls started to assimilate and, at the same time, struggle to reconstruct their fragmented identity, divided between the new land and the old world. Yolanda, for instance, often curses her immigrant origins:

If only I too had been born in Connecticut or Virginia, I too would understand the jokes everyone was making on the last two digits of the year 1969; I too would be having sex and smoking dope; I too would have suntanned parents who took me skiing in Colorado over Christmas break, and I would say things like 'no shit', without feeling like I was imitating someone else. (p. 95)

She feels her "old world parents" are an embarrassment, her father with his "thick moustache and three-piece suit and fedora hat", her mother with her "overly matched" outfit (p. 98). Yolanda is also categorized, for instance, by Rudy's parents, who think that dating a Spanish girl should be interesting for him to find out about people from other cultures. Rudy also stereotypes Yolanda, thinking that she would be "hot-blooded, being Spanish and all" (p. 99). This stereotyping and categorization represent the homogenization of Latinos, which affects the (re)construction of her identity given the idea of collective identity representation emphasizing similarities and eclipsing differences (Mato, 2003).

Exile not only represents loss but also erasure (Mujcinovic, 2003). This view of exile is illustrated by the unsuccessful permanent return to the island once Trujillo is overthrown. Although Carlos returns several times for inspection visits, the country's political instability dooms his desire to settle back in the Dominican Republic. Instead, he finds resignation: "I am given up, Mami! It is no hope for the island. I will become *un dominican-york*" (p. 107). When he recites the Pledge of Allegiance and swears to defend the Constitution of the United States, the family realizes they are to stay in the

United States. Carlos, then, remains silent and nostalgic for the rest of the narration, embodying resignation and disappointment.

On the other hand, the experiences of Yolanda and Sofía, though different and unique, illustrate exile as a potential liberating force which acts through the detachment of the girls from the patriarchal rules and traditions dominating the island-culture and the possibility of transforming and (re)constructing their hybrid identities through the rearmament of the different selves and the fragmented pieces of their individual and unique experiences and memories. Instead of absence and loss, from this perspective, exile also brings “the potential of presence and affirmation” (Mujcinovic, 2003, p. 181), the acceptance of their hybridity (García Canclini, 2001). Another instance of the interpretation of exile as a growing experience is illustrated by Laura García, the inventor, who tries to invent gadgets, inspired after the sightseeing visits to department stores and housewares, “where the true treasures women were after” could be found (p. 133). She gets absorbed by invention and drafts gadgets at night, sketching special nozzles, handier handler to different devices, adding odd doodles in kitchen drawers or on the back shelf of the downstairs toilet.

Exile represents, then, the transcendence of absence (created by the dislocation and displacement from the old world into the new one) through the transformation of exile into a site of self-affirmation. In other words, the girls are able to transform the negative experience of exile into a place to re-invent themselves and fulfill their expectations. This notion is related to the idea of appropriating the space, turning the margin into the center, and constructing a thirdspace (Soja, 1996). This in-between is the scenario to create new models to interpret the world (Gómez Peña as cited in Soja, 1996) and to (re)construct their intercultural hybrid and multiple identities.

2.2. Exile in *Dreaming in Cuban*

Exile in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) is explored in terms of the relationship between Cuba and the US during the time of migration. The 1960s were characterized by the political and economic tension surrounding both countries, caused by the struggle between communism and capitalism. This dichotomy is illustrated by the disruption and fragmentation within the family caused not only by exile, but also, by the constant confrontation between her view of the revolution and her mother’s appreciation and

involvement in it. Besides disagreeing with the ideals of the revolution, the force that leads Lourdes to exile with her daughter and husband is the violence of the regime, symbolized by the rape she undergoes, the confiscation of her property and the lack of understanding of her mother, who openly embraced the ideals of the revolution. These fragmenting forces contribute to the exile of Lourdes towards Cuba's antagonistic country in terms of ideology and values, the United States.

The experiences of Cuban exiles, just like the ones described in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992), are not homogenous, even though the feeling of unhomeliness is present since they are inhabiting the borderlands, in "the air while flying between the two cities" (De la Campa as cited in Esplin, 2005, p. 83). In *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), different characters correspond to the categorization of exiles conceptualized by Perez Firmat. Rufino²⁷, who leaves Cuba during his adulthood, remains Cuban no matter what. He is portrayed by Pilar as someone who feels kind of lost in Brooklyn, and who only looks alive when talking about the past, and about Cuba (p. 138). Pilar, who leaves Cuba with her parents when she is two years old, embodies the 1.5ers:

That generation of Cuban-Americans who were children at the time of migration, but grew into adults in the United States. They feel fully comfortable in neither culture but are able to circulate effectively in both. Unlike their parents, who will never be North Americans, they will never be Cubans. (Perez Firmat as cited in Payant, 2001, p. 163)

Pilar experiences an identity crisis, trapped by her roots and her present to which she needs to adapt to survive. Celia, who stays on the homeland and sees how the country changes, embodies the idea of being an exile in your own home (Esplin, 2005). She firmly believes in the old ideals of the revolution though the country and the nature of the revolution itself have changed considerably. When Celia, guarding the cost, receives a letter from her husband and realizes that he has already died, she reflects on the separation caused by exile. At this point, Celia can't decide which one is the worst, separation or death, because even when separation is familiar, she is "uncertain she can

²⁷ Rufino resembles Carlos García. Both men are forced by the circumstances to leave their homelands and settle in New York City, but they remain faithful to their traditions and ideologies. Carlos emphasizes his Dominican-ness every day by wearing his traditional hat and reading the newspaper in Spanish.

reconcile it with permanence” (p. 6). Consequently, Celia, in the solitude of her life, is her own exile, separated from her family, ideologically and physically.

Similarly to the strategy applied by Álvarez, García also presents the reader with a myriad of experiences and views about what Cuba and the revolution represent in the popular imaginary, and an idea about how these dissimilar views and feelings coexist, not only within society but also within a particular family. Thus, the different views and experiences among the Cubans are determined mainly by generational differences (Pérez Firmat & De la Campa as cited in Esplin, 2005, p. 85). These generational differences and variety of personal experiences produce different perceptions of what Cuba is in the mind of each of the female characters, who represent both ends in the continuum of Cubanness and Americanness. Celia and Lourdes are separated, not only by the physical limits of the ocean isolating Cuba, and the ideology separating it from the United States, but also because they endorse different representations of Cuba and the USA, based on their experiences, values and beliefs. Celia, on the one hand, patrols the beach from her house at Santa Teresa del Mar, with her binoculars, trying to detect any sign of invasion²⁸ from the invisible enemy, the American aggressor (p. 4). Celia is also part of the justice system; she acts as a Civilian Judge since she has been elected to the People’s Court (p. 112). Lourdes, on the other hand, joins the local auxiliary police, patrolling the streets of Brooklyn at night, wearing a skintight uniform and a nightstick that makes her feel powerful and with authority (p. 136). She also sends her family pictures of pastries from her bakery in Brooklyn; “each glistening éclair is a grenade aimed at Celia’s political beliefs, each strawberry shortcake proof- in butter, cream, and eggs- of Lourdes’s success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba” (p. 117). Both examples illustrate how mother and daughter defend their ideals actively, what moves them poles apart from each other. Therefore, Lourdes and Celia constitute the two poles of a set of binaries, and are at the same time, mutually necessary. This scene shows that these women not only express their views openly, but

²⁸ This invasion refers to the incident at the Bay of Pigs, in which, eleven years before the narration (April 17th, 1961), Cuban exiles and the US government launched an attack on the southern part of the island. The plan was to invade Cuba, overthrow Fidel Castro and replace him with a non-communist government, friendly to the USA. In the scene, Celia listens to the radio where *el Líder*, encourages people to defend the country, because without their support and sacrifices “there can be no revolution” (p. 4).

also move to action. The fact that they both have taken patrolling positions guarding their homelands resembles the image of two armies, ready to fight a war.

In order to understand the effects of exile in the process of identity fragmentation of each female character, it is also necessary to explore their personal histories, which reveal the intrinsic causes of the rupture of the family. Celia stands as a defender of the revolution, the same regime that rapes one her daughters and expropriates their property. However, it is indispensable to explore Celia's reasons to endorse the revolution. Celia's letters to Gustavo, her lover, are the ones that provide an insight into her past, feelings and ideas. In a letter written in 1942, Celia refers to the Civil War that ended and how both of their countries, Cuba and Spain, are under dictatorships²⁹. In another letter written in 1945, Celia writes about borders and boundaries, stating that "to be locked within boundaries plotted by priests and politicians would be the only thing more intolerable", and that these tyrannical leaders carve up the world, steal their geography and determine their fates, because "to survive is an act of hope", not an act of will, all these statements referring to the situation experienced in Cuba under Batista's dictatorship (p. 99). However, Celia thinks that the positive aspect of living on an island is that "the tides rearrange the borders", what represents the illusion of change (p. 99). Since Celia experiences the despotism of dictatorship for many years, the revolution and the ideas promoted by Castro symbolize the possibility to fight that oppression. She does it actively, campaigning for the Orthodox Party, pasting up fliers and protesting in front of the palace.

Celia endorses the revolution idealistically. She remembers the gloomy letters she used to write to Gustavo before the revolution and reflects on the fact that after her husband's death, she devotes herself completely to the revolution, joining to everything *el Líder* needs or proposes: helping building nurseries, inoculating children, harvesting the sugar cane, protecting the shore from foreign invaders (pp. 111-112). Celia justifies herself by saying that she decides to make a difference in other people's lives because she feels part of "a great historical unfolding", and instead of swaying "endlessly in her wicker swing" getting old before her time or babysitting her grandchildren, waiting for death, she feels she is actually doing something for the community (p. 111). She feels

²⁹ Celia refers in this letter to the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who ruled over Cuba from 1940 to 1944, and from 1952 to 1959; and the dictatorship of Francisco Franco in Spain from 1936 to 1939 and from 1947 to his death in 1975.

that “so much of Cuba’s success will depend on what doesn’t exist, or exists only rarely. A spirit of generosity. commitments without strings” (p. 115). Celia believes, for instance, that the revolution will give her daughter Felicia a sense of purpose, the chance to be part in something larger than herself, what she calls “the greater social experiment in modern history” (p. 117).

An important image in the representation of the revolution is *el Líder* himself. Just as Trujillo commands every aspect of life in Dominica, *el Líder* also plays a significant role, especially for Celia and Felicia, as regards sexual domination and seduction. Felicia, for instance, wonders how he would be in bed, if he would remove his cap and boots, if he would leave his pistol on the table, if the guards would be waiting outside the door; she wonders about his hands, his mouth (p. 111). She recalls about women offering themselves to him, and the fact that he fathers many children on the island. Celia, for example, dresses up for her all-night vigils patrolling the beach, puts on red lipstick, and darkens the mole on her cheek, imagining that *el Líder* is watching her, “whispering in her ear with his warm cigar breath”, thinking that she would be glad to do whatever he asked her (p. 112). Thus, besides being the political-military head, *el Líder* plays his role of sexual, patriarchal leader in Celia’s life. On the one hand, he equates Gustavo in Celia’s mind. For her, the leader of the revolution is a young lawyer, idealistic and self-assured, just as Gustavo used to be³⁰. On the other hand, Felicia feels there is something unnatural about her mother’s worship and attraction to him, something sexual, since Celia keeps a framed photograph of him by her bed, where her husband’s photograph used to be (p. 110). These two standpoints demonstrate the seduction and attraction that *el Líder* generated and how women fantasized about him. They also describe another form of patriarchal possession exercised over women: He not only possessed their spirits, their wills, and their bodies but also their minds and fantasies.

For Lourdes, exile is associated with loss and violation. Loss refers to the miscarriage she has two months before her exile, when she is riding a horse and falls to

³⁰ This idea is presented in a letter Celia writes in 1953, about the “rebels who survived the attack on Moncada” (p. 163). This event refers to the 1953 assault to the Moncada Barracks, the military barracks in Santiago de Cuba, by Fidel and Raul Castro, and a small group of very young followers from the Orthodox Party. Although the assault was unsuccessful, this date, July 26th 1953, is considered the beginning of the Cuban revolution.

the ground, and also to the loss of her property. Upon her return home, after losing her baby, she sees two young soldiers pointing their guns at Rufino, she jumps out of the horse and stands in between the rifles and her husband as a sort of shield, shouting at the soldiers. The violation occurs after that incident, when Rufino is not at home, and the soldiers return, this time with an official order declaring their farm property of the revolutionary government (p. 70). Upon her resistance and fierce reaction against the soldiers, Lourdes is violently raped (p. 71). After being sexually abused and beaten, the soldier carves something intelligible on her belly, "crimson hieroglyphics" (p. 72). The rape not only damages her physically but also disrupts her psychologically. This abuse represents an attempt to silence and dominate her, and signals the beginning of her feelings of rejection and repulsion towards the revolution and by extension, to Cuba. For Lourdes, the revolutionary Cuba her mother embraces and protects symbolizes pain, suffering, loss, and physical abuse. These feelings create a sort of wall between she and Cuba, and consequently, between she and her mother. Her involvement in the patrolling of Brooklyn and her feeling of power and security also represent the need she has to be protected against her aggressors back home, as if she, wearing an uniform and a nightstick would be able to stand against the Cuban revolutionary soldiers as equals, and not in the inferiority of conditions caused by her gender.

Another important facet of exile is illustrated when Lourdes, Rufino and Pilar leave Miami and drive north in a second-hand car. Lourdes keeps on saying that she wants to leave in a cold place, and does not stop till they reach New York City. Lourdes relishes winter because, in her own words, "its layers protect her", by layers meaning the layers of clothes, scarves and gloves. The coolness of New York City stands in opposition to the warmth of Cuba and the lightness of clothes necessary to cope with it³¹. When Lourdes says that "she wants no part of Cuba, no part in its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all" and when she asserts that Cuba never "possessed her", she denotes that although physically raped, that Cuban soldier never possessed her, neither her soul nor her spirit. Thus, winter protects her

³¹ References to the coolness of New York versus the heat of Cuba are also made by Mujcinovic (2003) who points out that on the one hand, Lourdes embraces coldness as a protective barrier, as if the weather conditions would help her freeze the emotions and reduce the intensity of pain; and on the other hand, New York cold weather would symbolize the loneliness and frigidity of exilic condition and also, the absence of the pain and suffering Lourdes associates with home (p. 177).

from Cuban heat and from the horrors, lies and corruption she associates with her homeland.

Following the categorization provided by Mujcinovic (2003), the exilic experience of Lourdes represents the embrace of exilic absence as a comforting distance from the source of pain and trauma (p. 169). This means that exile stands for a safe space for Lourdes, where she alienates and protects herself from her past. Lourdes, then “is forced to experience a destruction of home and the space of exile in search of physical safety and psychic restoration”, a space where her own self becomes one again (Mujcinovic, 2003, p. 175).

In the case of Lourdes, the trauma experienced does not trigger the need to return to the homeland because home symbolizes violence, loss, disruption and abuse; home becomes a “site of danger”. Thus, exile not only provides Lourdes with distance, a defense mechanism, but also becomes a site for self-(re)invention and transformation. The rejection towards everything Cuba stands for determines the efforts Lourdes makes to assimilate and acculturate successfully into the dominant culture, exemplified by her attempts to become a successful businesswoman, and adopt the values of the dominant culture, such as independence, self-sufficiency, and economic autonomy. Her efforts to become part of society become evident particularly in her treatment and disregard for other minority groups, and her self-imposed position of superiority over them. Therefore, whereas Lourdes enjoys personal security and is able to acculturate successfully, her traumas, and her past are there, haunting her. Until she is able to re-negotiate and re-appropriate her past, her individuality remains fragmented.

For Lourdes, coming back to Cuba symbolizes the healing of physical and psychological traumas associated to the loss of her baby, her property and the profanation of her female body when raped. The psychological and physical wounds that originate in the rape are also increased by the disappointment she experiences with her country and with her mother’s (lack of) reaction. Lourdes is able to reconcile with her past through the examination and acceptance of the positive and negative memories, which enables her to abandon her amnesia and reconcile her fragmented self (Savory as cited in Esplin, 2005, p. 96). Reconciliation does not mean forgetting what happened; it means that Lourdes is able to return physically to a place that wounded her deeply in

several ways, and that she is able to negotiate between her Cuban heritage and past, and her American present.

The effects of exile on identity construction materialize in the nostalgia Pilar feels about Cuba, since from time to time she feels the irrepressible desire to “hijack a plane to Havana” (pp. 137-138). Her memory of the last day on the island portrays exile as a dislocating and fragmenting violent force which separates her against her will from her beloved grandmother:

I was sitting in my grandmother’s lap, playing with her drop pearl earrings, when my mom told her that we were leaving the country. *Abuela* Celia called her a traitor to the revolution. Mom tried to pull me away but I clung to *Abuela* and screamed to the top of my lungs. (p. 26)

Pilar feels helpless about this and blames for that “the politicians and generals who force events on us that structure our lives, that dictate the memories we’ll have when we’re old” (p. 138), demonstrating the futility of exile. The sensation that every day Cuba and her grandmother fade a little more inside her and that there’s only in her imagination where their history should be corresponds to the perception of exile as an imposed restraint to one’s own memory, history and identity (Ricoeur, 2004). Driven by that fear of her memories vanishing, and the image of her father kissing a woman so “huge and blond and puffy like a 1950s beauty queen” (p. 25), Pilar experiences an unsuccessful attempt to return to the island. This scene is truly disturbing for her, and she decides to go back to Cuba, take the money out of the bank and buy “a one-way bus ticket to Miami”, from there she thinks she can make her way to Cuba, “maybe rent a boat or get a fisherman” to take her (p. 26). Nevertheless, once in Florida she is caught and taken back to New York.

For Pilar, the limitations to return physically to the island, such as the isolation of Cuba and her mother’s rejection towards Cuba, impulse her to find alternative ways to return. Pilar travels to the island mentally, through the constant dreaming and the conversations with her *abuela*, and she does it spiritually, through her approximation to the *Santería*, a way of returning home, a link to the culture of the island. Pilar is attracted towards a shop on Park Avenue full of dried snakeskins, wooden saints and talismans, and while she was examining some necklaces, the owner of the shop calls her a daughter of *Changó*, and tells her “you must finish what you began”, what clearly illustrates the incompleteness in her life and the need to return to her roots. In order to

find answers, Pilar performs a ritual, *baños*, during nine days in an attempt to reconnect with the island (Castillo, 2005), period after which she decides to return to Cuba. Interestingly, the decision to return to Cuba is triggered by a cultural, religious component that is part of the identity of the island (Perera Pintado, 2005).

Last of all, Felicia is involved in the revolutionary movement as part of the guerrillas training in the mountains. However, it isn't Felicia's will to be there. She cannot remember why she is marching in the Sierra Maestra on a hot October afternoon (p. 105). For her, the revolution symbolizes hardship: camouflage helmets feeling like metal ring, the rifle hurting her shoulder, the Russian boots pinching her feet, the heat, and the rhythmic voice of Lieutenant Rojas urging her to keep moving (p. 105). Felicia does not share the enthusiasm of the rest when they shout "Fatherland or death!", or when they set their tents and eat the canned food (p. 106). Even when she is encouraged to give the revolution another try to find in it the commitment she lacks, Felicia does not identify herself with the fight, nor does she with the rest of the guerrilla. She is there because she almost kills herself and her son, and thinks everybody in that guerrilla is a group of social misfits, for example, a woman is turned in by her daughter because she insists in saying grace at the table. Teenagers are sent to hard labor because of listening to American jazz or wearing the hair too long and seminarians, for instance, are sent to the guerrillas because the church is considered reactionary against the regime. Homosexuals are imprisoned as well (pp. 108-109). In this context, the revolution works as a social force trying to modify people's ideas to make them fit into the model.

After her experience in the mountains, Felicia thinks *el Líder* is a tyrant. However, as explained above, she cannot avoid feeling an irresistible sexual attraction towards him, or towards his masculinity, power, and brutality. For Felicia, then, the revolution is just another scenery of her life, one that she does not understand, one into which she is forced, just like the mental hospital where she is sent after attacking her son: a place of reclusion, prohibition, and fragmentation.

3. MEMORY AND FEMALE IDENTITY (RE)CONSTRUCTION

“She [Reina] wonders if memory is little more than this: a series of erasures and perfected selections” (García, 1997, p.163).

“The way an individual can hold herself together in a healthy state while living a life of exile lies in examining the past, working through memory and the desire for reconciliation of old and new versions of the self” (Savory as cited in Esplin, 2005).

As Paolo Montesperelli points out in *Sociología de la Memoria* (2005, p. 7), memory is part of the individual's patrimony, and thus it constitutes part of the individual's identity. Therefore, the dislocation and fragmentation caused by exile not only disrupt and affect the individual's identity and self-representation, but also their memory and the representation of the homeland. Adding to this notion, Candau (2008) illustrates the dialogism between memory and identity:

La memoria nos labra y nosotros, por nuestra parte, la modelamos a ella. Esto resume perfectamente la dialéctica de la memoria y de la identidad, que se abrazan unas a otras, se fecundan mutuamente, se funden y refunden para producir una trayectoria de vida, una historia, un relato. (p. 13)

Certainly, in the novels of the corpus, the quest for identity is intimately related to memory, and vice versa, since identity construction occurs, precisely, in a context of disruption and fragmentation caused by exile. Trauma, loss, and feelings of confusion and unhomeliness characterize the different processes of identity (re)construction, in which the ethnic identity of the female characters is haunted by the memories of the past, distorted by the image of the Other and pressured by the need to assimilate successfully to the host culture.

Both novels are made up of the individual memories of the diverse female characters, which constitute their memory (Acosta Hess, 2001). It is the individual memory that recreates the image the female characters have of themselves and their homeland, and also provides the reader with a representation of the experience of exile, and a glimpse into the social history of the nation. As a consequence, the exploration and study of memory in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) is conducted in terms of its role in the (re)construction of female identity, considering that memory, like exile, cannot be addressed as a homogeneous characteristic common to all female migrant subjects.

3.1. Memory and Identity (Re)Construction in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

When analyzing the role of memory in the process of identity (re)construction in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992), two main aspects stand out. Firstly, the sisters' memories of the homeland are their childhood memories, and thus, their perception of the island is, until they return as grown-ups, a child's perspective, which denotes distance in time and in the quality of the memories recollected. Secondly, the stories that make up the novel are narrated backwards, resembling the way in which memory works (Nas, 2003, p. 130). From that moment when Yolanda returns to the island and experiences the guavas incident, onwards, the reader is exposed to fragments of the story about the sisters' lives back on the island, their unexpected exile, and their acculturation process. In this way, the whole narration works as the recollection of fragmented pieces of memories which, like snapshots, are glued together creating "a (re) collection of memories, an assemblage of stories" (Yitah, 2003, p. 234). Memory and identity, both fragmented and dislocated, are involved in a dialogical relationship, in which they inform and nurture each other building the path to the (re)construction of female identity (Candau, 2008; Montesperelli, 2007; Ricoeur, 2004). And like female identity, the memory of the female characters is an instance of hybridity; the result of the synthesis and selection of individual memories, a constant (re)interpretation of the past and a representation of social history.

Based on this dialogism and reciprocity between memory and identity, and the description of the novel as a fragmented narrative made out of pieces of the sisters' lives, it is possible to argue that each particular story constitutes one of the sisters' memories. Thus, the selection of memories provides the reader with different perspectives about the sisters, their personal histories and an insight into the path towards the (re)construction of their identity. These memories also create a window into the history of the country of origin, the Dominican Republic, the dictatorship, and exile. As such, the selection of memories by the female characters constitutes part of their individuality (Ricoeur, 2004). Memory, then, functions as a tool to reorganize their fragmented selves and become one again, given that it works as a generator of identity (Ricoeur, 2004). Each of the chapters in the novel constitutes the girls' chosen, either

consciously or unconsciously, piece of memory to add to the quilt of their lives, and their contribution to the story of the family and to the (re)construction of their identities.

The first of these personal narratives, chronologically speaking, is Yolanda's. In "The Drum", she tells about a present she got from her grandmother after a trip to the USA: a drum. In this story, Yolanda recalls about a promise *mamita* had made to her: If Yoyo behaved herself, one day, her grandmother would take her from the island to the United States on an airplane to see Schwartz (the magic store where she had bought the drum) and snow (p. 277). The significance of this moment is seen later in the story in the similar meaning assigned by several characters to snow and the United States as a magical place. In another fragment of this story, Yolanda also narrates that having lost a drum stick and being unable to play it, she pursues the adventure of going to the coal sheds, known to be haunted by a Haitian maid, Pila. In the coal shed, Yoyo finds a couple of kittens but no mother cat, animal from which she had heard horror stories about a mother cat scratching out the eyes of someone who had threatened her babies. At that moment, she meets a man with a dog and a gun, who tells her that the kittens belong to its mother and no one else, and that pets should be old enough to survive without their mother. Yolanda, of course, doesn't pay attention to him, gets a kitten to herself and names her Schwartz, after the toy store. One day, she decides to take the cat and hides her inside her drum to avoid being seen by the mother cat, which meows calling its name (p. 287). That night, Yoyo wakes up with a bad dream, when she sees the black cat, with fluorescent eyes, glaring at her. After that night, she dreams about the same every night, for years (p. 289). In Yolanda's narrative, the cat disappears when they move to the States, where she sees the snow, goes to school, reads books and, in order to fill the hollow of her story, starts to write the story of Pila, the story of her grandmother. But even when she grows up, she can still hear the cat haunting her (p. 289-90). There are two important aspects in this story. One of them is the mother cat, that represents not just a mother dispossessed of her kittens, but her motherland, the Dominican Republic, deprived of her children. Instead of being haunted by the motherland, Yolanda is haunted by its symbolic representation, the mother cat. The other one is that the fact that Yolanda decides to become a writer to tell the stories of her past and childhood, means that in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992),

the one that carries the voice and takes the responsibility of remembering is, precisely, Yolanda.

The following stories narrated by Yolanda depict the most important memories she had about the island and her acculturation into the USA. In "The Human Body", Yoyo tells about her childhood experiences illustrating her life on the island. One of the images Yolanda chooses to perpetuate by telling this story is the one of the guavas, particularly the guavas orchard that her aunt Mimi had planted and that she had to cross in order to access her grandparents' house. The guavas are also part of her games and adventures with her cousin Mundín, with whom Yoyo breaks her aunt's crystal-ball garden decoration when trying to knock down some guavas (p. 226). In this story, Yoyo also depicts dictatorship through the eyes of children. She remembers about the violence around them through Westerns, the guards' raids and the disappearance of her relatives, the beginning of her grandpa's post in the UN, and last but not least, the education of her aunt Mimi in the US and the growing amount of books in English that started to populate the house. This last detail plays a significant role in the development of Yolanda and also in the (re)construction of her identity since these first excursions into a book of stories in English she could barely read gradually end up in her interest in "those dark, dense paragraphs of print" (p. 232). This section foreshadows Yolanda's future interest in language, literature, and in writing, which will become her instrument to protect the family's memories.

As it has been stated beforehand, each of the memories recalled by the sisters offers a snapshot of the island, their arrival and survival in the US and their quest for identity as adults. One of Carla's memories is related to the return of Carlos from a trip to New York and the promise to give them a surprise after dinner. Carla, like Yoyo, thinks it is snow, because their mother had promised they would see it someday. She remembers that her father always surprised them with wonderful presents from Schwartz. This time they got mechanical banks with different figures to start saving money. Two relevant aspects stand out from Carla's memory. One of them is the recurrent symbols of snow and New York as paradises of magic and wonders where dreams become true; the other is the amazement of the maids, Gladys and Nivea, when they see the presents. Gladys, a country girl, dreams about going to New York and becoming a successful singer. She has an altar with different saints and a postcard with

“a powerful American virgin”, the image of “a robed woman with a sharp star for a halo and a torch in her upraised hand” (p. 260). Clearly, the maid thinks a photo of the Statue of Liberty represents the image of a powerful saint to whom she prays every night. In this context, both New York and the Statue of Liberty work as representations of the American Dream, standing for the hope and faith this maid had to become successful in the North. The myth of the American Dream is also illustrated in her depiction of the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of freedom, opportunity and enlightenment throughout the world, as a virgin, a source of hope. Besides, Nivea, who had been nicknamed after the “American face cream that her mother used to rub on her, hoping the milky white applications would lighten her baby’s black skin”, hurries her sign of the cross and kisses her crucifix each time she talks about New York, always remarking how lucky the girls are (p. 260). Nivea exemplifies the concern over the lightness of skin and the awareness about white privilege and dominance. The fascination experienced by the girls listening to their father’s stories about “taxis and snowstorms (...) and the Christmas decorations on the streets” (p. 262), and by the maids as well, embodies the mental representation of the United States as a magnificent place, the land of wonder, opportunity and happiness, symbolized by the Statue of Liberty, snow and the breathtaking presents their father brought after each trip.

Sandi’s memories provide an insight into her identity and the traumas that affect her throughout her life. She recalls about *Doña Charito*, a cultured German who had a Hansel and Gretel house where she was sent when she was 8 years old, together with 13 of her cousins, for her first art lesson (p. 241). For her, that moment represents an epiphany in her life, a moment that single her out of the commonness and anonymous existence as one of the García girls, because the crayons and the tablets of paper make her unique, gifted, capable of “capturing likeness” (p. 241). However, her expectations are constrained by the delay of the lesson and the high amount of protocol that repress her artistic will. After defying *Doña Charito* by painting a gold, bruised-colored cat and being sent out of the house, Sandi has an accident (when she is spying into Don José’s workshed and breaks a giant figure) and fractures her arm. That incident changes her, and affects her deeply; she is turned inward, and when the world fills her, she is unable to draw it out, her hand has lost its art (p. 254). This memory represents the constraining nature applied to art in the traditional island, and how expression and voice

are silenced and hampered by the old rules of teaching. From the beginning of the story, Sandra's artistic talent is constrained by her family since it is attributed curing or malevolent powers; and at the same time, indirectly, she is shown that art won't make her stand out. Just as Yolanda's voice is repressed when she is prevented from delivering her Teachers' Day speech, and is forced to change it into a politically-correct speech, Sandra's ability and inspiration are restrained. At the end of this scene, and to her astonishment, Sandi sees an image of the virgin at the Cathedral, and realizes it is the same image she saw in *Don José's* workshed. To her surprise, the face of the virgin resembles her own face:

I put my hand in my own face to make sure it was mine. My cheek had the curve of her cheek; my brows arched like her brows, my eyes had been as wide as hers, staring up at the little man as he knocked on the window of his work-shed. (p. 255)

This last image implies that by identifying herself with the image of the Virgin Mary, Sandi is able to regain her lost sense of uniqueness.

Unlike her sisters, Fifi's memory, being the youngest, is affected not only by the rupture of exile but also by her youth when leaving the island. In this case, time, besides spatial dislocation, hinders her memories. She says she is the only one who doesn't remember anything about the last day on the island and, as a result, Fifi reconstructs that last day through her sisters' stories (p. 217). However, there is one thing she does remember: Chucha and her farewell voodoo ritual. This only memory from the last day on the island illustrates the fact that exile has traumatic effects on memory preservation and identity (re)construction, since Fifi is unable to remember what happened and how she felt, though she remembers particular details about Chucha's ritual. It also shows how, either consciously or unconsciously, certain memories are privileged over others. Fifi's reaction towards exile and its hurtful memories becomes a sort of amnesia or "self-mutilation" that helps her deal with the past (West as cited in Esplin, 2005, p. 83). In this way, memory's limitations and errors represent the potential opportunity to re-read the past and construct a new, hybrid, present representation of the past.

Another aspect of memory in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) is associated to the figure of the storyteller and the omniscience of the narrator. Usually, the narrator has the license to tell their own version of the story, one that is not

questioned. In the novel, Laura García plays the role of storyteller. According to the girls, she “had a favorite story she liked to tell about each one as a way of celebrating that daughter on special occasions” (p. 42). Although she has a story for everyone, like the story of the red sneakers about Carla and the anecdote of the poem when Yolanda got lost at New York’s metro, she doesn’t tell her favorite story about Sandi anymore since she, Laura, “would like to forget the past”, only a small part of the recent past (p. 50). This idea is also related to the notion of amnesia as a way to escape the hurtful memories of the past (West as cited in Esplin, 2005), and it also refers to the fact that memory is an instrument to (re)interpret the past, and as such it is a selective tool that allows the female characters to select only those fragments of the past that are not harmful, while forgetting or deleting those that cannot be reconciled or negotiated (Ricoeur, 2004). The last time Laura tells Sandi’s story is not precisely in a celebration but in Dr. Tandlemann’s office at Mount Hope mental hospital. Sandi has had a breakdown, which consists basically in her belief that she is becoming a monkey, losing her humanity and descending into the evolution scale. In order to keep her humanity, Sandi firmly believes has to read all great works of mankind; in this way “maybe she’d remember something important from having been human” (p. 54). Reading, particularly canonical works written by the great thinkers is, in her view, the only way to remain human, idea that illustrates the association of writing and books with history and remembering. Given that what is written can be remembered; it is out of the universal experience of writers that Sandi finds the meaning to become human again. After that traumatic experience, Sandi just wants to forget the past (p. 60).

As a storyteller, Laura regains authority and becomes the center of attention, status also cultivated by her age and the image of wisdom and respect she emits. Back at the hospital where her granddaughter (Fifi’s daughter) has been born, Laura starts talking to a young man who is looking at a baby in a neighboring cradle, and chooses him as her audience to tell her story, starting with the phrase “good bulls sire cows” (p. 57). The young man listens to “the old woman’s story” about the birth of her youngest daughter, Fifi, Carlos’s disappointment at having four girls, the robbery they undergo that very night, Fifi’s personality and how she meets Otto (pp. 58-59). Laura speaks out of the wisdom and experience she is endowed by being a mother of four girls, and an “old woman”, as the young man calls her. Age and gender provide her with the

authority, and the linguistic tools, to tell the story, given that very time she starts talking “everyone listens to the mother” (p. 67). Through storytelling Laura is able to preserve her own family’s history. And through the oral tradition, Laura contributes to the preservation of individual and collective histories, and thus memory (Cixous, 1976, Gómez et al., 1983).

Related to Laura’s storytelling is the idea that memory, an instrument to interpret the past, the present, and to shape the future, presents limitations and potential errors, which represent the opportunity to reread the past, (re)interpret oneself and (re)construct identity (Candau, 2008; Ricoeur, 2004). The girls laugh about the different versions of their stories that Laura loves telling to strangers: “In *mami*’s version of the story, you met in Perú” and you “fell in love at first sight”, says Sandra to Fifi, even when Fifi swears they have never been to Perú, and that they actually met in Colombia (p. 63). The girls know that their mother alters the stories: “I’ve heard so many versions of that story, Sandi says, I don’t know which one is true anymore” (p. 62), and that this is part of the magic of storytelling. Even the protagonist, Fifi, acknowledges the fact that sometimes it is difficult to remember how, when or why things happened, and one gets used to a version of it, even if that’s not the right one, and keeps it as a memory. She tells the girls that “Otto says we probably met in a New Jersey Greyhound Station, but we’ve heard all those exciting stories about how we met in Brazil or Colombia or Perú that we got to believing them” (p. 63). The mother alters the stories to add a sparkle, a spicy element, making the story similar to those in romantic *telenovelas* or soap operas where the protagonists live happily ever after. These alterations and plot changes reveal that Laura, just like Fifi or Sandi, wants to forget the past and re-interpret it (Candau, 2008; Ricoeur, 2004). Laura’s retelling her daughters’ stories is the result of the selection of painful memories from the past, the revisiting and negotiation of those memories, and their creative transformation into a colorful, hybrid, tale. Thus, the memories of the female characters, like their identity, are hybrid selections, re-creations, and re-appropriations of their past.

Although the girls know that their mother’s versions of the stories she tells are incomplete and fictional, they, in particular Fifi, like her mother’s versions. In Fifi’s view, Laura’s story helps forgetting the arguments with her father; it works as a healing tool and a reconciliation element. Laura’s storytelling serves her as a tool to deal with a

painful past and to create new memories out of fragmented pieces, some of which are them positive and happy, while others are negative and hurtful. Out of these fragmented memories, Laura (re)constructs her family's memory creating a pastiche, a hybrid recollection, selection and assemblage of stories, attributing to certain events the meaning she likes; revisiting, re-reading and re-appropriating, in this way, the past.

3.2. Memory and Identity (Re)Construction in *Dreaming in Cuban*

In *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), the female characters attribute different interpretations to memory, depending on their past experiences and traumas, in order to (re)construct their identities. These references to memory are also based on the generational differences between the diverse groups of exiles and the strategies they develop to cope with exile and acculturation, illustrating once more the connection between exile, memory and identity (re)construction. In relation to this, West proposes three types of actions the exiled adopts to deal with the ostracized position: amnesia, nostalgia, and cultural translation (as cited in Esplin, 2005, p. 83). Whereas West suggests that nostalgia, amnesia and cultural translations have negative effects and that the Cuban exile is able to construct a healthy relationship between her Cuban past and her American present, Esplin claims that such a healing occurs by revisiting the past, through the return to Cuba in search of both positive and negative meanings (2005, p. 84).

As regards amnesia, an amnesic memory becomes an instrument to cope with exile whether by becoming amnesic or being erased by the amnesia of others (Esplin, 2005, p. 89). Usually, it is the first generation which is worried about being forgotten in the future rather than forgetting about the past. In *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), for instance, Celia wants Pilar to read her letters so Pilar will be able to remember, revealing at this point the final purpose of the unsent letters to her lover Gustavo. Lourdes, instead, chooses to forget what hurts her and she does not experience feelings of nostalgia as her husband does. Rather, she chooses to retell her own versions of history and to rewrite the story of her life (Candau, 2008; Ricoeur, 2004). The hardship of reconciling with the past, in the case of Lourdes, refers, specifically, to the rape she experiences in the hands of a revolutionary soldier. In her mind, then, rape and Cuba

become synonyms, idea which she also associates to the revolution and her mother. In order to (re)construct her fragmented identity, Lourdes has to reconcile with the past; and the past includes restoring her relationship with her mother, home and herself. This amnesic state, therefore, presents negative effects for exiles since it resembles a sort of emptying out of memory and thus, identity. In Candau's words (2008), memory and identity are often seen as one undividable whole where it is impossible to distinguish which one comes first and which ones informs the other. Because of this dialogic relationship, amnesia, then, has to be reverted in order to achieve the reconciliation with the past that heals the wounds and contributes to the (re)construction of identity.

Whereas amnesia works as a sort of self-mutilation that "spill[s] over or burst[s]" spraying about the pieces of the fragmented self, and cultural translation "quivers between panic and a kind of hunger that devours itself in mirages", nostalgia produces in the exile an "endless state of grief" (West as cited in Esplin, 2005, p. 83). Pilar, who belongs to the generation which tries to heal their wounds and fragmented nature by remembering and by returning home to rediscover herself, "shift[s] from a portrayal of memories in Cuba to a depiction of the alterations in memory caused by the Cuban revolution and the Cuban diaspora" (Esplin, 2005, p. 91). Pilar's memories of Cuba are influenced by her life in the USA and her family's memories. West suggests that in order to conquer the depression and fragmentation of exile, the subject should invent a "fictitious Cuba from the remnant and pieces of their memories" (in Esplin, 2005, p. 83). While Cuba and *abuela* Celia are gradually fading inside her, Pilar realizes it is only in her imagination where their history should exist (p. 138). This last concept, imagination, relates directly to the idea developed by Ricoeur, who suggests that memory belongs to one region of imagination, the imagination of anterior reality. It is her imagination, through dreaming, that prevents her fading memories from disappearing.

Finally, cultural translation represents the idea of transplanting the home culture into the new world, living as if on the island and is also closely connected with nostalgia. A nostalgic cultural transplantation is manifested by Rufino Puente and Carlos García. According to Pilar, "Dad only looks alive when he talks about the past, about Cuba", meaning he feeds himself from past memories so as to endure a displaced present in a foreign land. This cultural transplantation occurs in everyday

actions and habits these men share and perpetuate, like their insistence in speaking Spanish, reading newspapers in Spanish and wearing Panama hats, trying to live their life as if they were still at home.

It is important to notice that it is Pilar the one who constantly reflects on the importance of the past. Just like Yolanda in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) is the writer, the one who retells the forgotten stories of unseen and voiceless women, and becomes the one who carries the voice and the responsibility of remembering, in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), the one in charge of “remembering” (in *Abuela* Celia’s words) is precisely Pilar. In this context, memory is approached from the individual and collective perspective, from its connection with imagination, and from the question of who remembers, what is remembered and how (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 13). Pilar contemplates (the distortion and/or omissions of) history when she recalls the stories told by her father: “he told me stories about Cuba after Columbus came. He said that the Spaniards wiped out more Indians with smallpox than with muskets” (p. 28). Pilar questions, in this way, what is remembered and how, and what is recorded and transmitted by history, contrasting in this way a collective versus an individual approach to memory:

If it were up to me, I’d record other things. Like the time there was a freak hailstorm in the Congo and the women took it as a sign that they should rule. Or the life stories of prostitutes in Bombay. Why don’t I know anything about them? Who chooses what we should know or what’s important? I know I have to design these things for myself. Most of what I’ve learned that’s important I’ve learned on my own, or from my grandmother. (p. 28)

This reflection illustrates the power of history in telling a version of the story, in which the dichotomy between white versus minority materializes. In the feminist criticism section, Gómez et al. (1983) argue that the volumes of anthologies of literature, both American and Latin American, did not contain a single name or line by a Latina writer speaking accurately about their experiences and remark the need of a literature that could testify about their lives. Thus “the truths” of the dominant society are transmitted and immortalized while other stories, the views and experiences of the Others, in this case the narratives and stories of women from diverse countries, different ethnicities, cultures, traditions and beliefs, are simple omitted and consequently forgotten. Similarly, Yolanda in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) wants to write about Pila (a Haitian maid), and about the story of her grandmother, that is, the stories

of women who have been silenced. In relation to this, O'Reilly Herrera (1997) refers to the traditional ahistorical role of women and the silencing of their voices throughout history due to the patriarchal dominant status of history. The author states that *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) presents the parallel between fictional characters in a domestic world and the historical events which affected their lives during the Cuban revolution and its results, and in this way, Cristina García is able to provide women with voices and history by letting them tell their stories.

Other instances of Pilar's reflections over the role of history are present in her assessment of historical misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Once back in Cuba, Pilar seems bewitched by the images she sees around her in the streets, the women on *Calle Madrid*, the cars, and she feels they are back in time like living in a Cuban version of an earlier America. At this point, she recalls about an American yacht *el Líder* took from Mexico to Cuba in 1956 in his second attempt to overthrow Batista, named *Granma*, and how the name was misspelled as Grandma, originating a myth, the name of a province and the launching of a Communist newspaper (p. 220). It is here when Pilar realizes the connection between identity, memory and the past: "we're all tied to the past like flukes" (p. 220). Memory, consequently, becomes a constitutive element in the processes of identity transformation and (re)construction and in the representation of female identity.

Accordingly, the idea of distorting the past is illustrated in Lourdes, who in Pilar's view "systematically rewrites history to suit her views of the world" (p. 176). Lourdes, then, reshapes events differently every day, not as a matter of premeditation, but actually believing that her version of those events is correct. In Pilar's words, her mother looks at the world with distorting lenses, what makes her "see only what she wants to see instead of what's really there" (p. 176). An example is her appreciation of Mr. Paresi as the "number-one criminal defense attorney in New York" whereas he defends many mafia leaders, only because he is a good client of the bakery. Nevertheless, Pilar acknowledges that her mom's "embellishments and half-truths usually equip her to tell a good story" (p. 176) and that maybe in the end "the facts are not as important as the underlying truths she wants to convey" (p. 177). For Lourdes, the fact that telling her own truth is *the* truth represents the idea of memory as an instrument to create individual and collective meanings. By interpreting the past, it is

possible to give meaning to the present and shape the future, giving the past a meaning that coincides with the present needs of the subject (Montesperelli, 2005).

Similarly, Pilar asks *abuela* Celia how she would like to be remembered because Pilar can paint her the way she likes. In this context, Pilar illustrates the power to manipulate and distort history and our own personal stories through the written, oral or artistic representation and re-creation of social history, for example, through books telling stories; through the art of storytelling or simply through painting. The idea of “painting her the way she likes” exemplifies the possibility of distorting and manipulating the images of the past and creating new versions or interpretations revisited, and influenced by our own personal backgrounds and ideologies. Just like Lourdes retells the story to suit her ideals and interests, Pilar is able to alter history by painting a distorted image of her grandma.

Furthermore, the need to be remembered and fight against forgetting is also illustrated in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993). Although Celia’s letters remain unsent, Celia reveals that Pilar will read the letters and she will remember: “women who outlive their daughters are orphans, (...). Only their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the first fire” (p. 222). Celia’s letters not only serve to retell her life story, but also they make Celia immortal. In other words, Celia comes to life every time her story is read and retold. She realizes that she has lived only out of her memories and that her past is eclipsing her present, idea which represents the role of the past in attributing meaning to the present (Montesperelli, 2005). Celia, just like Cuba, became a home-exile, isolated and living out of memories in a world that no longer exists. Solitude, she realizes “exists for us not to remember but to forget” (p. 92). In one of the letters she wrote to Gustavo, Celia stated that “memory is a skilled seducer”, meaning that she feels tempted to live out of her happy memories and accept the present as it is because relief is found in the memories of the past (p. 97).

Last but not least, Felicia struggles to remember her past and to get out of the amnesia that has hindered her life. Her memory, like her identity, is fragmented; and she tries to “assemble bits and pieces of her past” (p. 154). These broken, disconnected pieces are “stack up in her mind, soggly, arbitrarily, and she sorts through them like cherished belongings after a flood” (p. 154). But even when she “charts sequences and events with colored pencils shuffling her diagrams until they start to make sense, a

possible narrative”, the people remain nameless and faceless. Felicia’s fragmented memory is the result of those events she wants to forget about her past, like when she attempted suicide or when she pushed her husband Otto from the roller coaster. Amnesia constitutes a safe place for her mind, but her identity would never be complete and (re)constructed until she is able to remember and accept the negative and the positive aspects of her past (Esplin, 2005).

The connection between memory and imagination, developed by Ricoeur (2004) and present in Pilar’s and Celia’s narratives, is also portrayed in Felicia’s tale, when she points out to her son Ivanito that “imagination, like memory, can transform lies to truths” (p. 88). It is Ivanito who in the first section of “Baskets of Waters” recalls about memory, and particularly his experience learning Russian, the only foreign language students were allowed to learn at school. The words of his teacher, Mr. Mikoyan, “the most civilized countries are the coldest ones” and that “too much heat addles the brain”, made him feel he was meant to live in a colder world, “a world that preserved history” because in Cuba, “everything seemed temporal, distorted by the sun” (p. 146). This idea reveals the dichotomy between Cuba and the United States in terms of ideology, and also the heat-coldness metaphor developed by Lourdes, who wanting to escape the heat of Cuba (and everything it represented), moved north and north till she found the exact degree of coldness she needed to become amnesic.

The connection between memory and imagination as central components in the (re)construction of female identity highlight the hybrid nature of the female characters’ memory, and as an extension, of the representation of their social memory. Through the fictional histories of the female characters and their individual memories, it is possible to recreate and (re)construct the social history of Cuba, and the diverse voices, and perspectives that constitute it. Memory is not constituted of *pure*, unbiased, perfectly selected pieces of the past that remained immutably stored. On the contrary, like identity, memory transforms and (re)constructs itself. Memory, thus, is a hybrid and creative selection and negotiation of the past, influenced by imagination, time and context.

4. FEMALE IDENTITY (RE)CONSTRUCTION, LANGUAGE AND THE FEMALE BODY

I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one.
Don't write in English, they said, English is
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.

Extract of "An Introduction" by Kamala Das, 1965. Retrieved from
<http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/kamala-das/an-introduction-2/>

One of the central issues related to the (re)construction of female identity is the materialization of that identity, that is to say, the different means through which identity develops, emerges and becomes the expression of the self, a representation of belonging and voice. In the novels of the corpus, the female characters are displaced and fragmented by exile, and so is their identity. The female characters are vulnerable because they need to "forge an assimilated dual identity on the journey to a self-determined adulthood, an identity that both melds and celebrates cultural and linguistic elements from the Old World and the New" (Castells, 2001, p. 34). That is, the clash of cultures creates in the female characters a third element that results from the bridge between the identity of destination and that of origin, a hybrid identity, and thus, a hybrid language (Anzaldúa, 1987; García Canclini, 2001). In order to (re)construct it, the female characters resort to diverse means of expression, reflecting their experiences and traumas. Among these means, the use of language and the female body emerge as the most important.

4.1. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*: A Linguistic Identity

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992), the (re)construction of identity and the coming to terms with the past relate distinctively with language. The relevance attributed to language is present in the title of the novel in the words *accents* and *loss* (Acosta Hess, 2001; Luis, 2000). Whereas the word *accents* represents

Dominican culture and identity, the word *lost* refers to the ongoing loss of that heritage. The idea of losing part of their culture also implies the presence of a new accent and thus, their gradual transformation into new, hybrid subjects (García Canclini, 2001). The role of language in the (re)construction of female identity is illustrated by the initial experiences with language that affect the girls' assimilation processes, and the appropriation of English as the medium to express themselves. Each member of the García family shows different attitudes towards language and attributes diverse meanings to it, based on their personal experiences and backgrounds. As a result, language cannot be analyzed as a homogeneous experience but as an individual, unique component of female identity.

Viewing language as a central part of identity, not only a means of communication but also a means of cultural construction (Chambers as cited in Foresto and Engert, 2006, p. 93), it emerges as a crucial problematic element in the identity (re)construction process and in the expression of voice. Barak (1998) resorts to Bakhtin's theory to illustrate the relationship between language and identity, stating that language, in Bakhtin's view, lies on the borderline between self and other, and that it is on this borderline that Álvarez situates the female characters in the novel. Barak (1998) adds that in order to untie the complications experienced by the girls to adapt and assimilate to the new world, and to bridge the gap between the bilingual, immigrant family and monolingual mainstream society:

Álvarez spins a narrative that spirals from the outside in, whirling backward through the García's lives, highlighting in this spiral movement the centripetal and centrifugal forces which pull them toward and away from their island home, toward and away from the US, toward and away from an integrated adulthood. (p. 160)

Considering that language is a distinctive element of ethnic identity and that ethnicity determines the privileges of the dominant group over the privileges of the minority group; language certainly becomes an element that influences social positioning (Sarup, 1993). The initial clash of cultures experienced by the García girls is, therefore, connected to language, and it definitely has a vital role in the development of their relationships and in the processes of identity (re)construction. The collision of cultures causes fragmentation, dislocation and a sense of loss, which is evidenced through language crises, their linguistic alienation and the gradual loss of their accents

(Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989). As a consequence of the clash of cultures, language embodies the struggle between the old world (Spanish/the motherland) and the new world (English/dominant culture). The fragmentation caused by being caught between their native language, which initially they don't want to lose, and the new language, which they require to fit in the social sphere, affects how they see themselves, and thus, how their hyphenated identity is (re)constructed. Learning a new language implies, in the girls' view, the erasure of their accents and the loss of their heritage in the process.

One of the first fragmenting and hyphenating events fostered by exile is related to this initial clash of cultures and languages, in which the García girls are linguistically alienated and marginalized since they do not master the language of the dominant monoglossic culture, which is imposed (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989). In this context, language plays two central roles. It is a tool for integration into mainstream society, and at the same time, it becomes a barrier for integration. Language determines who fits into the social world and who doesn't in a sort of hierarchical power perpetuation which illustrates the tension between the powerful center (and its dominant language) and the unprivileged peripheries (with their fading mother languages) (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989).

Carla, Sandra and Yolanda are deeply disturbed by upsetting incidents related to language and ethnicity, particularly to their accents, that characterized their introduction to the dominant culture. Carla, for instance, feels homesick on her first anniversary on American soil. She feels "she would never get the hang of this new country" (p. 151), particularly because of the language barrier. For Carla, language, like the "No trespassing" sign, has the power to exclude and isolate. Every day at school, she is victim of bullying; "a gang of boys chased after her, calling her names, some of which she had heard before from the old lady neighbor in the apartment they had rented in the city" (p. 153). The boys pelted her with stones and shouted at her: "Go back to where you came from, you dirty spic!" (p. 153). As Carla says, "the girl she had been back home in Spanish is shed", and thus, her identity is hyphenated and distorted. She also feels that those ugly words and insults are as powerful as spells; and that because of her ethnicity, her language, and her changing body, no one would ever love her.

Besides feeling excluded by her language impairment and her accent, Carla's limited language ability hinders her adaptation into American society and the communication with the authorities, such as teachers and the police. The incident in which she is approached by a pervert, who follows her after school and masturbates in front of her, certainly increases her feeling of unhomeliness and exclusion. Her limited English vocabulary and the fact that she is learning English in a Catholic school make it very hard for her to describe exactly what happened. After the incident, the chasings and the bullying end, maybe because her school mates look for another victim, "someone too fat, too ugly, too poor, too different" (p. 164), an Other. Nevertheless, the boys in the gang trespass in her dreams, urging her to go back. Her Spanish accent and her limited language ability work not only as an obstacle for integration but also as an element for alienation that categorizes her as the Other, influencing negatively her process of identity (re)construction by homogenizing and over-simplifying elements like race, ethnicity, and class (Mato, 2003).

Likewise Carla, Sandra recalls being approached by their neighbor who shouts at them: "Spics! Go back to where you came from!" (p. 171). *La Bruja*, as they call the old woman in the apartment below, has been complaining to Alfredo, the Puerto Rican manager, on daily basis since the family has arrived, asking that they should be evicted because "their food smelled. They spoke too loudly and not in English. The kids sounded like a herd of wild burros" (p. 170). Language, and ethnicity, situate the García family in the periphery, and tag them as the Other.

Sandra thinks, for instance, that *mami* is the leader of the family in the States given that she has gone to school there and speaks English without a heavy accent. Once, for example, Laura has to repeat an address for the taxi driver because the man cannot understand *papi*'s accent (p. 174). Similarly, after living in the country for ten years and learning the language as a native, Yolanda perceives how the professor treats her differently and how different her last name sounds:

He called roll, acknowledging most of the other students with nicknames and jokes and remarks, stumbling over my name and smiling falsely at me, a smile I had identified as one flashed on foreign students to show them the natives were friendly. I felt profoundly out of place. (p. 88)

The fact that Yolanda identifies herself with Rudolf Brodermann Elmenhurst, the third, just because he also has an odd name, and sounds alien and exotic, highlights the

relevance names have in defining one's identity as well as the ethnicity-based hierarchy operating in society, which positions her as the Other (Staszak, 2008). Accent, like language, lies at the center of the scene. In *Massacre of the Dreamers* (1995), Ana Castillo addresses the conflict faced by Latinas regarding language choice: whereas Spanish is the language of childhood, family and personal history, English is the language of education and the dominant society (p. 39). Castillo (1995) also points out that assimilation into the mainstream culture, characterized by the social denigration of the mother tongue, may not be able to get rid of the accent, which will remain as a link to the roots forever (1995, p. 39). Accent, thus, becomes a constitutive element, which characterizes the process of identity (re)construction as the representation of difference (Mato, 2003).

Opposite to the experiences of their daughters, Laura García attributes a positive meaning to language: the medium to adapt to the new world. For her, language does not represent a barrier but the vehicle to integrate. Laura embraces the idea of integration: she reads the New York Times instead of newspapers in Spanish and she encourages her daughters to speak in English. Her motto that "when in Rome, do unto the Romans" (p. 135), reflects the idea that integration comes not only from speaking the language of the dominant culture but also through the adoption of the dominant culture's values, traditions, and the mimicking of their behavior. However, though Laura's attitude is positive, she cannot get rid of her own accent. Even though her English is described as quite fluent (as a result of her education in the US), it is presented as "a mishmash of mixed up idioms and sayings" (p. 135). Laura resorts to some expressions, typical from the island, like "no Moors on the coast" (p. 86), "with patience and calm, even a burro can climb a palm" (p. 138) or "there's no use trying to drink split milk" (p. 140) when trying to communicate in English. The constant use of Spanish idiomatic expressions adapted to English symbolizes her desires to adapt and form part of the dominant culture, at the same time that evinces the strong presence of her background and her culture. Certainly, the girls are more vulnerable and affected by language change than their parents. Whereas Laura and Carlos need to survive in the new world, the girls are caught in a critical period of their lives, affected not only by the clash of cultures but also by peer pressure and the need to fit in. Language, despite its alienating and exclusive features, is the tool for integration and a successful life.

The development of linguistic ability is represented in the novel by the appropriation of English as a means of expression and communication, embodied by Yolanda, who struggles to achieve control over the new language when she is chosen to deliver the Teacher's Day address at the school assembly. Cixous (1976), for instance, makes reference to the torment speaking up represents for women, characterized by the loss of words, the feelings of nervousness, the slipping away of language. Speaking up represents a transgression to the social rules and expectations and, at the same time, it epitomizes a double distress since the transgression often falls upon "the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine" (Cixous, pp. 880-881). Yolanda battles to make the words come together with meaning, until one night, "at last, she started to write, recklessly, when she was done, she read over her words, and her eyes filled. She finally sounded like herself in English!" (p. 143). Nevertheless, Yolanda is urged to modify the speech, given that in her father's view her words sound offensive. The modification of that speech represents the first instance of the silencing of her voice, an instance of verbal repression which affects the (re)construction of her identity; she is suppressed and stunned into silence by the need to conform to the rules and traditions of the dominant culture and by her condition the Other. Matching Cixous's idea, it is precisely her father, the "deaf male ear" the one who silences her; may be out of common sense, realizing that because of their condition as foreigners they have to show some respect.

The next aspect of language development, which shows its importance in the quest for identity and the (re)construction of a fragmented being is illustrated by the role attached to names and nicknames. Yolanda, for instance, finds pleasure when her name is pronounced in Spanish, what reflects in a nostalgic mood her desire to retain her heritage. When her mother pronounces her name in Spanish she feels "her pure, mouth filling, full-blooded name, Yolanda. But then, it was inevitable, like gravity, like night and day little apple bites when God's back is turned, her name fell bastardized breaking into a half dozen nicknames-pobrecita Yosita" (p. 81). These nicknames reflect Yolanda's fragmented, hyphenated being. Though nicknames are usually used to convey a sense of intimacy to express affection, they can also work as a tool to distort and fragment. One instance of this fragmentation and disfiguration of the self is caused by the way Yolanda's husband refers to her. John anglicizes her name as Josephine, Joe

or Violet, distorting her identity in the process. Yolanda considers this a violation: “He tried to humour her, playing on a new nickname. Not tonight, Josephine?” towards what she reacts: “stop violating me! I hated it when you do that!” (p. 74). It is Yolanda who realizes that she is not Joe, Yoyo, Yo, but Yolanda. Álvarez plays then with the meaning of the word *yo* in Spanish, also representing the short form of Yolanda, and the word *yoyo*, connoting a toy consisting of a flattened spool wound with string that is spun down from and reeled up to the hand, popular in Latin America.

Besides being a toy, a *yoyo* also means “one that undergoes frequent abrupt shifts or reversals, as of opinion or emotion; a vacillator”.³² In this way, the *yoyo* epitomizes the constant transformation of identity through its way to self-realization and (re)construction; the oscillation between the identity of origin and that of destination (García Canclini, 2001).

These several nicknames and names symbolize the multiplicity of beings Yolanda encompasses, multiplicity which characterizes the complexity of female identity and (re)construction. When Yolanda leaves her husband, she writes a note for him: “I’m needing some space, some time, until my head-slash-heart slash-soul-No, No, no, she didn’t want to divide herself anymore, three persons in one Yo” (p. 78). And when she is about to sign the note, she doubts about which of her selves she will choose: she thinks about signing as Yolanda, “but her real name no longer sounded like her own, so instead she scribbled his name for her, Joe” (p. 78). The situation described above signifies Yolanda’s identity as a collection of beings, a multiplicity of identity, which although diverse, coexist in a dialogical tension. Accordingly, when Yolanda fantasized about Dr. Payne, she felt “he would save her body-slash-mind-slash-soul by taking all the slashes out, making her one whole Yolanda” (p. 80). These slashes also represent the notion of the multiplicity of identity, and the hyphenation of her identity, that is, the coexistence of an old Yolanda, representing her childhood on the island, and a new one, representing her adolescence and adulthood in America.

One of the crises in the identity (re)construction process is illustrated in the novel by linguistic-mental breakdowns, experienced by Sandra and Yolanda. Sandra’s breakdown consists of her fear that she’ll lose the ability to read and reason with language. Sandra feels she’s becoming a monkey, indicating that from her point of

³² See entry in the reference list.

view, humanity is symbolized by language itself. In order to keep her human condition, “she had lists and lists of books to read” (p. 54). The monkey, denoting that she’s moving backward through evolution, suggests the loss her own unique identity. Humanity, in Sandra’s view, is symbolized by books and language, but not any type, only “the great works of man” (p. 54), the classics that compose the Western canon. In order to remain human and find a place in society, being accepted and respected, Sandra has to adopt Western ideology and lifestyle. This notion illustrates the power of knowledge and the supremacy of the dominant culture over the island-culture, given that keeping her values and culture equals becoming a monkey, uncivilized, at the bottom of the social pyramid.

Yolanda is also affected by a severe mental breakdown which consists of the deterioration of her ability to make sense of language and the feeling that she is allergic to some words. Before the breakdown, her husband John has “forced her to say her least favorite word in the world. She would never forgive him for that” (p. 77), after she has rejected him in bed. John’s attempts to reconcile with her fail and when he hands a bouquet of irises to her, “she could not make out his words”, that is “they were clean, bright sounds, but they meant nothing to her”, he spoke in “a language she had never heard before (p. 77). At that moment, Yolanda starts to feel allergy towards some words, for instance, “at the word love, her hands itched” (p. 77). When she tries to mimic what he is saying, she just produces a group of unintelligible sounds: “Babble babble babble babble. Maybe that meant *I love you too*, in whatever tongue he was speaking” (p. 78). This inability to make sense of language represents the end of their relationship. They are unable to communicate properly and fail to break the cultural and linguistic barriers between them.

During the breakdown that follow that event, Yolanda, who used to find pleasure in language, is unable to communicate: “She talked in comparisons, she spoke in riddles”, “she quoted famous lines of poetry and the opening sentences of classics”, for instance *Don Quijote*, which she was able to quote in the original and then translated some passages instantly into English (p. 79). Yolanda “quoted Frost; she misquoted Stevens; she paraphrased Rilke’s description of love”, she quoted to Dr. Payne, her psychiatrist, and she “sang what she knew of ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb’, mixing it up with ‘Baa Baa, Black Sheep’ ” (p. 79). The idea of (mis)quoting is associated to the

notion of adopting other people's words and ideas, and so, being unable to express her own ideas. (Mis)quoting famous people also relates to Sandra's breakdown and the role played by the dominance of the Western canon and ideology, and it becomes evident in the need to acquire power through the words of authorities. It also epitomizes the silence imposed upon minority groups by the discourse and the ideology of the dominant culture (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989).

One of the poems Yolanda quotes provides a hint of the origin of her problem with language: "'Tears, tears', Joe said, reciting again, 'tears from the depths of some profound despair'" (p. 80). That profound despair originates, clearly, in the fragmentation caused by exile and the consequent gradual loss of her language and accent. She feels that her name is "pure, mouth-filling, full blooded" when her mother pronounces it in Spanish, but it is inevitable that it "fell, bastardized, breaking into a half dozen nicknames" (p. 81). The pleasure Yolanda experiences when her name is pronounced in Spanish epitomizes not only her need to (re)connect with her accent and her heritage, but also illustrates the pressure exercised by the dominant language in disrupting and hyphenating her identity. Her fragmented self is exposed when, upon leaving her husband, she reflects "she didn't want to divide herself anymore, three persons in one Yo³³" (p. 78). These words also illustrate the idea of the multiplicity of identity and the notion that identity is not static, but transforms and re-invents continually influenced by time, geographic space and experience.

During the breakdown, a black bird emerges from Yolanda's throat and attacks Dr. Payne. The black bird represents her fear that language, particularly her own words, hurts the people she loves. She begins to reclaim language by labeling objects and playing word games. Labelling relates to the identification of things, and thus, her self-identification. Rhyming and playing with language convey the pleasure she finds in language, and the artistic sense she attributes to it: "the words tumble out making a sound like the rumble of distant thunder, taking depth, shape, and substance. Yo continues: Doc, rock, smock, luck, so many words. There is no end to what can be said about the world" (p. 85). This last phrase suggests that the world and its meanings are constructed through language, and thus language carries implicitly the ideology of a

³³ In this section, Álvarez plays with the double meaning of the word *yo*, that refers to Yolanda's shortened name and, at the same time, in Spanish, it means I, idea that is associated to the notion of identity.

certain society. The view that there are endless possibilities as regards language and expression means that language is also a tool for resistance and freedom. The ability to convey meaning again signals the recovery from her mental breakdown.

The image of Yolanda during her breakdown is also linked to the notion of the madwoman, developed by Gilbert and Gubar (1979). This monster-woman epitomizes the author's double or the "female schizophrenia of authorship", which results of an identity crisis, and equates female identity with female voice (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 78). This notion also suggests that the identity of the character and that of the author parallel, the madwoman being the author's double, which enables the woman writer to revise, deconstruct and (re)construct stereotypes and gender roles imposed by patriarchal and dominant societies (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979; Millet, 1969).

The final step in the quest for identity is embodied by Yolanda in the journey back to the Dominican Republic in an attempt to (re)construct her fragmented self. Yolanda, for example, shares with Pilar the romanticized and idealized view of the island, since "their identity is grounded in an idealized homeland that is paradise-like and culturally pure; survival of ancestral culture depends on the perpetuation of these nationalist mythologies" (Christian as cited in Acosta Hess, 2001, p. 222). The idealization of the Dominican Republic and Cuba, respectively, makes the characters feel hope about the possibility of erasing the feelings of unhomeliness and becoming one again by re-organizing and re-constructing the fragmented pieces of their selves (Bhabha, 1994).

The climax of Yolanda's journey takes place when she wants to eat some guavas and after some problems with her car she finds herself alone in the middle of nowhere. Being approached by two men, she is frozen with terror and speechless until they ask if she is American. At this point, she begins speaking English, which the men do not understand, and assert that she is indeed American. Thus, after years of internal conflict and wanderings, she has chosen English as a medium of expression trying to come to terms with her intercultural experiences and her hybrid identity.

Instances of Yolanda's Anglicization are present throughout the novel, for instance, when she doesn't remember what an *antojito* is. There are two interpretations for the term *antojo*, associated with the Dominican Republic and the US, respectively. It refers to "something you crave to eat, but also to the spiritual possession of

someone's body" (Luis as cited in Yitah, 2003, p. 238). Yolanda embodies both representations, though Luis doesn't clearly state the North American meaning of the word, it is implicitly stated that he places the spiritual possession of Yolanda's body in America, which stands for the *santo* who took her over, that is the invisible force that contained her.

Besides not recalling some words in Spanish, her Anglicization becomes evident in her appearance and values. As regards the former, Yolanda arrives "shabby in a black cotton skirt and jersey top, sandals on her feet, her wild black hair held back with a hairband", looking like "a missionary" (p. 3), coming from the US, a colonizing and imperialistic power, to the island, the periphery. Secondly, Yolanda's attitudes and behavior certainly do not correspond with the standards of the Dominican Republic. She embodies, for instance, mobility and self-sufficiency, values associated with American women. While Yolanda is warned by cousins about the dangers of being alone on the road at night: "you will get lost, you will get kidnapped, you will get raped, you will get killed" (p. 17), what represents the feebleness and vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society, her defiance of the warning and the gendered roles of the island culture signify the freedom and self-sufficiency of American women (Millet, 1969). Thus, Yolanda does not correspond with the cultural image of Dominican women since, for example, after the incident with the two men, the kid who helped her is hit by the police who do not believe in his story because "no *dominicana* with a car would be out at this hour getting *guayabas*" (p. 22).

At this point, it is necessary to refer to the words of the poet she met at a party before travelling:

No matter how much of it one lost, in the midst of some profound emotion, one would revert to one's mother tongue. He put Yolanda through a series of situations. What language, he asked, looking pointedly into her eyes, did she love in? (p. 13)

In the description of the incident, English is portrayed as flowing uncontrollably out of her mouth, like the black bird that haunted her during her trauma: "then, as if the admission itself loosens her tongue, she begins to speak, English, a few words, of apology at first, then a great flood of explanation" (p. 20). This description shows that English has been repressed by her hopes of finding a connection back to her mother tongue and heritage, but that in the midst of an emotion, she reverted not to her mother

tongue, but to the language she has chosen to express her voice. English confers the privilege of protection: in Spanish, she was voiceless and vulnerable; in English she found her voice, and is able to (re)construct her hybrid identity.

As a result, the slipping between the two worlds forces Yolanda to bridge the gaps and create something new, a synthesis (Anzaldúa, 1987). This process of deconstruction and (re)construction, marked by her use of English as her means of expression, finishes with something new, a bridge, and represents a personal achievement. Language becomes, in this way, an integral part of her identity and voice as well since Yolanda's female identity is a hybrid linguistic intercultural identity (García Canclini, 2001).

4.2. *Dreaming in Cuban*: The Female Body and Female Identity

The identity (re)construction process of the different female characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) is a reflection of their personal stories and the traumas that affect them and separate the family. Celia, Lourdes, Felicia and Pilar are clearly disrupted by the dichotomy between exile and permanence and also by the diverse meanings assigned to the revolution taking place in Cuba. In order to cope with their exilic experience (in the case of Lourdes and Pilar) and the personal traumas (in the case of Celia and Felicia), the female characters resort to diverse means to find and express their voices and finally discover who they are.

The matriarch of the family, Celia, resorts to different ways of expressing her voice and materializing her identity which correspond to two main moments in her life. On the one hand, there is a set of letters, never sent, addressed to her Spanish lover Gustavo. These letters, which cover a period between 1934 and 1954, coincide with the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and a dark period in Celia's life, in which her lover leaves, she marries and has a child with whom she can't bond, she is left with her mother and sister-in-laws, and finally sent to an asylum. Through the letters, Celia addresses mundane issues, events happening at home and a recount on the development of the revolution coming, as if she were having an everyday conversation with Gustavo. The epistolary genre, which implies more realism and a sense of privacy, represents the manifestation of her innermost feelings, desires and thoughts. These letters symbolize, then, Celia's strategy to empty her soul and escape from the silence imposed by

dictatorship and patriarchy. The very last letter, written on the day Pilar is born, explains that it is Pilar who will read the letters and “remember”; and thus, they constitute Celia’s memory; one that will be preserved and recreated by Pilar.

The second medium of expression extends from the revolution to the present, when Celia starts to communicate through actions, and therefore, through her body. According to Cixous (1976), “a woman without a body, dumb, blind, can’t possibly be a good fighter” but “she is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow” (p. 880). The female body is an essential component of female identity since women “speak with the body and signify what they mean with it” (p. 881). Consequently the actions of the female characters work as a medium of expression, and Celia is precisely an example of body language. For instance, Celia embraces the ideals of the revolution openly and actively. She guards the cost at night, acts a communal judge, and participates in everything *el Líder* proposes, from cutting the sugarcane to work in building and inoculate children. Her actions, then, speak for herself through a form of body-discourse. Celia is, in consequence, a pragmatic woman, who lives for the revolution in mind, soul and body, and whose actions determine ideology, tone, and meaning. Celia’s voice is also an instance of hybridity; the combination of the written word and body language; past and present, the mental and the physical, merging continually.

Similarly, Lourdes also speaks through her body, although her reasons, experience and body-discourse are completely different. Lourdes stands in complete opposition to her mother and the revolution. The main reasons behind her exile and rejection towards Cuba lie in two events which traumatize her and fragment her identity and body. One of these events is the loss of her baby. While galloping through a field of dry grasses, her horse throws her to the ground and she immediately feels the pain and the blood flowing through her body. At that moment, in a sort of foreshadowing, a rodent appears but she kills it instantly. When she gets home, two soldiers are pointing their rifles at Rufino, and she “jumped from her horse and stood like a shield before her husband”, shouting so fiercely that the soldiers leave immediately (p. 70). These images, Lourdes riding her horse through the fields and she defying the soldiers to defend her husband, portray Lourdes as a strong woman, Amazon-like, who is not afraid of challenging armed men and the patriarchal system operating at the time.

However, this action has a brutal consequence for Lourdes. When her husband is not in town, the soldiers return. They “handed Lourdes an official sheet of paper declaring the Puentes’ estate the property of the revolution” (p. 70). As a response to her reactions, yelling and resisting, Lourdes is raped. At that moment, Lourdes is unable to see but she smells the situation vividly: “She smelled the soldier’s coarse soap, the salt of his perspiring back. She smelled his milky clots and the decay of his teeth and the citrus brilliantine in his hair, as if a grove of lemons lay hidden there” (p. 71). This momentary blindness symbolizes her efforts to block the brutal images of the rape, and illustrate, at the same time, how her identity is fragmented and dislocated, since sexual representation is central to female identity (Butler, 1993).

After being raped, her belly is scratched with “a primeval scarping. Crimson hieroglyphics” (p. 72). Even when Lourdes tries to read what the soldier carved, “it was illegible” (p. 72). This scene clearly portrays the patriarchal attempt to silence her, after she openly challenges the regime and male authority by yelling at the soldiers and fighting back. The form chosen to silence her is the disruption and violation of her body and her sexuality (Millet, 1969). Her body is subjugated, not only through physical force and sexual supremacy but also through the writing of the soldier, a sort of colonizing domination over the female body and the experiences that it mediates, as well as female sexuality and its projection onto the female body (Conboy et al., 1997). Her inability to make sense of what is written is related to the idea that besides being verbally silenced, the language of the female body has also been silenced and reduced, showing male dominance (Cixous, 1976). Since the female body is “a text to be read”, the marks left by the soldiers accompany Lourdes her whole life, as a reminder of male power (Conboy et al., 1997).

Two months after the rape, Lourdes and her family exile to the United States, mediating through her body her hatred towards everything the revolution, and Cuba, represents. Her body-discourse materializes when she volunteers patrolling her neighborhood in New York City, implying that she stands for the United States as a soldier, protecting and defending the country and its values. Lourdes enjoys working as an auxiliary policewoman, patrolling the streets in “her thick-soled black shoes”, mainly because she feels the shoes are “a kind of equalizer”; that is to say, the shoes represent power, and if women wore shoes like those, they wouldn’t have to worry about

“abstract equalities” (p. 127). Through this last phrase, Lourdes refers to the struggle for reaching equality between men and women, and the double oppression affecting women and positioning them as the weak sex, the second sex (Beauvoir, 1949; Millet, 1969). In the same section, Lourdes wonders what would have happened if she had had a gun when she needed it, suggesting that her life could be different if she had not been subjugated and raped. Likewise, she feels safe wearing the uniform and is pleased with its “implicit authority” and the severity of her face (p. 17), which gives her a sense of power and feeling of safety.

Besides, her body-discourse materializes through her attempts to become a successful businesswoman through her two bakery stores. She buys the bakery five years earlier from a French-Austrian Jew who migrated to Brooklyn after the war, because she thinks there would be no sorrow in working with bread (p. 18). She “works extraconscientiously, determined to prove to herself that her business acumen, at least, is intact”, moving back and forth behind the bakery counter, “explaining the ingredients in her cakes and pies to her clients” (p. 66). Working hard, and getting advance-order sales, certainly restore her self-confidence. The hard work of Lourdes in the bakery and her transformation from an exile into a successful, self-sufficient and independent businesswoman signals that she effectively adapts to the dominant culture, she adopts and conforms to the ideals and values of capitalism and consumerism, and just like Laura García, the inventor, speaks through them. Lourdes considers herself lucky, since “immigration has redefined her”, welcoming the adopted language and “its possibilities for reinvention” (p. 73). Hence, Lourdes re-creates the exilic experience into a site of growth and personal development; turning the periphery into the center.

Her acceptance of American values becomes explicit in the relationship that Lourdes has with her employees and with other members of the community, particularly other immigrants. For instance, she fires the Pakistani worker (p. 18), the merchants in the neighborhood hate her (p. 63), her new Puerto Rican trainee, Maribel Navarro, is fired after slipping coins into her pocket (p. 67) and she seems happy that the Jews have moved out of the neighborhood (p. 168). Her perception of the different ethnicities that populate the neighborhood evinces a position of privilege over the other minority groups, resulting from the political interests that encouraged Cuban immigration in the 1960s and the networking abilities of the Cuban family (Araujo, 2000). Pilar thinks her

mother is bigoted, and that she positions herself in a site of superiority over other ethnic groups:

She hires the real down-and-outs, immigrants from Russia or Pakistan, people who don't speak English, figuring she can get them cheap. Then she screams at them half the day because they don't understand what she's saying. Mom thinks they're all going to steal from her so she rifles through their coats and shopping bags when they're working. (p. 32)

Thus, Lourdes embraced the values and ideas of the dominant culture by emphasizing difference and stigmatizing other ethnic groups, and even when she is part of an ethnic minority group, she clearly defines herself as the One (Beauvoir, 1949). Otherness, in this context, comprises a geographical dimension, based on a hierarchy of civilizations and cultures (Staszak, 2008).

Lourdes thinks that equality is an abstraction, and backs up her ideas saying: "I don't make up the statistics. I don't color the faces down at the precinct. Black faces, Puerto Rican faces. Once in a while a stray Irish or Italian face looking scared" (p. 128). For her, reality exposes "the brownstones converted into tenements in a matter of months, the garbage in the streets, the jaundice-eyed men staring vacantly from the stoops" (p. 168), images which depict the neighborhood as a decaying area, filthy and corrupted. She has also used her wooden stick once, to break up a fight between three Italians and a Puerto Rican kid, described as a "delinquent" who sells plastic bags of marijuana behind the liquor store (p. 129). These images illustrate the position Lourdes thinks she holds in the community, a position given not only by her role of policewoman, her black shoes and the uniform, but also by her Cuban upbringing, since she represents one of the first waves of Cuban upper class immigration, threatened by the growth of communism (Amaro & Portes as cited in Pedraza-Bailey, 1985).

Furthermore, Lourdes speaks through her body out of the abrupt fluctuations in her weight, determined mainly by her emotions. This variation in her weight is tied to the rise and fall of her food craving and her sexual appetite. It corresponds with the ups and downs in her mood, which relates to Derrida's notion of female discourse, a special language that seems to articulate or derive from the female body and female sexuality (as cited in Poovey, 1988, p. 54). These weight fluctuations also symbolize the constant oscillation between the multiple beings which constitute her hybrid identity; her identity of origin, which she tries to forget, and her identity of destination; which she praises and

embraces. Both her food and sex appetite increase when Lourdes takes her father for cobalt treatment. In this case, her body-discourse reveals her concern over her father's health and how helpless she feels being unable to save him. Lourdes opens the refrigerator and finds nothing to her liking, since "everything tastes the same to her these days" (p. 65) and eats pecan sticky buns:

She did not battle her cravings; rather, she submitted to them like a somnambulist to a dream. She summoned her husband from his workshop by pulling vigorously on a ship's bell he had rigged up for this purpose, unpinned her hair, and led him by the wrist to their bedroom. (p. 21)

Although Lourdes is portrayed as surrendering to these sexual cravings, she places herself as the dominant one, reversing the traditional stereotypes and gender roles. Her husband is described as fragile, voiceless and passive, opposite to the male image of men as active and prevailing over women. This craving for food and sex implies dissatisfaction, incompleteness, that is, something missing in her life. Lourdes channels that sense of loss and incompleteness towards items that are plentiful like food or sex.

These forms of body-discourse, which clearly communicate the ideologies of Celia and Lourdes, respectively, also fragment their relationship. Concerning this, Cixous (1976) explores the nature of women in terms of the relationship between women and the figure of the mother. In her view, a woman is her own "sister-daughter" since the force in her produces and is produced by the Other, that is other women (p. 881). In Cixous's view, the relationship to the mother can be defined in terms of intense pleasure and violence; it is limited in a similar way to the relation to childhood (p. 882). Accordingly, Celia and Lourdes function as binary opposites, and at the same time that they embody opposing and conflicting values and ideas, they need each other. The inability to communicate successfully from mother to daughter³⁴ affects all the characters in the novel, deteriorating their relationships. This conflict is illustrated in Celia's inability to understand her own daughters, the incapacity of Lourdes and Pilar to understand each other, and Felicia's failure to bond with her twins. Opposite, these women seem to have perfectly good relationships with their male relatives, mainly their sons (Celia and Felicia) and their father (Lourdes). Lourdes, for example, communicates with her father postmortem through a series of mystic apparitions in

³⁴ This does not mean that the communication from woman to woman is impaired, but just from mother to daughter and vice versa.

which they talk about commonplace affairs and business. This represents the strong connection they have, which perpetuates after death, and her inability to let him go. Furthermore, this communication impairment entails the resistance to the socio-cultural imposed female roles of mother and wife (Beauvoir, 1949). Female body-discourse not only attempts to deconstruct the socially-constructed female roles (the weak sex, male-dominated and passive) but also patriarchal representations of female sexuality. It also ventures to build a space of social resistance where the female characters have a voice and something to declare. By neglecting their role as mothers, and adopting other roles, like active political participants, *santeras*, artists, businesswomen, the female characters in the novel try to deconstruct the socially-imposed roles that are inflicted on them. To illustrate this point, Celia refuses to accept her role of grandmother and instead, surrenders to something bigger than herself: the revolution. This revolution, that impedes and fragments the relationship between Celia and her daughters, is also associated with madness (López, 1996; O'Reilly Herrera, 1997), and madness has been connected in patriarchal societies with certain features of femininity that deviated from the norm, such as independent and free-thinking women. In relation to this, López (1996) states that "through its representation of madness and revolution, *Dreaming in Cuban* explores women's vacillation between acceptance and rejection of traditional feminine roles" (p. 33). Therefore, some characters accede to domesticity and inactivity at some points of their lives, whereas others embrace the opposite: political activity (Celia and Lourdes), creative outlets (Pilar), and syncretic religious rituals (Felicía), with the intention of breaking with the traditional gender roles and defying oppression. In order to (re)construct their hyphenated identities and celebrate hybridity, "each female character must perform a balancing act between the fulfillment of gender expectations and the fashioning of an individual identity" (López, 1996, p. 44).

Pilar also experiences problems to find the words to express herself, since for her "English seems an impossible language for intimacy" (p. 180). She envies her mother's Spanish curses because they make her English "collapse in the heaps" (p. 59), maybe because her Spanish is fading. For instance, when she writes in Spanish, she does it, according to Celia, in a "Spanish that is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists" (p. 7). Pilar has another problem with language and words: truth. Departing from the consideration of history as a narrative influenced by

the socio-historical background of the writer and that of the reader, in Pilar's eyes, history in general and words in particular, entail the lies and corruption of the dominant culture. This "bias" is precisely what Pilar criticizes about Lourdes; she disapproves of her mother's "embellishments and half-truths" and her English, sounding immigrant-like and with a "touch of otherness" (p. 177). According to Pilar, for Lourdes, "telling her own truth is the truth to her, even if it's at the expense of chipping away our past" (p. 177). This clearly illustrates the bias and the partiality carried with language and how the re-writing of history in order to suit our needs and purpose certainly affects the representation of memory and the re-creation of the self.

Not finding in language a means of expression, Pilar resorts to art. In her view, painting "is its own language". She wonders "who needs words when colors and lines conjure up their own language?" because her objective is to "find a unique language, obliterate the clichés" through painting (p. 139). Given that painting constitutes her voice and her means of expression, it develops according to Pilar's mood and feelings. For instance, her paintings "have been getting more and more abstract lately, violent-looking with clotted swirls of red" (p. 29), illustrating her identity crisis. Painting, thus, serves as Pilar's language, one that emerges and flows through her body and the emotions it mediates. For example, when her mother commissions her to paint something pro-American in her restaurant, and instead through her painting, Pilar expresses all her contempt and disagreement with the capitalist system reigning in the United States by jeering the most important American symbol of freedom: the Statue of Liberty. Pilar painted black sticks around it, thorny scars looking like barbed wire, a safety pin through her nose and at the bottom the phrase "I'm a mess" (p. 141). This image, which totally expresses her disapproval of the United States, works as a mirror of her confusion and hyphenation. Though certainly Pilar does not aim at hurting her mother or ruining her business, it suggests that once you find a form of expression, it is hard to remain silent. Like the flow of words coming out of Yolanda's mouth in English when she is paralyzed by fear, Pilar, as if caught by an irrepressible force, cannot stop painting and expressing her mind. In this context, Julia Kristeva argues that "this disjunction, this lack of comfort, which are the places of suffering, eventually become lighter" by reflecting on them through artistic representations like music,

sensations, metaphors (2002, p. 287). Artistic expression does not necessarily mean the eradication of these places of suffering but their attenuation and progressive reduction.

Besides painting, and as the title of the novel suggests, Pilar dreams, and she does it “in Cuban” (p. 236). Night after night she dreams about her grandma and Cuba, and they talk in the dream about mundane affairs, what they do and what goes on in their lives. Dreams, then, are the medium Pilar finds to be in contact with her grandmother Celia. Pilar says:

I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She seems to know everything that’s happened to me and tells me not to mind my mother too much. Abuela Celia says she wants to see me again. (p. 29)

On the one hand, dreams represent the need to stay linked to Cuba, to her roots and to her beloved grandmother. On the other hand, dreams suggest the relevance of the unconscious and imagination, the fact that Pilar goes back to her roots through dreams in order to rediscover who she is and rebuild her hybrid identity insinuates that a physical return to the island is necessary so as to become one again. She is two parts of a person, hyphenated, one in real life and one, happier, in her dreams. After dreaming in Cuban, she used to “wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There’s a magic here working its way through my veins” (p. 235). This image reveals the internal yearning to reconcile with her past, a signal of her identity transformation and the intercultural, hybrid nature of her identity (re)construction process.

Felicia, the last of the female characters analyzed, transcends her body-discourse in the *Santeria*, based on the ideas that there are forces in the universe that can transform people’s lives, only if they surrender themselves (p. 186). Felicia, who feels out of place in the mountains and does not fit into the ideals of the revolution, surrenders instead to the power of the occult, in the quest for her spirituality, that is “an acutely personalized experience inherent to our ongoing existences”, “a synthesis of inherited belief with her own instinctive motivations” (Castillo, 2005, p. 13). This synthesis between old traditional religious practices and the dominant culture in the motherland represent a form of hybridity which replaces temporal linearity with spatial plurality (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989). This hybridity results from the identity crisis experienced by Felicia, in which the difficulty to differentiate between what is

inherited, what is imposed and what is acquired hinders the representation of the self, and thus, the (re)construction of female identity, creating an internal rupture (Anzaldúa, 1987). Spirituality, then, produces in Felicia a transformation, that is, the achievement of a synthesis, *mestizaje* or mixture of races, traditions and cultural practices, in order to become one again, a new person (Anzaldúa, 1987; García Canclini, 2001). This notion of transformation is also related to Mato's view of identity as a social construct, a self-representation that is transformed either consciously or unconsciously, and constantly re-produced (2003).

Felicia and her friend Herminia embody the stereotypes and the preconceptions about the *Santería*. Herminia, for instance, recalls how she meets Felicia when they are six years old and that Felicia's parents are afraid of her father because "he was a *babalawo*, a high priest of *santería*, and greeted the sun each morning with outstretched arms" (p. 183). People tell evil lies about her father, for example, that he uses to "rip the heads off goats with his teeth and fillet blue-eyed babies before dawn" and she is called *bruja* by the other kids (p. 184), stigmatizing her (Castillo, 1995).

Felicia's fascination with the *santería* starts when she sees Herminia's father use the *obi*, "the divining coconut" to answer the questions of a godchild who has come to consult him (p. 184). Pilar is also called *brujita*, little witch, when she is a baby. The nannies don't last more than a few weeks, and leave, arguing that the child is bewitched, and that she has made their hair fall (p. 24). As a result, Pilar is also part of cleansing rituals as a baby, bathed with chicken blood and covered with bay leaves.

Superstitions, therefore, are part of the island folklore. Celia, for instance, stops by a *ceiba* tree and she places an orange and a few coins by its trunk, while she says a short prayer for her daughter. At the same time, Felicia's house is full of herbs, roots, healing spices and leaves for Felicia's health or to ward off evil, referring to the ancient knowledge about medicinal plants and herbs, and the African beliefs that came to the Americas with the slave market, both of which merged with mainstream society during the colonization period (Castillo, 1995). Nevertheless, Celia "is uneasy about all these potions and spells" since she fears that "both good and evil may be borne in the same seed" and although many of these are part of the "harmless superstitions" of *santería*, she does not trust the "clandestine rites of the African magic" (pp. 90-91). This distrust in African magic is also related to the notions of race and ethnicity, traditionally

stigmatized (Anzaldúa, 1987; García Canclini, 2001). Herminia says, for instance, that Felicia is the only person she has known who does not see color. According to her, nobody speaks of the problem between blacks and whites since it is “too disagreeable to discuss” (p. 185). In this section, Herminia also refers to the power of the written word and the manipulation of history discussed by Pilar, explaining how the crimes and abuses suffered by black people during the Little War of 1912³⁵ is “only a footnote” in history books, as a consequence, she trusts only what she sees, and what she knows with her heart but not what is written (p. 185). In the past, “the whiter you were, the better off you were”, but things had changed with the revolution, giving colored people better jobs than “mopping floors of taking care of another woman’s children” (p. 185). However, what hasn’t changed is that “men are still in charge” (p. 185). Herminia illustrates through these lines that the notion of Otherness based on ethnic differences and the privilege of one group (white Cubans) over the other (black Cubans of African heritage), and how this notion of white privilege is often unnoticed and unquestioned by society. Furthermore, this categorization of black Cubans as the Other is seen in the distrust and evil portrayal of the *santería* and African religious rituals as exotic, mysterious and thus, evil. It also reflects the patriarchal basis of society, operating alongside ethnic and racial differences (Millet, 1969).

Felicia returned to the *santería* after she disappears in 1978 and asks to be taken to *la Madrina*, a sort of priestess. During a holy trance, she speaks of her days in a far-off town, narrates how she marries a man in an amusement park and plans to escape Cuba, “to take a fishing boat north and go ice-skating”, and says that she has pushed him from the top of a roller coaster, his body turned to gray ash, and the wind blew him north (p. 186). Under the power of spells and rituals, Felicia is capable of revisiting the positive and negative aspects of her past. According to Herminia, for Felicia, the rituals “were a kind of poetry that connected her to larger worlds, worlds alive and infinite”, the rituals healed her and made her believe again (p. 186), (re)constructing her fragmented identity (Castillo, 2005). Whereas Celia surrendered and gave herself

³⁵ In 1912, the Cuban army massacred thousands of AfroCubans in what became known as *El Doce*, (the Twelve), and *Guerrita de Raza*, (the Little Race War). Many of those murdered were members of the hemisphere’s first black political party outside Haiti, the Independent Party of Color (PIC).

entirely to the revolution, Felicia surrendered completely to the supernatural, where she finds a new space to reconstruct her identity.

Felicia is initiated into the *elekes*, and given necklaces of the saints that would protect her. Sixteen days before the *asiento*, a ritual that has been done in secret since the first slaves worked in the sugarcane fields, she goes to live with *la Madrina* “who had procured seven white dresses for her, seven sets of underwear and nightclothes, seven sets of bedding, seven towels, large and small, and other special items, all white” (p. 187). The white clothes and the clothes changes symbolize purity, since “Felicia changed every day to stay pure” (p. 187). Her clothes are torn to shreds until she is naked, she is bathed in river water, her skinned is rubbed with soap wrapped in vegetable flowers, and finally dressed in a white gown. She is also washed with a purifying coconut shampoo. Purity is an essential condition to be taken by *Obatalá*³⁶. It also refers to the meaning attached to the female body valued as pure, uncorrupted and virtuous body, given that the process to purify her soul is carried out through the purification of her body (Conboy et al., 1997). When Felicia is possessed, she “felt as though she were drifting through the heavens, that she was a planet looking at herself from one of her moons” (p. 187). This description of Felicia’s feelings and experiences during her initiation represent the coming to terms with her own selves in a sort of “looking-glass self” (Tatum, 2000). According to this notion, the answer to the question *who am I?*, resulting from the identity crisis produced by the tension between the process of self-definition and patriarchal representation of women (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979), depends on the surrounding context, or mirror effect (Tatum, 2000). In this way, Felicia needs to leave her own body, and look at herself from an external position in order to see who she is, who she’s going to become and thus, (re)construct her hybrid intercultural identity.

After being possessed by *Obatalá*, the “*santeras* had made eight cuts on her tongue so that the god could speak but Felicia could not divulge his words” (p. 187). This illustrates how the power of words remains in the hands of men, since Felicia’s body, soul and words are possessed by male spirits. She “dressed only in white, and

³⁶ Obatalá, in Yoruba religion, means King of Purity. He is the Holy Father, the creator of human beings and all the living things on the planet. As the creator, he rules the head, the thoughts, and human life; and he is the owner of whiteness, as a symbol of peace and purity.

didn't wear makeup or cut her hair", never touched the forbidden foods or looked at her own reflection in a mirror (p. 188), nevertheless, after a year, Felicia does not show the Gods' blessings. Little by little "her eyes dried out like an old woman's, her fingers curled like claws" and even her hair grew colorless (p. 189), and finally, Felicia dies in her mother's arms.

The identity (re)construction processes of the female characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), in each particular and unique case, are thus, hybrid and intercultural, illustrating the convergence of the old and the new; the mother tongue and the dominant language, patriarchal domination and the freedom of the female body, ancient religious practices and traditionally-accepted ones, and different means to express oneself: dreaming, speaking through the female body, painting, writing letters, exploring religions. The female characters, each in their own particular way, are able to come to terms with their past through the celebration of difference and through the realization that identities are constantly in a creative process of self-transformation.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

“Don’t grieve.
Anything you lose comes round
In another form”.
(Rumi as cited in Álvarez, 1995).

The complexity of the process of female identity (re)construction lies in the consideration of identities as socially-constructed representations, redefined on the basis of the dialogical relationship between the self and the Other (Candau, 2008; Mato, 2003). The female characters in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) experience an identity crisis characterized by the feelings of loss, fragmentation and dislocation generated by the exilic transgression of borders and boundaries. Alienated not only geographically and linguistically but also psychologically and culturally, the female characters struggle to find themselves in a new world, in which language, culture and ethnicity hyphenate them, and tag them as the Other. This identity crisis is complemented with a double consciousness, in which the female characters are caught between the new world, its imposing culture and dominant language, which they need to master to survive; and the old world, their heritage and mother tongue, which they try to preserve. The clash certainly occurs with the confluence of old and new, home and foreign, mother tongue and foreign language, the erosion of a valid sense of the self and the cultural denigration caused by Otherness.

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) exile certainly works as an element of “deterritorialization” (Kaplan, 1987); as the dislocating force that displaces the female characters and fragments female identity in the process. Thus, exile is understood in terms of what is missing, as the problem of finding home and the fear of losing one’s heritage in the process of becoming part of the new culture; idea that generates a constant feeling of loss, emptiness, and unhomeliness. In the case of the García family, exile is framed by the oppression and violence of Trujillo’s regime; and in Cuba, by the brutality of the revolution lead by Castro. These two leaders not only represent masculinity and totalitarianism but also patriarchal oppression and the perpetuation of traditional gender roles. In this work, exile is not understood as a homogeneous experience; it does not affect the female characters in each novel in the same way not does it with the same intensity. On the contrary, the

experience of exile and the effects it has over each female character varies and depends on their personal backgrounds and ideology. The reasons for migrating also determine how exile is perceived and experienced. For example, exile is voluntary in the case of Lourdes; she wants to leave the island motivated by fear, pain and anger. It is a matter of life or death, for instance, in the case of Laura and Carlos García who are forced by the circumstances to leave the island since, because of their ideology and their actions against the government, their lives are in danger. And exile is an involuntary, imposed separation from the homeland for Pilar and the García girls who, because of their age, are forced by their parents and by the social conditions at home to leave the homeland.

Julia Álvarez, for instance, presents exile from diverse perspectives: children's views (through the personal accounts of the García girls) and adults' views, such as Laura's fear and melancholy and Chucha's recall of the empty house and her own narrative of exile. This variety of narrative voices and points of view, coexisting in a dialogic state, illustrates the multiplicity and heterogeneity of exilic experiences. The perception, memories, and feelings associated to exile are singular to each of the female characters and their own personal struggles in the new land, and are thus, unique. Whether in Yolanda's struggle to find herself in the new language, Carla's limited language ability and bullying experience, Sofía's rebellious nature and detachment from the patriarchal conventions of the home culture, or Sandra's mental breakdown, the figure of exile, as a disruptive and fragmenting force, accompanies the girls throughout their lives, mainly through the clash between the home culture and the new dominant culture, and becomes, in this way, a distinctive feature of their identity.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), exile embodies the dichotomy between Cuba and the USA not only in terms of center-periphery, but also ideologically, representing communism and capitalism, oppression and freedom, respectively. It is this dichotomy, in particular the ideological gap which, besides the geographic boundaries perpetuated by exile, separates the family. The characters in the novel exemplify different types of exiles, and different perspectives and points of view as well. Pilar, for instance, is a child of exile, a girl of only two who didn't have the power to decide and who is hyphenated by the displacement and fragmentation caused by exile. Lourdes embodies the voluntary exile, the one who leaves the homeland driven by physical, psychological and emotional pain, and wants to take distance from the source of that pain. And

although they never leave home, Celia and Felicia also embody exile. Celia's decision to stay on the island isolates her from the rest of the family; and thus, Celia becomes a home-exile. Felicia, in turn, who lives in her own world struggling to find meaning in her life, is in a state of self-isolation. Just like Cuba, that surrounded by the sea and isolated from the rest of the world ideologically and economically becomes an island-exile, Celia and Felicia are secluded and solitary. Through the state of tension in which the diversity of points of view coexists as regards the role of the revolution in Cuba and the miscellaneous perspectives and experiences in terms of exile, Cristina García, like Julia Álvarez, creates a dialogue between the voices of the different female characters; an exchange which illustrates and (re)constructs the exilic experience and the histories of Cubans (and Dominican) immigrants in the USA.

Another central aspect of identity (re)construction is that identity is not a legacy passively received that remains static throughout time. On the contrary, personal identity is a temporal identity (Ricoeur, 2004) given that memory is the operator of identity in the subject and individuality is recreated through the negotiation and re-appropriation of the past (Muxel as cited in Candau, 2008). Therefore, memory and identity are intricately connected in a complex dialogic relationship in which they nourish each other. Consequently, the dislocating force of exile also affects memory, by distorting it and fragmenting it. And, as a result, the memories of the female characters, which work as the framework to (re)construct their identities, are also affected by the spatial and temporal dislocation they go through in their lives.

The fragmentation caused by exile and the clash of cultures challenge the female characters with a puzzle they have to solve in order to recreate their personal stories, and by extension, the social histories of the countries of origin. That is to say, the individual memories of the female characters not only are crucial and constitutive elements of identity, but also represent social memory. In this way, the combinations of the personal memories recreate social memory in the form of a kaleidoscopic quilt and provide, at the same time, a glimpse into the history of the nation. Therefore, the fictional personal stories of the female characters contribute to the representation of the social history of the countries of origin, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. It is important to highlight that, as Ricoeur (2004) explains, the idea of collectivity does not imply homogeneity, given that memory is affected by the surrounding social context in

which individuals represent only a point of view. Social memory, thus, is composed of several voices, perspectives and interpretations of history, in which the nation is (re)constructed by different realities and diverse actors: those who stayed, those who left, and the children of exile (following Pérez Firmat's categorization as cited in Esplin, 2005). Accordingly, the individual memories of the various female characters, woven together, recreate social memory, and by extension Dominican and Cuban identities, as a representation of difference (Mato, 2003).

As a consequence, this representation of social memory also implies a state of tension generated by the perspectives and points of view of the actors involved. In the context of the novels, the diversity of individual voices, languages, experiences, memories and social discourses create a heteroglossia, a multiplicity of voices or polyphony, originating a dialogism, in which these diverse voices, systems of beliefs and perspectives coexist in a dialogical tension (Bakhtin, 1998). And consequently, the selection of individual memories and the different voices of the female characters which provide snapshots into the experiences of being a female Cuban or Dominican exile in America are instances of hybridity. The selection of memories which constitute the memory of each character is, like female identity, a hybrid which results of the confluence of the old world and the new land, past events and its present reading, influenced by the surrounding context. Similarly, the view of social memory as representations of difference, as a cultural quilt composed of different voices, diverse actors with unique experiences, various ideologies and perspectives, illustrates social memory as hybrid and intercultural; in which different points of view and representations of the history of the nation coexist, communicate, and are revisited and re-negotiated continually.

Besides its role in the representation and (re)construction of social memory, memory also contributes to the (re)construction of female identity through the desire to narrate, in singular ways and from different perspectives, the past. Thus, memory is understood as a present representation of the past or the representation of something absent; and it becomes, in this way, a selective and creative tool that allows the female characters to re-visit the past and erase, select or (re)create those fragments of their personal histories that contribute to the (re)construction and reconciliation between the old and the new versions of

the self. Even when memory has limitations and potential errors, it becomes an instrument to interpret the past and re-shape the present and the future.

Since temporal distance exercises a powerful effect over memory and identity, these displacement and distance from the homeland produce nostalgia in Yolanda and Pilar. This feeling of nostalgia increases the need to return to the geographical space of the homeland, idea associated to the concepts of corporeal memory and memory of places developed by Ricoeur (2004). Given that memory of places refers to the act of moving, travelling and having lived in a certain place, and the influence that geographic space has over what is remembered, the nostalgic Yolanda and Pilar return to the Dominican Republic and Cuba respectively, in an attempt to (re)construct their identities through direct geographic contact. The fact that Yolanda, for example, feels that the contact with the people, the language and images from the past will provide the healing she is looking for, illustrates that memory and identity are determined, and affected, by temporal and geographic distance.

Till the moment when these female characters return to the homeland, the overlapping of the time and space increases their sense of disturbance and disorientation. They are, in Bhabha's words (1994), here and there, back and forth. Yolanda and Pilar are strolling between what they feel as a place "relational, historical and concerned with identity" and a non-place, by definition the opposite, trying to achieve a balance between transit and residence, interchange and the crossroads, being a passenger or a traveler (Augé, 1995). In order to do that, they have to transgress borders and boundaries, fixed entities that are physical, socio-cultural and psychological. Geographic space and the borders and boundaries that delimit the zone where the motherland begins and where it ends, also determine how we perceive ourselves. Yolanda and Pilar, for instance, think that returning to the islands will determine who they are, as if the process of identity (re)construction were a sort of magic moment, consisting in relocating themselves into the geographic space of the motherland. Thus, the dislocation caused by exile is reversed by a voluntary dislocation from the host land and a re-location into the motherland in search for answers.

Pilar and Yolanda return to the islands with imagined, idealized versions of the motherland given that both of them left the homeland when they were children, and consequently, the mental representation they have about it is composed of childhood

memories. They, therefore, mentally construct their own fictional representations of the homeland as a mystified entity (as defined by Acosta Hess, 2001, & Payant, 2001). In *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), this fictionalization has to do, precisely, with the act of dreaming, and thus, with the relationship between memory and imagination. Pilar's dreams represent the cultural, psychic and emotional connection she has with the motherland, and in particular, with her grandmother Celia. Dreaming, aided by the power of imagination, has contributed to the fictionalization of the island as a paradise-like place where the reconciliation, or spiritual communion (Leonard, 2004), with herself and her past would finally materialize. This act of imagination also works as an element that bridges cultures and trespasses geographic borders and boundaries; in this case, the political, ideological, cultural and economic differences that have kept Cuba isolated from the USA for decades. The fact that, as the title of the novel suggests, Pilar dreams in Cuban, and that sometimes she dreams her grandmother's dreams, represents a unique language, a bond between her and Celia that goes beyond family lines, one in which communication occurs in the realm of imagination and the unconscious, and not only through words but also through images. Yolanda's fictionalization of the Dominican Republic is embodied in the guavas she craves to eat when she returns to the island, in the first scene narrated in the novel. The guavas symbolize "a deep and private yearning for self discovery and her journey against all odds into the country is a journey to her inner self" (Yitah, 2003, p. 234). She hopes that the taste of the fruits will bring back her Dominican-ness and will take her back to the past in the form of body memory. As a result, the return to the islands allows Yolanda and Pilar to (re)construct their identity. In contact with the island-culture, Yolanda feels the weight of her fragmented self, and the dislocation she experienced due to exile. She realizes that "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" (p. 12).

However, it is language and the interaction with the people and the culture of Dominica that makes her realize who she is, because Yolanda's identity quest is mainly a linguistic process. By regaining her lost Spanish, she thinks she will *belong* again to Dominican culture. During her identity quest Yolanda struggles to retain her Spanish, the language of her childhood, whose words and sounds produce in her pleasure and

delight. But she also struggles to master the language of the dominant culture and acquire a perfect accent. In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992), Carla and Yolanda, for example, are openly excluded and stigmatized by their accents and the foreignness of their names. It is also language what is at the heart of the mental breakdowns that affect the lives of Sandra and Yolanda. Language, in this way, is at the heart of the dichotomy between the center and the periphery, since assimilation has imposed a severe linguistic violence, denigrating the first language and disrupting, in this way, integral ties between language, culture and identity. In this context, losing their accent implies the fragmentation of their identity and the loss of their cultural heritage.

Despite the pleasure that Spanish words and sounds generates in her, in a moment of panic, English flows out of her mouth with an irrepressible force. Ironically, the purpose of the trip to the Dominican Republic is to assert her Dominican identity and connect to her cultural and family roots. Yet, she fears interacting with Dominicans outside the safety of the family. During this moment of panic, she feels more comfortable pretending not to understand a word of Spanish. Her behavior is considered strange by Dominican standards, since a woman would not be out alone after dark looking for fruit. She can only explain herself by remaining tightly enclosed within her American identity and sticking to the English language. This experience highlights how culturally unprepared she is to behave, in cultural terms, as a Dominican woman, and how culturally American she has become as an adult.

Besides, this situation illustrates how Yolanda came to terms with her intercultural hybrid identity and negotiated the tension between her identity of origin and her identity of destination through an oscillation between her different beings. As a result, it is possible to argue that there is no a single, homogeneous and constant identity; rather, there is a multiplicity of identity, the perception of individual identity as the product of combining and amalgamating the different identities a person comprises. It means understanding that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity (Bhabha, 1990; García Canclini, 2001), and thus, that female post-colonial identity is a dynamic and constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures (Tyson, 1999). Identity (re)construction, then, involves active and dynamic processes of constant

transformation, which result in (inter)cultural identities; continually (re)negotiated and revisited.

As García Canclini (2001) explains, the richness of the processes of hybridation lie in the intercultural nature of identities, given that the various identities coexisting within a person are constantly interacting and communicating in a dialogic state with the surrounding context, which transforms itself all the time, and with the past, which is recurrently revisited and negotiated. These processes involve the elements that do not merge and those which are not negotiated as well.

For Pilar, coming back to Cuba signifies the (re)construction of her identity and the reconciliation between her roots and her present. Once in Cuba, the yearning of finding home materializes: "sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong- not *instead* of here, but *more* than here" (p. 236). In Pilar's view, then, Cuba and the USA are no longer mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. As García Canclini (2001) points out, it is not in the osmosis and the cohesion where the richness of intercultural identity is found, but in the creative aspect of difference. García Canclini refers to *intercultural* identities rather than multicultural identities because the latter does not imply the connection or fusion between the elements and subjects composing a certain culture and identity, whereas the former implies a state of dialogism and constant exchange between those elements and subjects. Her, thus, identity is a "culturally in-between" (Bhabha, 1994) and, therefore, capable of moving physically and psychically between the locations of Cuba and the USA, traversing "the path from exile to ethnicity" (Álvarez-Borland as cited in Machado Sáez, 2005, p. 130). This perspective evinces that Pilar successfully negotiates and re-appropriates her past and is able to synthesize the elements of both cultures that nourish her soul. This synthesis, negotiation or creative (re)construction of her intercultural identity is not a rigid product, but the constant oscillation and movement between the multiplicities of beings that compose her own self.

The result of female identity (re)construction processes is clearly the acceptance of their hybridity, and the realization that identities are not definite and fixed, but that the processes of self-transformation occur constantly, influenced by time, space, context and experience. The female characters in both novels are hybrid beings, *mestizas* whose hybridity is nothing but the synthesis between the old world and the new one, where the

traditional and the modern mix (García Canclini, 2001). As Anzaldúa explains, “In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness (...) and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (as cited in Androu, 1998). Being a hybrid means, in the context of these novels, to accept where they came from, how they changed and where they are going, without resentments or ties to the motherland. And it implies embracing and accepting the heritage but not privileging it over the host culture and vice versa. Rather, to make it part of them and use it as a raw material to create, to transform oneself, to speak up, creating a dialogical and dynamic relationship between the identity of origin and the identity of destination. *Mestizaje*, thus, is an enriching and fulfilling synthesis of heritage and present, mother tongue and adopted tongue, tradition and Western practices, cultures, lives and experiences, creating a new value system, a new (active) story. As Anzaldúa (1987) states, being able to create or synthesize a new system of values, beliefs and cultural practices involves moving towards the center from the periphery with evolutionary, revolutionary steps. This movement implies the deconstruction and re-location of the center and the periphery, perceiving the periphery, or borderlands, as a space of crosspollination, intercultural richness, and creativity. This fusion, or hybridation process (as defined by Bhabha), is constantly in motion and is not always planned or integrated harmoniously. The richness of this intercultural hybridity, as García Canclini (2001) defines it, is in the dialogical relationship emerging out of the cohesion and the contradiction; the oscillation between the identity of origin and that of destination, and the acceptance of mixing as a starting point and not as a problematic element.

In order to achieve this synthesis it is necessary to challenge the existing order and deconstruct the binary relationship privileging the center over the margin. When exile is no longer perceived as a fragmentary element, synonym of loss and emptiness, but, on the contrary, as the potential of presence and affirmation and as a site of internal affirmation, the female characters are able to appropriate the periphery (Mujcinovic, 2003). This view presents exile as a space of growth, re-invention and personal (re)construction, a sort of limbo with positive connotation where the female subjects recreate a space to negotiate between the multiplicities of their identity. Consequently,

hybrid identities emerge from a thirdspace (Soja, 1996); the need to create new spaces of signification, hybrid spaces resulting from the mixture of cultures, ideas, beliefs and cultural practices, the revision of the former negative meaning attached to the borders and the periphery as marginal, into spaces of creation, resurgence, blooming. This hybrid space, then, becomes the crucial context from where to position oneself and re-construct identity.

Evoked and re-created through language and the female body, this thirdspace becomes visible in Yolanda's writing, in Pilar's dreaming and painting, in the *Santería* Felicia practices, in the bakery Lourdes owns, in the oral tradition embodied by Laura García, in Celia's letters, in Fifi's rebelliousness. Female identity, like individual and social memory, thus, is represented and (re)constructed through literary discourse. It is through various forms of linguistic expression and through the language of the female body that women find the tools to deconstruct the center-periphery dichotomy and create their own hybrid space to (re)construct their identity. Writing, for example, enables Yolanda to speak up, come back home whenever she wants and experience, in this way, a sense of belonging. Writing, thus, becomes Yolanda's tool to move freely between her identity of origin and her identity of destination, synthesizing creatively language, content and context. As Julia Álvarez beautifully narrates in *Something to Declare* (1999), once she understood that "Americans were not necessarily a smarter, superior race" but "it was natural for them to learn their mother tongue as it was for a little Dominican baby to learn Spanish", she relaxed in the second language. English, then, "became a charged, fluid mass" that carried her in its great waves to deposit her on the shores of her new homeland: "I was no longer a foreigner with no ground to stand on. I had landed on the English language" (pp. 28-29). Writing in the English language enabled Julia, and Yolanda in the novel, to create a thirdspace from where to speak. Through writing, Yolanda is able to return home to the island and the beauty of her mother tongue whenever she wants, because in writing, she sounds like herself.

Furthermore, writing works as a liberating force and open the path for a new woman (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cixous, 1976). And together with other cultural productions, it is the result of the subversion and challenge of the system and the creation of a synthesis between the semiotic and the symbolic (Kristeva as cited in Sarup, 1993). It is through speech that the female body resists oppression, silence and marginalization; and

when the female body is demystified of the traditional gender roles attached to it, and resists, that it becomes a medium of expression and voice (Katrak, 2006).

Besides the written word, the figure of the storyteller, embodied by Laura García in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992), is also a central element in the preservation of memory and the representation of female identity through literary discourse, since the oral tradition relying on family connections and family traditions is central for the origin and development of Latina's literary tradition. Laura plays the role of the storyteller re-telling anecdotes about the lives of her daughters and altering the facts to make it more attention-grabbing; to the point that even her daughters hesitate about the actual course of events. Storytelling, in this context, empowers Laura to construct individual and collective meanings, attributing meaning from the past to the present and vice versa. Laura's representation of the past creatively combines anterior reality with imagination, the fantastic and fiction (Montesperelli, 2005; Ricoeur, 2004), and enables her to liberate herself and challenge the hegemonic language of the dominant culture. It also empowers her as the omniscient narrator; she is the carrier of the truth and the one who possesses and re-tells history. Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) works as storyteller as well, but with a different aim: She alters historical facts and her representation of Cuba influenced by her hatred of the regime and as a defense mechanism to soothe her wounds. By retelling her own version of the past, Lourdes regains control of her own body and is able to manipulate and re-shape history, positioning herself at the center of the center-margin dichotomy.

Another aspect of the relationship between literary discourse and female identity is the role played by Julia Álvarez and Cristina García in the representation of the experiences of Latinas in the United States. Adding to the idea that "it cannot be assumed that the multi-ethnic writer is a spokesperson for the central experience of the writer's group" (Nas, 2003, p. 127), Spivak (1988) points out that instead of speaking for her ethnic group, Álvarez writes both inside and outside of her group identity by taking as subject matter the problematic of cross-cultural and cross-class understanding of the borderlands. Mitchell (1998) adds that Álvarez contemplates the exploitative social conditions of both cultures she has moved in and 'refuses to privilege the country of origins over the newly adopted nation' (p. 29). The stories narrated by Álvarez represent just a minuscule snapshot of the myriad experiences of Dominicans in the

United States. Understanding this work as a homogeneous mirror of Dominican life and experiences of the diaspora means underestimating and oversimplifying the complexity of Latina experiences and identity (re)construction, which should be understood as representations of difference (Mato, 2003). The same notion can be applied to the writing of Cristina García, whose representation of Cuba and Cuban exiles in the USA offers just a glance into the great variety of sensations, practices and feelings that characterize the Cuban diaspora in America.

Just like the female characters in their stories, the novels of the corpus are instances of hybridity. Both novels are composed of diverse narrative voices and different points of view creating polyphony, there is no chronological order in the narration and there is temporal juxtaposition, there is an oscillation between madness and sanity where dreams and metaphysical, magic phenomena are intertwined with reality, and there is a fluctuation between languages. The novels themselves are examples of how literary discourse, and writing in particular, become the space from where to (re)construct female identity, since the borderlands occur in the oscillation between narrators and perspectives, when a person straddles over two languages, creating a hybrid, or post-colonial, narrative form “mirroring the shifting and multiple nature of post-colonial identity itself” (Nas, 2003, p. 133). In relation to this, Kristeva explains that writing in another language is a new experience which opens up different possibilities, resulting in hybrid works that reflect the wanderings of individualities and the polyphonies of individuals (2002, p. 187).

To conclude, Álvarez and García have appropriated the margins and turned them into thirdspaces and cultural in-betweens, creating a unique space from which they are able to provide examples of hybrid intercultural female identities and the diverse and unique processes of identity (re)construction exiles go through, avoiding overgeneralizations and the homogenization of exile experiences. The multiplicity of voices, experiences, memories and systems of beliefs and values displayed in the novels through the diverse female characters create a myriad of representations of exile stories, originating a dialogism where these various and dynamic voices converge.

“Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armour yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you.” (Martin, G.R.R., 2005, *A Game of Thrones*. Retrieved from <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/227321-never-forget-what-you-are-for-surely-the-world-will>)

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