

IDENTITY AND EMIGRATION IN THE WORKS OF JULIA
ÁLVAREZ, CRISTINA GARCÍA, ESMERALDA SANTIAGO
AND MARIA AMPARO ESCANDÓN

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JUNE 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Stephen Minta for all his help and his advice throughout this project. I am also very grateful to Dr. Elizabeth Tyler, who has been very generous with me.

Niels Seaton met me when I first arrived in Great Britain, and his warmth and pep talks have meant a lot ever since. My time in York would not have been the same without Dr. Megan Crane, to whom I owe too much to list here. También le agradezco a Noelia Díaz Vicedo su amistad durante el día a día de compartir casa. Mandy Kenyon, Patricia Ruddle and Margot Blanchard have also given me endless support, making me laugh and letting me rant when I needed it. Thanks to the three of you.

Gracias también a Brigitte Brínquez Anzano, por toda su ayuda.

Pero gracias sobre todo a mi familia y en particular a mis padres, Karmele de Echano y Juan Maria Vizcaya, por estar ahí siempre y creer en mí. Esto os lo debo a vosotros. Finally, thanks also to Jonathan Hay, whose help and company throughout these years have been priceless.

The research for and writing of this thesis has been undertaken thanks to a Basque Government research grant.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines selected works by four Latina writers of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican descent who have moved to the United States: Maria Amparo Escandón's novel *Esperanza's Box of Saints*, Esmeralda Santiago's memoirs *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*, Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*, and Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, and *¡Yo!* Intimately linked with their own backgrounds, these writers' literary creations show a deep authorial concern about self- and collective representations, especially regarding the portrayal of those communities with which the authors identify themselves. They also explore different instances of acculturation, re-appropriation of cultural referents and reconfiguration of hybrid subjectivities. As they do so, they make readers confront their perceptions of Latin American, U.S. Latina and mainstream North American cultures.

The narratives of Santiago, Escandón, García and Alvarez bring to the fore how membership of various national or ethnic collectives -Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban and Dominican, respectively, as well as U.S. Latina and American- is conceived differently by different individuals, also drawing the reader's attention to the frictions resulting from this divergence. As they can claim simultaneous membership of several of these communities, the authors' and characters' identities can be considered "hybrid". However, when contrasting the works it immediately becomes clear that "hybrid" is not a neutral term. Who applies that word to themselves or to others engages with complex questions of power differentials between certain socio-cultural and racial groups as well as with oppressed sectors' strategies of resistance and empowerment.

The first part of the thesis, Auto/Biography, Fiction and Social Concerns, studies the representation of individual and collective identities in the narratives of García, Alvarez, Santiago and Escandón. Chapter 1, Life-Writing and Social Commitment, links the authors' backgrounds with their narrative materials, their representations of personal and ethnic identities, and their views on their role as writers. Chapter 2, Questions of Genre, deals with these themes at the level of genre, examining the connections of Alvarez's *Butterflies* with Latin American testimonial writing and analysing García's novels and Escandón's *EBS* under the light of magic realism. Part II, History, Culture and Immigration, develops further the questions of identity and its representation in literary works contrasting the different treatments of Latin American and U.S. history and culture in the four authors' works, dedicating a chapter to each. Finally, Part III connects the topics introduced in the previous chapters with questions of language and translation. Chapter 7 examines the presence, roles and connotations of Spanish and other languages in these Latina narratives written in English, while Chapter 8 focuses specifically on the nature and translation of Spanish entries.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines selected works by four Latina writers of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican descent who have moved to the United States: Maria Amparo Escandón's novel *Esperanza's Box of Saints*, Esmeralda Santiago's memoirs *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*, Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*, and Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, and *¡Yo!* Intimately linked with their own backgrounds, these writers' literary creations show a deep authorial concern about self- and collective representations, especially regarding the portrayal of those communities with which the authors identify themselves. They also explore different instances of acculturation, re-appropriation of cultural referents and reconfiguration of hybrid subjectivities. As they do so, they make readers confront their perceptions of Latin American, U.S. Latina and mainstream U.S. cultures.

National, ethnic and other socio-cultural groups are, using Benedict Anderson's coinage, "imagined communities". These authors' works explore who is imagining certain communities, and in what terms. The self-perception of a collective is shaped by the prominence that certain referents such as language, land, history, culture, race and/or nationality bear on its members' sense of self. However, the group-membership of certain individuals or sectors can be a point of contention, as different people set varying criteria defining who belongs to the community and judge differently whether someone's connection with such referents enables them to qualify as part of the community. As Anderson points

out, all communities are limited by definition: they have ‘finite, if elastic, boundaries’ as none imagines itself as ‘coterminous with mankind’¹, and they are constructed according to various patterns of exclusions and inclusions. The narratives of Santiago, Escandón, García and Alvarez bring to the fore how membership of various national or ethnic collectives -Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban and Dominican, respectively, as well as U.S. Latina and American- is conceived differently by different individuals, also drawing the reader’s attention to the frictions resulting from this divergence.

As they can claim simultaneous membership of several of these communities, the authors’ and characters’ identities can be considered “hybrid”. However, when contrasting the works it immediately becomes clear that “hybrid” is not a neutral term. Who applies that word to themselves or to others engages with complex questions of power differentials between certain socio-cultural and racial groups as well as with oppressed sectors’ strategies of resistance and empowerment.

In relation to these themes, the works of Alvarez, Santiago, García and Escandón pose interesting questions regarding the often contested relevance of the author’s identity and intentions when writing. Whether they choose to write autobiography, “fictionalized (auto)biographies” or straightforward fiction, these authors face the insoluble conflict between two opposite conceptions of identity and history: either these ideological constructs are based on a set of objective facts and are thus recoverable, or they are only a privileged version among many other possible versions of the self and the past. Making the question more specific to these writers’ cases, what are the defining traits of their Puertorican(-

1. Benedict Anderson (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p.7

American)ness, Dominican(-American)ness, and Mexican(-American)ness? Are these national identities little more than the fruit of each individual's personal creativity?

In addition, there is still a further problem to consider: that of representation, in both its meanings. When depicting collective conditions, in what circumstances and with what consequences can the writer act as a spokesperson for a group? The way in which these questions are answered raises a crucial point of controversy: whether authors hold an unavoidable responsibility for their work towards their communities –however these are defined- and their readers, or whether literary writing is essentially an act of self-expression and the possibility of creative licence endless. These points obviously become the more relevant within the context of communities torn by long-lasting social, economic and cultural problems. Socially committed writing is often automatically associated with and demanded from “ethnic” writers, who are ‘expected to speak in terms of the ethnic group... while the white writer, artist or film maker is left free to speak about everything’². Alvarez, García, Escandón and Santiago offer different stances with respect to the points outlined above, particularly regarding the writer's role within society and the possibility of considering writing and reading as political actions.

Although I have introduced the writers as Latinas living in the U.S., it is necessary to clarify that there is an ongoing debate about whether U.S. people descending from Latin American Spanish-speaking countries are best defined collectively as “Hispanic” or “Latinos”. Nicolas Kanellos opts for the first term, arguing that it is ‘closest to the Spanish word hispano (short for

2. Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 38-39.

hispanoamericano) which was and is used whenever Spanish-speaking people of diverse national and ethnic origins interact and live in the same communities'³. He considers "Latino" less appropriate in that it 'can also include Haitians and Brazilians and other francophone people', while acknowledging that some politicised groups prefer it as "Hispanic" has been used by the U.S. government to group U.S. people descending from Spanish-speaking communities (Introduction, p. 8).

Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach hold this position, contending that '[t]he use of the term "Hispanic" to categorize Latinos distorts the origin and roots of [Latin American] populations, preventing and excusing the dominant culture from understanding, respecting, and taking into account all the complexities of a culture other than its own'⁴. They develop this point further stating that 'the presumption that all peoples of Latino origin are "Hispanic" fails to take into account the ethnic components of Latin America' and assumes that 'all "Hispanics" are linguistically Spanish-dominant or Hispanic-surnamed in spite of the fact that fourth-generation Chicanos, for example, are English-dominant' ('At the Threshold', p.8). While aware of its shortcomings, I will adopt the term "Latina" to refer to women of Latin American descent living permanently in the U.S. The reader must bear in mind that, while I am concerned exclusively with Latinas descending from Spanish-speaking countries, the word could also be applied to those of francophone or lusophone ancestries.

3. Nicolas Kanellos, Introduction to *Hispanic American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology* (New York: Longman, 1995), ed. Nicolas Kanellos, p. 8.

4. Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Stenbach, 'At the Threshold of the Unnamed' in *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings*, eds. Asunción Horno-Delgado et. al. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 7.

By studying the four authors together, I do not intend to label them as a group or to overemphasise any thematic or stylistic similarities among them in search of the defining traits of the “immigrant Latina novel”⁵. These writers possess distinctively individual concerns regarding the topics they focus on, their style and their literary and cultural references. Their backgrounds also differ greatly in terms of social class, age, reasons for migrating, conditions of arrival in a new community and relationships between the country left and the U.S. The variety in the four writers’ circumstances and literary materials -the specificities of which become the more marked when contrasted with one another- dismantles any notions of a homogeneous corpus of Latina immigrant narratives.

Regarding not the differences between individual authors but between U.S. ethnic groups, the term Latino writing encompasses various literatures which differ greatly in chronological terms and stages of development as well as in the cultural traditions they stem from. Mexican Americans were the first Latinos in the U.S. after the treatise of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 made what were Mexican lands part of the U.S. Consequently, their literature and criticism are the oldest and most established among Latino writing. After Spain’s cession of Puerto Rico to the U.S. in 1898, the second Latino group to settle in the U.S. were Puerto Ricans, and, accordingly, the works of Puerto Ricans on the mainland constitute the second most developed group within U.S. Following the exodus triggered by the 1959 revolution, Cuban Americans became the third largest Latino population in the U.S., and their writing, chronologically, the third to flourish among Latino literatures. Finally, Dominican presence in the U.S.

5. While some scholars refer to the movement of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. as “migration” since Puerto Ricans are American citizens, I will use the terms “immigration” or “emigration” to indicate that Esmeralda’s family’s journeys take place between two different countries as opposed to their internal migration in Puerto Rico from rural to urban environment and vice versa.

became more prominent from the mid 1960s onwards, although the emigration experienced and portrayed by Julia Alvarez anteceded these migratory movements.

The fact that the four authors are first generation migrant Latina women and chose protagonists who can also be identified as such helps set coherent limits to the scope of this project. Since the mid-1970s, when studies on migration started focusing on women's specific circumstances, there has been an increasing interest in how 'women and men stay –and move- for different, or similar, reasons... because of the gender differences in their relations to others and conditions of life, the form of their mobility and the consequences of their staying or moving might be quite different'⁶. Escandón, García, Alvarez and Santiago focus on the varying situations of Latina women, often showing how emigration can trigger a re-negotiation of female status and roles –and indeed of the very understanding of femininity. In this sense, these writers' works offer creative developments of the idea that 'migration is a gender-differentiated process and must be understood as such' (Bjerén, p. 223).

Santiago's *WIWPR*⁷ and *AW*⁸ provide an autobiographical account of the author's life up to the age of twenty-one. The former covers Santiago's childhood years in Puerto Rico until, at the age of thirteen, she departs for New York in 1961 to join her mother. The latter picks up Santiago's life story at that point and depicts the author's adolescence in Brooklyn, paying special attention

6. Gunilla Bjerén, 'Gender and Reproduction' in *International Migration, Immobility and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Tomas Hammar et al. (Oxford: Berg, 1997), p. 246.

7. Esmeralda Santiago (1993), *When I Was Puerto Rican* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). Henceforth *WIWPR*.

8. Esmeralda Santiago (1998), *Almost a Woman* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999). Henceforth *AW*.

to the evolution of her relationship with her family as she matures and craves increasing independence from her mother's surveillance. Santiago has also written *América's Dream* (1996), a fictional novel which portrays how América García leaves Puerto Rico and her abusive husband for the U.S., where she finds work as a maid. All three works recreate Santiago's impressions of the situation of poor, working class Puerto Ricans both in their own country and within U.S. Puerto Rican communities⁹.

As Puerto Ricans are granted American citizenship by birthright, the situation of Puerto Ricans wanting to move to the U.S. differs from the other cases studied here. As a result of Puerto Ricans' relative freedom to travel to the U.S. and back, Santiago's narratives focus not on the dilemma of whether one will be allowed to emigrate –or else, whether the person will decide to do so illegally-, but on other cultural, social, economic and politic factors affecting the migrants' processes of settling, belonging, remembrance and narration.

Julia Alvarez was born in 1951 in New York, but moved to the Dominican Republic when she was three-months old as her parents, 'both native Dominicans, decided to return to their homeland, preferring the dictatorship of Trujillo to the U.S.A. of the early 50s'¹⁰. Her first and third novels *GG*¹¹ and

9. I will use "Puerto Rican" to allude to people of Puerto Rican ancestry whether living on the island or on the continental U.S. As for those individuals of Puerto Rican ancestry living on the continent, the terminology most commonly used to refer to them presents serious problems. 'Puerto Rican Americans' could be seen as inadequate since many would not consider themselves to be American. 'U.S. Puerto Rican' or 'mainland Puerto Rican' –the most frequently used expression- are also problematic: on the one hand, the terms could be considered redundant since Puerto Rican Americans hold American citizenship by birthright; on the other hand, they could be deemed highly inappropriate since some do not see Puerto Rico as a territory of the United States but as a separate country (Barbara R. Sjoström, 'Culture Contact and Value Orientations: The Puerto Rican Experience' in *The Hispanic Experience in the United States: Contemporary Issues and Perspectives*, eds. Edna Acosta-Belén and Barbara R. Sjoström (New York, Westport [Connecticut] & London: Praeger, 1988), p. 183). While acknowledging the terms' shortcomings, I will refer to Puerto Ricans in the continent as U.S. Puerto Ricans or mainland Puerto Ricans.

10. Although several works on the author such as, for instance, Silvio Sirias' *Julia Alvarez: A Critical Companion* (2001) state that she was born in the Dominican Republic, she clarifies this

*¡Yo!*¹² mirror different episodes in the Alvarezes' family story as they leave the Dominican Republic for New York in 1960 escaping from Trujillo's dictatorship. *GG* and *¡Yo!* show the fictional García family's long processes of self-reconstruction and adaptation to a new country and way of life. The novels' protagonist Yolanda García follows a trajectory very similar to that of Alvarez, as both character and author grow up in a middle-class environment, stay in close contact with her motherland, and eventually become prose and poetry writers and professors of English.

Alvarez's second fictional work, *Butterflies*¹³, is also based on the real story of the Mirabal sisters, who, known as "the Butterflies", were murdered because of their role in the resistance against Trujillo's regime. When, as a young girl, Alvarez hears about them, she becomes fascinated by their heroism. *Butterflies* can be read as Alvarez's attempt to understand and spread the story of the sisters, filling the gaps in her knowledge of their lives by resorting to her imagination. Apart from these works, the author has also written numerous essays, novels and stories.

*Esperanza's Box of Saints*¹⁴ is the first novel of María Amparo Escandón, a bilingual Mexican writer who has published numerous short stories in Spanish since 1973. Having lived in Mexico most of her life, she moved to the U.S. in

misunderstanding on her official website, [Julia Alvarez](http://www.alvarezjulia.com), accessed October 2003 <<http://www.alvarezjulia.com>>.

11. Julia Alvarez (1991), *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (New York: Plume, 1992). Henceforth *GG*.

12. Julia Alvarez, *¡Yo!* (New York: Plume, 1997).

13. Julia Alvarez (1994), *In the Time of the Butterflies* (New York: Plume, 1995). Henceforth *Butterflies*.

14. María Amparo Escandón, *Esperanza's Box of Saints* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). Henceforth *EBS*.

1989 and published further short stories; she now lives in Los Angeles, where she runs a Hispanic advertising agency and teaches fiction writing. *EBS* portrays the tragicomic odyssey of Esperanza Díaz, a young pious widow searching for her missing daughter Blanquita. The story ends in a fairly cliched romantic way as Esperanza finally finds peace of mind and love again, after having travelled from the Mexican rural town of Tlacotalpan to the brothels of Tijuana and Los Angeles.

Finally, Cristina García was born in Havana, Cuba, grew up in New York and now lives in Los Angeles with her daughter Pilar. Her novels *Dreaming in Cuban*¹⁵ and *The Agüero Sisters*¹⁶ depict the turbulent evolution of Cuban society through Fidel Castro's government as well as the island's complex links with the U.S. through the changing relationships among several female members of families torn by personal antagonisms, political dissension and exile. She has also written a third novel, *Monkey Hunting* (2003), about a Chinese Cuban family in 1857, and written and edited other non-fiction works.

As "immigration" has been widely used to describe very different sorts of displacement with equally diverse causes and consequences, it is necessary to clarify how I will understand the term throughout this study. Hammar and Tamas identify it as a primarily spatial phenomenon which takes place as 'people move from one place to another, alone or together with others, for a short visit or for a long period of time, over a long or short distance'¹⁷. Narrowing their definition further, they define the international immigrant as 'a person who has moved from

15. Cristina García (1992), *Dreaming in Cuban* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993). Henceforth *DC*.

16. Cristina García, *The Agüero Sisters* (London: Picador, 1997). Henceforth *TAS*.

17. Tomas Hammar and Kristof Tamas, 'Why do People Go or Stay?' in *International Migration, Immobility and Development*, eds. Tomas Hammar et al., p. 15.

one country to another with the intention of taking up residence there' (Hammar and Tamas, p.16). I will adopt this description of the term as a point of departure which will be qualified further throughout the following chapters. However, I am conscious of its insufficiency in that it obliterates the fact that mobility is conditioned –and forced- by diverse factors such as nationality, wealth or lack of it, family connections, gender, education or lack of it, ideology or legal status.

Although there are substantial differences between the two predicaments, I will use the term “immigrant” to refer to those who leave a country for economic or welfare reasons as well as to those who do it motivated by ideological factors –exiles and refugees. Some of García’s main characters in *DC* and *TAS* as well as the García family of Alvarez’s *GG* and *¡Yo!* fall within this category, whereas the causes for the journey in the case of Escandón and Santiago’s protagonists are mainly personal and, in the second case, also economic. The four authors’ works, however, all illustrate that immigration is a process that starts well before approaching physical borders between countries, and which constitutes ‘a long-term if not life-long’ negotiation of ‘identity, difference, and the right to fully exist and flourish in the new context’¹⁸ – especially for ethnicised and marginalised groups.

The focus of this project is primarily literary in that it is mainly concerned with the construction and status of the writers’ works as narratives. However, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary since, as Benmayor and Skotnes state, immigrant subjects and their creative works ‘constantly build, reinvent, synthesize, or even collage identities from multiple sources and

18. Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes, ‘Some reflexions on Migration and Identity’ in *Migration and Identity, International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories 3*, eds. Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), p. 8.

resources, often lacing them with deep ambivalence' (p.15). Together with this, quoting Chicana scholar Alvina Quintana, '[b]ecause "minority" women are interpellated by a series of competing and overlapping ideologies, we should view their artistic endeavors as emerging from a complex material reality influenced by race, class, ethnicity, gender, national origin, and education'¹⁹. The methodology for the consideration of such factors in this thesis draws mainly from feminist, post-colonial and globalisation theories, a choice of analytical frameworks which I proceed to explain in more detail.

Feminist Perspectives

Latina feminist and literary criticism constitutes an essential reference when approaching the women-focused texts of Alvarez, García, Santiago and Escandón, together with the theoretical contributions of other U.S. women of colour as well as Third World scholars²⁰. Edited by Asunción Horno-Delgado, Eliana Ortega, Nina M. Scott and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, the work *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings* provides useful insights into the complex questions of gender, class, race, ethnicity, language and emigration raised in the writings of the authors studied here. *Breaking Boundaries* presents itself as 'the first book of literary criticism where Latina writers of all these

19. Alvina Quintana, *Homegirls: Chicana Literary Voices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 28.

20. Despite their denouncement of the Three World Theory as a biased fallacy, the term has been critically reappropriated by scholars from former colonies, developing countries and ethnically marked groups with historical experiences of oppression.

groups [Chicanas, Puertorriqueñas, Cubanas, and Latinoamericanas from other countries] are considered simultaneously’ (Horno-Delgado et al, p. xiii).

Such a grouping acknowledges common socio-historical realities that have led Latina authors to share certain concerns on literary and political matters (Horno-Delgado et al., p. xiii). However, it goes side by side with the editors’ acute consciousness that ‘[t]he literary production of Latinas is by women who belong to several different national origins’, and whose different socio-historical positionings have been often overlooked by mainstream tendencies to consider Latinos/as as a homogeneous entity²¹. Added to this, as Latina writers often experience the problematics of speaking as someone who is neither an Anglo woman nor a Latino man, feminism becomes ‘one of the three cultures a Latina must take into account as one more structure of ideological domain’ (Ortega and Sternbach, p. 13).

Post-colonial and feminist discourses have increasingly acknowledged the need to address the differences as well as the connections between “Woman” –quoting Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses’- and “women” –‘real, material subjects of their collective histories’ living in vastly different conditions²². If there is no universal Woman, constructs such as “Third World”, “Post-colonial”, “ethnic” and “Latina” Woman must also be confronted with an awareness of the socio-historically diverse situations of the subjects subsumed under such generalising terms. The works of Alvarez, Santiago, Escandón and

21. Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporita Stenbach, ‘At the Threshold of the Unnamed’ in *Breaking Boundaries*, eds. Asunción Horno-Delgado et al., p. 6.

22. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’ in *The Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 259.

García make it clear that identities are not homogeneous or fixed, that there are many ways of being Latina, a woman, and an immigrant.

While advocating an acknowledgement of the specificities of Latinos/as both with respect to other U.S. ethnic groups and among themselves, Ortega and Sternbach also denounce the fact that ‘the much used concept of “diversity” also becomes a euphemism for racism when it is imposed by outsiders’ (p. 13). Like “difference”, they add,

[i]f diversity is perceived only in racial or ethnic terms, without questioning the relations of, and to, power structures, then it also becomes a celebration of oppression and continues the marginalization of the “diverse” people in question by assigning them a framed space and date in which to perform. (p. 13)

Alvarez, García, Santiago, and Escandón deploy diverse strategies to portray both their own and their characters’ difference, whether felt by the individual or ascribed to them by others. The first two offer socially committed novels which explore the differences of Cuban and Dominican Americans with respect to island communities, older generations of their U.S. communities, and white America. While still concerned with the situation of Latina immigrants, the writings of Santiago and Escandón show more individualistic overtones which seem to challenge the automatic imposition of responsibilities towards their ethnic groups by either mainstream audiences or other Latinas.

With its light tone and fairy-tale ending, Escandón’s narrative in particular stands in an indefinite space between humorous, celebratory parody of Mexican and Latina culture and the manipulation of its cultural particularities in an exercise of self-exotisation. These features can arguably be connected with the fact that Escandón is the only one of the four authors studied to move to the U.S.

voluntarily at an adult age. Her protagonist, in similar circumstances, integrates herself into a U.S. Chicana community –and literary corpus- with a longer and more prominent presence in the country than the other ethnic groups considered here. To a lesser extent this last point also applies to Santiago’s self-portrayal in *WIWPR* and *AW*.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* develops in the notion of Borderlands a way to conceptualise the experiences of difference, contradiction, discrimination, and self-(re)construction of collectives living simultaneously in various cultures. Anzaldúa is referring primarily to the geographical borderland between the U.S. Southwest and Mexico, but underlines that the Borderlands ‘are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy’²³. From the ‘racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization’ taking place in the borderlands ‘an “alien” consciousness is presently in the making –a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer’ (*Borderlands*, p.77). ‘Like all people,’ she states, the new mestizas ‘perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages’ (*Borderlands*, p. 78).

Her “new mestiza”’s strategy is learning to live juggling cultures, having a plural personality and operating in a pluralistic mode: ‘Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else’ (*Borderlands*, p. 79). This “something else” constitutes a new consciousness

23. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Preface to Borderlands/ La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), not paginated.

which is ‘a source of intense pain’ but is also in a ‘continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm’ (*Borderlands*, pp. 79-80). The protagonists of García, Santiago, Escandón and Alvarez shift classes, languages, and cultures; becoming “alien” both in their countries of origin and in the U.S., they reclaim their place in both reshaping their identities in the process. Anzaldúa’s celebration of racial, cultural and sexual heterogeneity, without obliterating the painful consequences often experienced by collectives marked as different and living in the borderlands, provides a powerful referent when approaching these authors’ “in-betweenness”.

Post-colonial contexts.

Studying the prose of Alvarez, Escandón, García and Santiago within the context of post-colonialism underlines further essential dimensions in the interrelated articulations of space and Latina subjectivities offered throughout these authors’ writings. Their respective countries share a legacy of colonialism under Spanish rule and U.S. neocolonial influence. However, the trajectory and current situation of each vary greatly. Alvarez’s narratives in particular have the socio-economic differentials between them as a secondary theme, portraying the exodus of rural Dominicans to the capital and then often to Puerto Rico in search of better conditions of life.

As a concept and as a field of study, post-colonialism has come to encompass a wide range of meanings with different degrees of accuracy. The main focus of post-colonial discourses are the historical processes of colonialism,

the ample variety of its effects on both colonising and colonised countries, and the equally diverse responses they have received from those societies. '[A] result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices'²⁴, post-colonial literatures differ from one another as much as the circumstances of the post-colonial societies within which they are born do. The works of Santiago, Escandón, García and Alvarez represent a varied range of such mixtures of Cuban, Mexican, Dominican, and Puerto Rican literary traditions and perspectives. The framework offered by post-colonial theories also allows the examination of how the works of Alvarez, García, Santiago and Escandón depict the fact that, despite the power differentials between coloniser and colonised, colonialism's effects have affected both in complex two-way processes.

The narratives of Alvarez, Escandón, Santiago and García present historical accounts as politically charged narrative constructs. The authors' concern with narrativity, the plurality of identity and history and the uneasy boundaries between fact and fiction echo post-colonialism's destabilisation of European master narratives and their pretensions of historical objectivity. While the works challenge historical discourses that have become official, the alternative renderings that they offer must be contextualised with care, as '[c]onstructing the past is an act of self-identification... motivated in historically, spatially, and socially determinate circumstances'²⁵.

24. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.

25. Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (London: Sage, 1994), p. 145.

Globalisation

Although Latina writing is more frequently examined from post-colonial and feminist perspectives, I believe that the exploration of the immigration movements and transformative cultural exchanges portrayed by these authors can gain much from utilising analytical tools developed within globalisation studies. These writers' literary production in particular and that of Latinas in general has in turn a contribution to make to the understanding of central issues in globalisation studies, challenging perceptions that people from developing countries are passive participants in globalisation processes.

Since the 1980s the term "globalisation" has become widely used to convey the series of processes through which the world has been increasingly perceived as a single place, a whole consisting of interdependent parts. Globalisation has been mainly connected with 'the flexible and spatially extended forms of production, the rapid mobility of capital, information and goods, the denationalizing of capital, the deterritorialization of culture, the interpenetration of local communities by global media networks and the dispersal of socio-economic power beyond the Euro-American axis'²⁶ (Papastergiadis, p. 76). A further dimension of globalisation is the proliferation, expansion in volume and acceleration of migratory movements (Papastergiadis, p. 86).

Although not new, the set of heterogeneous processes identified as globalization is felt to have intensified, gaining special momentum since the 1970s and 1980s. While globalisation was initially understood mainly in economic terms, its social, political and cultural aspects have been increasingly

26. Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 76.

recognised with an awareness that, quoting Ulf Hannerz, ‘the world has become one network of social relationships, and between its different regions there is a flow of meanings as well as of people and goods’²⁷. The works of Alvarez, Escandón, García and Santiago explore from varied perspectives how an increasing number of people are involved with more than one culture as a result. However, their depictions of the political, economic and cultural links between Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the U.S. with one another and with other countries also illustrate that ‘there clearly are global developments and processes, yet the confidence with which they could be incorporated into a single, explanatory, global historical narrative has been lost’²⁸.

The socio-economic tendencies toward globalisation run parallel to a resurgence of the particular and the local. In Mike Featherstone’s reading of these two opposite but interrelated phenomena,

the changes which are taking place as a result of the current phase of intensified globalisation can be understood as provoking reactions that seek to rediscover particularity, localism and difference which generate a sense of the limits of the culturally unifying, ordering and integrating projects associated with Western modernity’ (*Undoing Culture*, p. 114).

What is more, thanks to the flows of people and information local concerns may acquire a wide projection, gaining the support or opposition of other spatially distant groups serving them as points of reference in their own struggles. As

27. Ulf Hannerz, ‘Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture’ in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalisation, and Modernity: a Theory, Culture and Society Special Issue*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), p. 237.

28. Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 88.

these examples evidence, a clear-cut separation of the global and the local is becoming increasingly problematic, as they are being acknowledged not as opposite but as 'two constitutive trends of global reality' (Friedman, p. 102). Rather than necessarily implying socio-cultural homogenisation, the processes of globalisation can facilitate the emergence of 'new spaces for the clashing of cultures'²⁹.

Globalisation thus encapsulates a wide array of phenomena with equally multifarious effects. People experience globalisation in highly varied ways depending on their particular social circumstances, and, as feminist geographer Doreen Massey points out, '[t]here are differences in the degree of movement and communication, but also in the degree of control and of initiation' of globalisation processes³⁰. These considerations become evident when contemplating the different circumstances of the protagonists of Alvarez, Santiago, Escandón and García.

Looking at the critical frames outlined above, it becomes evident that there is a certain overlap in the undertakings of feminist, post-colonial, and globalisation studies. However, the divergences in the three fields' approaches make their respective contributions both complementary and essential for the purposes of my analysis. Regarding the conceptualisations of space and history within post-colonialism and globalisation theories, the former puts a greater stress on the agency of individuals and collectives as well as on the cultural interfaces among them. The latter, on the other hand, allows for considerations of

29. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, *Introduction to Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, eds, Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), p. 1.

30. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 150.

socio-spatial phenomena not directly related to the effects of the interactions between colonised and colonisers constituting postcolonialism's main focus. Feminist scholarship, in turn, exposes the gender bias and blindspots often found in the other two disciplines.

It can also be noted that these three areas of study partially coincide with postmodernist concerns. Indeed, postmodernism's major undertaking, 'the deconstruction of the centralised, logocentric master narratives of European culture', resembles 'the post-colonial project of dismantling the Centre/Margin binarism of imperial discourse' (Ashcroft et al, p. 117). However, as Linda Hutcheon argues, postmodern

challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses³¹

While an awareness of postmodern literary strategies can be presumed in the writings of García, Santiago, Alvarez and Escandón, it is this difference in focus that has led me to relegate postmodernist scholarship to a less prominent plane in the analyses undertaken in this chapter.

As regards the organisation of the thesis, a first part, *Auto/Biography, Fiction and Social Concerns*, studies the representation of individual and collective identities in the narratives of García, Alvarez, Santiago and Escandón. Chapter 1, *Life-Writing and Social Commitment*, links the authors' backgrounds with their

31. Linda Hutcheon, 'Circling the Downspot of Empire' in *The Postcolonial Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft et al., p. 131.

narrative materials, their representations of personal and ethnic identities, and their views on their role as writers, while Chapter 2, Questions of Genre, deals with these themes at the level of genre, examining the connections of Alvarez's *Butterflies* with Latin American testimonial writing and analysing García's novels and Escandón's *EBS* under the light of magic realism. Part II, History, Culture and Immigration, develops further the questions of identity and its representation in literary works contrasting the different treatments of Latin American and U.S. history and culture in the four authors' works, dedicating a chapter to each. Finally, Part III connects the topics introduced in the previous chapters with questions of language and translation. Chapter 7 examines the presence, roles and connotations of Spanish and other languages in these Latina narratives written in English, while Chapter 8 focuses specifically on the nature and translation of Spanish entries.

PART I

AUTO/BIOGRAPHY, FICTION, AND SOCIAL CONCERNS

CHAPTER 1

LIFE-WRITING AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT.

As the authors themselves have explained in articles and interviews, the depictions of social, political and personal struggles in the narratives of Santiago, Alvarez, García and Escandón are inspired –although admittedly in different ways- by their own experiences as Latina immigrants to the United States. The works studied here are born of a series of tensions between the individual and the social, between one culture and another, between tradition and innovation, between various conceptions of identity and history. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the discussions developed further in Parts II and III as they contrast these authors’ lives and social concerns with their narrative materials and focus on the complex bond between experiences and their shaping into narration. This opening chapter focuses on the representation of “ethnic” characters and communities by these “ethnic” writers, examining the tensions between their respective narrative concerns, backgrounds, understandings of their role as writers, and acts of life-writing.

1.1. Problematizing Authorial Social Commitment

This section provides an initial approach to how the authors understand their role as “ethnic” writers, considering complex questions emerging from the duty to act as an intermediary between the voiceless and mainstream audiences often felt by or imposed on minority writers. Such an authorial social commitment is illustrated by the definition of literary success of Sandra Cisneros, the most widely known U.S. Latina writer, as the capability to ‘change the way someone

thinks about [her] community, or [her] gender, or [her] class'³². This stance is supported by the awareness of being the first woman in her family to 'pick up a pen and record what I see around me, a woman who has the power to speak and is privileged enough to be heard'³³.

The question of a writer's display of social awareness and the authorial responsibilities derived from it raises complex questions in the narrative of Alvarez, García and Santiago, while in the case of Escandón we will examine the effects of the lack of this dimension in a minority or ethnic work. First, it is necessary to explore what people, gender and class constitute the communities that the authors portray and/or belong to. When determining these points, we have to take into account their condition as immigrants, their social mobility and the fact that gender –“being a woman”- is understood differently in different socio-cultural groups. There is also the issue of whether such an allegiance is enough to justify the act of representation and of how the writer's subjectivity affects her mediating role. Together with this, we have to enquire whether the depiction of a certain national, ethnic or social group might be tainted by nostalgia, guilt about geo-social mobility, or a conscious attempt to avoid confirming stereotypes about 'cultures of poverty'.

Introducing an ethical element to her writing, Julia Alvarez states that she wishes to be a 'force for the good', to 'change people's perceptions and prejudices about things'; she wants 'to show the full complexity of a situation. When... you change people's perceptions of the world, that is the best kind of

32. "A House of My Own": Sandra Cisneros and the Art of Storytelling, ed. Dolores Zumwault, accessed March 2000 <<http://www.twu/library/zumwault.html>>.

33. Sandra Cisneros, 'Notes to a Young(er) Writer' in *Hispanic American Literature*, ed. Nicolas Kanellos (New York: Longman, 1995), p. 52.

force for change'³⁴. However, she can only show the “full complexity” of a situation from her own limited perspective, and must face the difficulty of “changing people’s perceptions and prejudices” without instilling in them new preconceptions of which the author is not necessarily aware. Asked about her political agenda when writing *Butterflies*, the author answers that she thought that

it was my mission..., my responsibility to do this, because I was one of the lucky ones. My family survived. Somehow, I had to give voice to... the names of the dead that Trujillo murdered during the 31 years. But I also had the desire to understand how these women did this. I was interested in how people get courage. I figured they were just like me. They were flesh and blood, they wanted to live, they had children, they had husbands, they wanted to grow old and see their grandchildren. Then how did they become who they became? (Interview with Julia Alvarez)

Alvarez undertakes an act of creative collective remembrance which, as Maya Socolovsky affirms of García’s writing, reveals ‘the difficulty of remembering and representing an act or moment of violence from the past without translating its recovery into a symbol of “memorial” and thus into another forgetting’³⁵.

Cristina García also shows a social and feminist consciousness linked with the wish to reveal and record silenced histories, believing that the way ‘traditional history’ has been ‘written, interpreted and recorded, obviates [sic] women and the evolution of home, family and society, and basically becomes a recording of battles and wars and dubious accomplishments of men. You learn

34. Interview with Julia Alvarez, eds. Jessica Browde et al, accessed February 2000 <<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/JuliaAlvarez.html>>.

35. Maya Socolovsky, ‘Unnatural Violences: Counter-Memory and Preservations in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters* in *Lit: Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 11:2 (2000), p. 144.

where politics really lie at home'³⁶. García also adds that this issue is very important to her as a writer although she was not brought up within any Latina or Cuban community. These words introduce some essential points in the study of the writers I am dealing with: what does it mean to “be” or “feel” Cuban (or Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican, and their hyphenated-American counterparts) if it does not depend on geographical boundaries or living within the community and if it is subject to endless personal reconstructions? And how does this cultural identity interact with other factors constituting a subject’s identity? These questions, at the core of the four authors’ writing, will recur throughout the chapters in parts I and II structuring the discussions undertaken in each.

The writings of Alvarez and García seem motivated by the wish to understand what has caused social and personal situations rather than to communicate straightforward ideological statements to the reader. Alvarez makes it clear that her writing is not to be considered political in the sense that ‘you come right out and say, “to be a bilingual and bicultural female in this culture is a very hard thing and you make mistakes along the way”’; she prefers just to ‘tell the story. From this [the readers] become involved with a character and realize things’ (Interview with Julia Alvarez). The authors deploy various strategies to avoid delivering any clear-cut messages which would transform their novels into mere vehicles for ideology: the most prominent ones are offering the conflicting viewpoints of various characters, adopting a tone of

36. Iraida H. Lopez, ‘“And There Is Only My Imagination Where Our History Should Be”: an Interview with Cristina García’, in *Bridges to Cuba/ Puentes a Cuba*, ed. Ruth Behar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 107.

ironic detachment and humour in certain episodes, and including fantastic elements that make a literal reading of the narratives difficult.

Each in her own style, Alvarez and García illustrate Cherríe Moraga's definition of the political writer as 'the ultimate optimist, believing people are capable of change and using words as one way to try to penetrate the privatism of our lives'³⁷. Their strong Latina protagonists stand against defeatism as if acting on Gloria Anzaldúa's belief that 'if we posture as victims we will be victims, that hopelessness is suicide, that self-attacks stop us on [sic] our tracks'³⁸. Although they remain distinctively individual, most of their characters face oppressive circumstances by struggling to change their situation at a personal level, at a community level or at both. In their socio-historical analyses, both the authors and their protagonists echo Anzaldúa's refusal to 'glorify those aspects of [her] culture which have injured [her] and which have injured [her] in the name of protecting [her]' (p. 22).

Esmeralda Santiago expresses a desire –already problematised when introducing Alvarez and García- to make known the fact 'that people can live the way [she] lived and do live the way [she] lived'³⁹. Her job as a Puerto Rican writer is 'to convey a sense of that culture and of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States from many different angles'⁴⁰, and she affirms that she thinks she will 'be writing of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican women the rest of [her] life'

37. Cherríe Moraga, 'Refugees in a World of Fire', Foreword to the Second Edition of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), page not numbered.

38. Gloria Anzaldúa, Foreword to the Second Edition of *This Bridge*, page not numbered.

39. Cultural Go-Between: Author Esmeralda Santiago's Two Languages and Two Lives, ed. Libby Ingrid Copeland, accessed September 2001, <<http://www.nabe.org/press/reprints/98112e.htm>>.

40. Carmen Dolores Hernández, *Puerto Rican Voices in English: Interviews with Writers* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), p. 169.

(Hernández, p. 166). Regarding the portrayal of Puerto Rican culture and circumstances so essential to her writing, she feels that she is ‘an intermediary between people who can’t communicate and people who need to be communicated to’ (Cultural Go-Between). She believes that ‘if you don’t exist in the arts of a people... you don’t exist in a culture’ (Cultural Go-Between).

Santiago’s awareness of the collective repercussions of her work is also manifest when she states that, although she could write for herself in private journals, she ‘realized that [her writing] had to be public’ believing it coincided with the experiences of many other immigrants (Hernández, p.163). While Santiago’s words stress the necessity for “minority” and “ethnic” groups to have a cultural and artistic presence in society, the question arises once again of how and by whom those groups are defined and represented. Santiago’s portrayal of island and mainland Puerto Rican culture in narratives that do not tone down the author’s drive and unapologetic individualism has been severely criticised by Puerto Rican critics, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Contrasting with the express desire of Alvarez and García to effect social change through writing and with Santiago’s commitment to depict her reality, Escandón’s novel was born primarily out of her fear of losing her daughter. ‘To face this fear head on, and to double the challenge’⁴¹. she writes her anxiety out as a comedy; she stresses its entertainment value, describing it as ‘a novel full of surprises’ and guaranteeing ‘one per page’ (BookBrowser Interview). *EBS* possesses a light, highly dramatic and often humorous tone even when dealing with issues like the traffic of organs and young girls, prostitution, and religious faith.

41. BookBrowser Interview: María Amparo Escandón Interviewed by Alycia Harris, accessed September 2001, <<http://www.BookBrowser.com/authors/interviews/MariaEscandon.html>>.

The ideological concerns briefly summarised in this section prove central to these five writers' narratives in terms of content, style and genre. However, they can be easily overlooked –or, equally fatally, taken at face value- by readers from groups where such social and cultural struggles are not so marked and can even be seen as something from the past. The writings of García, Santiago, Alvarez and Escandón show each in their own way how narratives can create –or not- a new language to refer to specific situations and collectives, offer –or fail to offer- new role-models for marginalized or invisible social groups, and dismantle or reaffirm stereotypes. In this respect, the case of Santiago and Escandón triggers an examination of what happens when an “ethnic” writer refuses to adopt, either overtly or at all, a specific kind of social responsibility towards their communities. These points will be studied throughout the following sections and chapters.

1.2 Different Possibilities of Life-Writing

The previous section has examined how the texts of Escandón, García, Alvarez and Santiago are connected with each author's processes of self-definition as Latina writers. Together with a belief in having a story that needs telling, they face complex questions about the elusive nature of individual and collective identities, the authenticity of the authors' experience and the impossibility of its objective, “transparent” (self-) representation. As these writers' characters –and, I will argue, the writers themselves- engage each in their own way in a search for

self-definition, they also undertake a quest to ascertain who they were, their past, and their origins⁴².

In a statement also applicable to other forms of life-writing, Betty Bergland affirms that since ‘the autobiographical narrative makes its presentation of the human seem natural, autobiography remains... a genre possessing ideological power -in short, it serves a political function’⁴³. This is the reason why, although ‘[t]he complex intertextuality of fiction and autobiography is as old as the novel’⁴⁴, the interactions between facts and their interpretations continue to be studied and constantly redefined. If any study of works with a marked auto/biographical component is bound to engage with the current debates ‘about factual and fictional discourse, authorial intention and reference’⁴⁵, it is the more so in the case of texts by “ethnic”, minority or marginal social groups. As a result of what Bergland calls ‘institutionalized efforts to incorporate literatures of the cultural other, and efforts to expand the canon’ (p.130), “ethnic” autobiographies –as well as other kinds of “ethnic” works–

often serve representative functions, evoking so-called minority literatures, cultures, and subjectivities.... Because of such representative status, the burden of these texts becomes enormous, and how we read these texts raises profound questions... (p.130)

42. This quest for origins (personal, national and continental) is a key concern in Latin American literature and goes beyond the individual level which is dealt with in the present chapter. Much of Latin America’s pre-Columbian history is unrecorded and perhaps unrecoverable except through imagination, a point which is also related to these writers’ and their characters’ self-search through narration. An awareness of these issues is essential for an understanding of the arguments presented –especially in Chapter 2 regarding Alvarez’s take on *testimonio* and García’s magic realist writing.

43. Betty Bergland, ‘Postmodernism and the Autobiographical Subject: Reconstructing the Other’ in *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, eds. Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore and Gerald Peters (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1994), p. 131.

44. Liz Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992), p. 59.

45. Laura Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Criticism, Theory, Practice* (Manchester & New York: Manchester UP, 1994), p. 229.

An awareness of these issues affects the different links established by Alvarez, Santiago, García and Escandón between their life and their literary creations – whether in their narratives or in interviews and papers-, also conditioning their choices when writing.

Examining different possible mediations between a life and its written reconstruction, Carolyn G. Heilbrun identifies four main ways of narrating a woman's existence:

the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognizing or naming the process⁴⁶

Liz Stanley suggests further ways of textualizing women's life-stories noting that

[s]omeone may write a person's biography in what they choose to call fiction... Someone may 'collect' a life history, often focussed on particular themes or dimensions, in what is called oral history or social science... Someone may focus on a single life in the absence of a life history within social science... Someone may edit for publication a person's written words in a diary or letters... (p.124)

Heilbrun and Stanley's listings call attention to the fact that the reception of a text can potentially vary depending on the literary category that the author decides to ascribe to it. This is especially so when what "she chooses to call it" differs from what it would conventionally "be called", or if she refuses to "call it" anything at all. Bearing these points in mind will be crucial to an

46. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (London: The Woman's Press, 1989), p. 11.

understanding of the different ways in which Santiago, García, Alvarez and Escandón present their narratives as well as the ways in which the authors position themselves in relation to their fiction.

The links between the lives and writings of Escandón, García, Alvarez and Santiago vary greatly with important generic and stylistic consequences. Since even realist narratives focusing on the factual are constructed according to generic conventions by the writer's active intervention, I do not intend at all to establish which account is more truthful or more fictional. The aim of this section is rather to contrast the various plots, structures and genres chosen by these authors to shape their narrative materials, while also paying attention to the autobiographical connections established between the writers and their works. This analysis will provide the frame for the discussions in following sections regarding the implications of their narrative choices in relation to their understandings of individual and collective identities as well as of the recoverability of personal and communal pasts.

WIWPR and *AW* are fairly straightforward autobiographical accounts of Santiago's childhood and adolescent years, first in Puerto Rico and then in New York, up to the age of twenty-one. While depicting the processes of cultural adaptation and redefinition undergone by the author, her life-story focuses on various instances of female emotional dependency as she portrays her parents' love-hate relationship, her passionate affair with her older first lover, and the conflictive but deep bond between her and her mother. A third central thread in Santiago's narration is her family's dire economic predicament and constant displacements. She summarises this point matter-of-factly explaining how, in the twenty-one years she lived with her mother, they moved 'at least twenty times':

We moved from country to city to country to small town to big city to the biggest city of all. Once in New York, we moved from apartment to apartment, in search of heat, of fewer cockroaches, of more rooms,... of nearness to the subway or the relatives. We moved in loops around the neighbourhoods we wanted to avoid, where there were no Puerto Ricans..., where people dressed better than we did, where landlords didn't accept welfare, or didn't like Puerto Ricans, or looked at our family of three adults, eleven children and shook their heads. (*AW*, p. 1)

Although the young Santiago does not seem to reach any clear certainties throughout a life-story which is left open-ended, she does develop a strong awareness of the importance of family ties as well as of personal and economic independence. With a linear temporality and a focus on the factual, *WIWPR* and *AW* remain a conventional autobiography as defined by Lejeune: a 'retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his [sic] individual life, in particular on the development of his personality' (qtd. in Marcus, p. 251).

The narratives have been marketed as memoirs, '[a] mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment as either observer or participant'⁴⁷. They call attention 'more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator' and challenge boundaries between the private and the public and between subject and object (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 198). *WIWPR* and *AW* do locate Esmeralda in various home, social, institutional and national environments, establishing the connections between each together with their importance in her development, and thus disrupting clear-cut divisions between the public and the private. However, the focus of the works is predominantly Esmeralda's life, ambitions, emotions and

47. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 198.

dilemmas. The motivations and concerns of other characters are seldom explored in depth beyond the way in which their actions affect Esmeralda. Her brothers and sisters in particular are not individuated throughout the narratives; as a collective they provide a counterpoint to the protagonist, who is characterised as “different”, more motivated and ambitious and less socially committed than they.

This individualist focus, together with the structuring of the story, according to Esmeralda’s developmental stages and personal and academic successes –learning English, excelling at high school despite the obstacles, managing to enter Performing Arts and later Harvard-, places the works closer to autobiography than to the memoir. While they do not cover Esmeralda’s whole life until the moment of writing, as autobiographical accounts frequently do, their focus on Esmeralda’s childhood and teenage years is a long enough span of time to include the narratives in the genre, particularly since nothing stops the author from continuing her narration in further volumes. Arguably, the autobiographical generic frame also proves a problematic vehicle for Santiago’s wish to convey her childhood in Puerto Rico and her adolescence in the U.S. writing about Puerto Rican culture and women in both places.

Autobiography has been challenged by feminist and non-Western critics as a conservative genre ‘irrevocably tainted by its Eurocentric, masculinist, individualist assumptions’ (Marcus, p. 293). With their focus firmly on the protagonist’s singularity, Santiago’s writing thus does not follow the example of other instances of autobiography by authors from non-Western cultures that have adapted and radically subverted Western models of self-representation. Santiago’s use of autobiography conveys a wish to portray the culture and predicament of an ethnic and social group (Puerto Rican women on the continent

and on the mainland) as an individual, from a personal point of view, and without becoming its spokesperson. This stance raises interpretive questions regarding self- and collective representation to which works by “non-ethnic” white authors are not usually subjected, and which are further complicated by the author’s upward mobility from poverty in a ghetto to a middle-class lifestyle. These issues surrounding the reception of Santiago’s memoirs will be analysed further in Chapter 5.

Alvarez and García establish a different authorial relation with their texts: as Jacqueline Stefanko writes about Alvarez, they ‘purposefully fictionaliz[e] [their] own historical, autobiographical life story’⁴⁸. Alvarez’s *GG* is divided into brief sections depicting incidents in the García family’s life both in the Dominican Republic and in the U.S. The four García girls, alternatively used as focalisers and occasionally as narrators, initially seem completely different from one another, and appear still more detached from their parents’ views and cultural background. The sisters’ constant shifts from past to present and vice versa gradually familiarise the reader with their trajectories and current behaviours in a process parallel to the girls’ increasing understanding of their parents and sisters’ choices. *¡Yo!* is structured according to the same pattern of apparently disconnected accounts gradually forming a multifaceted portrait of the García family. In *¡Yo!* not only the Garcías, but also their acquaintances and relatives offer their viewpoints, providing further insights into the family dynamics, and especially into the protagonist Yolanda.

Alvarez acknowledges that the autobiographical exercise was at the very origin of her writing career. She had good teachers in the United States who

48. Jacqueline Stefanko, ‘New Ways of Telling: Latinas’ Narratives of Exile and Return’ in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 17:2 (1996), p. 56.

encouraged her to write about her Dominican memories, and without whom she probably would have lacked ‘enough faith in myself to go on and become a professional writer’ (Interview with Julia Alvarez). The Garcías’ general features, their Dominican background and relatives and the constant exchange of anecdotes among family members are avowedly inspired by Alvarez’s own family environment. The author grew up

in a family of four sisters, just like in *The García Girls*.... My sisters and I are constantly telling each other stories and interrupting each other’s stories to add our own version of the story... My original culture of the Dominican Republic is an oral culture, a storytelling culture... there were never any books around when I was a little girl... (Interview with Julia Alvarez)

The circumstances in which Alvarez’s parents emigrate to the U.S. also show marked parallels with the Garcías’ journey to North America. Alvarez’s family arrived in New York after leaving the Dominican Republic in haste due to the father’s participation in a failed underground plot against Trujillo’s dictatorship, and these incidents are fictionalised mainly in *GG*’s section ‘The Blood of the Conquistadores’. The tension and bewilderment that the García girls feel once in the States, as a result of having to keep the circumstances of their journey secret, also seem modelled on Alvarez’s experiences.

Alvarez’s *Butterflies* focuses more directly on Trujillo’s regime rendering imaginatively the story of the resistance heroines Las Mariposas. *Butterflies* initially seems Dedé Mirabal’s narration (addressed to the “interview woman”, Alvarez’s persona) of her sisters’ participation in the resistance movement and their subsequent murder by the secret police SIM forces. In the opening and final sections it becomes clear that what we are actually presented is

the “interview woman”’s reconstruction of Dedé’s account, paralleling Dedé’s appropriation of her sisters’ stories.

Cristina García’s first novel *DC* was admittedly born of her wish to ‘examine... the personal cost of what happened in Cuba after 1959’ (Lopez, p.106). This motivation to ‘look at the costs to individuals, families, and relationships among women of public events such as a revolution’ (López, p. 107) is also prominent in *TAS*. *DC* follows a family’s story through three generations depicting the political and personal conflicts simultaneously dividing and linking the family members. Celia del Pino, a passionate supporter of Castro’s policies, has become detached from her daughters Felicia and Lourdes: Felicia, profoundly disturbed by the end of her violent marriage and lost in a deep nostalgia, finds shelter in Afro-Cuban *santería* rites, while Lourdes, deprived of her lands and raped by soldiers of the revolutionary government, has moved to Brooklyn and adopted the American way of life. Her daughter Pilar, a young painter who mocks her pro-American attitude and has not lost the closeness with Celia despite not having seen her for years, ends up returning to Cuba together with Lourdes in an attempt to come to terms with their past.

Shifting between Santa Teresa del Mar in Cuba and New York, the plot follows these women’s lives from 1972 to the 1980s, but it also unravels events starting back in the 1930s. *DC* reveals the Del Pinos’ personal and national histories through constant temporal and spatial dislocations as Celia, her children and grandchildren remember their pasts from different points in time while also telling about their current lives. The unsent letters of Celia to an old Spanish lover dating from 1934 to 1954 also appear interspersed with the characters’ narrations.

Showing a similar structure and narrative technique, *TAS* deals with the story of three generations of the Agüero family. It focuses on the complex relationships of estranged sisters Constanica and Reina, who are both haunted by the deaths of their parents and the gaps in their common, but differently remembered, past. Blanca Agüero dies mysteriously during a trip made with her naturalist husband Ignacio to the Zapata swamp in 1948, an event which led the man to commit suicide soon after returning from the expedition. The sensual Reina, an electrician living in Havana, and Constanica, a cosmetics saleswoman living in New York and Miami, differ from each other in temper and way of life.

However, both of them feel compelled to find out the truth about their parents in a process during which they come to terms with their own lives and with their rivalry. Since the key scene of Blanca's murder by Ignacio is presented as the opening section of the novel, telling the reader the mystery that Constanica and Reina try to uncover, the focus of the novel shifts to the sisters' reconstructions of their past. Constanica and Reina are in turn critically examined by their own daughters Isabel and Dulce in first person narrations interspersed with those of the sisters. Ignacio Agüero's own narration of his life story also appears intertwined with the accounts of these four women. Together with the temporal progression of the characters' lives there is also a sense of regression as the Agüero women's minds flow backwards in time in an attempt to make sense of their past.

The temperamental women populating *DC* are partly modelled on some of García's own relatives: Celia is inspired by her grandmother, Lourdes by her

mother, and Felicia by an unnamed aunt⁴⁹. These revelations suggest the possibility of taking Pilar as the author's persona, not only because this character is the one destined to give a testimony of the family story, but also because the circumstances in which the character leaves and returns to Cuba coincide with García's own life, something which will be further examined later on. García explains that she was not 'like Pilar at all growing up. I was very much the dutiful daughter... so Pilar is a kind of alter ego for me' (López, p. 107).

The author's relationship with the Agüero sisters seems to be slightly different, as she acknowledges that she considers them embodiments of forces through which she works out her obsessions. Speaking about Constanca in particular, she confesses: 'there's something about her and her desire to stave off death. The way she selectively remembers the past. I identify with that' (Cristina García Identifies with her Characters). García also explains that Ignacio and Blanca Agüero's passionate dedication to their job as naturalists originated in her own interest in Cuban flora and fauna, an interest which took hold of the story and which developed into a 'metaphor for exploring other subjects prominent in this novel: loss, extinction and exile' (Cristina García Identifies with her Characters).

Commenting on how autobiographical her writing is, García states that 'emotionally, it's very autobiographical' but 'the details are not' (López, 107). Born in Havana, she emigrated with her family to New York when she was two years old; it was not until she was thirty in 1984 that she made her first visit to Cuba with her sister. Establishing contact again with the relatives who had stayed on the island becomes a turning point for García, who remembers how

49. Cristina García Identifies with her Characters, ed. Florangela Dávila, accessed March 2000, <http://www.seattletimes.com/extra/browse/html97/altcris_0691797.html> .

right away they accepted me and observed everything I did and made fun of me... And then I began to hear their stories. They would come out slowly one by one...a lot from my grandmother in particular.

It was during this trip that I got a larger sociopolitical context for being Cuban. For me, Cuba had been a black and white situation up to that point. Half of my family came here, half stayed there, and most of them didn't speak to each other for twenty years... it wasn't something I worried about everyday; it was something *de familia*. (López, p. 104)

Noting García's 'carelessness with historical and cultural facts', Nara Araújo contends that this lack of accuracy 'could be justified or explained by her particular object of focus'⁵⁰. In a description also suiting *TAS*, Araújo considers *DC* 'not a narrative of nostalgic evocation or factual recuperation –after all, it's dreaming in Cuban- but of unhappy women's lives. That unhappiness is related to the separation which may occur between mothers and daughters living in the same country (Araújo, p. 100). In both of García's novels, 'political discourse, history, nostalgia or memory –past, present and future- are linked with the personal' (Araújo, p.102).

Of all the works under study, Escandón's *EBS* is the one which departs most radically from conventional autobiography and the realistic in both tone and characterisation. Her *EBS* presents the odyssey of Esperanza Díaz, a young pious widow living in the rural Mexican town of Tlacotalpan. Her quiet existence is dramatically disrupted when her only daughter Blanquita is hospitalised to undergo a tonsillectomy, dies of a rare virus and is buried to avoid infection, without Esperanza having the chance to see the corpse. Soon after, the woman witnesses an apparition of Judas Tadeo, patron saint of hopeless causes, who reveals that Blanquita is not dead and commands her to find the girl. The

50. Nara Araújo, 'I Came All the way from Cuba so I Could Speak Like This? Cuban and Cubanamerican Literatures in the United States', in *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures*, eds. Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 100.

desperate mother vows to do anything to recover her lost daughter, who she suspects has been kidnapped and forced into prostitution, and thus starts a journey which will take her to the brothels of Tijuana and L.A. At the end of this tragicomic trip Esperanza finds not only Blanquita -not dead but a spirit who appears on the stains of Esperanza's toilet tiles to communicate with her mother- but also a new lover, Angel.

When asked what aspects of her life influenced her novel, Escandón answers: 'all of my life. My relationship with my mother, my love for the exuberant, a desperate need to experience the world through my senses, my upbringing as a Catholic'. However, she denies that there are any autobiographical aspects to her book (BookBrowser Interview), which is full of implausible twists and turns and unrealistic characters. Still, there is some connection between the settings and topics presented in the novel and the author's background. She acknowledges that her depiction of Tlacotalpan is inspired by the exuberant landscapes of Fortín de las Flores, Veracruz, where one of her grandfathers had a country house. Similarly, Esperanza's final destination, L.A., is where Escandón currently lives. However, the author's main involvement with her protagonist's adventures takes place at a different level: the novel was born after Escandón became haunted by the question

'What if I was told that my daughter had died and I wasn't able to confirm her death?' My immediate answer would be to deny it. To prove them wrong I would do what anyone else would in this case: anything and everything. Call on otherworldly forces for guidance? Sure. Set out to find her who knows where in the world? Of course. Become a prostitute? You bet. And in the process of looking for her, I'd most likely find myself. And so Esperanza embarks on this magical, amusing yet enlightening, serious yet irreverent journey of self discovery.⁵¹

51. Interview with Maria Amparo Escandón, accessed March 2000 <<http://www.esperanzasboxofsaints.com>>.

EBS reads not as the author's exercise of creative recovery of the past through memory, but as the development of a certain hypothesis intimately linked with Escandón's emotions which goes beyond what is commonly understood as autobiographical. Esperanza Díaz can be considered the author's alter ego not in the sense of mirroring the latter's biographical circumstances but of being the extreme manifestation of dilemmas and reactions that Escandón detects in herself.

1.3. Representing Individual and Collective Identities.

The narratives of Santiago, García, Alvarez and Escandón present individual and collective identities as complex constructs composed of shifting, heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting elements and affected by people's social and affective links with others. By studying each writer's understanding of self, memory and collective representation, I will examine how they combine their belief in having a story that needs telling with an awareness of their constant subjective intervention on all levels of the self-defining and narrative acts. This section will provide a first approach to the questions regarding the nature of nationalities and history articulated in these writers' narratives.

In Santiago's autobiographical accounts, the transformative processes constantly undergone by the characters are apparent from the very titles of the works. The past tense in *WIWPR* stresses Santiago's reworking of her cultural identity after emigrating to the U.S. When the adult Santiago depicts her

childhood in Puerto Rico and her adolescence in New York among her Puerto Rican family, her narration is done from a standpoint which is no longer simply Puerto Rican but is not considered just American either. Similarly, the adverb in *Almost a Woman* underlines the other main transition recorded as the author recreates her teenage years: the transition from childhood to womanhood which, together with the discovery and negotiation of sexual identity and gender roles that it brings, is intimately linked with Santiago's cultural metamorphoses.

Complicating matters further, the author explains that her intention in writing *WIWPR* was to 'get back that feeling of Puertoricanness I had before I came here' adding that 'its title reflects who I was then, and asks, who am I today?'⁵². The memoirs themselves examine how that feeling of Puerto Ricanness might be regained since, despite being apparently presented as a discrete set of features such as one's language, geographical location and way of life, on a closer look it was not so clearly defined even when Santiago was living on the island. Added to this, Santiago undertakes her attempt to "get back" her Puerto Ricanness through writing down her memories, which implies a further paradox. Although she does purport to believe in what she asserts –one of the defining ethical tenets of autobiography set by Elizabeth Bruss (qtd. in Marcus, p.263)-, this belief does not seem diminished by the admission that her works are

what I remember, as I remember it. Memorable statements, compelling confessions, and intriguing questions have contributed to the recreated conversations in some scenes.

The names of members of my immediate family are real, but circumstances have forced me to change others. For example... [t]o avoid confusion, I've nicknamed or renamed some people. (*AW*, p. 1)

52. *A Note to the Reader*, Esmeralda Santiago, accessed September 2001, <<http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/puerto/santiago.html>>.

Alvarez and García also conceive their characters' subject formation as changeable, inextricably linked and constantly interacting with other individuals, which is reflected in the way they use a variety of focalizers in first and third person narrations. Due to their skilful use of this technique, Stefanko identifies them as prominent examples of how 'due to the shifting, unstable terrain they inhabit, Latin American (migrant) women writers' tend to 'question and reject the assumption that a unitary, synthesizing narrator is capable of telling the stories they have to disclose, instead opting for a narrative stance that includes multiple voicings' (Stefanko, p. 51).

Alvarez's *GG* and *¡Yo!* use a similar narrative organisation to García's in which 'third person character specific narrative pieces engage mobility as the novel progresses backward through time and experience in order to enable first person narrators to emerge and take over the telling of their memories' (Stefanko, p. 52). This shift from third to first person narration happens once the characters have negotiated their version of events by contrasting it with those of relatives, acquaintances and lovers. In this respect, Stefanko notes that in *Butterflies* the surviving sister Dedé 'speaks through a third-person character-specific narrator until the end of the text when, after her sisters' memories have been narrated, her own voice emerges to articulate "I"' (p. 52).

As in Santiago's memoirs, the self in Alvarez and García's stories possesses a heterogeneous and shifting nature; the close relation of the self with the various collectives to which a person belongs is apparent from their very titles. *GG* stresses the Americanisation of the four sisters, also underlining how they feel closely linked to one another. *¡Yo!*, short for Yolanda and also meaning "I" in Spanish, celebrates the main protagonist's individuality in a novel

consisting precisely of the impressions on Yolanda of several people connected with her. Similarly, the fact that García introduces Constancia and Reina together to the reader as *TAS* underlines the deep bond between the two women. As for *DC* this title underlines the personal redefinition of their nationality, ideals and allegiances that García's characters must continually undergo –both those on the island and those exiled to the States.

García's narratives deal with the ambivalences in the understanding of national and cultural identities already observed in Santiago. She explains that, despite not 'grow[ing] up as part of any Latin or Cuban community', at home she 'felt very Cuban and that identity was very much instilled in [her]' (López, p. 103). García also adds that 'this Cuban identity wasn't that relevant as [she] moved through the rest of [her] life. It was a schizophrenic situation without the negativity that this implies' (López, p. 103). These statements suggest that Cubanness is not clearly defined and seems to survive the physical distance from the mother country. However, the idea that Cubanness can be relegated to a second plane in certain contexts without much difficulty is questioned by how the conflicting elements in their cultural identity haunt all of García's characters.

The protagonists of Alvarez and García remember events differently at different moments in time, and their memories and judgements not only differ from, but are often contested by, those of other characters. This seems to stress that a version of facts which makes sense to the individual is more important than abstract or literal truths, or, in fact, that this personal interpretation of events is the only possible truth, however relative. The painter and writer Pilar self-consciously points this out in García's *DC* observing how her mother

systematically rewrites history to suit her views of the world... in a dozen ways every day, contesting reality....Mom truly believes that her version of events is correct, down to details that I know, for a fact, are wrong...

Mom filters other people's lives through her distorting lens... It makes her see only what she wants to see instead of what's really there... Mom's embellishment and half-truths usually equip her to tell a good story, though... Maybe in the end facts are not as important as the underlying truth she wants to convey. Telling her own truth is the truth to her, even if it's at the expense of chipping away our past.

I suppose I'm guilty in my own way of a creative transformation or two.
(DC, pp.176-77)

Pilar denounces her mother's subjectivity and inaccuracies as "contesting reality" and obfuscating "what is really there" –which is not defined further- only to admit that this objective, factual reality is only so from her own biased viewpoint, and is also the result of her "creative transformation or two". Why do then García's characters live haunted by their past if it can be reinvented, i.e. recovered through imagination and fiction?

Alvarez's *¡Yo!* poses a question closely related to these points as the other three García sisters complain about the writer Yolanda's distorting appropriation and public spreading of their lives in her stories. By protesting against 'this whole spiel about art and life mirroring each other and how you've got to write about what you know' (*¡Yo!*, p. 3), they trigger the question: with what consequences does a writer assume the representation of issues and people contemporary to her -especially in the case of individuals not so well placed to contest? These dilemmas posed by the characters of Alvarez and García are also key concerns regarding the authors' own positions when writing.

In their representations of collective and personal (hi)stories and the possibility of recovering the past through fiction, Alvarez, Santiago and García stand in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, they admit through various narrative devices that when attempting to "tell the truth" and represent –in both

senses of the word- certain collectives they can only offer their personal viewpoints and acknowledge the cultural, social and personal circumstances from which they do so. They seem conscious of the fact that, using Stanley's words, '[t]he notion of the "reconstruction" of a biographical subject is an intellectual non-starter. It proposes we can somehow recover the past, understand it as it was experienced and understood by the people who actually lived it' (Stanley, p.7). Not pretending to be objective or "transparent", instead of attempting to reconstruct the past –and the present- "as it was experienced and understood by those who lived it", they focus on the subjectivities operating in that reconstruction.

Their constant insistence on their narrators' –and their own- manipulating interventions suggests a belief that 'the past, like the present, is the result of competing negotiated versions of what happened, why it happened, with what consequence' (Stanley, p. 7), together with the idea that if

memory is necessarily limited, and fictive devices are always necessary in producing accounts of our selves... the apparently referential and unique selves that auto/biographical accounts invoke are actually invocations of a cultural representation of what selves should be; these are shared ideas, conventions, about a cultural form: not descriptions of actual lives but interpretations within the convention

(Stanley, p. 62)

On the other hand, the notion of a common, factual reality that must be remembered, understood and faithfully depicted –something for which its narrator holds a responsibility- seems to haunt both characters and authors. The narratives of Alvarez, Santiago and García appear more concerned with making the reader aware of what is at stake in how these questions are answered, than in articulating a clear response to these questions themselves.

Escandón takes a completely different narrative line, denying any autobiographical connections between her life and her novel. She affirms that even in early writings more closely connected to her life her main interest was to recreate the personal and emotional side of incidents. She explains that

at sixteen I started writing my family's history and how it affected us being descendants of Ramon Corral, my great-grandfather and vice-president of Mexico during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz⁵³. It was a very personal vision. It really didn't refer to historical facts but to my grandparents and parents' intimate family life.

(Interview with María Amparo Escandón)

Escandón also states –apparently quite naively- that she quit the project to avoid family quarrels and that she then dedicated herself to fiction, ‘a safer ground where no one gets offended’ (Interview with María Amparo Escandón).

These remarks suggest an author's understanding of private, individual lives as not being part of “proper” history. This contrasts with the stories of Alvarez, Santiago and García, which denounce social injustices witnessed by the authors and focus on the way these affect their characters' private lives. Added to this, Escandón acknowledges the risk of offending those close to her as a determinant factor in choosing what –and how- to narrate or not, an issue that Alvarez, García and Santiago do not raise openly⁵⁴. However, when a novel with

53. General Porfirio Díaz seized power in 1876 from President Lerdo de Tejada ‘with the support of disgruntled regional caudillos and military personnel, liberals angered by the political manipulations of the entrenched Lerdo machine, and Indian and mestizo landowners who believed that Díaz would put an end to land seizures’ (Keen and Hayes, p. 219). Díaz also had the support of ‘American capitalists, army commanders, and great Texas landowners who, regarding Lerdo as “anti-American”, supplied [him] with arms and cash’ (Keen and Haynes, p. 219). He remained in power until 1911, when he resigned and left Mexico. Chapter 6 will offer a wider overview of the connections between Mexican history and *EBS*.

54. Although the dangers and consequences of offending friends and relatives are thematised in Alvarez's *¡Yo!*, in the narratives of Alvarez and García giving testimony of one's experiences through writing is generally presented as a duty, the fulfilment of which proves rewarding and is valued by others. Admittedly, the fact that these authors offer clearly fictional(ised) accounts of

a flat, child-like protagonist deals in a light-hearted humorous way with the kidnapping of the young girls and prostitution networks, the trade of human organs from the Third World to the First, and immutable religious faith, as *EBS* does, it is very unlikely that it will be “safe” and not offend anyone. Escandón’s story contravenes many expectations about “ethnic” women migrants’ literature, especially the notion that the author’s personal involvement with her narrative must necessarily take the form of a realist piece of writing mirroring her life and “speaking for” less privileged members of her community.

their backgrounds protects them from such dangers in a way that, for instance, Santiago with her real(istic) memoirs is not. Interestingly enough, it is Santiago who does not allude at all in her memories to this risk of offending people close to her.

CHAPTER 2

QUESTIONS OF GENRE.

The previous chapter has already introduced the way in which the works of Escandón, Santiago, García and Alvarez deal with the representation of both individual and collective identities. This undertaking depends greatly on how each author views and portrays individual histories as well as national ones. This section will approach these questions by paying special attention to Alvarez's *Butterflies*, García's *DC* and *TAS*, and Escandón's *EBS*, considering how their generic choices convey the literary influences shaping their work as well as the authors' understandings of and positionings towards their respective ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The issue of the origins, formation and nature of national identities has been a central concern in Latin American literary practice and criticism. Different ways of dealing with these topics have generated different tendencies, two of which constitute essential referents for a better understanding of the narrative of Alvarez and García: on the one hand, a realist literature with manifest social concerns that culminates in documentary writing as well as in the *testimonio* providing a point of departure for Alvarez's *Butterflies*; on the other, the magical realism which has become practically synonymous with Latin-American writing, epitomised by Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and present in García's work. While originating from the wish to allow the reader a more or less direct "access to reality", testimonial writing is strongly shaped by the particular ideologies of both testifier and transcriber, and is also subject to problems of interpretation and representation more commonly associated with works of fiction. As an alternative way to render oppressive

socio-economic circumstances, the magic realist novel in turn runs the risk of the obfuscation of its historical basis by its fantastic elements, its exotisation as representative of “ethnic literature”, and an unqualified connection with practically any other work showing magic or supernatural elements.

2.1 *Butterflies*: Testimonial Novel and Historiographic Metafiction

In *Butterflies*, Alvarez recreates in an avowedly personal way the lives of the Dominican resistance heroines the Mirabal sisters (three of whom she actually never met) in order to understand their courage and make it known. What lies at the very core of the novel is thus the wish to re-member an episode in Dominican history through a collective act of remembrance -and, if we wish, of appropriation- in which the reader also becomes engaged.

Butterflies shows a connection with Latin American testimonio (testimonial literature), which has “represented both a rejection of and an alternative to the sophisticated boom narrative identified with Borges, Carpentier, Donoso, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Fuentes, and Cortázar”⁵⁵ - itself a reaction against a previous tradition of realist, regionalist writing. This section examines *Butterflies*' links with *testimonio*, studying how Alvarez avoids placing her novel directly within the testimonial tradition while paying homage to it. Alternative readings of the narrative as a historical novel and a piece of historiographic metafiction are also acknowledged, analysing which of the

55. John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 178.

novel's thematic and social concerns are highlighted by its association with each genre.

A literary form developed in and traditionally associated with Latin-America, *testimonio* possesses an 'urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself'⁵⁶. Testimonio emerges as a narrative genre in the 1960s, and its subsequent development is linked to 'the movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of that decade' (Beverley, p. 93). Ariel Dorfman defines testimonial writing as documenting

some aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source. A direct source is understood as knowledge of the facts by the author or his or her compilation of narratives of evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified as witnesses. In both cases reliable documentation, written or graphic, is indispensable.⁵⁷

Relating the genre to the category of life-writing without underestimating its documentary nature, John Beverley describes testimonial literature as

a novel or novella-length narrative in a book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant experience. (pp. 92-93)

Butterflies presents the characteristics of *testimonio* mentioned so far, something that critics such as Concepción Bados Ciria have appreciated, placing the work within this literary tradition. In relation to Alvarez's narrative, Bados

56. John Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)' in *De/Colonising the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 94.

57. Qtd. by Concepción Bados Ciria, 'In the Time of the *Butterflies*, by Julia Alvarez: History, Fiction, Testimonio and the Dominican Republic' in *Monographic Review- Revista Monográfica* 13 (1997), p. 416.

Ciria quotes Argentinian author Mempo Giardianelli's statement that 'recovering our collective memory is an implicit mission of our narrators. Latin American Narrative nowadays novelizes the truths of history encouraging a testimonial, historical, biographical literature which pursues a goal: the fight to make utopias into realities' (p. 406). Suggesting that 'a similar impulse is textualized on literature produced by Latino/a authors living and writing in the United States' (p. 406), Bados Ciria believes that *Butterflies* offers a *testimonio* 'as it is defined in the context of Latin American literature' (p. 408) while it also develops fictional elements which are openly acknowledged by Alvarez in the postscript to the work.

Whatever the nature of the eclectic range of materials that may appear included in a *testimonio*, both Beverley and Doris Sommer stress that it is not fiction: readers are meant to take the narrator of a *testimonio* and the social and political contexts depicted in it as real; 'the "legal" connotation implicit in its convention implies a pledge of honesty on the part of narrator that the listener/reader is bound to respect' (Beverley, p. 95). While believing in the importance of a story that must be told and wishing to engage the reader in its telling, Alvarez seems wary of absolute, abstract "truths of history" as well as of fixed, unquestionable definitions of what is "real". Although she does make it clear that there is a historical basis for the events in her novel, by using different narrative layers (the accounts of Minerva, Mate, and Patria presented by Dedé and retold by the "interview woman") Alvarez invites the reader to examine how (hi)stories are constructed, who talks from which perspective to whom.

In the cases when it involves the transcription and edition of a witness's account by a mediating agent, *testimonio* has been considered as allowing 'the

entry into literature of persons who would normally, in those societies where literature is a form of class privilege, be excluded from direct literary expression' (Beverley, p. 97). The testifier's active involvement with a collective situation of marginalisation or oppression and, where relevant, the collaborative authorship of testifier and transcriber, dismantle Euro-American assumptions of the author's textual centrality as well as of literature being the fruit of an individual artist's genius⁵⁸. Alvarez's account stages such a collaboration between Dedé Mirabal and the "interview woman", but, as I will argue later, the novel also shows the limitations and conflicts in the rapport between testifier and transcriber arising from the potential divergences in their backgrounds and perspectives, and the invisibility of the transcriber's presence in the text.

Beverley celebrates *testimonio* as 'an affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode' (p. 97). Denouncing a collective situation, the testifiers of *testimonios* appear in a position similar to 'the symbolic function of the epic hero, without at the same time assuming the epic hero's hierarchical and patriarchal status' (Beverley, p. 95). The testifiers present themselves as equals among equals, establishing a narrative situation where '[t]he singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole' (Bados Ciria, p.108).

In her portrayal of the Mirabal sisters, Alvarez insists on stressing their ordinariness by depicting in detail home anecdotes as well as everyday worries and illusions. Alvarez considers the idealisation of the historical Mirabals 'dangerous, the same god-making impulse that had created our tyrant', meditating on how 'ironically, by making them myth, we lost the Mirabals once

58. Caren Kaplan, 'Resisting Autobiography' in *De/Colonising the Subject*, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, p. 23.

more, dismissing the challenge of their courage as impossible for us, ordinary men and women' (p. 324).

This collaborative dimension of testimonial literature is also meant to extend to the relationship established with its readers. *Testimonio* appeals to its readership's sense of ethics, justice and solidarity regarding a struggle often remote from their own worlds (Beverley, p. 99; Bados Ciria, p. 409). However, the engagement asked from the readers is not based on their identification with the narrator or on any presumptions of universality regarding their experiences. In Bados Ciria's words 'the testimonial "I" does not invite us to identify with it. We are too different' (p. 108). This is the position from which the readers are invited to penetrate the Mirabals' world in *Butterflies*. By placing the readers in a situation similar to that of the "interview woman" listening to Dedé, the novel acknowledges the differences between the Mirabals, the "interview woman"-who functions as Alvarez's persona- and the potential audiences who are likely to be removed from the events narrated by time, language or culture

Although *Butterflies* pays homage to the genre, it cannot be considered unproblematically a testimonio 'as it is defined in the context of Latin American literature' as Bados Ciria suggests (p. 498). Alvarez herself does not place her text within this tradition, presenting it instead as a 'fictionalized story', a novel which 'is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart' (Postscript to *Butterflies*, p. 324). Added to this, since the Mirabals' murder takes place in 1960, the author's revision of their story can hardly be said to show an "urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival" (see Beverley's statement quoted in p. 23), although the heroines' lives certainly provide instances of all

these predicaments. Her motivation seems to be the wish to recover creatively the Dominican elements in her identity, as well as to acquaint North Americans with the Dominican history so entangled not only with her own story but – through the country’s interventionist policies and the presence of immigrants like herself- with theirs too. *Butterflies* seeks to redress contemporary readers’ potential ignorance of the Mirabals’ and other Dominicans’ resistance towards Trujillo’s dictatorial regime while also avoiding its remembrance merely as, using the words of Alvarez’s Dedé, ‘a sad story about a past that is over’ (*Butterflies*, p. 318).

Alvarez also incorporates in her novel an acknowledgement of what Browdy de Hernández calls ‘the power and peril of... collaborations among women from different nations, races and classes’⁵⁹, and thus offers a literary and sociopolitical frame within which to evaluate her novel. Although Alvarez mentions Dedé Mirabal and Minou –Minerva Mirabal’s daughter- among ‘those who helped me write this book’ (*Butterflies*, p. 325), she openly admits her creative intervention in shaping the narrative material, stating that

what you find in these pages are not the Mirabal sisters of fact, or even the Mirabal sisters of legend. The actual sisters I never knew, nor did I have access to enough information or the talents and inclinations of a biographer to be able to adequately record them...

So what you find here are the Mirabals of my creation, made up but, I hope, true to the spirit of the real Mirabals... though I had researched the facts of the regime... I sometimes took liberties –by changing dates, by reconstructing events, by collapsing characters or incidents. For I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by imagination. (Postscript to *Butterflies*, p.324)

59. Jennifer Browdy de Hernández, ‘Of Tortillas and Texts: Postcolonial Dialogues in the Latin American Testimonial’, in *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women’s Literature and Film*, eds. Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose (New York: Garland, 1997), p. 162.

Such an admission has important implications on several planes. In addition to “lacking enough information” and not having the “talents and inclinations of a biographer”, Alvarez does not claim either to possess an insider’s privileged insight into the historical Mirabals’ world on the basis of her Dominican origins. On the contrary, she humorously exposes the situation of her persona the “interview woman” through the words of the fictional Dedé Mirabal. This character reflects on her own objectification as a “historical figure” with resignation, admitting that ‘[she] shies from these interviews’ since, ‘before she knows it, she is setting up her life as if it were an exhibit labeled neatly for those who can read: THE SISTER WHO SURVIVED’ (*Butterflies*, p. 5). Dedé waits for the “interview woman” noting with amusement the socio-cultural differences between herself and the foreigner who wants to understand her story. She thinks that

[t]he woman will never find the old house behind the hedge of towering hibiscus at the bend of the dirt road. Not a gringa dominicana in a rented car with a road map asking for street names!...

Could the woman please come over and talk to Dedé about the Mirabal sisters? She is originally from here but has lived many years in the States, for which she is sorry since her Spanish is not so good. The Mirabal sisters are not known there, for which she is also sorry for it is a crime that they should be forgotten, these unsung heroines of the underground, et cetera.

...Now after thirty-four years, the commemorations and interviews and presentations and posthumous honors have almost stopped, so that for months at a time Dedé is able to take up her own life again. But she’s long since resigned herself to Novembers. Every year as the 25th rolls around, the television crews drive up. There’s the obligatory interview. Then, the big celebration..., the delegations from as far away as Peru and Paraguay... But this is March, ¡Maria santísima! Doesn’t she have seven more months of anonymity? (*Butterflies*, p. 3)

By stressing the sociocultural differences between the Mirabals and herself and acknowledging her active intervention in the shaping of the narrative, Alvarez makes herself visible and thus adopts not the position of scribe but that

of novelist and single author of the text. With these narrative devices, she attempts to avoid the power dynamics 'reinforc[ing] existing oppressor/oppressed hierarchies through the invisible agency of the scribe' which are often embedded in testimonios (Browdy de Hernández, p. 62). Jennifer Browdy de Hernández denounces this invisibility of the scribe explaining how

although the Latin American testimonial is always the product of two subjects in dialogue –the testifier...and the scribe...– the final product is a first-person narrative that reads like an unmediated autobiography: the scribe, after transcribing, editing, and shaping the testifier's oral presentation, effaces herself completely from the text. (pp. 163-164)

By refusing to perform this self-effacing act, Alvarez makes the readers view her text 'as complex, double-voiced literary collaborations' instead of 'transparent, first-person narrative cultural documents', as is often the case with *testimonios* (Browdy de Hernández, p. 164).

A further question crucial -and often conflictive-in testimonial literature also tackled in Alvarez's novel is who she speaks for, and who she speaks to. As it has been already pointed out, she does not claim to represent oppressed Dominicans, but, if anything, to explore a Dominican-American's personal process of understanding a part of her Dominican roots from her Americanised prism. She aims to 'bring acquaintance of these famous sisters to English-speaking readers' while also offering the book to 'Dominicans separated by language from the world I have created' in the hope that 'this book deepens North Americans' understanding of the nightmare you endured and the heavy losses you suffered' (Postscript to *Butterflies*, p. 324). By acknowledging the audience targeted as well as her own locatedness as a writer, Alvarez distances

her work further from Latin-American testimonial writing; she avoids the reception of her text as a piece of Third World resistance providing an exotic object of consumption for the First World –as it would probably be considered if offered as a transcription of accounts by the real Dedé Mirabal.

Rather than a straightforward *testimonio*, Alvarez’s portrayal of the Mirabal sisters could be considered a “testimonial novel” or “nonfiction novel” as defined by Beverley, a narrative in which ‘an “author” in the conventional sense has either invented a testimoniolike story or... extensively reworked, with explicitly literary goals (greater figurative density, tighter narrative form, elimination of digressions and interruptions, and so on), a testimonial account that is no longer present except in its simulacrum’ (p. 105). By laying bare her motivations and the sociopolitical and literary position from which she writes her novel, Alvarez avoids being accused of the deceit and exploitation that Beverley detects in “pseudotestimonios” ‘inverting a form that grows out of subaltern experience into one that is middle-brow’ (p. 105).

As well as placing it within the context of Latin American testimonial literature, Bados Ciria also reads *Butterflies* as a historical novel continuing a narrative tradition in the Dominican Republic which has been ‘until now only written by men’ (p. 409) whose works “present a masculinism/nationalism revisited, revolutionary in intent but suspiciously familiar and patriarchal in content and form” (Bados Ciria, p. 409). With its strong female protagonists and narrators, Alvarez’s novel is considered ‘an affirmation of the individual feminine subject thus offering an answer to the problem of women's access to literature’ (p. 409). However, it is in the United States and not in the Dominican Republic –and as a Dominican-American, not just as a Dominican- that Alvarez

produces a novel that both follows and subverts the Dominican male tradition of historical narrative as well as that of the Latin-American *testimonio*.

Isabel Zakzrewski Brown has also studied *Butterflies*' dimensions as a historical novel, relating it to the subgenre of the Latin American "novel of the dictator", a type of narrative 'in which the character of the dictator is a centrifugal force with regard to the plot'⁶⁰ and the most well-known instances of which are Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *Tirano Banderas*, Augusto Roa Bastos' *Yo el supremo*, Miguel Angel Asturias' *El Señor Presidente* and *El Otoño del Patriarca* by Gabriel García Márquez. (Zakzrewski Brown, n.1, p.111).

Zakzrewski Brown has also pointed out how, as a historical novel, *Butterflies* could be considered a piece of historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon to conciliate postmodern and feminist approaches to history and fiction (Zakzrewski Brown, p. 99). Hutcheon has defined historiographic metafiction as challenging divisions between the personal and the political or public, and problematising the differentiation between "real", historical, and fictional referents. In connection with these enterprises, it contests the notion of a 'unified and coherent subject' as well as 'any totalising or homogenizing system', challenging '[h]istorical and narrative continuity and closure... from within'⁶¹.

Historiographic metafictional texts are 'intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' with a 'self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs' which lays 'the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past' (Hutcheon,

60. Isabel Zakzrewski Brown, 'Historiographic Metafiction in *In the Time of the Butterflies*' in *South Atlantic Review* 64:2 (1999), p. 112.

61. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 12. Henceforth *Poetics*.

Poetics, p.5). While coinciding with postmodernism in its exploration of these points, historiographic metafiction also recognizes that ‘it is a complex institutional and discursive network of elite, official, mass, popular cultures that postmodernism operates in’ (Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 21). Reading it as a piece of historiographic metafiction thus contributes to the understanding of how its author’s social consciousness, feminist agenda, and awareness of the effects of questions of identity, history and literature on people’s lives are intertwined with what could be interpreted as its postmodernist deconstructions of master narratives, its questioning of the limits between fiction and reality, and its calling attention to its own status as a literary artifact.

Butterflies, thus, consciously draws from various genres when shaping its narrative material in a strategy which acknowledges the influence of both Latin American and Western literary traditions while pointing out the impossibility of approaching it exclusively from one or the other. Whether we read it as a testimonial/ pseudotestimonial novel, as a historical novel, or as a historiographic metafiction, however, there are some aspects in which this ambitious narrative project does not fully succeed. As we have examined, Alvarez acknowledges an authorial intention to counteract idealised imagings of the Mirabals while conveying their historical importance to contemporary readers. However, as Ilán Stavans points out, this enterprise of dismantling what she calls “the Mirabal sisters of legend” (*Butterflies*, p.324) might have been more effective had she not relegated the description of the public reaction to their assassination and the media-oriented trial of their murderers after Trujillo’s death to a brief summary

in the novel's epilogue⁶². As an alternative, Stavans suggests having inserted '[i]nterleaving news clips, court testimony, interviews, and other paraphernalia throughout her narrative might have helped –anything, to insert the Mirabals more firmly in the flux of Dominican memory' ('Las Mariposas', p. 556).

Alvarez's attempts to redress a deification of the Mirabals which she considers dangerous, since it puts their courage out of average people's reach, are also flawed in that, as Zakzrewski Brown notes,

in her fictional re-creation of the Mirabal sisters' youth, Alvarez, informed by social constructs characteristic of conventional occidental perceptions of ideal women, fashions stereotypes, rather than real people. These include: the pious one, Patria; the pragmatic one Dedé [sic]; the rebellious one, Minerva, and the innocent one, Mate. The four come together to form a perfect whole: the now legendary Mirabal sisters. (p. 110)

This stereotyped, reductive characterisation of the Mirabals not only contributes to the mythification of the Mirabals that the author had intended to combat, but it also diminishes the novel's advocacy of women's agency against oppressive patriarchal and political structures. Added to the lack of coverage of their murder's aftermath pointed out by Stavans, Alvarez's representation of the sisters does not completely avoid the danger of the scribe "appropriating" and "silencing" the voice of the oppressed, a danger frequently highlighted in the context of testimonial literature and acknowledged by the novel itself.

62. Ilán Stavans, ' "Las Mariposas: Review of *In the Time of the Butterflies*' in *The Nation* 7 (1994), p. 556.

2.2. Under the Shadow of Magical Realism: García and Escandón.

This section contrasts the use of supernatural and fantastic elements by García and Escandón relating it to the authors' social concerns as portrayed in their novels and manifested in interviews and articles. Latin American magical realism gave prominence to the deployment of fantastic elements as an alternative prism through which to render social and cultural conflicts. This narrative option has been celebrated by some critics and readers as well as criticised by others for its supposed escapism and exotisation of “ethnic” literatures. Since magical realism has become an inevitable referent for novels with Latin American roots, I will examine how the authors deal with the influence of this literary tendency as well as with the controversies surrounding it.

As a kind of narrative discourse, magical realism has undergone several stages, been the object of ongoing critical discussion about its central defining features and received several names, among them “lo real maravilloso” (“the marvellous real”), “realismo maravilloso” (“marvellous realism”) and “realismo magico-maravilloso” (“marvellous-magic realism”). The term “magical realism” was originally coined by art critic Franz Roh in 1925 referring to the objectivity of German postimpressionism. A crucial moment in its definition as a Latin American literary genre was Alejo Carpentier's 1948 essay ‘De lo real maravilloso americano’, which asked Latin American writers to turn towards their continent for inspiration instead of towards Europe. Carpentier identified

magical realist literature for its thematic concern with Latin American reality and its particular treatment of that material⁶³.

Among the themes most commonly agreed by critics from that point onwards as characteristic of magical realist writing is a reflection of Latin America's search for identity dealing with what are considered the basic traits of its consciousness, listed by Argentinian scholar Graciela N. Ricci as:

recurrence of the archetypes of death and rebirth; psychological "mestizaje" as a result of an ethnic-cultural historical plurality forced to adopt a unique language and to fight against an exterior reality; facility to accept the marvellous; European, semi-Oriental, African and autochthonous mythical-religious heritage, which... tend to a more affective participation of the symbols and myths intertwined in literary and extraliterary reality... (as quoted in Angulo, p. 14)

Concerning the treatment of these concerns, Elena Angulo follows Irlemar Chiampi's criteria and lists a baroque style of description – 'the multiplication or distortion of the signifier in order to describe the indescribable'- and metadiegesis as prominent traits of magic realist narratives (Angulo, pp. 10-11).

In addition to these traits, Angulo cites the 'nondisjunction of contradictory terms' (p. 12), a point which she uses to differentiate between the real, the marvellous, the fantastic, and the magic realist following once again Graciella Ricci's proposals. Realist texts reproduce 'the understandable universe, with...its laws for space, time, causality, and consequences' (Angulo, p.16). Contrastingly, marvellous writing reproduces 'the supernatural universe' counting with the reader's complicitous suspension of disbelief, while fantastic narrative departs from realist discourses by having 'its "familiar reality"'

63. Maria Elena Angulo, *Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse* (Garland Publishing: New York & London, 1995), p. 7.

interrupted by the unusual or the unknown event' (Angulo, p. 16). The specificity of magic realism in turn lies in that it 'intends a transformational synthesis of the natural and the supernatural' leading readers to accept 'the coexistence of both worlds' (p. 16).

Together with these features, the question of language played a pivotal role in magic realist writing of the 1960s, which explored the nature of reality and demanded the readers' active participation making them aware of the complex relationships between narrator, narratee and socio-cultural context. In Angulo's words, '[m]any social, historical, political and ideological issues are treated through the questioning of the enunciation and the use of imagination, and by breaking the barriers of time and space' (p. 34). Inextricably intertwined with magic realist treatments of socio-cultural concerns is a blurring of the limits between fiction and reality and between literary and historical narration. There is thus a consciousness in these works that

[l]iterary discourse may differ from historical discourse by virtue of its primary referents, conceived as imaginary rather than real events, but the two kinds of discourse are more similar than different since both operate language in such a way that any clear distinction between their discursive form and their interpretive content remains impossible.⁶⁴

At the core of this exploration of the construction processes of historical discourses is an awareness that what established historical accounts offer as "real" or "historical" truth is what has been selected and validated as such by the victor in socio-political and economic conflicts. In this respect, García's novels thematise how the challenge to the dominant discourses embodied by the

64. Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 6.

alternative discourses of the subordinated groups -often suppressed or misrepresented in established historical accounts and now unknowable and unrecoverable- can in many cases only be re-presented through hypothesis and imagination. The magic realist synthesis of opposite categories thus transcends merely ludic purposes calling attention to specific socio-historical conditions and problems related to the writer's native culture and circumstances.

Cristina García's novels possess an eerie atmosphere where the characters resort to santería, politics, work, excess, nostalgia and madness as they attempt to understand or at least placate deep desires of which they are not always conscious. In *DC* telepathic links bind relatives living apart in Cuba and the States, and climatic changes mark decisive turning points in the characters' lives. *TAS* presents a similar world where characters live between dream, reality and the supernatural and whose paths are governed by powers beyond their understanding and control. Among the Agüeros, the dead constantly interact with the living, who mysteriously inherit their ancestors' physical traits. Indigenous rites and beliefs of connection with natural forces are cleverly mixed with references to Christian imagery. The idyllic setting of Blanca and Ignacio's honeymoon is reminiscent of the biblical garden of Eden, for instance; their fall from paradise, which recalls the incident between Eve and the serpent, is signalled by the bite that Blanca suffers in her left heel from a mysterious animal while making love to her husband.

García's mixture of real and mythic elements also extends to her treatment of temporal structure: in both her novels, cyclical temporal patterns coexist with a linear development of historical events as well as of the characters' everyday lives. Personal features and conflicts perpetuate themselves

generation after generation, until a denouement is reached in a way that reminds the reader of García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. *TAS* covers almost a year in the lives of Constancia and Reina Agüero and their children, and is divided into sections dealing with each consecutive month from December 1990 to September 1991. If we add the prologue to the temporal pattern, we can observe a symbolic year extending beyond linear time which begins with the murder of the Agüero sisters' mother, Blanca, by their father Ignacio in September 1948. The narrative ends in September 1991 as the tensions originating in the destructive love of Blanca and Ignacio finally find a resolution throughout the next three Agüero generations: that of Reina and Constancia, that of their respective daughters Dulcita and Isabel, and that of Isabel's son Raku and Reina's unborn child.

DC presents a similar arrangement of interacting linear and cyclical temporal patterns. The novel opens with Jorge del Pino's apparition to Celia, but the family story actually starts long before that with Celia's brief but intense romance with the Spaniard Gustavo Sierra de Armas during the spring of 1934. Their affair begins most probably in April, as one of her unsent letters to Gustavo states that 'it is April, and I am melancholy, and twenty-one years have passed' (*DC*, p. 165). The novel ends with Celia's death in April 1980, thus completing a symbolic year when events fragmented in time are considered together.

As Gabriel García Márquez stated in his Nobel Prize speech, the magic dimension of a narrative can be the literary expression of an 'outsized reality', a reality

not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty... Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all

creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable...⁶⁵

Gerald Martin affirms that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seems 'less concerned with any "magical" reality than with the general effect of a colonial history upon individual relationships: hence the themes of circularity, irrationality, fatalism, isolation, superstition, fanaticism, corruption, and violence'⁶⁶. This observation also proves enlightening when studying the literary worlds of Cristina García, who nevertheless focuses on such themes inasmuch as they affect individuals' private lives and relationships.

Although García's characters often do not fully grasp the forces shaping their paths, her main protagonists do reach an awareness of the cyclical nature of life that develops from generation to generation. In *TAS*, for instance, Dulce meditates on the links between present and past regarding both individual and social histories. She confesses that

sometimes I wish I could go back through all the blood and muscle to the origin. I read in the newspaper how scientists have traced genetic trails back millions of years to the first human beings in Africa. It makes me realize how we walk in their footsteps and everyone else's since. Thieves and czarinas, village chiefs and galley slaves, opera singers and oxcart drivers. (*TAS*, p. 203)

In *DC*, Celia's perception of this cyclical nature of life is especially evident in her last letter to Gustavo dated January 1954 which says: 'the revolution is eleven days old. My granddaughter Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. It is

65. Nobel Prize Lecture, Gabriel García Márquez, accessed November 2000 <http://www.themodernword.com/gabo/gabo_nobel.html> .

66. Gerald Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (London & New York: Verso), pp. 228-229.

also my birthday. I am fifty years old. I will no longer write to you, mi amor. She will remember everything' (p. 245). Celia also explains to Pilar how even before the latter's birth she 'told him [Jorge del Pino] all about you. He said it was impossible for me to remember the future' (p. 222). Together with the development of an empathy towards antagonistic family members, the possibility of such an awareness is precisely what enables García's protagonists to learn from and modify the destructive cycles of resentment and frustration.

The adequacy of magical realism as a literary form through which to portray collective social and economic situations has been widely questioned and even contested on several points. There is a danger that the violence, alienation and harsh circumstances experienced by characters are sentimentalised by readers who do not face such experiences in their own lives. Objections have also been raised on the basis that the supernatural is often connected with indigenous worldviews and practices while the natural is associated with Western rationality. Approaches to magical realism obliterating that what for Westerners might seem supernatural might be perceived as real by natives of a certain culture and viceversa constitute a literary reenactment of a colonial power's economic, socio-politic, and epistemological subjugation of another country. The popularisation and marketability of magical realism both as a narrative style and as a ready-made label has further complicated the controversies surrounding it. To a certain extent magical realism has become an umbrella-term covering practically any use of fantastic or supernatural elements, not just in "ethnic" texts but almost in all kinds of novels irrespective of their geographical, historical and cultural specificity.

Cristina García uses various tactics to avoid the sentimentalisation of the violence in her novels as well as the mellowing of her characters' harsh predicaments by the magic quality of her stories. The fact that the settings and political events at the core of her novels are real is underlined by constantly specifying the date and place of all the protagonists' brief narrations. Moreover, García describes her characters' suffering with enough detail and strength for it not to be underestimated; this is so, for instance, in the description of Celia's abuse by her mother-in-law with her husband's knowledge, the expropriation of Lourdes' land and her rape by revolutionary soldiers, Felicia's abuse by her husband and subsequent descent into madness and incest, and the confusion, resentments and lack of fulfilment of Constancia, Reina, Isabel and Dulce Agüero. The main lines of protagonists in both novels –Celia/Lourdes/Pilar in *DC* and Constancia and Reina/Isabel and Dulce in *TAS*- do reach a certain understanding and resolution of their identity and family conflicts. However, too many of her characters succumb to confusion, hermetism and madness for her narratives to be qualified as naively optimistic.

The misunderstanding of the magic in “magical realism”, the frequent ascription of this term to any works with supernatural elements, and its almost automatic association with Latin American and “ethnic” writing, could be what leads María Amparo Escandón to dissociate herself very clearly from this literary trend. In a protest against the term which paradoxically -and revealingly- defends the main points in its definition, she states that

some will think of it that way, but I wanted to keep this story outside the margins of magic realism. Why keep magic within the parameters of extraordinary worlds, when it is all over the place in real life? Esperanza's story is “magic reality” the kind that makes us perceive the extraordinary in the real world. We find magical reality in the newspapers, on the street. We live surrounded by saints and virgins that appear before

us, of products and brands which, depending on each case, we consider our friends or enemies. Latin American reality is already magic in itself. You just need to look around
(Interview with Maria Amparo Escandón)

Escandón's protagonist Esperanza Díaz sees her guiding saints appear in the grass stains of her kitchen oven, and her daughter in the patterns in her bathroom tiles. However, apart from the character's strong religious beliefs and experiences, there are no supernatural happenings of the same kind as the telepathic bonding Celia and Pilar and Jorge and Lourdes experience in *DC* or Constancia's transformation into the murdered Blanca's living image in *TAS*, for example. There are no recurrent, intergenerational cycles conditioning the lives of Escandón's characters. Most importantly, there are no metanarrative layers exploring the links between existence, identity, culture, history and narration in her story, no clear attempt to engage with the socio-political questions surrounding immigration and multiculturalism posed by Esperanza's journeys.

EBS's tragicomic tone, the flatness of its characters and their unlikely reactions –like, for instance, the fact that the “bad” characters recurrently end up helping the protagonist- make it difficult to read Escandón's story as a realist narration. Not fitting comfortably into magic realism, the improbable events in the novel read better having in mind as its referents tales and fables as well as Latin American telenovelas, soap-operas with frequent displays of extreme emotion, dramatic incidents, an often naive but strong protagonist with a love interest, and an unexpected happy ending. The connections between the novel and *telenovelas* are strengthened by references to various people watching them, and particularly by a scene in which the dialogue between Esperanza and her friend Soledad regarding an apparition of San Judas Tadeo becomes entangled with the conversations of soap opera characters in a television programme.

PART II:

HISTORY, CULTURE, IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY.

The next four chapters examine the representations of history and culture in the narratives of Alvarez, Escandón, García and Santiago. These works' physical and psychological landscapes are intimately linked with the protagonists' identities – presented as plural, socio-historically located constructs. Studying the socio-historical specificities of authors' and characters' shifting positionalities in the context of Latin American and U.S. Latino/a literatures also dismantles essentialist imagings of immigrant and ethnic women as either a romantic or a monolithic, paradigmatically victimised figure.

When considering the treatment of historical materials in the narratives, however, it must be taken into account that they focus on a limited range of periods and themes, and, in the case of Santiago, Alvarez and García, the boundaries of their literary representations of Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban histories are explicitly or implicitly acknowledged in the narratives. Alvarez's works, for instance, do not explore in depth the role of considerable parts of Dominican population in dictator Trujillo's seizure of power and upholding of it throughout decades. The author chooses to focus on instances of resistance (and, concretely, of female resistance) against his regime. Similarly, García's *DC* and *TAS* do not depict in much detail the socio-political achievements of Castro's government, as the novels are concerned mainly with the worldviews of Cuban exiles to the U.S. and of their Cuban American children.

Rather than concentrate on the episodes of Latin American history that are not considered and problematised in the narratives, I will call attention to those points in the narratives in which the limits of the authors' specific historical

concerns are acknowledged. I will also provide the background for oblique historical references that are not fully explained in the texts. The one case in which I will examine in relative detail historical matters that are totally absent from a narrative is that of Escandón's *EBS*. The reason for this exception is that the ahistorical atmosphere of the novel contrasts strongly with that of the other narratives and indeed with the literary concerns that have become associated with Latina immigrant literature. By recalling the "absent histories" of Mexican and U.S. relations with which the novel does not engage, I aim to expose the ways in which Escandón's portrayal of immigration and multiculturalism can prove problematic.

While the concerns of Escandón, García, Santiago and Alvarez relate respectively to those of Mexican writers "from the other side" and Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican authors "from the island", they differ from them due to socio-cultural transformations sometimes looked down on as "Americanisation". Their viewpoints nonetheless remain distinct from those of white, middle-class America, keeping strong ties with their cultures of origin. As they recreate Latin American and U.S. settings and histories, they enforce a reevaluation of how these notions are understood. Their contrasting backgrounds, styles and thematics also demand a consideration of the nature of Latino/a cultural identity. In particular, their stories make the reader consider by whom the ethnic hybridity of authors and characters is brought to the fore, also calling attention to the contexts in which they are marked as "hybrids" and the implications carried by such a label.

Alvarez, Santiago, García and Escandón draw from a long tradition of politically engaged, anti-imperialistic Latin-American literature. However,

several factors set them apart from previous generations of Latin American writers, specifically the authors of the 1960s boom who have become an inevitable term of comparison for subsequent Latin American and Latino/a works. Latina writers also bear marked divergences from the –mostly male-Mexican-, Puerto Rican-, Cuban-, and Dominican-American names associated with the emergence of Latino literature in the 1960s. The most prominent among such factors are: the disintegration of the socialist bloc and a decentralization of power away from the Euro-American axis; the consolidation of diverse ethnic minority groups –among them, Latinos and particularly Chicanos- in the U.S. after the 1960s’ civil rights struggles; a resurgence of cultural particularity together with its commodification for the consumption of global markets; and the feminist, postcolonial and postmodern questionings of self- and collective representation.

Compared with their predecessors, Latinas writing from the mid-1980s onwards show a greater acceptance of the effects of living in the U.S. While still denouncing enforced cultural loss and discrimination, Alvarez, García, Santiago and Escandón reject adopting a tragic consciousness, defending the validity of refashioning elements from both their U.S. experiences and their Latin American backgrounds to suit their individual socio-cultural circumstances. Their works also show a preoccupation with redefining gender roles in their original and adoptive societies. Their characters’ emigration to the U.S. and their subsequent social mobility bounce the different gender identities accepted as standard in each place off one another, exposing them as social constructs.

CHAPTER 3.

GARCÍA'S *DC* AND *TAS*:

'IS MERCY MORE IMPORTANT THAN TRUTH?'

García's novels explore the power struggles among various social sectors competing in the construction of historical discourses as well as in the claiming of specific territories—Cuba and the U.S. *DC* and *TAS* portray the complex bonds between islanders and exiles, while considering generational divergences within each faction. These issues are tackled in relation to gender struggles and, to a much lesser degree, to class and race tensions. If history is (re)written by the victorious parties in socio-political conflicts, García's depictions of Cuban exile examine the sometimes contradictory elements in the identities of people belonging to national and ethnic imagined communities which are divided by ideological debates in which no clear winner has been acknowledged yet.

The revolution of 1959 brought profound socio-political transformations in Cuba, also triggering an ongoing diaspora: more than 700,000 Cubans have left the island for the U.S. at different stages since the revolution⁶⁷. About 250,000 people abandoned the country between January 1959 and October 1962, a span of time covering the departure of García's family as well as that of *DC*'s Lourdes and Pilar and *TAS*'s Constancia and Isabel. This chapter does not analyse the Cuban revolution's achievements and shortcomings, but how García's characters experience this event, which alters drastically their self-perception as Cubans and as family members.

García's novels depict the latest stage in a long history of Cuban emigration to the U.S. going back to the late nineteenth century when, quoting Gabriel Haslip-Viera, 'New York became the headquarters for the exiled leaders

67. Isabel Alvarez Borland, *Cuban-American Literature of Exile: From Person to Persona* (Charlottesville, Va: The University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 5.

and supporters of Cuban and Puerto Rican independence⁶⁸. This exodus has led to the emergence of Cuban American literatures in Spanish and English. This chapter locates García's works within the literary tradition in English following the considerations of Gustavo Pérez Firmat and Isabel Alvarez Borland. It also studies how her treatment of Cuba and its diaspora reflects her positioning as what Alvarez Borland calls "ethnic Cuban American".

3.1. Cultural Presences in Cuban Identity

García's narratives portray the shifting historical weight of the "four presences" (Spain, Africa, the U.S and the Soviet Union) in relation to which most scholars articulate Cuban cultural identity. She also dwells on some of what O'Reilly Herrera calls 'additional constitutive cultural identities or 'presences' that are, at first glance, less visible', such as the Taino and the Chinese⁶⁹. This leads to a depiction of Cuban presence in the U.S. and other countries which dwells on the nature and compatibility of national and cultural allegiances. Acknowledging the evolutions in a community's national and socio-cultural identities throughout time challenges essentialist notions of Cubanness and validates the transformations in the characters' subjectivities as they emigrate to the U.S. and become Cuban American.

68. Gabriel Haslip-Viera, 'The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City: Early Nineteenth Century to the Present' in *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition*, eds. Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Baver (Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996, pp. 3-29), p. 4.

69. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, *Introduction to ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of Diaspora* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), ed. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, n. 20 pl. xxxiii.

DC develops the theme of the Spanish presence in Cuba through Celia's brief affair with Gustavo Sierra de Armas, a married Spaniard who returns to his country leaving her haunted by his memory. The Conquest's effects are also recalled through allusions such as the mention of 'three fishing boats... –the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa María' sailing by the coast where Celia lives (p. 4). In *TAS*, the Spanish components in Cuban culture are evoked through Ignacio who, born in 1904 of Spanish immigrants, represents the 'first criollos, ... who... created the country that became today's Cuba' (Alvarez Borland, p.144).

In *DC*, the African sociocultural elements in Cuban culture are mainly represented by Felicia's friend Herminia, a santería priest's daughter. The attempts of Celia's mother-in-law to 'remove any evidence of her mulatto blood' (*DC*, p. 41) using potions, also allude to the wish to suppress a mixed racial background and pass for white, escaping the social inferiority historically experienced by blacks. In *TAS*, Blanca Agüero's origins bring to the surface the racial tensions resulting from the extinction of the island's original inhabitants after the Conquest and a repopulation with African slaves. Blanca's mother was a mulatta partly 'descended... from French colonialists who'd fled Haiti after the slave revolt of 1791' and 'settled in Santiago de Cuba with twenty-seven thousand other displaced French planters, imprinting the city with their culture' (*TAS*, p. 184). Her history recalls the interactions between the different Caribbean islands and their colonial and plantation pasts, while casting a shadow over Constancia's claims that Ignacio's Spanish origins make the family 'true criollos' (*TAS*, p. 10). Significantly, the lover who impregnates Blanca with Reina during an extramarital affair is a 'giant mulatto with a touch of Oriental blood' (*TAS*, p. 263). As Benitez Rojo explains, 'hundreds of thousands of

Asians' were brought to the Caribbean as indentured servants to sustain the plantation economy giving rise to a new racial type, 'el mulatto chino',⁷⁰.

3.2. National and Family Histories

Portraying the effects of the revolution of 1959 on the del Pinos and Agüeros, García depicts the most recent episode in the (re)configuration of Cuban consciousness. Her novels underline the need to conceptualise this term in the plural, as her characters' understandings of Cuban identity differ greatly depending on various factors. The most prominent in the novels are their socio-economic status pre and post 1959, their ideological stance, whether they stay on the island or leave, and, in this last case, the date and circumstances of their departure. A further point to consider is that García's characters in *DC* and *TAS* are predominantly white, middle-class and heterosexual⁷¹. These factors affect the characters' selection of the historical events that prove most prominent in their lives, as well as the way in which these events are represented.

García's depiction of the links between the U.S. and Cuba also presents critically each society's positive and negative aspects. She describes characters sympathetic towards the revolution –*DC*'s Celia and, in an idealized way, Pilar, and initially Reina in *TAS*- and others critical of it, examining the pain and

70. Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1992. Trans. by James Maranis), p. 199-200.

71. For an overview of works dealing with questions of sexuality, exile and politics by gay Cuban American writers, see Alvarez Borland's chapter 'Gay and Lesbian Images of Community' in her *Cuban American Literature* (pp. 107-122). As for race, García's third novel *Monkey Hunting* (2003) widens the scope of her previous literary undertakings by focusing on the saga of a Chinese Cuban family.

violence both experienced and exerted by each group. In doing so, the author distances herself from the predominant stance among writers from previous generations, i.e., a decided support for the Cuban cause versus U.S. capitalist imperialism. The characters' differing views of the events following 1959 are contextualised by their memories of Cuba's previous situation. As Alvarez Borland notes, the stories from the characters' past 'help explain present circumstances and demonstrate the links of past and present' (p. 138).

DC alludes to the time before Castro's era mainly through Celia's unsent letters to her old lover. In 1952, Celia writes that 'Batista stole the country from us when it seemed things could finally change. The U.S. wants him in the palace. How else could he have pulled this off?' (*DC*, p. 162). In January 15 1934, Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar overthrew Ramón Grau San Martín's brief government with support of the army and the U.S.⁷² Batista exerted power through various puppet presidents for the next seventeen years, becoming president himself in 1940 (Marshall, p. 37). In 1955, Celia foresees: 'We'll get rid of Batista the way we did with that tyrant Machado' –a dictator preceding Batista (*DC*, p. 165). Batista finally left for the Dominican Republic on January 1 1959, seven days before a triumphant Castro entered Havana. Celia explains to Pilar that before 1959 'Cuba was... a parody of a country. There was one product, sugar, and all the profits went to a few Cubans, and, of course, to the Americans' (*DC*, p. 233).

TAS goes further back in time as Ignacio Agüero's manuscript recalls 'the birth of the Cuban republic, a tale fraught with violent dictatorships' (Alvarez Borland, p. 144). After the end of Spanish rule in 1898 and the U.S. occupation

72. Peter Marshall, *Cuba Libre: Breaking the Chains?* (London: Unwin, 1988), p. 37.

of the island from 1899 to 1902, Tomás Estrada Palma became Cuba's first president. His visit to Ignacio's hometown on the day of Agüero's birth –October 4 1904-, is described as surrounded by bad omens for the country's future (*TAS*, p. 27). The subsequent years of turbulence lead to the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado (1925-1933), supported by loans from U.S. banks (*TAS*, p. 150). Machado repressed harshly the unrest caused by his oppressive regime and economic instability⁷³, and Ignacio describes how the pressure on him intensified until he had to leave Cuba in 1933 while his followers 'were tracked down, beaten, and dismembered by mobs' (*TAS*, p. 153).

After 1959, the del Pinos and the Agüeros split as Lourdes, Rufino and Pilar in *DC* and Constanca, Heberto and Isabel in *TAS* leave for the U.S. These separations are followed by the departure of Reina's daughter for Spain and of Celia's son Javier for Czechoslovakia. These splits accentuate unsolved antagonisms among the characters, suggesting that in García's narratives 'families are essentially political' and one has to 'choose sides' (*DC*, p. 86). The revolution's impact on the protagonist family is subtly conveyed by the way personal events are dated in *DC*: Pilar was born 'eleven days after El Líder rode in triumph to Havana' (*DC*, p. 24) in January 8 1959, while Hugo marries Felicia 'the week of the Cuban missile Crisis' (*DC*, p. 81) in October 1962.

73. Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes, *A History of Latin America. Vol. II. Independence to the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p. 436.

3.3 Gender Struggles and Historical (Re)Constructions

García's revision of Cuban and U.S. histories also deals with alternative discourses suppressed for a long time from the accounts that have become "official". Her concern with the bias and omissions in established discourses are perhaps most explicit in *DC*, when Pilar remembers being told by her father how 'the Spaniards wiped out more Indians with smallpox than with muskets' (*DC*, p. 28) after Columbus' arrival. She states that history books list 'one damn battle after another. We only know about Charlemagne and Napoleon because they fought their way into posterity' (*DC*, p. 28). Her thoughts show an awareness that historical master narratives have been written by the victors in national, social and cultural struggles and thus embody the suppression of the voice of subordinated groups.

By calling attention to the gaps and biases in the narratives that have prevailed, Pilar's remarks also point to the irrecoverable nature of certain historical events or versions, a point particularly relevant in the context of Latin America's history and culture before the Conquest. These "lost" facts and perspectives can sometimes be reconstructed only through hypothesis and imagination. However, *DC* suggests that it is still important to do so in order to counterbalance the (hi)stories that have become predominant and underline the subjective components in these accounts.

The main enterprise of historical recovery through imagination in García's novels is undertaken by women –specifically, Cuban and Cuban American women-, traditionally excluded from the making of history because of their gender. *DC* explicitly thematises this point when Pilar affirms that she

would 'record other things' like 'a freak hailstorm in the Congo' which 'the women took... as a sign that they should rule', or 'the life stories of prostitutes in Bombay', wondering: 'Who chooses what we should know...? I know I have to decide these things for myself. Most of what I have learnt that's important I've learned on my own, or from my grandmother' (*DC*, p. 28). Her statements indicate that her subjectivity cannot be approached merely in the national or ethnic terms of a Cuba/ U.S. axis, demanding a wider context that considers women's circumstances across societies.

The theme of women's oppression together with their struggles and contributions to society is recurrently explored in both narratives, which portray the pain, alienation and identity re-formulations experienced by various generations of del Pino women in *DC* and Agüero women in *TAS*. Alvarez Borland considers *DC* 'a pioneering voice in telling the story of the Cuban diaspora from the point of view of Cuban women' (p. 139). She argues that '[t]he female characters left in Cuba experience a loss of voice that can only be understood in terms of gender and political history' (p. 139), which I argue can also be extended to include the characters who leave for the U.S.

DC develops these issues mainly through the relationships between Celia, Lourdes and Pilar. Celia had been interned in a psychiatric centre after her lover's departure, her marriage to a jealous Jorge, and abuse by her mother and sister in-law –pointing at some women's collaboration in other women's oppression. Celia dreams of leaving for Spain in search of her lover, although 'she would stay' if she had a daughter in order to 'train her to read the columns of blood and numbers in men's eyes, to understand the morphology of survival' (*DC*, p. 42). Sadly, by the time Lourdes is born, the woman is too damaged to

bond with her. Celia channels her energies and frustrations giving herself to the revolution and becoming a civilian judge, which proves empowering in that '[w]hat she decides makes a difference in others' lives, and she feels part of a great historical unfolding' (*TAS*, p. 111). However, she cannot solve her own differences with Jorge and Lourdes, and she fails to reach her other daughter, Felicia. An equal lack of communication exists between Lourdes and Pilar, which will be overcome only when each acknowledges the other's circumstances and wounds.

TAS continues this examination of gender conflicts across generations showing Soledad, Ignacio's mother, as the first embodiment of female oppression and initiative. Ignacio's memories of Soledad focus on her defiance of Machado's regime as well as of the patriarchal conventions of the time. Banished from her family after being raped by a married man who would become the town's mayor, she 'refused to join the convent or surrender her child for adoption' and started a new life supporting herself (*TAS*, p. 152). Gender struggles perpetuate in Blanca's relationship with Ignacio, whose love is based on possession and submission. After marrying her he stops paying her for their joint work and forbids her to find employment elsewhere. Blanca disobeys him and considers 'leaving for the United States, where professional women were treated marginally better' (*TAS*, p. 224). She deeply resents falling pregnant with Ignacio's baby, Constanica, and disappears without explanation to come back pregnant with Reina.

Constancia and Reina suffer the effects of their parents' story of passion and abandonment, effects perpetuated in their own daughters' lives. Reina falls in love with José Luis Fuerte, 'one of the original revolutionaries who was at

Moncada and in the Sierra Maestra side by side with you-know-who' (*TAS*, pp. 52-53). This refers to his participation in the 26th of July Movement which, under the leadership of Castro, made a failed attempt to topple Batista by attacking the Moncada army barracks (Keen & Haynes, p. 439). The mention of Sierra Maestra recalls Castro's plan to land in Cuba's Oriente province in 1956 having sailed there from Mexico in the yacht *Granma* together with eighty-two followers. They were betrayed, although Castro and a small group managed to flee to the Sierra Maestra mountains. From there, they adopted guerrilla tactics resisting the assault of forces far superior in number (Keen & Haynes, p. 441).

When, pregnant with Dulce, she asks Jose Luis to marry her, he refuses, which Reina ascribes to his not wanting children. She explains that 'it was nothing personal' against Dulce (*TAS*, p. 68), but the latter still resents her father's absenteeism and his status as a national hero together with Reina's decision to send her to a boarding school. (*TAS*, p. 52). Dissatisfied with the restrictions of Castro's regime, Dulce wonders 'what [her] father would think of... his revolution' (*TAS*, p. 52). She complements her earnings as a sports teacher by prostituting herself, mirroring Reina's promiscuity not out of sensuality but out of disenchantment.

Constancia's trajectory echoes Reina in that her short marriage to Gonzalo ends when he leaves her when she falls pregnant. If Reina's lover was a revolutionary hero, Gonzalo was injured in the 1961 Bay of Pigs failed invasion of Cuba by a group of exiles counting on President Kennedy's approval (Keen & Haynes, p. 443). 'Corrupted... for any other love' (*TAS*, p. 40), Constancia marries Gonzalo's brother Heberto. Years later, their daughter Isabel enters a

similar cycle of love and abandonment as her American partner leaves her when she becomes pregnant.

For Alvarez Borland, 'Celia and Felicia are products of male-dominated Cuban society': 'Celia's husband tries to punish her for having a lover before she met him; Felicia's husband abandons her as soon as they are married' (pp. 139-140). She considers that '[t]heir poverty, their unhappy childhood, and their lonely existence are indirectly tied to events that have rendered them powerless' (p. 140). However, García's women are not mere "products" of their circumstances; while often tragic, they are not portrayed as powerless victims but as characters making choices within their restricted possibilities. If anything, the plot of the novels lies in how these characters face personal and national narratives of trauma as they struggle to take control of their lives. Coming to terms with their past is not depicted as a passive process but as an active reconfiguration of their identities through dialogues with those that have hurt them or whom they have hurt.

Their capacity for agency is manifested in their ability to bond with other women as a means to understand or alter their own predicament. Pilar's telepathic links with Celia allow her to bear the confusion of her life in the U.S., for instance, while the old woman finds hope in the belief that Pilar will "remember" their family history. Felicia finds some comfort in her friendship with Herminia, whose santería rituals will ease –though not stop– her mental and physical degeneration. Celia and Pilar also use historical women as points of reference in their attempts to comprehend their situation. The former, a strong but sometimes misguided woman estranged from her husband, admires a 'weathervane of Doña Ines de Bobadilla, Cuba's first woman governor' (*DC*, p.

43). The parallelisms between the two women are strengthened further: ‘her husband, Hernando de Soto, left to conquer Florida. Doña Ines... was frequently seen staring out to sea, searching the horizon for her husband. But de Soto died on the banks of the Mississippi River without ever seeing his wife again’ (*DC*, p. 43).

As for the novel’s main protagonist, Pilar, she becomes interested in Jacoba Van Heemskerck, ‘a Dutch expressionist painter’ who inspires her to ‘obliterate the clichés’ with her own paintings (*DC*, p.139). She also denounces the fact that ‘[p]eople still ask where all the important women painters are instead of looking at what they did paint and trying to understand their circumstances’ (*DC*, p. 139). This self-conscious moment in *DC* suggests that, while acknowledging the characters’ difficult circumstances, its focus is on depicting their struggles to understand and take control of their lives.

Another issue absent from Alvarez Borland’s statements is that men’s actions in *DC* and *TAS* must also be understood in terms of gender and political history. Celia makes this point explicit as she thinks about Batista’s dictatorship: ‘I fear for my son, learning to be a man from such men’ (*DC*, p. 162). Except for Felicia’s abusive husband, García shows the men’s backgrounds without condoning their actions but suggesting how certain role models and wounds shape their behaviour. If García’s women are not mere victims of their societies and their men, her male characters are not just unidimensional tyrants. *DC*’s Jorge and Rufino, for instance, sustain for a long time strong bonds of companionship with Lourdes and Pilar, respectively. In *TAS*, Ignacio gives Constancia an affection that Blanca denies her. Finally, it is significant that in *TAS* the American partner of Isabel also leaves her for a younger woman as soon

as she becomes pregnant; in *DC*, Pilar's Peruvian boyfriend cheats on her with a Dutch blonde woman, and soon after she is assaulted by three boys aged eleven. These incidents point out that infidelity and women's exploitation occur in the two societies in a variety of forms, not being exclusive to Latin American machista societies.

While the novels' protagonists are mainly white, middle-class and heterosexual, *TAS* dwells briefly on social concerns and gender issues related to other sexualities through Constancia's homosexual son Silvestre. Similarly, Felicia's friend Herminia is used in *DC* to elaborate briefly on race and class tensions. However, I contend that these secondary characters' interventions indicate not so much a direct authorial interest in their circumstances as an acknowledgement of the particular social group the novels engage with by pointing out sectors with different concerns from the protagonists'.

3.4. Physical and Psychological Exiles

TAS and *DC* complement their exploration of the cultural elements in Cuban identity by depicting Cuban "presences" in other societies through characters who leave for other countries. In *DC*, Alvarez Borland highlights 'three important dimensions of Cuban exile: the story of the Cubans who remained in Cuba (exemplified... by... Celia and... Felicia), the story of the Cuban exiles who came to America in the 1960s (the story of Lourdes...) and, finally, the story of the children of exile (...Pilar's story)' (p. 137). The characters representing each sector conceive the "imagined community of Cuba" in

different, clashing ways. The novel's fragmented temporality reflects the disruptions in the characters' lives and the conflicting elements in their identities by juxtaposing 'two moments in time: a Cuban past (which goes back to the beginning of the [twentieth] century and presents us with the poverty and corruption under which Celia... grew up) and the American present (which takes us all the way to Pilar's visit to Cuba during the early 1980s)' (Alvarez Borland, p.138).

Alvarez Borland observes accurately that *DC* is mostly narrated in the first person by Pilar when she describes her life in the U.S., and is filtered through her omniscient voice when relating the other characters' stories (p. 137). 'When Pilar visits Cuba', she notes, 'the reader also hears the first-person voice of Ivanito, Pilar's Cuban counterpart' (p. 137). Towards the end of the novel, Lourdes sends Ivanito on a plane to the U.S. with Pilar's complicity, taking advantage of the upheaval following the occupation of the Peruvian embassy in Havana by dissidents in 1980. These points suggest that *DC* is mainly told from the standpoint of Cuban Americans coming to terms with the conflicts within their family and mother-country.

TAS is organized in a similar way, but shows significant variations in its treatment of exile. Constancia leaves Cuba in 1961 with baby Isabel soon after having sent her son Silvestre to the U.S. Reina stays in Cuba, as does her daughter Dulce until she departs for Madrid with a lover twice her age. In *DC*, Pilar and Lourdes return to Cuba on a visit enabling them to reconcile themselves with painful events in their family's and Cuba's history. In *TAS*, the Agüeros' reunion takes place in Miami, and the characters' experiences are not rendered through a focalizer using the first person like Pilar in *DC*. The only cases of first-

person narration are the fragments from Ignacio's posthumous manuscript and the words of Dulce, but these are not omniscient narrators in charge of transmitting the predicament of other characters to the reader.

The sociocultural effects of exile that have shaped Cuban subjectivities for more than two hundred years and that permeate García's narratives have been widely studied (Herrera O'Reilly, p. xviii), generating varied analyses of how 'the various generations of refugees have adapted to and transformed their receiving cultures as they continue to make their transition into exile' (Herrera O'Reilly, p. xvii). What differentiates the exodus following 1959 is not only its length and dimensions, but also the fact that the consciousness of exile 'traverses several generations of "exiles," including those born or raised outside the Island' (Herrera O'Reilly, p. xvii). Without establishing hierarchies of suffering, García explores how 'the term "exile" occupies many alternative places and meanings' (Herrera O'Reilly, p. xxi) questioning the notion that it 'could only be conceptualized in physical, spatial or geographical terms' (Herrera O'Reilly, p. xxi). As we will see, feelings of alienation often appear well before any thoughts of actual physical departure, constituting a sort of inner, psychological exile.

3.4.1. DC: 'What Unknown Covenants Led Ultimately to this Hour and this Solitude?'

In *DC*, the reasons for which the characters support or disagree with the regime divide the del Pinos physically and ideologically. Even those staying in Cuba become exiles, 'either through personal isolation due to the family's instigation

of one ideological narrative, or through their opposition to the political remembrance that reconstructs Cuba' (Socolovsky, p. 150). This is evident even in the case of Celia, the most pro-Castro character, who represses her affective dissatisfactions by working for the revolution. Seymour Menton considers Celia's psychiatric treatment as successful and her support for Castro as a civic act, stating that she 'eventually becomes a stable, generous and idealist person' who 'gives herself to her family and the Revolution',^{74 75}. This interpretation proves excessively simplistic since Celia's letters record the 'impossibility of forgetting the violence that was done to her, while her new narrative embraces Castro's communism and forgets the violences of its beginnings' (Socolovsky, p. 151). Celia's thoughts in *DC*'s opening scenes imply that her acceptance of the constitutive myths of Castro's regime and her oblivion regarding the revolution's price are not complete. Grieving for her dead husband's 'mixed-up allegiances', Celia meditates about 'the happenstance of El Líder, a star pitcher in his youth, narrowly missing a baseball career in America... Frustrated, El Líder went home... and started a revolution in the mountains. Because of this... her husband will be buried in stiff, foreign earth [and] their children and their grandchildren are nomads' (*DC*, pp. 6-7).

Felicia, in turn, cannot adapt to the transformations in Cuban society, 'a country living on slogans and agitation, ...always on the brink of war' (*DC*, p. 107). Felicia shuts herself away in her own world, 'unable to produce representations of memory, and consequently, [not engaging] in versions of memory and forgetting in the same way as the rest of the characters'

74. Seymour Menton, *Historia verdadera del realismo mágico* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), p. 201.

75. 'llega a ser una persona estable, generosa e idealista' que 'se dedica a su familia y a la Revolución'.

(Socolovsky, p.154). This shift into atemporality and oblivion is connected with a progressive madness caused by syphilis caught from her husband. In Alvarez Borland's words, '[h]ers is the silent world of the inner exile' (p. 140).

Lourdes, expropriated and raped by revolutionary soldiers, flees to the U.S. with Rufino and baby Pilar without knowing 'how long they'd be away' (*DC*, p.69). As Louis A. Pérez Jr notes, '[f]ew Cubans who departed during the 1960s could have even vaguely foreseen that their expatriation would become permanent. Many believed that... the United States would step into the breach and return them and the island the way it used to be'⁷⁶. Once in New York, Lourdes opens a bakery faring much better than Rufino, who 'could not be transplanted' (*DC*, p.129). In Pilar's words, she 'hires the real down-and-outs, immigrants from Russia or Pakistan, people who don't speak any English, figuring she can get them cheap. Then she screams at them... because they don't understand what she's saying' and mistrusts them (*DC*, pp. 31-32). This illustrates the hierarchies and exploitations among immigrants of diverse national and social backgrounds.

Despite her apparently successful adaptation to the U.S. Lourdes experiences obsessions with food and sex. Menton reduces them to the fact that 'Lourdes is essentially a picturesque character that puts on weight, loses it, and gains it once again in a way reminding [sic] of Aureliano Segundo in *A Hundred Years of Solitude*'⁷⁷ (p. 203). While acknowledging that her extreme anti-communism can be ascribed to her rape and expropriation, he fails to connect the impact of these events with Lourdes' compulsions. These are linked with her

76. Louis A. Pérez Jr. (1990), *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 246.

77. 'Lourdes es esencialmente un personaje pintoresco que sube de peso, baja de peso y vuelve a subir de peso, algo como Aureliano Segundo en *Cien años de soledad*'

efforts to forget the rape and the subsequent loss of her baby, her home, and her mother-country. Socolovsky recognises her cycles of weight gain and starvation as attempted changes of identity (p. 152), and they can also be related to the predominantly female illnesses of bulimia and anorexia. Lourdes's alternate self-privation and excessive food consumption would aim at taking control of her body, compensating for her powerlessness over certain episodes of her life. The memories that she tries to suppress pay 'tribute to the violence endured under the establishment of Cuba's new leader' (Socolovsky, p. 152). Like Celia, Lourdes has not fully come to terms with her wounds: she has only put them aside.

Her daughter Pilar, very different in temper and unaware of her sufferings, grows up in the U.S. with mixed-up feelings. Nostalgic for a stylised Cuba associated with Celia, she needs to reacquaint herself with her cultural and familial heritage to reconstruct 'an identity that very much belongs in the United States but that needs Cuba in order to be complete' (Alvarez Borland, p.146). Pilar is the one character capable of integrating her relatives' different narratives into a meaningful whole and a usable past.

The differences among the del Pino women are perhaps best exemplified in their debates about the revolution's outcomes. As Celia evokes the extended poverty in the island before the changes following 1959, Lourdes replies recalling 'the plantados, the political prisoners who've been in jail... almost twenty years' (*DC*, p. 233). She also raises the question of retribution for expropriated people together with religious persecution (*DC*, p. 234). Felicia also complains that Cubans are 'dying of security' (*DC*, p. 117), while for Celia '[n]o one is starving or denied medical care, no one sleeps in the streets, everyone works who wants to work' (*DC*, p.117). At another moment, Pilar asks her

grandmother whether she can paint whatever she wants in Cuba; Celia answers affirmatively, provided one does not ‘attack the state’ since ‘Cuba is still developing... and can’t afford the luxury of dissent’ (*DC*, p. 235). She then quotes Castro’s famous statement allowing ‘Within the revolution everything; against the revolution, nothing’, which, Pilar observes distancing herself from Celia’s views, was made ‘in the early years, before they started arresting poets’ (*DC*, p. 235). The superimposition of generational conflicts and ideological disagreements also takes place in the male line of the del Pinos: Javier, Celia and Jorge’s son, ‘never fought his father openly. His war was one of silent defiance, and he left for Czechoslovakia secretly in 1966, without saying good-bye to anyone’ (*DC*, p.118).

3.4.2. TAS: ‘Everyone’s Vision’s Splintered’

Like *DC*, *TAS* makes characters and readers alike struggle to make a meaningful whole out of competing stories. The novel’s ‘questions of remembrance and recording create a counter-memory by asking its characters to recollect a secret which has remained hidden from them’ (Socolovsky, p. 156). It exposes the “blind spots” in each character’s worldview, underlining how their need to recollect the(ir) truth is entangled with the question of whether ‘[m]ercy... is more important than knowledge’ (*TAS*, p. 165). However, *TAS* contrasts with *DC* in that it seems more concerned with those who leave Cuba sooner –like Constancia and Isabel- or later –like Reina and Dulce. There is not an actively pro-Castro figure equivalent to Celia in *DC*, and the final family reunion happens in Miami

rather than in Cuba. Also, *TAS*'s characters often meditate on questions of truth, memory and history in a much more explicit and sustained way than in *DC*. Confirming what Alvarez Borland identifies as 'the novel's main effort of pondering about what it means to be human' (p. 144), the characters resort to various kinds of knowledge in their attempts to articulate the(ir) truth.

The novel posits recurrently the idea that geo-physical factors affect people through Ignacio, a specialist in Cuban flora and fauna. 'Evolution', he affirms, 'is more precise than history' (*TAS*, p. 44). The Agüeros' violent story would thus be related to the law of the survival of the strongest. Reina herself wonders 'Why is it that people rarely perceive the underlying violence of nature?' (*TAS*, p. 272). The atmosphere of determinism created by the accumulation of such statements acquires fatalistic tones as the characters meditate on the certainty of death. Constanca recalls Ignacio's belief that '[e]very force moves towards death' and '[o]nly constant violence maintains it' (*TAS*, p. 212), while Isabel is fascinated with the idea that '[w]e are all... radiant with disease' (*TAS*, p. 41).

For some characters, the atmosphere of determinism becomes one of fate, paradoxically best captured by Ignacio's belief that '[f]rom [his] parents' first meeting, [his] future was born and the very moment [he is] living was predetermined' (*TAS*, p. 59). As in *DC*, the characters' existences present recurrent cycles of abandonment, infidelity, and violence perpetuated throughout the generations. Watching the sky, Reina notes that '[the constellations seem jumbled and overburdened above, as if tired of the same senseless repetitions' (*TAS*, p. 274). Portraying some characters' belief that superhuman forces affect human existence, *TAS* also illustrates the tensions and convergences of science,

Catholicism, santería, and other beliefs like astrology. The novel illustrates Benítez Rojo's statement that '[i]n the Caribbean, epistemological transparency has not displaced the dregs and sediments of the cosmological arcana, the splatterings of sacrificial blood... but rather, unlike what happens in the West, scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge coexist as differences within the same system' (p. 17).

The conflictive relations between scientific and paranormal knowledge are perhaps best illustrated by the relationship between Blanca and Ignacio. 'Blanca's gifts,' we are told, 'had nothing to do with intelligence, which she displayed in impressive abundance, but were born of qualities much less tangible. Instinct. Intuition. An uncanny sense for the aberrational' (*TAS*, p.181). Blanca, hermetic to Ignacio and their daughters, evokes the all-pervading presence of the unknown in human existence. Speaking 'little, as if unwilling to surrender to the unreliable realm of words' (*TAS*, p. 181), she is 'slight, as delicately boned as certain birds' (*TAS*, p. 181).

The circumstances of her murder, after Ignacio aims at a rare bird but shoots her instead, develop this theme further. This scene, the repercussions of which will affect the following Agüero generations, weaves together several issues already outlined: science's attempts to supersede the mystical or spiritual and defeat the unknown, the thirst for power and domination often underlying the quest for knowledge and the recording of history, and patriarchal efforts to control women. Although they perceive the cyclical patterns structuring their lives, García's characters also seem to believe in a certain capacity for initiative through which one can understand and break the cycles. Ignacio himself states: 'to our dying breath we have a will, diminished though our range of possibilities

may be. This is... what separates us from the lesser creatures of the planet' (*TAS*, p. 261).

In the case of the rivalry between Constanca and Reina, the theme of competing personal and ontological truths becomes entangled with the struggle for ideological supremacy. The latter shows a dwindling support for Castro's regime until she decides 'to do nothing more for the revolution' (*TAS*, p. 66). Her lover Pepín blames Castro for inviting 'trouble by allowing the exiles to return to Cuba for visits. What those... brought in their crammed suitcases... began rapidly to unravel the revolution' (*TAS*, p.66). After joining Constanca in Miami in 1991, Reina meets 'pride-engorged Cubans' who 'want her to crucify El Comandante, repudiate even the good things he's done for the country', and feels that 'el exilio... is the virulent flipside of Communist intolerance' (*TAS*, p.195).

Self-confident and sensual, Reina is apparently the most content character in the novel: unlike Constanca, she has been brought up by both her parents, and unlike Dulce, she manages to lead a satisfying life under Castro's regime. Pragmatic Reina believes in the relativity of knowledge, enjoying 'the freedom from a finality of vision, of a definitive version of life's meaning. If she could perceive nothing in its entirety, then why not celebrate what she could grasp with her own senses?' (*TAS*, p.10). Alvarez Borland believes that 'within the novel's Darwinian perspective, Reina, the most Cuban character in the novel, seems to have the best odds for survival since she has had to give up little compared to the others' (p. 145).

However, Reina is not as unaffected by the family story as these statements lead us to believe. As Socolovsky points out, the fact that Reina lives in Ignacio's old study among his collection of stuffed animals implies that she is

haunted by a past parts of which she tries to suppress: '[t]he room... serves as a memorial to her father, pretending to display the secrets of the past except the most violent one- that of her mother's death' (p. 159). This interpretation is supported by her insomnia, which represents for Socolovsky a 'loss of memory' that 'breaks down community and communication', a shared feature with García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (p. 159). Apart from marking her realisation of her political disaffection, Reina's convalescence after being struck by lightning also triggers her need to unravel the past superseding her previous relativist, contented stance.

The incident results in her having miraculously successful 'experimental skin grafts from loved ones' and '[o]ther people dead and alive' (*TAS*, p. 33). Reina 'cannot accept a rational explanation' for the events, believing that 'she was singled out to die, but, instead,... has survived' (*TAS*, p. 34). This could be read as a manifestation of her need to include others in her life, acknowledging the parts of their common story that she has suppressed. Such a reading is strengthened by the fact that Reina cannot orgasm once in Miami, and is only able to do so again after a violent fight with Constancia. In the fight, a physical enactment of their rivalry, both of them are on the edge of killing the other but refrain from doing so (*TAS*, pp. 274-75).

Like *DC*'s Lourdes, Constancia represents one of 'the hundreds of thousands from the disaffected middle classes' who in the early 1960s 'emigrated in numbers well out of proportion to the relative size of the general population'; they were 'largely white and educated, in possession of a range of skills, professional expertise, entrepreneurial backgrounds, and often capital resources' (Perez Jr., *Cuba*, p. 245). She realizes that she does not belong to the Miami

Cuban exile community, since ‘the cubanas here can’t make comfortable assumptions about her’ while she does not ‘consider herself an exile in the same way’ as them: she ‘shuns their habit of fierce nostalgia, their trafficking in the past like exaggerating peddlers’ (*TAS*, pp. 43-44).

Constancia has also been the repository of a secret for her whole life: while Ignacio had initially told everybody that Blanca had drowned, he had later lied again to Constancia stating that the woman had shot herself (*TAS*, pp. 272-3). While she is apparently settled in the U.S., Socolovsky observes in her ‘an obsession with freezing time so as not to remember or record the secrets of violence and death’ (p. 158). Constancia inherits her mother’s face in an unexplained manner, an incident which suggests the strong influence of Blanca’s absence in her life together with her need to discover the truth about the character’s death. Constancia reacts by commercialising a successful product range called *Cuerpo de Cuba* (Body of Cuba) with Blanca’s face as an emblem, embodying ‘the exalted image Cuban women have of themselves: as passionate, self-sacrificing, and deserving of every luxury’ (*TAS*, p. 129).

Constancia creates ‘a gendered Cuba that can imagine itself as located yesterday and as youthful and passionate. The lotions, preserving the community’s imagining of itself as exiled, indulge the melancholic nostalgia of the women’ (Socolovsky, p. 160). Instead of acknowledging the effects on her of leaving behind her culture and her only partially unravelled family story, Constancia objectifies these feelings in the form of skin-care products that trigger recollections of Cuba in her clients and giving her a vicarious pleasure. Constancia’s attitude shifts dramatically after Reina’s arrival in Miami, their fight for supremacy and, ultimately, their reconciliation. She returns to the ranch

of Blanca's family in Cuba where she spent her childhood, and finds Ignacio's manuscript revealing the story of Blanca's death.

Finally, Dulce represents the "inner exile" and disaffection of those remaining on the island, and resents Reina's arguments that 'young people today are spoiled and... should've seen how things were before the revolution to understand deprivation' (*TAS*, p. 50). She sees Cuba as 'an evil stepmother, abusive and unrewarding of effort' (*TAS*, p. 50), a place where people are divided between 'those with dollars and those without' (*TAS*, p. 51). She finally leaves for Spain, where her harsh life makes her reassess her past in Cuba without being able to determine where she was poorer (*TAS*, p. 202). She eventually joins Reina in Miami, but the direction of the character's evolution is left unexplained.

3.5 García and the Cuban American Novel

Examining perceptively how García's narratives deal with Cuban American identities in relation to the different waves of exiles from 1959 onwards, Alvarez Borland contextualises García's literary production by classifying it as "Ethnic Cuban American". Alvarez Borland provides a productive framework for a study of *DC* and *TAS* with respect to the differing literary perspectives of Cuban American authors since 1959. She examines in what sense one can 'speak of the Cuban and Cuban American literary output, given its varied stance before its diasporic history, as well as the diversity of languages and ideologies that inform it' (p. 2). While 'the themes of exile and displacement seem to be a constant in the literature of the various generations', she observes, 'the perspective from

which the story of diaspora is conceived and told varies considerably among the groups' (p. 6).

The first exile generation departed from the island as adults, having been fully educated there; among them stand writers such as Cabrera Infante, Reinaldo Arenas, Severo Sarduy, Novás Calvo, Hilda Perera, Heberto Padilla, and Antonio Benítez Rojo. The works of this generation, including authors who left Cuba in different moments since the early 1960s, show marked political concerns permeated with 'indignation, and anger towards the traumatic events or individuals causing the exile... reflecting the chronological proximity of the events to the writing' (Alvarez Borland, p. 7).

The children of first generation exiles show notable differences in the perception of Cuba and the U.S., not only with respect to their elders but also among themselves. This depends on whether they left Cuba as adolescents or pre-adolescents, or whether they were born in the U.S. or had left the island as infants (Alvarez Borland, p. 6). Alvarez Borland calls the latter group, including García as well as her characters Pilar and Isabel, "ethnic Cuban Americans". The former, represented by *DC*'s Ivanito, have become known as the "one and a half (1.5)" generation –a term popularised by Gustavo Pérez Firmat in his seminal *Life in the Hyphen*. Pérez Firmat borrowed the term from Cuban sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut, who argued that '[t]hese refugee youth must cope with two crisis-producing and identity-defining transitions: (1) adolescence and the task of managing the transition from childhood to adulthood, and (2) acculturation and

the task of managing the transition from one sociocultural environment to another⁷⁸.

These psycho-cultural processes take place as individuals grow into specific gender roles under contrasting messages from their Cuban past –often recreated within their U.S. homes- and their U.S. lives. Their parents, Rumbaut adds, only have to face the first kind of ‘crisis-producing and identity-defining transitions’, while children born and brought up in the U.S. will face only the former⁷⁹. However, as *DC*’s Pilar illustrates, these children brought up in the U.S. also face a cultural process parallel in some ways to their parents’ “transition from one society to another”: negotiating the contrasts between the parental Cuban background and the American surroundings, as well as being labelled as hyphenated or ethnic American without necessarily having first-hand experience of their ancestors’ Cuban land and culture determining that status.

Members from the one-and-a-half generation, in Alvarez Borland’s analysis, ‘recognize the disruption of their exile and create for themselves a new persona in the adopted language’ (p. 8); their prose production often takes the form of ‘autobiographical writings and fictions of community and geographical crossings’ (p. 8). Cuban American ethnic writers’ works, Alvarez Borland argues, place ‘greater distance between the writers and the events of the diaspora’, and ‘join an already existing corpus of U.S. literature of Cuban heritage, not explicitly about the 1959 revolution, which is central in the appraisal of the English literature of Cuban heritage in the United States’ (p. 8).

78. Rubén G. Rumbaut, ‘The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indonese Refugee Adults and Children’ in *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services*, eds. Frederick L. Ahearn Jr., and Jean L. Athey (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 61, as quoted in Pérez Firmat’s *Life in the Hyphen*.

79. Loc. cit.

Alvarez Borland presents García's writing as a significant instance of the treatment of exile from an ethnic Cuban American consciousness (p. 137).

Summarising the cultural and thematic divergences between exile writers from the first generation, the "one-and-a-halfers" and ethnic Cuban Americans, Alvarez Borland characterises the first group as reflecting 'nostalgia and anger toward their homeland as well as a feeling of alienation from the world of English' (p.9). The second group's works present 'the literary dramatization of the Cuban voice from Spanish to English and explore the solutions or substitutions that these authors have devised in order to compensate for linguistic loss' (Alvarez Borland, p. 9). Like *DC* and *TAS*, writings by Cuban American ethnic writers 'will be orientated toward issues of recovery as they set about the task of construction a U.S. identity that very much needs to take into account their Cuban heritage' (p. 9).

CHAPTER 4.

HISTORY IN ALVAREZ'S AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL FICTIONS.

Like García, Alvarez focuses on the different –and often competing- factions involved in the construction of historical discourses. She challenges the reader to face the tensions between dominant social sectors shaping such discourses, less powerful ones who are silenced, and agents of historical revision reclaiming or discarding voices from the past. Her explorations of Dominican history tackle the cultural and ideological divergences between Dominicans on the island or on the U.S., gender and class power imbalances within each sector, and the country’s heterogeneous cultural legacy. Concerning this last point, Alvarez’s narratives – like García’s- use brief but recurrent references to bring to the fore the multiple ethnic elements conforming Dominican culture, recalling the historical conflicts resulting in the country’s present hybridity. This hybridity is represented more as a complex, contradictory and often painful mixture of referents that the characters struggle to combine into a meaningful whole than as the unproblematic coexistence of heterogeneous elements in their background.

Among the main “presences” shaping Dominicaness, Alvarez’s narratives refer with varying degrees of directness to a pre-Columbian past, Spain’s colonial rule and repopulation of the island with African slaves, and the United States’ cultural, economic and political weight. They also bring to the fore the Dominican Republic’s complex bonds with its neighbour Haiti, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Quoting Ferguson, contemporary Dominicans ‘reflect the different phases of the country’s history and different generations of immigrants’⁸⁰. As its original people virtually disappeared after the Conquest, the country’s population is composed of the descendants of the original Spanish settlers and the African slaves they imported, Haitians, ‘subsequent immigrants

80. James Ferguson, *Dominican Republic: Beyond the Lighthouse* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1992), p. 20.

from the Canary Islands, Cubans and Puerto Ricans, Italians, Chinese, black North Americans, Jews, Syrian-Lebanese and blacks from the English-speaking Caribbean' (Ferguson, p. 20). Alvarez acknowledges this sociocultural variety as a prominent feature of the Caribbean, 'a string of islands,... a sponge, as most islands are, absorbing those who come and go'⁸¹. Such permeability and diversity challenge essentialist notions of national and cultural allegiances. Like their Dominican backgrounds, the identities of Alvarez's characters are relative and oppositional: they shift depending when, where and in relation to whom they are defining themselves or being defined by others.

4.1. Revising Dominican History

As Alvarez's works explore the characters' historical revisions, they constitute literary acts of historical revision themselves. *GG*, *¡Yo!*, and *Butterflies* move backwards and forwards in time departing from a current situation to examine past incidents which make characters and readers alike re-evaluate their presents. *GG*'s three parts span from 1989 to 1972, 1970 to 1960, and 1960 to 1956, respectively. *¡Yo!*, set in the 1990s, has its multiple narrators constantly recalling past events. Finally, *Butterflies*' three parts cover time-spans from 1938 to 1946, 1948 to 1959, and from January to 25 November 1960 –date of the murder of Patria, Maria Teresa and Minerva Mirabal-, while the scenes in which Dedé tells their story are set in 1994.

81. Julia Alvarez, *Something to Declare* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1998), p. 175. Henceforth *STD*.

4.1.1. The Conquest

In October 12 1942, the anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World, Minerva Mirabal notices in *Butterflies* that the usual October rains 'seem more severe than ever', believing that 'the god of thunder Huracán always acts up around the holiday of the Conquistador, who killed off all his Taino devotees' (p. 93). Minerva's words recall the colonisation of the island of Hispaniola – comprehending the current Dominican Republic and Haiti- following Columbus' four expeditions to the area from 1492 to 1504 (Ferguson, p. 13). Due to the violence and disease brought by the conquest, the native Taino Arawak population, approximately half a million in 1492, had virtually disappeared half a century later, and Spain repopulated the island with African slaves to work in the mines and fields⁸². By 1550, its gold seemed practically exhausted and the incursions of predominantly French buccaneers added to Spain's diminished interest in the area paved the way for the cession of the island's western third to France in 1697. This division established 'the basis for the later national divisions between Haiti and the Dominican Republic' (Atkins & Wilson, p. 8).

The references that Alvarez's characters make to their country's origins are tainted by their own ideologies. Underlying Minerva's evocations of the Tainos' fate under Spanish rule is her own opposition to Rafael Trujillo's brutal regime, as her sympathy towards the Tainos contrasts with the dictator's

82. G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson, *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 7.

institutionalised reinterpretation of the colonial past⁸³. Trujillo had 'established the official policy that Dominicans had an exclusively Spanish heritage, not only in terms of culture and Roman Catholic religion but of racial purity as well' (Atkins & Wilson, p. 78). This denied the African cultural and racial elements in Dominican society, which became associated with Haiti. This denial of the country's multicultural background, together with the ascription of hybridity to others, constituted an exercise of symbolic violence -both towards the Dominican population, some of whose racial and cultural roots are being obliterated, and towards the Haitians whose identity is externally defined exclusively in terms of these denigrated origins. The denial of the African presence in the Dominican Republic also increases the differences between this country and its neighbour, artificially antagonising them.

References to the Conquest's violent effects are used as a device to reinforce the characters' determination to oppose Trujillo's regime and its ideology. For example, the codename of Minerva's husband-to-be Manolo in the anti-Trujillo national underground is Enriquillo, 'after the great Taino chieftain' (*Butterflies*, p.142). The connotations of alluding to the Tainos' annihilation are further extended to include struggles against other figures of political and/or patriarchal oppression such as Dedé's possessive husband (*Butterflies*, p.189).

Significantly, when Yolanda García visits her Dominican relatives in *GG* she meets a country boy called José Duarte, Sánchez y Mella. These names, which, as the protagonist observes, are 'the surnames of the country's three liberators' (*GG*, p. 15), evoke Hispaniola's convoluted history during the first half of the nineteenth century as well as the birth of the Dominican Republic.

83. Eric Paul Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbour Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 198), pp. 190-191.

After a slave revolt against France, the western part of Hispaniola won independence, becoming Haiti in 1804. ‘From the outbreak of the French revolution in 1789 until the founding of the Dominican Republic in 1844’, the Spanish part of the island was ‘ceded to France (1795), returned to Spanish control (1809), declared independent (1821), [and] occupied by Haiti (1822)’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 9). It regained independence again after a secret organisation led by Juan Pablo Duarte, Ramón Mella and Francisco del Rosario Sánchez seized power from the occupying Haitian army on 21 February, date on which ‘the Dominican Republic was baptised and first came into being as an independent state’ (Ferguson, p. 7). After several unsuccessful attempts by Haiti to regain the territory, Spain reannexed the country in 1861 until a ‘three-year guerrilla War of Restoration forced the Spanish authorities to abandon the country to a renewed independence in July 1865’ (Ferguson, p. 16).

4.1.2 Trujillo’s era

The regime of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, ‘a brutal, militarist, personalist and absolute dictatorship’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 62) lasting thirty-one years until his assassination in 1961, provides the setting of the main events in *Butterflies* as well as constituting a decisive episode in the Garcías’ family story in *GG* and *¡Yo!*. After becoming head of U.S. designed Dominican military forces, he seized power and brutally repressed any opposition, taking total control of Dominican affairs either as president himself or through a series of puppet presidents. In Ferguson’s words, ‘[n]ationhood became all but inseparable from the cult of the

omniscient leader' (p. 24) in which active participation was practically compulsory .

Butterflies describes extensively several public acts staged in honour of Trujillo, the first of which is the 1944 centennial celebrations of the country's independence from Haiti. Minerva narrates how her family had to 'give some sort of patriotic affair to show their support of Trujillo' on Independence Day on February 27th, adding that the whole country had to '[put] on a big loyalty performance' (*Butterflies*, p. 24). She also comments on the transformation of Trujillo into a kind of supernatural saviour of the nation through a historical revisionism which made Dominican history mirror 'the plot of the Bible' (*Butterflies* 24).

Alvarez depicts the development of the Mirabals' political consciousness as resulting from their reaction to incidents in their immediate environment as much as from their country's socio-political circumstances. In this respect, Isabel Zakzrewski Brown calls attention to the fact that the Mirabals represent

the awakening and call to activism among a segment of the population, i.e., middle-class women of a repressive, machista society, that does not typically rise to action given the social pressures against precisely such demonstration of political passion. (p. 102)

The novel, she adds, seeks to emphasize the courage of the Mirabals in acting against social expectations on women of their status.

For Minerva, meeting Sina Perozo –whose male relatives had been murdered due to their opposition to the regime- and Lina Lovatón –seduced by Trujillo into becoming his mistress- at Inmaculada Concepción school triggers her hostility towards the regime. Minerva suggests in a family conversation that

perhaps they should 'just take off into the mountains like the *gavilleros* had done' (*Butterflies*, p. 56). The Mirabals 'had heard the stories of the bands of *campesinos* who took to the hills to fight the Yanqui invaders' when their mother was eighteen (*Butterflies*, p. 56). Despite sympathizing with the *gavilleros*, the girls' mother had felt that she could not do much 'against the Yanquis' who 'killed anyone who stood in their way' (*Butterflies*, p. 57). In order to help sugar growers seize Dominican land, the U.S. military authorities had promulgated laws bringing communally owned lands into private ownership (Ferguson, p. 18). The *gavilleros* were 'the most militant sectors of the Dominican peasantry, particularly those dispossessed by the land legislation', who since the 1916 eight-year-long U.S. invasion 'had fought the occupying forces' (Ferguson, pp. 18-19).

Another event which moves the Mirabals is the massacre of October 1937, when Dominican military forces killed between 10.000 and 20.000 Haitians within Dominican borders following Trujillo's orders (Ferguson, p. 83; Atkins & Wilson, p. 72). The incident also appears in *STD* (p. 104) and in *GG*, where Sofía recalls being told that the river to which the corpses were thrown 'still runs red to this day, fifty years later' (p. 218). The massacre has been seen as the result of the dictator's 'personal animosity towards Haitians' and 'concerted effort to eliminate the perception of "blackness" from Dominican society' (Atkins & Wilson, p. 72). This antagonism was allegedly felt the more strongly due to a 'Dominican-Haitian mixed mulatto background') which he denied (Atkins & Wilson, p. 79).

The abduction and murder in 1956 of Jesús de Galíndez, a Spanish exile who had written a doctoral thesis criticising Trujillo's regime, also affects the Mirabals strongly (*Butterflies*, p. 135). The case also involved the murder of an

American pilot who had fled the airplane carrying Galíndez after his abduction, which ‘led to a U.S. congressional inquiry and... helped precipitate a diplomatic rupture with the United States’ (Roorda, p. 106). Together with these incidents, what finally makes Patria become involved in the anti-Trujillo underground is witnessing ‘forty-nine men and boys [being] martyred’ on June 14 1959 during her spiritual retreat in the mountains of Constanza (*Butterflies*, p.163). They were part of ‘some 56 men brought in by aircraft and about 140 by yachts, all originating in Cuba’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 96); these forces had invaded various points of the country but were totally annihilated according to the Dominican government’s claims (Atkins & Wilson, p. 96).

In 1947 Trujillo attempted to ‘create the appearance of democracy in the Dominican Republic’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 88), ‘legal[izing] the Popular Socialist party (the Dominican Communist party)’ and ‘encourag[ing] the organisation of other political parties and... labor unions’ which he would later manipulate for his own purposes (Atkins & Wilson, p. 88). The Mirabal sisters see through the dictator’s announcement that ‘[they] were going to have a free country’, realising that it is ‘just a show’ (p. 66). This period of the regime is also covered in *¡Yo!* as Carlos García recounts how he had to leave for New York in 1939 due to his political activism. Ten years later, he returned to the country after obtaining a pardon during the ‘supposed liberalizing of the regime’ (p. 298).

Carlos García’s experiences mirror very closely the departure of Alvarez’s own father from the Dominican Republic in 1937. Like his fictional counterpart, he returned to the country after the dictator ‘invited all the exiles back to form political parties’ only ‘to discover that the liberalization was a hoax staged so that the regime could keep the goodwill and dollars of the United

States' (*STD*, pp.105-6). Again like Carlos García, once on the island Alvarez's father became involved in the underground and had to escape to the States a second time nine months before 'the group of plotters with whom [he] had been associated assassinated the dictator' on May 30 1961 (*STD*, p. 107). In *Butterflies*, the survivor Dedé celebrates Trujillo's death as well as 'the day the elections were announced, [the] first free ones in thirty-one years' (p. 304).

4.1.3. After the Dictatorship

While *GG*, *¡Yo!* and *Butterflies* make extensive references to the period of Trujillo's regime, their depiction of the time between 1961 and the 1990s is somewhat succinct. Having left the island in 1959, the Garcías are not as directly involved in the events following the dictator's assassination. As for *Butterflies*, its main focus is Dedé's narration of her sisters' story for the Dominican-American "interview woman". During a reception in her sisters' honour, Dedé expresses her disenchantment with Dominican politics mentioning 'the free elections, bad presidents now put in power properly, not by army tanks' (p. 318) and summarising a political crisis that has undergone different phases since 1961.

The transition to democracy following Trujillo's death was soon thwarted by a military coup resulting in a civil war and a U.S. invasion in 1965 (Ferguson, p.1). The García sisters refer to this period explaining that after 'the dictatorship had been toppled' their father 'had become interested in his country's fate again' as the 'interim government was going to hold the first free elections in thirty years' (*GG*, p.143). '[T]hree-going-on-four years' after departing in 1959, Carlos

García returned to the island ‘for a trial visit, and a revolution broke out, a minor one, but still’ (*GG*, p. 107). This made him go back to New York ‘giving up’ on his country’s government: ‘It [sic] is no hope for the Island. I will become un dominican-york’ (*GG*, p. 107). The American occupation was followed by ‘a series of highly dubious elections’ which, quoting Ferguson, ‘has further undermined the country’s experience of democracy’ (p. 2).

The main figure dominating Dominican politics after Trujillo’s era has been Joaquín Balaguer, who had been Trujillo’s chosen president and was holding the post at the time of the dictator’s death (Ferguson, pp. 1 & 25). Balaguer, in power for three presidential terms between 1966 and 1978, was reelected again in 1986, 1990 and, for the final time, in 1994 at the age of 83. Dedé alludes to these events as she refers to him as ‘our current president who was the puppet president the day the girls were killed’ (*Butterflies*, p. 317). When her niece advises her to ‘put that behind’ her since Balaguer is ‘an old, blind man now’, Dedé retorts: ‘He was blind when he could see’ (*Butterflies*, p. 317). Since the 1994 election, the Dominican Republic has experienced ‘a series of general strikes, demonstrations and violent confrontations between protestors and the military’ (Ferguson, p. 2). Yolanda describes this political situation to an American lover saying: ‘it is a democracy down there, but... the word doesn’t mean the same things as [in the U.S.]’ (*¡Yo!*, p. 190).

Together with her political disappointment, Dedé describes sarcastically the economic transformations that her country has experienced since Trujillo’s death: ‘our country beginning to prosper, Free Zones going up everywhere, the coast a clutter of clubs and resorts’ (*Butterflies*, p. 318). The Industrial Free Zones, created by Balaguer to attract foreign investment, are industrial parks of

low-cost assembly plants manufacturing products mostly directed at the U.S. and European markets (Ferguson, p. 64). ‘In both cases’, Ferguson underlines, ‘the attraction for foreign investors lies in the low wages paid to Dominicans who work in tourist resorts or assembly plants’ (p. 3).

4.1.4. Relations with Cuba

Castro’s revolution in 1959 provided a crucial point of reference for Latin American countries and affected Dominican political life substantially, something evidenced in *Butterflies* through the characters’ allusions to Dominican and Cuban politics. There is an unexplained mention of how Trujillo ‘had attributed the failure of the invasion from Cayo Confites’ to the Virgin’s intervention (p. 55). This alludes to the Dominican Republic’s conflict with Cuba in the summer of 1947, when a revolutionary expedition led by Dominican exiles ‘used a key off eastern Cuba (Cayo Confites) as a base of operations against the Trujillo regime’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 93). ‘[T]he Cuban government’, however, ‘reversed its initial support of the expedition’ and ‘arrested the group of more than 1,500 men preparing to leave for the Dominican Republic’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 93). Similarly, we are also told that Minerva had been given by a fellow revolutionary ‘a little Nivea tin... with ashes of the Luperón martyrs not killed at the sea’ (*Butterflies*, p. 102). On 19 June 1949, ‘an incident occurred at Luperón Bay on the Dominican coast involving two amphibious aircraft and about fifteen men’ which were ‘easily suppressed by Trujillo’s forces’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 94).

Alvarez's Mirabal sisters follow closely Castro's attempts to depose Batista's dictatorship in Cuba. They listen to a broadcast of Castro's speech on January 14 1954 and find inspiration for their own struggle in the words 'Condemn me, it does not matter. History will absolve me!' (*Butterflies*, p. 123). The tensions between the two countries continued as Castro established a revolutionary government in Cuba on 1 January 1959, which the Mirabals welcome. Castro and Trujillo 'became the principal rivals in Caribbean international politics' after the former proclaimed his intention 'not only to carry out a thoroughgoing social revolution in Cuba but also to work for the speedy elimination of remaining military dictatorships in Latin America, beginning with the Caribbean area' (Atkins & Wilson, p. 96). Castro's hostility towards Trujillo augmented as the latter offered the deposed Batista asylum.

Cuban politics also influence the continuity or withdrawal of U.S. support of the anti-Trujillo underground. A member of the movement, for instance, informs Minerva that they do not count on U.S. assistance anymore since 'the gringos' are '[a]fraid [they]'re all communists. They say they don't want another Fidel. They'd rather have a dozen Trujillos' (*Butterflies*, p. 273). In *GG*, a young Yolanda living in the U.S. hears her schoolteacher explain the Cuban missile crisis, and watches President Kennedy acknowledge on television the possibility of entering a war 'against the Communists' (pp.166-67).

A further political issue during Trujillo's regime to which the Mirabals pay close attention is his attempt to assassinate the Venezuelan chief of state Rómulo Betancourt on June 24 1960 (*Butterflies*, pp. 246-47) after Venezuela's denouncement of Trujillo's breaches of human rights. Added to other events, this led the United States and the Latin American states that had not already done so

to break diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic on 26 August 1960 (Atkins & Wilson, p. 101), something welcomed by Minerva and her friends (*Butterflies*, p. 264).

4.1.5. U.S.- Dominican relations and immigration

Alvarez's novels subtly portray the economic and sociocultural relationships between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic through their various characters' conflicting views. While *Butterflies* indirectly comments on the U.S. influence in Dominican affairs during Trujillo's era and its aftermath, *GG* and *¡Yo!* explore the bonds between the two countries focusing particularly on the causes and effects of immigration. Paradoxically, the very country that gives the Garcías a new home when they leave the Dominican Republic as exiles and offers them new opportunities played an important role in establishing Trujillo's dictatorship. As they become americanised, the García girls have to negotiate such ambivalences in their background and identities. Together with this, the novels show that the Garcías were privileged both regarding the education and the contacts they had, which allowed the family to leave the island and helped Carlos find a job once in the U.S. The experience of emigration covered by Alvarez's narratives is thus affected by the characters' specific socio-cultural circumstances, being by no means representative of the plight of most Dominican immigrants to the U.S.

Quoting Ferguson, 'the allure of the US, with its promise of economic opportunities, is paralleled by a sense of resentment over the role played by US

governments and businesses in the exploitation of the Dominican Republic' (p. 20), which relies heavily on the U.S. market. Together with the U.S. economic superiority goes its political weight in the country, which in *GG* is embodied by Victor Hubbard, the American consul who helps Carlos García escape the Dominican Republic when the latter's anti-Trujillo activities are discovered. Hubbard is actually 'a CIA agent whose orders changed midstream from *organize the underground and get that SOB out to hold your horses, let's take a second look around to see what's best for us*' (*GG*, p. 217).

The Garcías are one family among the more than one million Dominicans living in the United States according to the U.S. embassy in Santo Domingo (Ferguson, p. 8). The favourite destination is New York with about 400.000 Dominicans there, representing the second largest Hispanic group after Puerto Ricans (Atkins & Wilson, p. 76). Alvarez's protagonists arrive in the U.S. in 1959, which, like the case of Alvarez's own family, precedes the waves of Dominican immigrants that would take place in the following decades: approximately 10 per cent of the Dominican population left the island for the U.S. from the mid-1960s to 1990 (Atkins & Wilson, pp. 160-61).

If *GG* focuses on the aftermath of the family's exile to the U.S., *¡Yo!* explores the effects of the Garcías' departure and subsequent Americanisation on their Dominican relatives and acquaintances. It also portrays other stories of economic migration more representative of the immigration waves from the mid-sixties onwards, depicting the plight of those without the Garcías' contacts and education. Approximately 80.000 have settled in Puerto Rico looking for work there while others go from this country on to the U.S., entering 'with bogus

documents, claiming to be Puerto Rican and therefore automatically entitled to residency in the US' (Ferguson, p. 76).

These issues are alluded in *¡Yo!* as María, the wife of the de la Torres' caretaker, notes how in the 1990s '[e]veryone was leaving in droves, the less desperate for the capital, and the rest for Miami and Puerto Rico in rowboats' (p. 116). It also covers the story of a young countrywoman who after leaving her village for the capital had first emigrated to Puerto Rico on a rowboat and then moved to New York, from where she sends money to her mother every month. The importance of such remittances in keeping rural families above the poverty line is stressed again when the novel mentions how the sons of some neighbours of the de la Torres' night watchman had 'made it to Miami in rowboats, without papers, and gone on to work in factorías and restaurants, marrying portorriquenas and getting their papers' (*¡Yo!*, p. 243). Thanks to the money they send, their family 'had a small generator that ran a television, a radio, even a cookstove like the rich people down the mountain' (*¡Yo!*, p. 243). These references about leaving for Puerto Rico in rowboats evoke what Ferguson describes as '[p]erhaps the most desperate form of emigration' undertaken by more than 110,000 migrants since 1980: a '70-mile boat trip from the eastern tip of the Dominican Republic across the Mona Passage to Puerto Rico' often done in overcrowded unsafe fishing boats (pp. 2 & 79).

While about one million Dominicans live in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, between 500.000 and a million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic (Ferguson, p. 75). Ferguson relates this double diaspora to the fact that '[p]overty is relative': if '[t]he Dominican Republic is poor,... Haiti is poorer still' (p. 81). While rural unemployment in the Dominican Republic can be as high as 40 per

cent, there is a chronic shortage of people to work in the sugarcane plantation: foreign –mainly Haitian, and often forced- labour is needed for a job the locals reject (Ferguson, p. 75). ‘[I]f Dominicans encounter prejudice and lack of opportunities in the US’, Ferguson adds, ‘Haitians are confronted with much worse in the Dominican Republic’ (p. 76).

Two interrelated phenomena have developed from these movements of people, capital, and ideas: the “Northamericanization” of the Dominican Republic –i.e., the effects of the U.S. cultural and economic influence on the country-, and the simultaneous “Dominicanization” of the United States –part of a larger process of “Caribbeanization” (Atkins & Wilson, p. 4). As a way to counteract the ‘U.S. cultural penetration’ as well as a perceived “Haitianisation” of the country, Trujillo pursued the ‘Dominicanization of the Dominican Republic’ (Atkins & Wilson, p. 4). This policy of stressing the country’s Spanish legacy while denying the African background of a great part of its population, was also adopted by president Joaquín Balaguer.

4.1.6. ‘Was It for This, the Sacrifice of the Butterflies?’

Alvarez’s depictions of various episodes in Dominican history in *Butterflies*, *GG* and *¡Yo!* examine how official and alternative discourses are constructed with often competing purposes. Alvarez’s novelistic undertakings do not take a merely descriptive approach in the treatment of historical events; they trigger a discussion on who and what makes history. Alvarez shows a marked concern with how people get on with their daily lives during and after times of violence

later recognized as historical turning points. She humanises both the heroes and the villains that “make history” and, while alluding to prominent dates in Dominican history, she focuses on the processes through which individuals set their own historical watersheds.

Another related issue raised by Alvarez concerning Trujillo’s dictatorship is Dominican society’s difficulties in coping with its aftermath. In a section of *Butterflies* covering the months previous to her murder in 1960, Patria expresses her wish to ‘start believing in [her] fellow Dominicans again’: ‘[o]nce the goat was a bad memory in our past, that would be the real revolution we would have to fight: forgiving each other for what we had all let come to pass’ (*Butterflies*, p. 222). Patria’s words echo Alvarez’s observation in *STD* that Trujillo’s ‘execution was an external event, not necessarily an internal exorcism’ (p. 107). Alvarez describes how ‘[a]ll their lives [her] parents, along with a nation of Dominicans, had learned the habits of repression, censorship, terror’ which ‘would not disappear with a few bullets and a national liberation proclamation’ (*STD*, pp. 107-108).

The hardest question that Alvarez’s characters face is society’s part in the dictator’s seizing and preservation of power. This point is raised through Dedé’s remorse at having followed her husband’s prohibition to join anti-regime activities with her sisters. Similarly, when Trujillo asks her whether she knows a man involved in underground activities who is actually a family friend of hers Minerva denies having ever met him thinking: ‘I see now how easily it happens. You give in on little things, and soon you’re serving in his government, marching in his parades, sleeping in his bed’ (*Butterflies*, p. 99). Later on, she accuses her

own father, Dedé's husband Jaimito 'and other scared fulanitos' of having 'kept the devil in power all these years' (*Butterflies*, p.179).

A further recurring theme is the impression of unreality that violent episodes in both national and personal histories may give when examined from a later standpoint. Lucinda, the Garcías' cousin who lives on the island, suggests that such sense of unreality may be produced even by events contemporary with one's life if the person is not directly affected by them. Regarding the time after Trujillo's assassination, Lucinda explains that 'now when [she reads] about those dark and bloody years in history books, they don't seem the same years [she] lived through' (*¡Yo!*, p. 38). She 'didn't miss one birthday party, one quinceanera party, one saint's-day party' although '[m]aybe, ...the cakes weren't as rich' (*¡Yo!*, p. 38). Sofía, the youngest of the García sisters who 'doesn't remember anything from [the] last day on the Island' (*GG*, p. 217), recalls her family's escape to the U.S. acknowledging: 'it sounds like something you saw on "Miami Vice," but all I'm doing is repeating what I've heard from the family' (*GG*, p. 219).

In *Butterflies*, Dedé remembers her sisters' political activism and murder with a feeling not so much of unreality as of futility. She realises that younger generations look at her as if she was a '[character] in a sad story about a past that is over', noting people's detachment regarding struggles distant from them either in time or space (p. 318). This makes her think with disenchantment about the Dominican Republic's situation in 1994, the novel's present, and wonder: '[t]he nightmare is over; we are free at last. But the thing... that I do not want to say out loud –and I'll say it once only and it's done. Was it for this, the sacrifice of the butterflies?' (p. 318). That the price of re-establishing social cohesion might

imply a certain extent of oblivion is further suggested as Dedé's niece Minou intends 'to build a house up north in those beautiful mountains' where, Dedé recalls, Minou's parents were murdered (p. 319). On second thoughts, Dedé considers it 'a sign of [her] success' in raising her niece, who instead of growing up 'haunted and full of hate' claims 'this beautiful country with its beautiful mountains and splendid beaches –all the copy we read in the tourist brochures' (p. 319).

Alvarez develops further the idea that historical incidents might be considered irrelevant or unreal by people unaffected by them, connecting it with the way in which powerful countries rewrite both their own and weaker countries' histories to fit their purposes. This is particularly explicit in moments such as Lucinda de la Torre's depiction of her time at a U.S. school, 'forced to take American History and listen to Battleaxe Ballard lecture about the USA lending a helping hand to the primitive countries of Latin America' (*¡Yo!*, p. 41). In the mid-nineties, Lucinda recalls how '[they] were finally having elections back home', adding: '[d]on't think Battleaxe didn't give a grand lecture on the difference between democracies and wannabe democracies' (p. 43).

In *STD*, Alvarez acknowledges explicitly the paradoxes and irony in historical developments, stressing that the very 'great country that had offered [her] parents a refuge had also created the circumstances that made them have to seek refuge in the first place' (*STD*, p. 108). 'It was this same United States that had helped put our dictator in place during their occupation of the country from 1916 to 1924', Alvarez observes, pointing out that '[a]bout all these matters, [her] parents were silent, afraid that ungratefulness would result in [their] being sent back to where [they] had come from' (*STD*, p. 108). As it has been

previously noted, *¡Yo!* provides a fictionalised recreation of these concerns of the author.

Alvarez's writings also study the narrative structures with which people understand and (re)organise their experiences. *¡Yo!* and her autobiographical essays in *STD* show respectively how the families of Yolanda García and Julia Alvarez gradually warm up to the women's vocation -to be writers- after these have their work published. She notes that '[t]he change in their attitude proves, if nothing else, how even our memories favor the classic Aristotelian structure of narrative -with a beginning, middle and end' (*STD*, p. 115). '[A] happy ending', Alvarez adds, 'redeems the past and makes the struggles meaningful' (*STD*, pp. 185-86). By retelling the Dominican Republic's history under Trujillo, the Butterflies' struggle, and the plight of those Dominicans who left for the U.S., Alvarez gives these episodes new meanings and relevance for contemporary audiences, whether Dominican or American.

At the core of these questions raised in *STD* as well as in Alvarez's fiction are the interactions between "History", "histories", and "stories". Her characters' varying recollections of their families' and countries' history mirror her statement that 'fiction is a form of fact' in her story-telling, opinionated family (*STD*, p. 124). She extends this 'fictive cast of mind...beyond families and small communities to politics and government and to the wider culture', and exemplifies this statement referring to Trujillo's regime 'in which the wildest myths had to be accepted as facts on pain of death. The dictator, for instance, decreed the country officially a "white nation" even though we are ninety percent mulatto' (*STD*, p. 124). These words encapsulate authorial concerns which are also central features of Latin American magic realism: the act of power involved

in elaborating and imposing a certain historical discourse; the impossibility of determining objective, universal historical facts or “truths” neatly differentiable from myth and fiction; the limitations of realist writing in capturing the circumstances of Latin America; and the conflictive interactions between different histories –in Alvarez’s case, public and private, personal and collective, U.S., Dominican, Latino and “Dominican-York”.

Although Alvarez’s writing does not use magic realist strategies, it addresses the topics listed above distancing itself from realism through devices such as the presentation of competing personal, historical, and cultural discourses simultaneously operating within a single community as well the use of fragmented narration, multiple and unreliable narrators, embedded texts and metafictional tactics. *¡Yo!*’s protagonist, however, points out the connections between Alvarez’s literary preoccupations and those of magic realism as she explains to her American lover: ‘[I]t’s all one big story down here... It’s like one of those Latin American novels that everyone thinks is magical realism in the States, but it’s the way things really are down here’ (p. 197). These words may be read as simplistic and condescending, which could arguably be attributed to Yolanda’s “Americanisation”, to her lover’s unfamiliarity with those issues, or to the casualness of their conversation. However, Alvarez’s novels suggest that the Garcías’ often mystifying experiences in the U.S. also make this country an equally apt subject for magic realist writing or, in her case, for a postcolonial, postmodern study of the fluid boundaries between fact, fiction, history and story.

4.2 Questions of Gender, Class and Race

4.2.1 Class structures and social mobility

Shifting between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic, Alvarez's fiction examines the class structures of each society focusing on the characters' social mobility due to either leaving one country for another –as in *GG* and *¡Yo!*- or antagonising a dictatorial regime –as in *Butterflies*. *GG* and *¡Yo!* portray the links between the Garcías, who live in the U.S., and their Dominican extended family, the wealthy de la Torres whose status is evidenced further through mentions of the family patriarch's honorary post in the U.N. as cultural ambassador of the Dominican Republic. *¡Yo!* also reveals that an uncle of Yolanda's had presented himself several times as presidential candidate in the country's elections. The family's privileges also extend to the younger generations, traditionally educated in U.S. boarding schools and colleges.

The de la Torres' way of life shows noticeable similarities with Alvarez's descriptions of her maternal family, also living in a complex of houses next to one another in the Dominican Republic (*STD*, p.149). An aunt's great-grandfather had been Francisco del Rosario Sánchez, 'one of the three founding fathers of the country'⁸⁴ (*STD*, p.150), and the author's maternal grandfather had held a post in the United Nations (*STD*, pp. 3 & 13). Alvarez's mother had been educated in U.S. boarding schools and colleges, becoming "quite Americanized"

84. See section 4.1.1.

and enrolling the author in an English school while in the Dominican Republic (*STD*, pp. 23-24).

Despite the communal life of the de la Torres, the novels show subtle hierarchies operating within the clan: high up are the patriarch's family, who inhabit the biggest building in the compound (*¡Yo!*, p. 7), while 'deaf poor relations' (*¡Yo!*, p. 22) lie at the bottom. The de la Torres are attended by numerous staff, whose colour-coded uniforms show their occupation and category. Below the house staff are poor peasants like José in *¡Yo!*, who is in turn looked down on by Sergio, the de la Torres' caretaker, as if he had 'forgotten... that [he himself] had come down to town from dirt-poor farms up in those mountains' (*¡Yo!*, p. 244).

When the Garcías leave for the U.S., they face a life strongly contrasting with their previous status as members of the de la Torre clan. According to the four sisters, during the 'three-going-on-four-years' that the family 'were on greencards', they 'didn't feel [they] had the best the United States had to offer' having 'only second-hand stuff, rental houses in one red-neck Catholic neighborhood after another' (*GG*, p. 107). However, the Garcías' situation, dire as it is for them, does not seem as daunting in economic terms as that of, say, Esmeralda Santiago's as depicted in her memoirs. The Garcías could resort to their Dominican relatives for loans (*GG*, p. 43), and had both an education and contacts that made it easier for Carlos García to work as a doctor eventually making 'real money in his office up in the Bronx' (*GG*, p. 109).

The Garcías' physical and socio-economic displacements in the U.S. make the sisters reconsider their conceptions of class together with their own self-perceptions. In this regard, the self-fashioning of Yolanda –protagonist and

fictional writer of *GG* and *¡Yo!* and Alvarez's persona- prove problematic at several points in the narratives. Although Yolanda is born within the rich de la Torres, her own mother acknowledges her difference stating: 'that one was mostly raised by the maids. She seemed to like to hang around them more than she did her own kin, so that if she had been darker, I would have thought she was a changeling that got switched with my own flesh and blood' (*¡Yo!*, p. 22). Such identification with the servant class seems naïve to the extent that it does not acknowledge that Yolanda is not confined to the socio-economic restrictions experienced by the Dominican maids. Besides, while she may choose to hang around the staff, they certainly do not enjoy the same freedom to hang around their employers at will.

Yolanda's ambivalences become more marked once the Garcías' situation in the U.S. improves and they employ one of the de la Torres' maids, Primitiva. When Primitiva's daughter Sara joins the García household, the girls receive her as their little sister. The bonds that Yolanda feels towards Sara are further stressed when the former studies the latter's 'acculturation...as a way of understanding her own immigrant experience' for a college assignment (*¡Yo!*, p. 62) as she considers her 'part of her family' (*¡Yo!*, p. 65). However, the sections narrated by Sara evidence Yolanda's naivety in these dealings. Even if Sara is allowed to feel part of the family, she and Primitiva fear that 'one wrong move' would take them back 'home to poverty and hard work' (*¡Yo!*, p. 68), and depend on the Garcías' financial help. While Yolanda is proud of her project's outcome, Sara feels that 'something had been stolen from [her]' (*¡Yo!*, p. 66).

As for Primitiva, that is not even her proper name but a nickname the de la Torres gave her 'when she was a young wild girl just hired out of the campo'

(*¡Yo!*, p. 66). It conveys her employers' control over her person as well as her inferior position with respect to them. When Primitiva reveals that Sara's father was a de la Torre, the Dominican part of the family turns against her while 'the U.S.A. Garcías never [reject] her' (*¡Yo!*, p. 71). Yolanda even invites Sara to her wedding despite the attendance of the Dominican relatives, and Sara meditates: 'the truth is these four García sisters are the closest I've got to family... all of us caught between cultures –but with this added big difference, I'm also caught between classes' (*¡Yo!*, p. 227).

These tensions in Yolanda's attitudes towards class are developed further in *¡Yo!* as she spends some time in the de la Torres' summerhouse in the mountains seeking solitude and inspiration in order to write, as her cousin Mundín explains to Sergio the caretaker (*¡Yo!*, p.114). For Sergio, to whom being a writer is an unfamiliar and out-of-reach prospect, 'these words were like the silverware the rich lined up on a table when all that was needed was a spoon to scoop and a machete to cut. Inspiration? Maybe something was wrong with the woman's lungs' (*¡Yo!*, p.114). The fact that Yolanda and the staff attending to her are not equally able to choose how to deal with each other also arises repeatedly. All they have to do for Yolanda 'is talk to her, it seems' (*¡Yo!*, p.120), but the caretaker's wife María believes that she 'will end up asking for a lot more' (*¡Yo!*, p. 120).

Yolanda is not told that Sergio and María's son drowned in the house's swimming-pool, since if she knew '[s]he would leave' (*¡Yo!*, p.120). When Sergio advises his wife that '[i]t is past time' for her to get over the incident, she retorts: '[e]ven our sorrows have to be put aside for them [their employers]' (*¡Yo!*, p.120). Later, Yolanda asks the night watchman José whether he knows of

any baby who needs a home that she could adopt, which brings to mind María's previous suspicion. Experiencing difficulties in maintaining his family, José plans to give her his own baby so that it has a better life in the U.S. with her. Yolanda backs out after talking with her husband, ignoring whose baby she would have received and consequently also unaware of how her decision affects José.

The relationship between Yolanda and the summerhouse staff is given a further twist when José, who had been given Yolanda's address to write to her when he could read, starts making collect calls to her U.S. home. Yolanda, her husband Doug and her stepdaughter Corey gather that he intends to travel to New York and needs to know what to do once there (*jYo!*, p. 265). While the two women are moved by José, 'a nice man' '[p]robably desperate' since '[h]e is so poor' (*jYo!*, p. 265), Doug does not want complications and secretly forbids him to call again. Yolanda's subsequent lack of concern about the man's fate and about the baby she had once wanted so much makes Doug think that 'these enthusiasms Yo picks are momentary inspirations she eventually deletes from the rough draft of her life' (*jYo!*, pp. 272-73). She seems to believe that 'there's nothing else [they] can do for him so far away' (*jYo!*, p. 273). When Doug suggests that they could buy some land in the Dominican Republic and ask José to farm it for 'a good salary', both Yolanda and Corey are happy with 'the ending he has given their story' (*jYo!*, p. 275).

The novels make the reader observe Yolanda's limitations in her identification with and understanding of those of a lower social status. Testimonies such as Sara's point out Yolanda's occasional naivety and inability to consider things from the perspective of her social "Others". That her

ambivalences and shortcomings are acknowledged in the narration although the character remains unaware of them stresses the different positionalities of character and author. In *STD*, after describing a childhood in the Dominican Republic similar to Yolanda's, Alvarez states that her 'deepest identification' was not with any of her aunts but with the maids of the household (p. 154). She also reviews the shifts in her socio-economic circumstances derived from leaving her mother country, stating: 'by losing everything I had escaped the entrapment of my Dominican social class. The golden handcuffs, as I like to call those positions of privilege that often trap us women into denying our bodies, our desires, our selves – and what is worse or just as bad, into denying the souls of others' (*STD* 156). 'Those golden handcuffs', she adds, 'manacle the hands that could otherwise be holding a paintbrush or a pen or unlocking the handcuffs of others' (*STD*, p. 156), an allusion to the purpose of her own work as a writer.

If in *¡Yo!* and *GG* the four sisters and the maid's daughter experience a social mobility connected with their physical and cultural displacement to the U.S., the circumstances of *Butterflies'* characters fluctuate within the same country depending on personal initiative as much as on the dispositions of Trujillo's government. Before 1938, when Dedé's recollections of her sisters' story start, the Mirabals' father 'had made a lot of money from his farm' (*Butterflies*, p. 12). Minerva observes the implications of this change stating: '[n]ow we had class. And, Mamá argued, we needed the education to go along with our cash' (*Butterflies*, p. 12). She and her sisters are sent to Inmaculada Concepción boarding school, but the differences between them and their schoolmates from traditionally wealthy families are immediately made evident (p. 13). The Mirabals' wealth and status are neither as considerable as that of the

de la Torres nor as established through generations of inherited privilege. However, they have several people working their fields (*Butterflies*, p. 70) as well as a devoted couple taking care of their home, and Enrique Mirabal is invited to official parties and functions (*Butterflies*, p. 90). The family's situation, however, shifts again as, in Maria Teresa's words, they '[get] in trouble with the government and Papá start[s] losing money' (*Butterflies*, p. 124).

A further decisive factor in the development of the sisters' class consciousness is Minerva and Maria Teresa's encounters in jail with inmates of various extractions. The differences among them become blurred as all experience similar hardship regardless of their background, allowing them to discover affinities and develop feelings of solidarity. These bonds become particularly manifest when a hardened inmate reproaches Maria Teresa for exceeding her allotted time by the cell window, and grumbles about "rich" women like the Mirabals (*Butterflies*, p. 229). Other fellow prisoners react by ceding their time by the window to Maria Teresa, who is in turn moved by 'the generosity of these girls [she] once thought were below [her]' (*Butterflies*, p. 230). Similarly, the Mirabals share with their cellmates the contents of parcels sent by relatives as well as the privileges bought from the guards in order not to 'create a class system in [the] cell, the haves and the have nots' (*Butterflies*, p. 234).

Another episode of cross-class empathy takes place when Maria Teresa befriends an inmate who at age thirteen had taken 'a job as a maid for a rich, important family (The de la Torres, real snobs)' (*Butterflies*, p. 248). Magdalena reveals that 'she was "used" by the young man of the house... When she got pregnant, she did go to the doña, who... threw her out on the street' (*Butterflies*,

p. 248). This reference to the de la Torres could well be an instance of self-referentiality in Alvarez's works, and recalls the treatment of Primitiva by the Garcías' Dominican relatives.

4.2.2. (De)Constructing Race

Exposing the links between colour and socio-economic status, Alvarez's fiction contrasts the different constructions of race in the U.S. and the Dominican Republic focusing on the changes in the characters' self-image as they move between the two. While in the former racial divisions are mainly between European white and "non-white" or "black", the racial differences in the latter are made between various colour shades. According to Dominican racial constructions, the Garcías and de la Torres are not considered –and do not consider themselves– racially marked. We are told that 'Sandi was fair and blond, Fifi was tall like an American girl', 'Carla and Yo were light olive' (*¡Yo!*, p. 58), and their mother had 'pale skin' (*¡Yo!*, p. 66). One of the SIM agents that enter the household searching for Carlos feels intimidated by the four sisters, their mother, and the red-haired American consul Victor Hubbard, 'strange white people' who make him feel 'ashamed and cornered' (*GG*, p. 214).

At the bottom of the country's racial and social hierarchies is the dark black Haitian population, an issue made patent within the microcosmos of the de la Torre household. In the words of one of the García sisters, the maid Chucha, who 'had just appeared at [the girls'] grandfather's doorstep one night begging to be taken in' during the 1937 massacre of Haitians, is 'Haitian blue-black, not

Dominican *café-con-leche* black' (*GG*, p. 218). The 'light-skinned Dominican maids' think that she is 'below them, being so black and Haitian' (*GG*, p. 219).

Once in the U.S., the Garcías are identified as non-white Others by neighbours and classmates who call them 'spics' and 'greaseballs' that should 'go back where [they] come from' (*GG*, pp. 107 & 171). Even though their experiences in the U.S. force them to reconsider their racial status, the family still maintain Dominican notions of race long after arriving in their adopted country. *GG*'s Laura, for instance, scares her daughters into obedience by mentioning a 'Haitian bogeyman' (*¡Yo!*, p. 23). Years later fair Sandi –who has been artificially inseminated with sperm brought from the Dominican Republic– conceives a baby with a 'dark olive' complexion which Carlos García 'keeps saying is just a suntan until Sandi shuts him up by saying well the kinky hair must be a perm', a statement followed by his wife's attempts to appease him saying that 'Dr. Puello screened the sperm' (*¡Yo!*, p.16).

While the issue of race is not elaborated upon to the same extent as in *¡Yo!* and *GG*, it is indicated that Enrique Mirabal –like most of the Garcías– is 'olive-skinned'. The intersection between race and class in the narration is pointed out when their servant Fela is described as being 'ebony black' (*Butterflies*, p. 62). Similarly, former model Manuel de Moya, one of Trujillo's sidekicks, is said to have met Trujillo on one of the dictator's shopping trips to the U.S. in search of 'elevator shoes, his skin whiteners and creams', being 'hired... right on the spot' as a 'tall, polished, English-speaking white Dominican to decorate his staff' (*Butterflies*, pp. 95-96).

4.2.3 Gender roles and feminist consciousness

Alvarez's fiction explores how its characters' gender intersects with their class and colour shaping their experiences of the Dominican Republic and the U.S. and their construction of historical –and literary- discourses. Through their protagonists' shifts between the two countries, *GG* and *¡Yo!* contrast the constrictions they experience in each due to their gender. For the García sisters, the U.S. seems to offer a freedom and equality lacking in the Dominican society where they were born. Adult re-evaluations of their experiences gradually expose sexist aspects of their U.S. lives, arguably more subtle but also oppressive in their own way. *Butterflies* offers a complementary view on these issues as Dedé recounts her sisters' story to the americanized “interview woman”: her memories construct a portrayal of Dominican women from the 1930s to the 1990s of greater complexity than that in *GG* and *¡Yo!* –novels more focused on their protagonists' U.S. lives.

GG opens with a description of an afternoon in the family compound during Yolanda's visit to her Dominican relatives. After ‘cake and cafecitos, the cousins will... supervise their cooks in preparing supper for the husbands, who will troop home after Happy Hour’ (*GG*, p. 7). This hour is the time in which ‘a Dominican male of a certain class stops in on his mistress on his way home to his wife’ (*GG*, p. 7). Carlos García himself is ‘the youngest of his father's thirty-five children, twenty-five legitimate, fifteen from his own mother’ (*GG*, p. 216) –a situation similar to that of Alvarez's father (*STD*, p. 7). Foreigners also take advantage of the privileges that their gender confers on them: the American consul-cum-CIA agent Victor Hubbard uses the Dominican ‘upper-class fellas’

to whom the de la Torres have introduced him to find a madam who would procure 'the little girls he likes' (*GG*, pp. 206-7).

The men's freedom contrasts with the constricted social behaviour and physical mobility experienced by the women. Yolanda is quickly informed that '[t]his is not the States... A woman just doesn't travel alone in this country' (*GG*, p. 9). Her intentions of travelling by bus are received with words evidencing the limitations their gender and social status impose on the de la Torre women: '...you *have* been gone too long... Can't you see it!?... Yoyo climbing into an old *camioneta* with all the *campesinos* and their fighting cocks and their goats and their pigs!' (*GG*, p. 9). That the roles assigned to each gender also shape the lives of the younger generations is stressed by references to the de la Torres' tradition of sending boys and girls to U.S. boarding schools, but only letting the former stay for college. The García sisters comment on their cousin Mundín's behaviour, noting: 'When he's in the States... he's one of us, our buddy. But back on the Island, he struts and turns macho, needling us with the unfair advantage being male here gives him' (*GG*, p. 127).

The sisters' behaviour also mirrors this double code since they do as they please in the U.S., but they tone down their words and actions among their parents or their relatives in the island. In the U.S., their parents raise them according to patriarchal values echoing Alvarez's depiction of her own upbringing in *STD*: 'We were being groomed to go from being dutiful daughters to being dutiful wives with hymens intact' (p. 42). If they had been sons instead of daughters, Alvarez wonders, perhaps their parents would have found it easier to allow them 'the independence [they] needed in order to survive in this new country' since 'many of their ultimatums and threats had to do with customs,

which in the old country could only be broken at a female's peril' (*STD*, p.122). The values transmitted within the Garcías' home contrast with the messages that the sisters receive in their American milieu, 'the late sixties... when wearing jeans and hoop earrings, smoking a little dope, and sleeping with their classmates were considered political acts against the military-industrial complex' (*GG*, p. 28).

The ambivalences that this generates in the sisters remain with them affecting family relations even once they have become adults. Yolanda's difficulties in juggling the contradictory cultural elements in her background are extensively described in *GG* and *¡Yo!*, especially regarding her love life. Reviewing her college relationships, she remembers being unable to keep her boyfriends "interested" because she would not have sex with them. She had felt at the time that she would 'never find someone who would understand [her] peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles' (*GG*, p. 99).

Her break-up with her second husband John is also related to her feeling torn apart by the contrasts between her different personas –'Yolanda, nicknamed Yo in Spanish, misunderstood Joe in English, doubled and pronounced like toy, Yoyo' (*GG*, p. 68). Due to these tensions and to the divisions between her 'head-slash-heart-slash-soul' (*GG*, p.78), she cannot cope with 'so many words' with which 'there is no end to what can be said about the world' (*GG*, p. 85). A similar inability to communicate fully who she is arises with a later partner, the laid-back American Dexter Hays, as he insists in joining her during a visit to the Dominican Republic. Hays finds it difficult to adapt to life among de la Torres, being bewildered by the sight of the adult, divorced, Americanised Yolanda

following the local Catholic, conservative customs. While ‘Dexter has always had a weak spot for Latin women’ and the protagonist ‘is right up his ethnic alley’ (*¡Yo!*, p.189), this is merely a fascination with Yo as an exotic Other rather than a real acceptance of the complexities in her identity and on the admission that he might not ever fully grasp some of its aspects.

Dexter contrasts with Yolanda’s third husband Doug, who is also American but accepts the protagonist’s family and worldview although he does not always understand them. These two attitudes towards the protagonist’s ethnicity illustrate two possible reader-reactions when facing Alvarez’s works. It could be thought that Dexter’s failure to comprehend Yolanda’s background is accentuated by her inability to explain it in ways that he could understand. This, however, would force upon her the role of teacher/ ethnographer instead of putting the onus on him to familiarise himself with their differences. While taking this into account, from the standpoint of a reader unfamiliar with the place, certain references that Yolanda makes to Dominican life would arguably require further explanation to counterbalance the lack of progress connoted by the “old world” label that she and her sisters often assign to the country.

Dexter, for instance, recalls Yolanda’s assertion that what she calls her ‘hair-and-nails’ cousins ‘are actually cooking up a little feminist revolution... under that cloud of hair spray and eye shadow’ (*¡Yo!*, pp. 196-97). What such a revolution, of which his recollections of Yolanda’s words are the only mention, consists in is left unspecified. The one character to whom this could apply is Lucinda, a mother, wife and career woman although ‘that’s not easy in [their] *third world country*’, while ‘the García Girls struggle with their either-or’s in the land of milk and money’ (*¡Yo!*, p. 52). Lucinda, however, is depicted more as a

one-off than as representative of attitudes common among the de la Torre women.

Except for a few secondary characters such as Doug and Sofía's husband Otto, most representations of masculinity –whether U.S. or Dominican- involve women's oppression either in physical or psychological terms: they range from the patriarchal values of Carlos García and the male island relatives to the behaviour of the flasher met by Carla, the stalker that confronts Yolanda, and the violent husband of Yolanda's landlady Marie in *¡Yo!*. The women affected find support among other women, who in Yolanda's case are her sisters, friends, acquaintances and fellow art therapy group members. There is a noticeable lack of friendship bonds between men and women not tainted by sexual attraction or gender conflicts. The only exception -Yolanda's college mentor Professor Garfield- is a father figure who eventually reveals himself as gay. The other male characters with whom Yolanda has a friendly bond are her ex-partner Hays and her current husband at the end of the novel, Doug.

The clashing elements in Yolanda's multicultural background – particularly regarding gender roles- affect her dealings with people both in the Dominican Republic and in the U.S. Two other determinant factors in her self-image as a woman are her decision to remain childless and her career as a writer. *¡Yo!* describes how her childlessness stands out in societies where women are still generally expected –and generally still expect themselves- to become mothers, depicting her doubts and her momentary thoughts of adopting. *STD* deals thoroughly with Alvarez's own similar vacillations after opting for childlessness in order to give herself to her writing. Being a writer whose work is based on the reality around her earns Yolanda her family's hostility in the

opening section of *¡Yo!*, a “treason” which in Alvarez’s case also involves challenging established gender roles. For her relatives it “was a woman’s place to be the guardian of the home and the family secrets” (*STD*, p. 122). ‘By opening my mouth, I had disobeyed’, Alvarez states, but ‘[b]y opening my mouth on paper, I had done even worse. I had broadcast my disobedience’ (*STD*, p. 123).

4.2.2 Gender Struggles and Political Activism in *Butterflies*

The lives of the Mirabals, contemporary with the García sisters’ parents, contrast strongly with the de la Torres’ comfortable existence in *GG* and *¡Yo!* regarding status, feminist consciousness, and political activism. The sisters’ awareness of the need to advance women’s rights in the country develops simultaneously with their anti-regime stance. The connections between the two struggles are underlined in the novel’s first chapter, where Minerva’s wish to become a lawyer makes her mother remark playfully ‘Just what we need, skirts in the law!’ (*Butterflies*, p. 10), manifesting the ideological and generational divide between the two.

For Minerva, ‘[i]t’s about time... women had a voice in running our country’ (*Butterflies*, p. 10). She initially sees going to Inmaculada Concepción school as a liberating experience from the restrictions at home, but meeting Sina Perozo and Lina Lovatón there makes her realise that she had ‘just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country’ (*Butterflies*, p. 13). Minerva’s solidarity with other women becomes perhaps most poignant when she finds out about her father’s second family and, after her initial anger, she

ensures that his illicit daughters receive financial help and an education after his death.

A concern about the situation of the women also grows in the motherly, Catholic Patria, brought up 'the old-fashioned way' (*Butterflies*, p. 157) and married at sixteen. However, she decides to raise her daughter 'modern' so that 'she wasn't kept cooped up, learning blind obedience', which manifests a generational gap with her own mother. Significantly, Patria's political consciousness also develops from her maternal feelings when, being pregnant, she witnesses the murder of a young man contrary to the regime. The character, roughly the same age as a baby that Patria had lost would be, becomes her 'stillborn of thirteen years ago', her 'murdered son' (*Butterflies*, p.162).

Dedé, the surviving Mirabal, was spared her sisters' fate since she did not become actively involved in the anti-Trujillo underground due to her husband's disapproval. Together with guilt and resentment, her suffocating marriage makes it difficult for her to see 'the young man of her dreams' in 'the bossy, old-fashioned macho he'd become' (*Butterflies*, p. 175). She slowly rebels against Jaimito, encourages her sisters-in-law to do so, and finally divorces him in 1984 –twenty-four years after her sisters' murder. In 1994, reviewing her lack of political involvement, she states: 'Back in those days, we women followed our husbands' (*Butterflies*, pp.171-72). However, with the perspective acquired with time she quickly corrects these words, accepting a responsibility that in the past she had delegated to her husband: 'Let's put it this way,... I followed my husband. I didn't get involved' (*Butterflies*, p. 172).

While in *GG* and *¡Yo!* there is a noticeable absence of friendship links between the two genders, in *Butterflies* common purposes within the

underground movement allow the possibility of becoming ‘comrades in a struggle... to be together that did not necessarily have to do with romance’, according to Minerva (*Butterflies*, p. 76). Dedé, however, disagrees, stating that ‘a man was a man and a woman was a woman and there was a special charge there you couldn’t call revolution’ (*Butterflies*, p. 76) and seems to have a point. Lío, the family friend who triggers the two sisters’ discussion on love and politics, does have feelings for Minerva even if they are not reciprocated.

4.3. Conclusion

The preceding sections have shown the interactions between History and story in Alvarez’s writing, an enterprise manifest in the very genres chosen for her works. While *Butterflies* can be considered historical fiction, *GG* and *¡Yo!* are based on autobiographical experiences. Her study of the boundaries between fact and fiction explores the (re)construction of individual and collective histories that examines the conflictive interactions among the different social sectors involved in such undertakings. Through her Dominican and Dominican American characters, Alvarez exposes national, cultural, gender, class and race tensions that question the limits between the characters’ public and private spheres. ‘The narration of events’ in her works ‘is developed not through the recounting of the officially recorded “historical” events which led to the political turmoil, but through remembering the [characters’] daily struggles’⁸⁵.

85. Maribel Ortiz Márquez, ‘From Third World Politics to First World Practices’ in *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women’s Literature and Film*, eds. Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose (New York: Garland, 1997), p. 236.

Her works also dismantle stereotypical polarisations of the Dominican Republic and U.S., particularly clichés about “Third World” countries. As Ortiz Márquez points out regarding *GG*, Alvarez ‘explicitly shows that some sectors of the population in the Dominican Republic have access to goods and services which do not comply with our understanding of the “Third World”’ (p. 239). Alvarez herself stresses that the Dominican Republic must be conceived as a historically located society changing throughout time versus the monolithic, static images associated with the “Third World”⁸⁶.

Concerning her motives in writing *Butterflies*, Alvarez states that, apart from being drawn to ‘a good story’, she ‘had felt a measure of responsibility’ to tell the Mirabals’s story since the four sisters ‘were sacrificed to the regime, whereas [she and her own sisters] made it safely’ to the U.S.⁸⁷. Added to this, there was a ‘desire to understand [her] parents’ generation, who fell victim to the dictatorship’ and are known in the Dominican Republic as “the lost generation”; she ‘needed to understand and to redeem the time for [her]self’, ‘so much talent, so much energy and faith, so many lives gone to waste’ (*Interview with Atlantic Unbound*).

A similar wish is also evident in *GG* and *¡Yo!*, where the García sisters gradually understand their parents’ pre-exile life and difficulties adapting to the U.S. With her stories, she not only becomes ‘a wanderer through the Americas, weaving North and South together’ (*Interview with Atlantic Unbound*) in a process mirroring that of her protagonists, but also gives her readers a better understanding of both cultures. Alvarez, however, is ‘not interested actually in

86. *Interview with Salon.com*, Sept. 25 1998, accessed September 2003 <<http://archive.salon.com/mwt/feature/1998/09/25feature.html>>

87. *Interview with Atlantic Unbound, The Atlantic Unbound Online*, accessed September 2003 <<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/ba2000-07-19.htm>>.

taking sides'; she does not 'want to create monsters or to simplify that complex relationship of North and South' (Interview with *Atlantic Unbound*), something evident in her balanced, humane portrayals even of agents of patriarchal, political or racial oppression.

In *STD*, Alvarez reflects on her lack of role models as a Dominican American girl, stating that she 'learned early to turn to books, movies, music, paintings, rather than to the family to find out what was possible' (*STD*, p. 4). This search is paralleled by her later efforts as an adolescent 'pag[ing] through [her] anthologies looking for someone else with a Spanish-sounding name, someone else who had come to English when she was ten, someone else to prove that [she] could become what [she] dreamed of becoming' (*STD*, p. 4). Her protagonists in *GG* and *¡Yo!* illustrate such attempts to forge Dominican American identities overcoming the restrictions that they experience on the island and in the U.S. by virtue of their gender, ethnicity and social status.

Regarding her career, Alvarez acknowledges having found it 'at odds with [her] training as a female and as a member of la familia' (*STD*, p. 122). Since in her Dominican environment 'it was a woman's place to be the guardian of the home and the family', not having a public life except through male relatives, Alvarez's writing represented an act of transgression (*STD*, pp. 122-23). It meant that she had 'a voice' and said '[t]hat women have mouths and needs and bodies and problems and breakdowns and all of the stuff that is not nice to admit and certainly not to the [Americans] [sic]' (Interview with *Salon.com*).

Regarding her gendered socialisation, Alvarez clarifies: 'Not that as a Latina I was raised to be weak and powerless... las mujeres around me were

strong and resourceful and full of compassion, but they exercised that power privately within the home' (Interview with *Atlantic Unbound*). She describes finding her voice as a Dominican American woman writer as a long process influenced by the example of her Dominican aunts with their 'passionate engagement with their lives' (*STD*, p. 149), the maids who looked after her as a child, and, once in the U.S., the Latina nurses at her father's office – 'the only models [she] had of what it might be like to be a professional woman and a Latina in this country' (*STD*, p. 158). With their aspirations, mistakes and successes, Alvarez's protagonists provide the role models for Dominican Americans that she lacked as a young girl.

Alvarez's narratives are not merely descriptive or didactic, and their allusions to Dominican history, for example, are often only partially explained, making readers search for more information if they want to understand their full implications. As Ortiz Márquez observes, 'the reader is forced to 'name' that social reality which lies not at the core of the text, but at its margins' (p. 236). While her writings show a marked social awareness, they do not present a simplistic, rosy view of her characters' and their societies' evolution. As Dedé reconciles herself with being 'the one left behind to tell the story', for instance, she also wonders what purpose the three Butterflies' death had served. The ambivalences in Yolanda García's identity also show that Alvarez's women are complex beings whose dilemmas cannot be easily solved. If her novels end on a positive note as the protagonists come to terms with personal, familial and national backgrounds, they also make clear the price that they have paid together with the problems that they still face. The identities of Alvarez's characters can be considered "hybrid" in that they can be considered to belong simultaneously

to several “imagined communities”, but the novels also show the ambivalences, confusion and pain derived from their multiple allegiances.

CHAPTER 5.

WIWPR AND AW:
INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY, SOCIO-CULTURAL ALLEGIANCES
AND UPWARD MOBILITY

WIWPR and *AW* portray the development of Santiago's subjectivity as her younger self attempts to discern what it means to be Puerto Rican in the island and in the continental U.S. Describing *WIWPR* as 'a way of starting a discussion about what is Puerto Ricanism' (Hernández, p. 165), Santiago examines various elements at the basis of national identities such as land, language, folkloric, historical and literary referents, and social structures. By pointing out their ambivalent meanings she destabilises any notions of ready-made, monolithic collective identities. Santiago's memoirs show how individual as well as national and socio-cultural identities are in constant flux and renegotiation, and use this argument to validate her own Puerto Rican subjectivity once in the U.S. At the same time, the memoirs acknowledge the cultural and ideological divergences both between and among Puerto Ricans on the island and on the continent, calling attention to the contested legitimacy of some sectors' claims of national and ethnic belonging.

Santiago's memoirs portray her steps from her life in Macún and San Juan (Puerto Rico) to her admission to the exclusive Performing Arts High School in Manhattan and, later on, to Harvard University as a scholarship student. *WIWPR* covers her childhood in Puerto Rico until her departure for New York in 1961, where *AW* picks up her story depicting her adolescence in Brooklyn until she is twenty-one. The memoirs present a driven, individualistic young woman whose academic achievements will be followed later by an adult Santiago's professional success. However, '[s]ocioeconomic success in multicultural situations often appears as a conversion to the dominant culture'⁸⁸.

88. Barry B. Levine, 'Salpicar and the Specter of Self-Hate among Puerto Ricans: On the Testimonial Literature of Modernization and Ethnicity', in *Images and Identities: The Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts*, ed. Asela Rodríguez de Laguna (New Brunswick [USA] & Oxford: Transaction, 1987), p. 93.

The production and reception of works by “minority” authors are greatly affected by how such questions are answered, as we will see regarding Santiago’s commercially successful narrative of upward mobility.

For “ethnic” and “minority” writers, writing acquires ethical and political dimensions beyond personal leisure, catharsis and artistic creativity. A great part of these writers’ appeal and authority for mainstream audiences derives from their perceived status as “insiders” of “exotic” or deprived communities. They are thus assigned the role of making their socio-cultural backgrounds accessible for mass-readerships. Their writing also tends to be interpreted as a contribution to ‘forg[ing] artistically a collective identity’ and ‘breaking the silence’⁸⁹ to redress injustices for themselves and for other community members not privileged enough to speak.

If U.S. “ethnic” writers achieved relative recognition after the struggles for self-definition and civil rights in the late 1960s and 1970s, the interest they generated in mainstream America also led to their exotisation and commodification. Regarding U.S. Puerto Rican literature, ‘[t]he publishing industry learned to profit from civil rights-era texts that could be advertised as ‘ghetto’ testimonials, which helped create a new and lucrative pulp fiction niche during the mid- to late 1960s and 1970s’⁹⁰. In the 1980s and 1990s Latino – especially Latina- culture gained a still growing popularity. Among the new U.S. Puerto Rican prose-writers in these decades, Sánchez Gonzalez highlights Ed Vega, Soledad Santiago, Oswald Rivera, Carmen de Monteflores, Judith Ortiz

89. Genevieve Fabre, ‘Introduction: Blueprints in the Development of a New Poetics’ in *European Perspectives on Hispanic Literature of the United States*, ed. Genevieve Fabre (Houston: Arte Publico Press 1988, pp. 5-21), p. 16.

90. Lisa Sánchez González, *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora* (New York & London: New York UP, 2001), p. 134.

Cofer, Abraham Rodríguez, and Edward Rivera together with Esmeralda Santiago (p. 134). Their works give wide audiences ‘access to the American “Other”’ with mixed effects, among them ‘the possibility of armchair cultural voyeurism’ (p. 134).

5.1. The Puerto Rican years: 1948-1961

Depicting what Juan Flores describes as ‘the archetypal Puerto Rican journey from rural origins to the San Juan slums’ to New York⁹¹, Santiago’s memoirs pay great attention to the physical settings of her childhood and adolescence together with the social interactions and psychological states both shaped and reflected by them. Her detailed depictions strengthen the contrasts among the different scenarios in Santiago’s years in Puerto Rico, as well as between these and the places structuring her life in New York. Her childhood settings are also used to examine the shifting meanings of traditional national and literary emblems, reassessing Puerto Rican history and identity.

‘Jíbara’, the first section of *WIWPR*, presents her as a four-year-old girl arriving in Macún, a neighborhood in Toa Baja, in 1952. This date, chosen as the beginning of Santiago’s narration, is precisely the year in which Puerto Rico acquires the status of Free Associated State to the U.S. after its population had already been given American citizenship in 1917, putting them in the ambiguous position of being American and not being American. Young Esmeralda’s understanding of human relationships develops side by side with a growing

91. Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1993), p. 169.

awareness of her country's history of colonisation, first under Spanish rule and then under American control after the Spanish-American war and the U.S. occupation of the island in 1898 (Sánchez González, p.156).

The austere new family home in Macún does not hinder the girl from admiring the idyllic beauty of her surroundings: '[m]ist hung just above the trees, burning off in patches where bright sun dulled the intensity of red hibiscus blossoms, yellow morning glories, the purple centers of passion fruit flowers' (*WIWPR*, p.7). The girl recalls that morning landscapes like this one 'inspired much of the jíbaro [Puerto Rican traditional peasant] poetry' (*WIWPR*, p. 18). Apart from conveying a patriotic attachment to the land, the local flavour achieved by Santiago's meticulous descriptions of her childhood environments engages with a long tradition of Puerto Rican regionalist writing. This kind of writing formed part of a "culture of the land" which, Morales Carrión observes, was constituted not only by literary and artistic works of literature but also by the heritage of oral legends, graffiti, proverbs, colloquial expressions and concepts coming from Puerto Rico's poor rural population⁹². In *WIWPR*, Santiago often uses Puerto Rican proverbs together with their English translation which pay homage to her background while also constituting ironic allusions to her Puerto Ricanness -with all its complex ambivalences. In *AW*, narrating Santiago's New York years, only the prologue and the epilogue are introduced by a proverb –in untranslated Spanish in the first case, and only in English in the second-, which parallels the evolution of the author's identity.

Esmeralda's idealised view of the peasants' life echoes the image of the *jíbaro* 'projected by romantic and realistic Puerto Rican authors such as Alonso

92. Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1983), p. 319.

in *El Jíbaro* (1849) or the skit writer Manuel Méndez Quiñones' (Morales Carrión, p. 329). Santiago's choice of referents is a disingenuous one, since other works like Manuel Zeno Gandía's *La Charca* (1894) document 'the painful existence of the rural society at the... end of the nineteenth century' (Morales Carrión, p. 330). The figure of the *jíbaro* has come 'to represent the human and spiritual entity that was considered the substance of Puerto Rican culture' (Morales Carrión, p. 327), and that would contrast with the country's increasing industrialisation and Americanisation after 1898. Esmeralda's contradictory attachment to the iconic *jíbaro* thus echoes deep transformations and ambivalences in Puerto Rican cultural and national identity. Her fascination has been nurtured by stories and poems learned at school that, together with music and poetry on the radio, 'chronicled [the *jíbaro*'s] life of struggle and hardship' which also involved 'independence and contemplation, a closeness to nature coupled with a respect for its intractability, and a deeply rooted and proud nationalism' (*WIWPR*, p. 12).

Her identification with the *jíbaro* is destabilised by her mother's explanation that the city-born Esmeralda cannot be a *jíbara*, that '*jíbaros* were mocked for their unsophisticated customs and peculiar dialect' (*WIWPR*, p. 12), and that calling somebody a *jíbaro* could cause offence. The girl then wonders: 'If we were not *jíbaros*, why did we live like them? Our house, a box squatting on low stilts, was shaped like a *bohío*, the kind of house *jíbaros* lived in' (*WIWPR*, p. 12). Later on Esmeralda herself will be called a *jíbara* by her mocking classmates in Santurce, thus making her be what she was not in Macún. The poverty around her and her love for Puerto Rico lead the girl to identify with the traditional country dweller and her house with the *bohío*, arguably not with

the actual building -which Rodríguez Vecchini doubts was ‘the most common peasant dwelling in the 1940s’⁹³ ⁹⁴- but with the image of it firmly ‘set in the Puerto Rican imaginary’ (‘afianzada en el imaginario puertorriqueño’, p.141). Ramona’s remarks leave Esmeralda ‘[p]uzzled by the hypocrisy of celebrating a people everyone looked down on’ (*WIWPR*, p. 13), a precocious observation which for Rodríguez Vecchini contributes ‘to the demythification of [Puerto Rican] cultural identity, as well as of the authoritarian wisdom of tradition embodied by the mother’ (‘la desmitificación de la identidad cultural, así como de la sabiduría autoritaria de la tradición, que ejemplifica la madre’, p. 151).

The girl’s statements expose an internalised “double cultural code” (‘doble código cultural’, Rodríguez Vecchini, p. 151) in the representation and assessment of the *jíbaro* arising from the contradictions triggered when Puerto Rico becomes a U.S. possession in 1898, that is, ‘when there is a simultaneous institutionalisation of (Puerto Rican) national culture and (North American) nationality’⁹⁵ (p. 152) and ‘the conflict arises between an idealised autochthonous model and the modern metropolitan model which made the peasant referent already transformed into national myth seem poor, ignorant, and backward’⁹⁶ (p. 152).

The girl becomes further aware of the intricate relationship between her country and the U.S when a neighbour tells her that a nearby land belongs to

93. Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini, ‘Cuando Esmeralda ‘era’ puertorriqueña: Autobiografía etnográfica y autobiografía neopicaresca’ in *Nómada 1* (195), p. 146.

94. ‘la vivienda campesina “más común” en la década de los cuarenta’

95. ‘cuando se institucionalizan simultáneamente la cultura nacional (puertorriqueña) y la de la nacionalidad (norteamericana)’

96. ‘surge el conflicto entre un modelo autóctono idealizado y el modelo moderno metropolitano que hacía ver pobre, ignorante y atrasado... al referente campesino ya convertido en mito nacional’

‘[a]n Americano from the Nueva Yores [sic]’ who will allegedly build a hotel there making them move away (*WIWPR*, p. 55). Esmeralda witnesses other instances of U.S. presence in Puerto Rican life, when a community centre opens in Macún with facilities ‘provided by the... Free Associated State, which was the official name for Puerto Rico in the Estados Unidos’ (*WIWPR*, p. 64). Her teacher Miss Jiménez tells the class that their mothers would learn there ‘about proper nutrition and hygiene, so that [the children] could grow up as tall and strong as Dick, Jane, and Sally, the *Americanitos* in [their] primers’ (*WIWPR*, p. 64). However, the advice they receive refers to products not grown in Puerto Rico, and the experts do not know which “native foods” could substitute for them (*WIWPR*, p. 66).

The children are also given polio vaccines at the centre, which one of Esmeralda’s classmates explains saying that ‘the government’s doing all this stuff... because it’s an election year’ and calling Americans imperialist ‘gringos’ (*WIWPR*, p. 72). Her father Pablo talks to her about these new concepts, telling her that calling ‘an *Americano* a *gringo*’ is ‘a very bad insult’ (pp. 72-73). He also describes Puerto Rico’s shift from being a Spanish colony to an American one, adding that many Puerto Ricans ‘don’t think that’s right’ and ‘call *Americanos* imperialists, which means they want to change our country and our culture to be like theirs’ (pp. 72-73). Connecting Pablo’s references to the compulsory English lessons at her school –due to a U.S. imposition of bilingual education in Puerto Rico- Esmeralda decides not to become American by not learning the language. This contrasts with her attitude once in New York and with the fact that Santiago’s memoirs are originally written in English. Pablo retorts that ‘[b]eing American is not just a language... it’s a lot of other things...

Like the food you eat... the music you listen to... the things you believe in', and tells her that '[w]e call them *gringos*, they call us spiks' -a term mocking Puerto Rican accents in English. She answers that 'Americanos talk funny when they speak Spanish', to which Pablo replies: '[t]hat's part of being an imperialist. They expect us to do things their way, even in our country' (*WIWPR*, pp. 72-73).

If her father provides her with the first articulate notions of her status as a colonial subject, her mother makes her aware of the limiting expectations on her gender offering a model for overcoming them. Ramona finds sewing work in a factory, becoming 'one of the first mothers in Macún to have a job outside the house' (*WIWPR*, p. 122). This alludes to the implementation of the U.S.-led economic development project Operation Bootstrap, which from the 1940s onwards attracted 'many United States labor-intensive industries, such as the garment, textile, and leather trades, which provided employment to thousands of women workers on the island'⁹⁷. The drastic industrialisation and capitalisation of the country's economy 'had a great impact on Puerto Rican traditional values, on institutions associated with the old agrarian society, and on the role of women'⁹⁸. Women's growing visibility in the marketplace and in society in general have been seen by some as 'part of what they consider to be the process of Americanization of Puerto Rico and the acceptance of values that are detrimental to the preservation of a Puerto Rican cultural identity', instead of as 'a natural consequence of socioeconomic development and consciousness-

97. Altigracia Ortiz, 'Puerto Rican Women Workers in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Appraisal of the Literature' in *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, eds. Félix Matos Rodríguez and Linda C. Delgado (Armonk, New York & London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), p. 50.

98. Edna Acosta-Belén, 'Puerto Rican Women in Culture, History and Society' in *The Puerto Rican Woman: Perspectives on Culture, History and Society*, ed. Edna Acosta-Belén (New York, Westport (Connecticut) & London: Praeger, 1986), p. 13.

raising' (Acosta-Belén, p. 13). Ramona's husband and neighbours –particularly other women- react with 'a visible, angry resentment that became gossip', which lets Esmeralda know that her mother 'was breaking a taboo' (WIWPR, p.122).

Another determining factor in the child's life are the shifts between city and country determined mainly by her parents' rows: '[w]henver Mami was fed up with Macún, or with Papi, she ran away to Santurce, a suburb of San Juan, which, by the early fifties, had become as much a metropolis as the capital, though with little of its cachet' (WIWPR, p. 37). Santurce had 'distinctly drawn neighborhoods that separated the rich from the poor' (WIWPR, p. 37). Later they settle with Pablo in Sabana Grande, in 'a pretty *finca*' separated by a creek from a large house belonging to 'rich folks' (WIWPR, p. 190). Esmeralda's changes of address familiarise her with socio-economic differences among Puerto Ricans which point to a social reality far less idyllic than she recalls once in Brooklyn.

5.2. Americanisation and Adolescence

In *WIWPR*, a narratorial "I" corresponding to the adult author evaluates the journey from Puerto Rico to the U.S. saying: 'the person I was becoming when we left was erased, and another one was created. The Puerto Rican *jibara*... was to become a hybrid who would never forgive the uprooting' (p. 209). While conveying how drastic leaving her birthplace was, these words also point to a process of stylisation of her past there, neither less complicated nor less hybrid. Once on the continent, she will struggle against further stereotypings of Puerto

Ricanness exposing the complex relationships between the two countries, and between island and U.S. Puerto Ricans.

‘Used to... rural Puerto Rico’, the girl finds Brooklyn, darker, dirtier and more aggressive than she had imagined New York to be (*AW*, p. 4). This cityscape also contrasts strongly with ‘the trim, horizontal suburbs of white Americans’ that she will discover in children’s comic books, where ‘teenagers’ lives were very different from [hers]’ (*AW*, pp. 26-27). Esmeralda’s first apartment in Brooklyn has ‘a bathtub in the kitchen with hot and cold running water, and a toilet inside a closet with a sink’, being ‘more substantial’ than her homes in Puerto Rico (*AW*, p. 6). The family soon start a cyclic search for more comfortable, more affordable or better located apartments which recalls their constant change of houses in Puerto Rico.

More new challenges await Esmeralda in her new school environments, first of all being held back one grade due to her poor command of English. She adamantly rejects this arguing that she has ‘A’s in school Puerto Rico’ (*WIWPR*, p. 226), and she is eventually sent to the lowest eighth grade class with the learning disabled, which makes her still more determined to improve her English: ‘By my fourth month in Brooklyn... I stunned the teachers by scoring high in English, History, and Social studies... I became a different person to the other eighth graders... they knew, and I knew, that I didn’t belong there’ (p. 236). Her increasing competence in English, however, also becomes a bond separating her and her siblings from their mother, whose ‘expression chang[es] from pride to envy to worry’ (*AW*, p.18).

In Esmeralda’s junior high schools in Brooklyn ‘most students were Puerto Rican, Italian, or black’, groups which did not mix; ‘[t]he few

Americans..., all white-skinned, lived and moved in their own neighborhoods and groups, closed to the rest of us' (*AW*, p. 57). When she joins Performing Arts later on she becomes still more aware of the divisions between the "disadvantaged" and the "advantaged," as well as of the subtle links between ethnic and economic backgrounds and career opportunities. Later, touring the U.S. with a theatre company, she feels that wherever they stop she is 'the darkest person in... the entire town' (*AW*, p. 241). While this makes her determined 'to educate people about Puerto Rico' (*AW*, p. 241), she feels 'wary of venturing farther into the continent': 'In New York I was Puerto Rican, an identity that carried with it a whole set of negative stereotypes I continually struggled to overcome. But in other places, where Puerto Ricans were in lower numbers, where I was from didn't matter. I was simply too dark to be white, too white to be black' (*AW*, p. 242).

The way in which Esmeralda's self-perception alters when others define her according to identity categories which she does not apply to herself –or at least not in the same way- echoes her unwilling transformation into "Hispanic" in the opening pages of *AW*. When a Spanish-speaking girl in the neighbourhood enquires whether she is hispana, Esmeralda answers that she is Puerto Rican, only to be told that both mean the same: that is what anybody who speaks Spanish and whose parents are 'Puerto Rican or Cuban or something' becomes in the States (*AW*, pp. 4-5). Esmeralda then wonders whether one is still Hispanic if 'your parents are Cuban... and you're born here, but you don't speak Spanish', to which the other girl can only answer in confused terms: '[i]t has to do with being from a Spanish country. I mean, you or your parents, like, even if you don't speak Spanish, you're Hispanic, you know?' (*AW*, p.5). If Esmeralda can rework

the culturally constructed links between ethnicity, language and geographical boundaries in the shaping of her Puerto Ricanness away from the island, this same process is applied by others to define her in ways which are confusing if not reductive and oppressive.

Always conscious of being labelled according to stereotypes about Puerto Ricans, Esmeralda tries not to confirm such perceptions. Being often told by her boss at Fisher Scientific that she does not ‘sound’ or ‘act’ Puerto Rican’, she is ‘hurt that he was surprised that Puerto Ricans could be competent, chaste girls who spoke good English’ (AW, p.169). She also feels strongly against the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in the film *West Side Story*, ‘the *only* movie about Puerto Ricans anyone has seen’ (AW, p. 121), where ‘the only virgin... was always played by an American, while the sexy spitfire was Puerto Rican’ (AW, p. 121). She is hurt when, at an audition where they are ‘looking for real people’, she is told: ‘You just don’t have the look [of a Puerto Rican]. You’re a pretty girl’ (AW, pp. 147 & 151).

However, when taking part in ‘a Broadway production of an Indian fable’, she shows a very different attitude towards clichéd cultural representations on stage (AW, p. 226). As she puts on her costume an Indian friend complains that it ‘looks nothing like what Indian girls wear’ (AW, p. 236), to which she answers that ‘[t]he designer took creative liberties,... but the costume works on stage, which is what matters’ (AW, p. 236). This contrasts with her opinions of the portrayals of Puerto Ricans in *West Side Story*, arguably also resulting from artistic “creative liberties” and aimed at working on stage and on the screen. Santiago does not hide or apologise for her protagonist’s contradictions and prejudices, a point to which we will return later.

Esmeralda has to negotiate constantly her identity in the different private and public spaces outlined above. Consequently, she feels pulled in seemingly opposite directions, often leaving her confused and exhausted. In New York, the girl observes, it was ‘good to be healthy, big, and strong like Dick, Jane, and Sally. It was good to learn English and to know how to act among Americans, but it was not good to behave like them... we were to remain 100 per cent Puerto Rican’ (AW, p. 25). She finds it ‘hard to tell where Puerto Rican ended and Americanized began’, sensing that no specific group or individual can offer a neat, irrefutable definition of Americanness and Puerto Ricanness (AW, p. 25).

A related issue faced at home is the consequences of her upward mobility. Ramona, despite being proud of her skill at stitching for a factory, tells her children repeatedly: ‘Don’t be like me’ (AW, p. 210). Santiago recalls that her mother ‘lined [them] up like a general getting her troops ready and said, “you’re going to learn English, get a good education and you’re going to get good jobs”’ (Hernández, p. 167). Esmeralda’s admission to Performing Arts High School comes as a reward for Ramona’s sacrifices and aspirations; when she tells the protagonist that at Performing Arts she ‘will be exposed to a different class of people’, Esmeralda feels ‘her ambition without knowing exactly what she meant’ (WIWPR, p. 263). However, Ramona also accuses her daughter of ‘wanting to go to a school for *blanquitos*’ (AW, p. 57) –referring to ‘people of superior social status more than to skin color’ (AW, p. 57)-, and of ‘reaching higher than she ought to’ (AW, p. 55). These conflicts surrounding the girl’s academic success point out that upwardly mobile individuals may be seen as betraying the group, “opting out” of it, or, at least, not belonging to it in the same way as before, the group here comprehending simultaneously Puerto Ricans in the island and in

New York, her family, and her social class. As a result of such conflicting messages, Esmeralda notes that '[t]he home that had been a refuge from the city's danger was now a prison [she] longed to escape' (*AW*, p. 210).

She first reacts to this confusion by imagining that she was back in Puerto Rico with her father in Macún, 'where [she] knew who [she] was, where [she] didn't know [she] was poor, didn't know [her] parents didn't love each other' (*AW*, pp. 29- 31). As we have seen in the previous section, this alleged ignorance of the turbulences in her parents' relationship and of her poverty in Puerto Rico is put into question by several scenes through *WIWPR*. Perhaps the point here is that, once in the U.S., the wealth of part of its inhabitants gives her new parameters regarding socio-economic status, making her poverty in Macún, Santurce and Brooklyn appear more marked. Santiago acknowledges the impact of the contrasts between the Puerto Rico that she left, the one that she remembers, and the one to which she returns, affirming: 'what made me a writer was not necessarily the experience of going to New York but the experience of returning to Puerto Rico' (Hernández, p. 162). The exhaustion of negotiating daily her multiple identities leads young Esmeralda to dream about being someone else, 'a confident, powerful woman whose name changed as [she] tried to form the perfect [self]' (*AW*, p. 83). '[N]ames not based on [her] own didn't sound quite right' (*AW*, p. 83), suggesting that what she wishes is not to be someone else altogether but to escape the internalised pressures of living within her family and neighbourhood together with economic, linguistic and racial discriminations.

Esmeralda eventually admits her physical, psychological, and cultural changes as well as the distance that these create between her and Ramona, for

whom she is becoming Americanised. Ramona feels that Esmeralda believes herself 'better than everyone else, better than her', and looks at the girl 'resentfully, as if [she] had betrayed her' (*AW*, pp. 58-59). However, despite the struggles derived from her multiple positionalities, Esmeralda also knows that she cannot renounce her Brooklyn home, Puerto Rico, or the world 'across the river, where [she] intended to make [her] life': she must 'learn to straddle all of them, a rider on three horses, each headed in a different direction' (*AW*, p. 153). Aged twenty-one she feels an overwhelming need for independence, longing to hear her own voice 'even if it was filled with fear and uncertainty' (*AW*, p. 210). At the end of *AW*, it is not clear whether she has stayed with her family or has followed her first lover Ulvi, an authoritarian father figure who makes her choose between her family and him. In the prologue, however, the author had already indicated that she did leave her mother's house to travel to Florida with him (*AW*, p. 2).

5.3. The Civil Rights Era

Esmeralda arrives in New York in 1961 being approximately thirteen, and becomes twenty-one at the end of *AW*. Her adolescence takes place during the time of the civil rights struggles, a crucial moment in U.S. contemporary history when ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups gained visibility and took action against discrimination. The other main event shaping the decade was the Vietnam war, and *AW* makes some references to both this topic and the civil rights struggles. The social upheaval of the 1960s, however, does not seem to

affect Esperanza's consciousness except in tangential ways, perhaps due to the fact that Santiago's memoirs are written in the 1990s from a position of awareness regarding the civil rights movement's internal divisions and limitations, or to an authorial acknowledgement that not every Puerto Rican was politically conscious and active to an equal degree.

As the U.S. recovered from the Second World War, it experienced a prosperity during the fifties denied to certain sectors of society. Racism deprived the black population from the wealth and freedom that many white Americans were enjoying at the time. Black Americans' protests against segregation had many whites' support, and led the federal government to show an increasing interest in civil rights and poverty during the 1960s⁹⁹. In the early years of the decade, thousands of blacks across the country became involved in campaigns against racism and discrimination involving forms of non-violent opposition promoted most prominently by Martin Luther King. In Daniel Preston's words, 'the civil rights movement threatened to topple an entire social, political, and economic system based upon racial segregation' (p. 153).

After being elected president in 1961, John Kennedy showed ambivalence towards the civil rights movement, not wishing to antagonise southern Democrats. Finally, in June 1963 he asked Congress to pass legislation banning discrimination in public places and in employment, but the bill was blocked despite having considerable public support (Preston, p. 153). Kennedy's assassination five months later is briefly mentioned in *AW* as Esmeralda's family mourns his shooting 'with the rest of the country' (p. 100). Kennedy's successor, President Lyndon Johnson, was a firm supporter of the civil rights movement and

99. Daniel Preston, *Twentieth Century United States History* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), p. 148.

managed to convince Congress to pass the civil rights bill in 1964, advancing among other arguments that it would constitute an homage to Kennedy (Preston, p. 153). Johnson's commitment to civil rights was accompanied by a determination to launch a "war on poverty" in the U.S. through the implementation of a program named "The New Society".

Divisions gradually appeared within different sectors of the civil rights movement. By the mid-1960s, some blacks, disappointed with the movement's progress, doubted the effectiveness of the strategies of non-violent protest, which were considered too slow or not radical enough. A growing number –most prominently, advocates of Black Power such as Malcolm X- also questioned the movement's objective of integration (Preston, pp. 156-57). The hardships and dissatisfaction of the black population living in ghettos finally exploded in 1964 in the form of riots all over the country between 1964 and 1968. These events' impact on Santiago's family is depicted in *AW*, which describes how 'the scariest thing to happen during that summer of 1964 was when whole neighborhoods like ours turned against themselves' (p. 100).

Santiago's family are affected by news in newspapers, radio and televisions of 'people who looked like [them] running down streets that looked like [theirs], setting fires, beating each other, being chased' by a police force that was 'all white men' (*AW*, p. 100). Ramona disapproves of the rioters and looters warning her kids against following their steps (*AW*, p.100). The narrator depicts how the local shops that had not been too badly affected opened for business the morning after one riot, adding: 'When we shopped, they watched us with distrustful eyes, as if we'd been part of the violence, and we stared back, resentful that no one was immune from their suspicions and anger' (*AW*, p. 102).

The narrator witnesses the involvement of Puerto Ricans around her with the civil rights movement, noting: 'In El Barrio and the Bronx, in parts of Brooklyn, other young Puerto Ricans, some of them members of the Young Lords, campaigned to improve the lives of their compatriotas' (*AW*, p. 286). The Young Lords, the most prominent U.S. Puerto Rican grassroots organisation during the civil rights struggles, launched a variety of initiatives aimed at improving life in local communities. Esmeralda's cousin Corazón 'was involved with a group in [sic] the Lower East Side that offered art and photography lessons to Puerto Rican high school students', while some of her siblings 'were involved in youth organisations in [the] neighborhood' (*AW*, p. 286). Santiago, however, acknowledges that her own 'social consciousness was pathetically underdeveloped', feeling no commitment to an abstract community while at the same time being overwhelmed by her family duties (*AW*, p. 286). Similarly, Esmeralda does not show any involvement with the women's movements which gained momentum from the mid-1960s onwards.

Together with the civil rights movement and the race riots, the Vietnam War is a third crucial issue in the 1960s dealt with in *AW*. President Lyndon Johnson thought that a greater U.S. intervention in Vietnam would put an end to the conflict between pro-Western South Vietnam and the pro-Communist Viet Cong guerrilla groups in North Vietnam. The conflict worsened in 1965, when American forces entered combat after several Americans were killed and wounded in a Viet Cong attack. The Vietnam question polarised the U.S., but the opposition to war grew as the conflict developed and U.S. participation in it intensified, with several large anti-war demonstrations taking place across the country. The last American forces abandoned Vietnam in 1972, but the U.S. kept

on providing military aid to South Vietnam until its army and government crumpled in 1975 (Preston, p. 176).

The Vietnam question becomes personally relevant for Esmeralda when Neftalí, a young man she likes, is drafted to join the army and his proposal of formalising their relations before leaving triggers mixed emotions in her. On the one hand, she is confused by television news: 'We watched news reports of soldiers having a great time... as sober newsmen talked about casualties. We saw the landscape, lush and tropical,... that reminded us of... Puerto Rico's northern coast... It didn't seem real' (AW, p. 161). A similar feeling of unreality also taints her reaction to Neftalí's imminent departure, as she finds herself torn between feeling sorry for the boy's family and 'the romance of a boyfriend in a faraway country fighting for democracy' (AW, p. 161). When Neftalí proposes, his understated ways and the reality of committing to him shatter Esmeralda's romantic dreams, and she rejects him. Her puzzlement and shame about having rejected the man who would have been her first boyfriend, however, are as far as the memoirs' protagonist becomes explicitly concerned about the Vietnam War.

5.4. Authorial Representativeness and the Commodification of "Ethnic" Life-Writing

Santiago depicts her first visit to Puerto Rico as an adult in 1976 after her departure in 1961, a trip echoing the idea that one cannot really return to the places of the past. Back in the old family home in Macún, the narrator finds that the place 'was no longer familiar, nor beautiful', nor did it evidence who she had

been there or who she will become (AW, p. 2). Added to her perplexity and distress at feeling alienated from the land of her childhood, the islanders' reactions further destabilise her self-perception. She recalls in an interview the devastating realisation that she was not considered Puerto Rican 'because [she] was so Americanized': 'I was trying to understand... strangers could pick up on something that happened to me, but that I didn't know showed. I didn't feel Americanized, I felt very Puerto Rican' (Hernández, p. 162). Puerto Rico in 1976 seems different not only because of the distortions and idealisations in her memories of it, but also because the place had changed while she was away.

Questioning Puerto Rico as the standard of "authentic" Puerto Ricanness, Santiago remembers thinking: 'How can *puertorriqueños* who have never left the island accuse us when they allow the American contamination I was seeing all around? There were McDonald's, Pizza Huts, and so on. I used to think this was not our culture... We in the States at least have an excuse to be Americanized' (Hernández, p. 163). That "I used to think" hints at a later shift in Santiago's stance; at the time, however, these realisations' destabilising effect 'drove [her] away' from Puerto Rico. The author wondered: 'if I'm not Puerto Rican enough and in my eyes Puerto Rico is not Puerto Rican the way it was Puerto Rican before, then what is Puerto Rican and what am I doing here?' (Hernández, p. 163). Her memoirs examine from a personal point of view these questions for which no universal answer can be found, as she acknowledges herself (Hernández, p. 163).

However, this enterprise stops involving only Santiago once her memoirs become published narratives with varied audiences and commercial success. In her *Boricua Literature*, Lisa Sánchez González analyses Santiago's story of

socioeconomic achievement from this perspective. While finding Sánchez González's work thought-provoking, I want to address some of her main criticisms against Santiago's memoirs to study "minority" authors' potentially problematic situation regarding their works' reception. Sánchez González groups *WIWPR* with Carmen de Monteflores's *Cantando Bajito/Singing Softly* (1989) and Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun* (1989) as a series of 'fictionalized memoirs' (p. 11) written in the 90s portraying the authors' personal development and socioeconomic success. In 'the absence of other voices who would contradict them in actual demographic proportion', she contends that considering them as Latina feminist texts, however accurately they might reflect individual women's empowerment, 'performs in the public sphere as an outright denial of the structural inequalities... that the overwhelmingly working-class majority of Boricua women endure collectively as a colonial diasporan community' (p. 141).

While aware of U.S. critics' tendency to interpret all "ethnic" narratives narrowly as collective allegories, Sánchez González argues that 'American authors from communities of color who aspire to represent their cultural difference for general consumption are without question involved in an allegorical enterprise' (p.12). She contends that texts like Santiago's represent the dilemmas of writing ' "Third Worlded" feminism in a First World context' (p. 12). Such texts would undermine their authority as Latina feminist narratives in various ways which 'mainstream public and feminist audiences in the United States may not perceive' (p. 150). First, she points out their representation of Puerto Rican women as infantile victims within dysfunctional family structures, 'ambitious fairy tale and romance writers', or 'disingenously assimilating youths' (p. 159). These types, all revelling in their 'all but automatic stateside socio-

economic freedom', would 'satisfy a certain hegemonic thirst (and market demand) for the subaltern woman's acceptance –even celebration- of colonial paternalism' (p. 159).

While the harmful effects of the commodification of “ethnic” women's struggles are not to be underestimated, some points regarding Santiago's memoirs require clarification. The main female characters in *WIWPR* and *AW* – Esmeralda's mother and grandmother, her Jewish friend Susannah, and of course Esmeralda herself- are certainly troubled and flawed each in her own way. However, the impression they convey is not one of utter powerlessness or defeatism as implied by Sánchez González. It is also worth noting that, while the Santiagos are “dysfunctional” in that the unmarried parents have a turbulent relationship leading to Ramona's departure for the continent with her children, they are certainly not more so than many white middle-class Anglo-Saxon families.

Sánchez González also sees these works as relying on stereotypical descriptions of Puerto Rican island culture as machista, backward, and community-oriented in stark contrast with the U.S., ‘the utopia of the mature female protagonist's liberatory exile’ (p. 141). Such liberation ‘involves the projection of all individual socioeconomic self-sufficiency, self-imposed as class-motivated exile from the Boricua community, and the rather uncanny ability to pick one's cultural baggage at will’ (p. 141). She acknowledges that the protagonist's identity dilemmas triggered by life in the U.S. are depicted as complex and painful. However, she argues that the way they are portrayed ‘proposes alienation as both a symptom and a cure for the protagonist's

disaffection with [her] cultural legacies', which are rejected as obsolete (pp. 141-42).

'[I]n the twenty-one years [she] lived with [her] mother' Santiago learned 'not to attach value to possessions because they were as temporary as the walls that held [her] for a few months' (AW, p. 1). Her Puerto Ricanness, however, she does not –cannot, or would not- leave behind despite the confusion and exhaustion caused by circumstances in the U.S. –which are certainly not utopic in her narrative. Santiago is and is not the Puerto Rican she was, while Puerto Rico is and is not the country it was before 1898. Rodríguez Vecchini perceptively contends that contemporary island and mainland Puerto Ricans 'have also stopped being *jíbaros*, those who wished to be literary *jíbaros* as much as those descending from the *jíbaro* of the countryside'¹⁰⁰ (p. 159), adding that Santiago too is a contemporary Puerto Rican even if immersed in an anglophone culture. After rejecting national and cultural essentialisms and highlighting the difficulty of stating accurately what Puerto Ricanness meant once and what it means nowadays, Rodríguez Vecchini points out 'that Puerto Ricans are not identical to one another, that for better or worse they are more American than yesterday, more modern, because the model of change is still the American one'¹⁰¹ (pp.159-160).

Sánchez González notes *WIWPR*'s depiction of the circumstances and consequences of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico as well as the examination of social and racial inequalities through Esmeralda's experiences in New York. *WIWPR*'s epilogue, however, invalidates in her opinion those previous

100. 'también... han dejado de ser jíbaros, tanto los que han querido ser jíbaros literarios como los que descienden del jíbaro de la gleba'

101. 'que los puertorriqueños no son, entre sí, idénticos, que para bien o para mal, son más americanos que ayer, más modernos, porque el modelo del cambio sigue siendo el americano'

denouncements of the hardships and injustices faced by island and mainland Puerto Ricans. Sánchez González reads this section as ‘a quick tally of Negi’s subsequent personal successes’, arguing that she has reached ‘a privileged position’ from which she ‘may be able to reshape the world around her by revising it with her creative talents, not only for herself but for others as well’, but ‘we never hear of how or whether such transformations will happen’ (p. 158). One could contend that Santiago does indeed change lives with her art, even if it is merely by the fact that the popularisation of her success dismantles preconceptions of Puerto Ricans as the fruit of a culture of poverty to which they are in turn necessarily destined. Besides, what *WIWPR*’s epilogue stresses is not the author’s attainment of wealth or a respectable job but her academic achievements. This point stresses the importance of education and of entering influential institutions historically out of reach for working-class Latinas.

The quotations above also treat Santiago’s memoirs as a close-ended story, a point strengthened by Sánchez González’s statement that they read ‘more like a realist novel’ (p. 153). Sánchez González does clarify that her examination of Puerto Rican life-writing does not criticise the author’s lives but their deliberate stylisation in the narratives. This stylisation involves aesthetic choices regarding ‘tone, pace, personification, setting, and dialogue’ as well as plot construction with ‘the calculated emphasis, understatement, or omission of the multiple possibilities intrinsic to any life story’ (p. 12). However, one of autobiography’s premises is the author and protagonist’s “real” life continues beyond the point at which the narrative ends, and one wonders what stops Santiago from continuing the depiction of her life narrating later experiences that

would change the perspectives from which *WIWPR* and *AW* are read and evaluated.

I believe that both writers' and readers' attitudes towards autobiography and the novel are still substantially different, despite contemporary awareness of the narrative manipulations involved in the former, which make it difficult to set clear-cut boundaries between the two genres. Santiago takes a risk by not toning down her younger self's individualism and flaws, as well as by not "compensating" for these with a mature author's apology for past weaknesses and lack of social activism. From an autobiographer's point of view, this could have been felt as being untruthful in the portrayal of herself, an ethical question not faced by the novelist. From the readers' and critics' perspective, the resulting portrayal of Puerto Ricans may appear clichéd and offensive.

Sánchez González has considered Santiago's *WIWPR* together with Monteflores's *Cantando Bajito* and Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun* as 'very sneaky [sic] texts' articulating 'too many internally racist-sexist attitudes to speak progressively and productively as allegories for the community at large' (p. 159). These judgments seem to be confirmed by Santiago's interview statements that Puerto Rican culture is connected with 'why Puerto Ricans are not further ahead' than other U.S minorities (Hernández, p. 167). Santiago mentions being told by a boss in Puerto Rico after her return there that 'You can have ten Harvard degrees, but you're still a woman in Puerto Rico' (Hernández, p. 162). She also notices that she was 'assertive and if you're assertive you're not feminine in Puerto Rico. American women got rid of that thirty years ago' (Hernández, p. 167). She adds that 'people are taught... not to be disrespectful' while 'to be successful you have to be disrespectful to a certain point, especially

in the American community, where the symbols of respect are... very different' (Hernández, p. 167). The question arising from the contrast between the positions of Santiago and Sánchez González is whether and how an upwardly mobile "Americanised" U.S. Puerto Rican is entitled to offer criticism on the country that she left behind: is she an outsider or an insider? If her memoirs are mainstreamed, failed allegories, for whom are they so?

Santiago tackles these matters, stating her commitment to depict the multi-faceted quality of Puerto Rican culture (Hernández, p. 169). She describes *WIWPR* as 'a documentary on paper' (Hernández, p. 169), adding that '[i]t was not only [her]experience but an experience that a lot of immigrants are facing...: if you leave your "village", your village is going to know you left and they are going to challenge you' (Hernández, p. 163). This "village", apart from Macún to where she returns with such unsettling personal consequences, also functions as a metaphor for the working-class New York Puerto Rican environment which she "abandons" physically and through her professional success and upward mobility. However, despite the objections that may arise within these communities regarding Santiago's participation and representation of them she still claims membership, thus refashioning the very nature of these collectives.

Santiago has come to realise that there are 'degrees of Puerto Ricanness', observing: 'in Puerto Rico the people couldn't tell me what a Puerto Rican was. They could tell me what a Puerto Rican was not, and I was one of those who wasn't' (Hernández, p.164). She, in turn, had judged Puerto Rico 'not Puerto Rican enough', and notes that Americans 'find it a lot easier to know what Puerto Rican culture is than to know what American culture is' (Hernández, p. 166). Santiago thus suggests that culture can only be defined relationally, through

contrast (Hernández, p. 166). Accepting different degrees and ways of being Puerto Rican allows her to comprehend the varied experiences of both island and mainland Puerto Ricans. She feels Puerto Rican; if someone does not consider her so, 'it's their problem' and 'they're going to have to deal with the Puerto Rican that [she is]' (Hernández, p.165).

When reassessing her cultural identity, Santiago does not adopt self-defining terms used by U.S. people of Puerto Rican descent such as "Nuyorican", '[i]nitially a derisive word, popular among insular Puerto Ricans for demeaning mainland-born or -raised Puerto Ricans', which was 'appropriated in the early 1970s by avant-garde poets in New York City' (Sánchez González, p. 1). The term has come to describe mainly 'Puerto Ricans in and of New York', not all of whom favour being described that way (Hernández, p.14). Santiago stresses that her works are 'about a different kind of Puerto Rican, who is not circumscribed [sic] to the ghetto or to New York' (Hernández, p. 166), affirming: 'That's where I'm heading with the things I'm writing about... people keep thinking of us as a group in the ghettos of New York or Chicago, yet we are all over' (Hernández, pp.166-167). She also adds that, not living in New York City, she is not connected with a community of writers or with the general Puerto Rican community there (Hernández, p. 161), although she is friends with Puerto Rican author Nicholasa Mohr. After leaving New York she went to Texas and Syracuse, none of which 'were Puerto Rican communities', which made her feel 'outside of that experience' and consider that 'the Puerto Rican community was whatever [she] brought with [herself]' (p. 162).

While arguably fairly conventional in structure and style, Santiago's memoirs show how controversial a particular woman's reshaping of her cultural

identity –and, with it, of the communities to which she claims membership- can prove even in these postmodern times. It is a basic tenet in the realm of theory to acknowledge the subject’s multiple, shifting positionalities together with the increasing destabilisation of traditional notions of geo-national belonging. Santiago’s writing, however, exposes the potential problems of doing so in (literary) practice: being cast as an exotic/exoticised Other, as an insider or an outsider, as a “hero” or a “traitor”, simultaneously by different collectives. *WIWPR* and *AW* trigger interesting questions regarding the literary and identity parameters of an upwardly mobile writer in the context of a culture –such as the U.S. Puerto Rican- historically connected to the working-class economic immigrant. This, and the condition of the “ethnic” woman writer’s book as an object of commercial interest worldwide, substantially condition literary production and reception mechanisms. In Sánchez González’s words, ‘[g]one are the days when Latina writers were clearly outside the realm of commodification... the book market’s late-capitalistic logic -its simulacra of diversity, of aesthetic autonomy, and of international, gender, racial, or ethnic sensitivity- has essentially changed the playing field for contemporary women writers of color’ (p. 137). The question now is, paraphrasing Santiago, how the readers choose to deal with the Puerto Rican that she is, however they judge her literary and personal choices.

CHAPTER 6.

EBS: HAPPY STORIES, ABSENT HISTORIES

Escandón's *EBS* portrays humorously the emigration of a Mexican woman from her rural village of Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, to the border town of Tijuana and then to Los Angeles. Although the circumstances of Esperanza's journeys to the U.S. are all but usual, the border atmospheres and the various immigrants that she meets on her way to Los Angeles represent contemporary manifestations of a long history of political, economic and cultural interactions between the two countries. However, the novel celebrates these interactions without examining their often conflictive nature, namely the power differentials between Mexico and the U.S., and the cultural and ideological divergences both between and among Mexicans on each side of the border. In a related way, *EBS*'s portrayal of the hybridity of both individuals and societies obliterates the painful ways in which it is often felt and the experiences of discrimination and alienation that it might cause.

With its 760,000 square miles, Mexico is the third largest Latin American country and figures among the ten largest in the world¹⁰². It is also one of Latin America's most populated countries, and was expected to have more than 100 million inhabitants by the middle or the 1990s (Levy & Székely, p. xv). Mexicans or Chicanos also constitute the greatest Latino group in the U.S., mainly as a result of ongoing immigration waves partially explained by factors such as: the two countries' neighbour status; a long tradition of going to the U.S. and back depending on the agricultural labour demands of the Southwest; fluctuations in U.S. economy; and variations in U.S. immigration policies related

102. Daniel Levy and Gabriel Székely, *Mexico: Paradoxes of Stability and Change* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), p. 9.

to these fluctuations¹⁰³.

While the U.S. has a conspicuous influence on Mexican society, life in the former is also considerably affected by its bonds to the latter since ‘cultural penetration is very much –and increasingly so- a two-way phenomenon’ (Levy & Székely, p. 14). If its population growth continues at the present rate due to immigration and high fertility rates, Latinos –among which Mexican Americans are the most numerous group- may become the largest minority in the U.S. by 2020 (Davis, Haub & Willette, p. 3; Levy & Székely, p. 14). As Esperanza’s impressions of Tijuana and L.A. show, the socio-cultural interactions between Mexico and the U.S. are particularly evident around the border, a 2,000 mile-long frontier constituting a prominent geopolitical feature of both countries. This chapter explores the novel’s portrayal of Mexican and U.S. relations, examining the protagonist’s travels back and forth together with her impressions of the border. It also locates *EBS* in the context of the two countries’ literatures, considering how the author’s background, the protagonist’s circumstances and the narrative tone set the novel apart from the other works studied here in ways that can arguably prove problematic. In connection with these points, I also argue that Esperanza’s female empowerment and challenge of conventions are far less drastic than they seem.

103. Cary Davis, Carl Haub and JoAnne L. Willette, ‘U.S. Hispanics: Changing the Face of America’ in *The Hispanic Experience in the United States: Contemporary Issues and Perspectives*, eds. Edna Acosta-Belén and Barbara R. Sjostrom (New York, Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger, 1988), p. 35.

6.1. Esperanza's Mexico

The action in *EBS* initially takes place in Tlacotalpan, a humble village in Veracruz, Southern Mexico. Although no explicit dates are stated throughout the narrative, Esperanza's journey is quite likely to take place in the 1980s and early 1990s. The novel depicts various aspects of Mexican culture, also celebrating several manifestations of the intermingling of U.S. and Mexican customs, particularly in Tijuana and L.A. However, the novel gives a certain impression of atemporality due to various accumulating factors.

Tlacotalpan's descriptions and the motives and development of Esperanza's journeys to the U.S. are not given a historical perspective or connected with wider socio-economic phenomena. The time span in which the novel is set, for instance, has been a turbulent period in contemporary Mexican history, with several crises, drastic changes in rural environments and a severe decrease in living standards. Those crises are linked with economic and commercial relations with the U.S. placing Mexico in a position of neocolonial dependence¹⁰⁴, forcing it to adopt neoliberal¹⁰⁵ policies that hit the country's poorest sectors the hardest. Despite the adoption of such strict economic measures, 55 per cent of Mexicans lived in extremely precarious conditions by 1996 (Keen & Haynes, p. xiv).

These circumstances are not mentioned at all in Escandón's portrayal of Tlacotalpan. When the economic and cultural exchanges and the related people

104. Neocolonialism can be defined as 'the dependent condition of countries that enjoy formal political independence' (Keen & Haynes, p. xiii).

105. Neoliberalism 'refers to the policies of privatization, austerity, and trade liberalization accepted willingly or unwillingly by the governments of dependent countries as a condition of approval of investment, loans, and debt relief by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank' (Keen & Haynes, p. xiii).

movements between Mexico and the U.S. are acknowledged as Esperanza reaches the border areas, the narrative papers over much of the difficulty and inequality in their development. The description of the two societies generally remains clichéd, and immigration is treated more as a metaphor for self-discovery than as the harsh displacement that it means for many.

6.1.1. Filling the Historical Gaps

The complex relations between the U.S. and Mexico date back to the middle of nineteenth century, with the U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845 and the Mexican War (1846-1848). Coming from very different colonial backgrounds, the countries had not had much contact before that time (Levy & Székely, p. 184). After achieving independence after the 1810-1920 war with Spain, Mexico was not in a position of obvious inferiority regarding the U.S. Their territories had a similar extension, although Mexico's population was significantly smaller (Levy & Székely, p.184). Added to this, the country had a weak economy in need of capital due to debt, bankruptcy and absence of sound commercial relations with European markets (Levy & Székely, p. 24). Not having experienced Mexico's deep economic and political unrest, the U.S. had reached a vastly superior situation by the middle of the century.

After a substantial immigration of U.S. settlers to the territory, Texas declared itself independent from Mexico and was annexed by the U.S. in 1845. The annexation and the latter's wishes to obtain the lands of California and New Mexico as well led to a two-year war resulting in a victory which 'represented

the ascent of the United States as an active –or overactive- international power’ (Levy & Székely, p. 185), making Mexico lose approximately half its lands. Although the treaty stated that the civil and property rights of Mexicans living in what had become U.S. territory would be respected, that promise was not fulfilled.

Since the Mexican American war, the two countries have been linked by complex economic exchanges, characterised by Mexican dependence on U.S. imports (mainly technology, machinery, and factory-made products), capital and loans, and, on the other hand, by U.S. importation of Mexican goods (principally food and raw materials) and fluctuating need of cheap Mexican labour. Being in a position of power in such unequal relations, the U.S. has frequently interfered in Mexican affairs to safeguard its own interests, for instance actively supporting, opposing or contributing to topple a long list of Mexican governments, from the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-11) to several presidencies after the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

6.1.2 The Crises of the 1980s and 1990s

As has been already mentioned, the 1980s and early 1990s, the time in which *EBS* is set, were years of economic crises for Mexico affecting relations with the U.S. These issues are absent in the descriptions of Esperanza’s life in Tlacotalpan and her trips to Tijuana and L.A. The circumstances of her displacements thus contrast with the numerous cases of Mexican migration to the U.S. triggered by the country’s economic weakness –a situation accentuated by U.S. policies. From

the mid 1950s onwards, Mexico augmented the production of goods demanding 'the importation of expensive machinery, equipment, and technical licenses from countries like the United States', something which led to imports increasingly exceeding exports (Keen & Haynes, p. 268). The country's problems worsened in the 1980s as it underwent a crisis of far-reaching consequences. After major oil and gas deposits had been found on the country's coasts, Mexico had become one of the biggest oil producers worldwide by 1980. However, maximising that production demanded expensive importation of equipment and technology, which was financed by new loans and triggered the growth of Mexico's trade deficit and inflation. At the same time, its agriculture was also experiencing an unbalance due to the increase of capital-intensive ventures dedicated to exportation, which used land and labour needed for the production of staples for internal consumption (Keen & Haynes, p. 299).

To alleviate these problems' consequences, Mexico received a loan from the International Monetary Fund in 1982 under the condition of adopting severe policies like the reduction of subsidies and the curbing of salary increases. The peso was devalued to promote exports, which made imports more expensive, worsened foreign debt and lowered real wages (Keen & Hayes, pp. 300-301). These measures were catastrophic for the country's economy, affecting the most those population sectors already experiencing hardship. Mexico's difficulties intensified after entering the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, which 'eliminated tariffs between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico over fifteen years and permitted the free flow of investment capital across borders' (Keen & Haynes, p. 304). The lifting of trade barriers proved disastrous for many Mexican small farmers unable to compete with the far lower prices of staples

brought from the U.S. This, together with agrarian reforms dividing communal lands into lots to rent or sell, forced hundreds of thousands of farmers to stop working the land. Some headed for the overpopulated cities and unemployment or underemployment, others took badly paid jobs in border factories or farms producing goods for U.S. consumption, and many emigrated to the U.S. to work there illegally.

6.2. Border Crossing: Tijuana and L.A.

While focusing primarily on Esmeralda, *EBS* also presents a variety of people on the move for various reasons. The dimension of Mexico as a receiving country is underlined through the figure of Don Arlindo, the Spanish owner of the store where Esperanza works in Tlacotalpan. Esperanza's suspicions that Blanca has been kidnapped and taken to the U.S. introduce the issue of the international traffic of women. On her way to Tijuana, Esperanza also befriends the parentless and homeless young nomad Paloma. Once there, she also meets the American judge Haynes, who travels back and forth between San Diego and Tijuana for pleasure. In that town she also meets Cacomixtle, who becomes so obsessed by her rejection of his advances that he follows her to L.A.

Esperanza first enters the U.S. without papers becoming an illegal alien, a term referring to 'persons crossing the border "without inspection" or with fraudulent documents, or overstaying a work or student visa' (Davis, Haub & Willette, p. 35). The character becomes one among the Mexicans and other Latin Americans constituting the majority of illegal immigrants to the U.S. Quoting

James D. Cockcroft, '[b]y 1984, low estimates placed the number of "illegal" immigrant workers in the United States about 4 million, while high estimates approached 10 million'¹⁰⁶. The second time that Esperanza heads towards the U.S., it is suggested that she will enter as a legal citizen after marrying Angel. This journey thus would place her among the 5 to 7 million legal immigrants expected to arrive to the country throughout the 1980s (Cockcroft, p. 211).

Although the novel shows a range of immigrants, Esperanza clearly distances herself from them, praying to God: "I'm not an immigrant, but I do want a better life with my daughter back in my own town... If I find her, I'll come back with her. If she's not there, I'll look for her elsewhere. So, don't count me as an immigrant, but help me as one" (*EBS* 162). Her unusual reasons for travelling to the U.S. also separate her from the most common factors triggering rural Mexican immigration to the country. She does not leave Tlacotalpan to escape poverty, to improve her job prospects, or because of a fascination with the American way of life. The factors triggering her journey remind the reader of the distinctiveness and individuality of each case of displacement, as Esperanza's case challenges the usual stereotypes of Mexican immigrants. However, together with the fact that she is not motivated by attaining a better lifestyle, her intention to stay in the U.S. only until she finds Blanca and her later return to the country legally, make her a kind of immigrant which U.S. audiences may find unthreatening and easy to sympathise with.

In *EBS*, the Mexico-U.S. border appears as a fluid space where physical crossings are intimately linked with socio-cultural and psychological shifts. It is the site of numerous transgressions and interactions providing new opportunities

106. James D. Cockcroft, 'The Unrecognized: Mexican Immigrant Workers and America's Future' in *The Hispanic Experience*, eds. Edna Acosta-Belén and Barbara R. Sjostrom, p. 211.

for personal freedom and reinvention. Haynes, for instance, loves the border because ‘he could be a respectable, law-abiding, and law-enforcing San Diego judge and, in a matter of minutes, become an unidentifiable being sleeping in the arms of a prostitute, in a place where no one cared if what he did was right or wrong’ (*EBS*, pp. 158-9). Tijuana is presented as the embodiment of all the myths and idealisations about the border. It is described by Esmeralda’s fellow bus passengers as ‘the largest cantina in the world’ and ‘just one huge whorehouse’ (*EBS*, p. 91). Another passenger living in Tijuana, however, strongly disagrees: ‘that’s not what it’s like... Where else can you find a bilingual Santa Claus? Or a Chinese restaurant that serves sweet and sour pork tacos?... it’s one huge whorehouse, but size is not what counts. It’s our women who make us famous’ (*EBS*, p. 91). While this statement challenges the tone of the previous ones, it also papers over the fact that such experiences of the city are affected by the individual’s gender, class, nationality, and financial possibilities, among other factors. The city’s stereotyping is developed further when the Pink Palace prostitutes tell her that ‘[t]here are no natives’, that ‘[n]obody belongs in Tijuana’ and that ‘Tijuana belongs to everybody’ (*EBS*, p. 116).

The contrasts between Esperanza and Judge Haynes suggest that the degree and price of the freedom found in crossing borders vary, depending on each individual’s circumstances. For the respectable judge Haynes, mobility is not restricted by law or lack of wealth, and the main purpose of his trip is leisure. Esperanza’s mobility the first time that she travels to the U.S., on the other hand, is conditioned by her status of ‘illegal alien’, her lack of wealth, and the nature of the trip: she has to resort to working in brothels, peep-shows and disreputable travel agencies to look for Blanca.

However, Esperanza's plight is not representative of that of the majority of Mexican immigrants, since '[i]f tourism is the principal factor motivating U.S. citizens to cross the border, the principal factor for Mexicans is work' (Levy & Székely, p. 211). Due to her good luck, she enters the U.S. fairly easily and her return to Mexico is equally unproblematic, free from the hardships of deportation, financial worries or any concern about the future. Esperanza marvels at 'how easy it was to cross back, as opposed to going into the United States... The immigration officers seemed to be happy to see all those Mexicans wilfully going back home' (*EBS*, p. 232).

If the descriptions of border crossing and border towns are considerably stylised, the cultural interactions taking place in those spaces are also celebrated without contemplating the problems often experienced by the people living that multiculturalism. Like the portrayals of Tijuana examined above, this unqualified celebratory tone also obliterates the fact that such cultural exchanges do not always occur on equal terms. The first embodiment of border cultures found by Esperanza is a statue of Juan Soldado, 'the unofficial patron saint and protector of illegal immigrants' (*EBS*, p.115), that she buys in Tijuana. When she remarks Juan Soldado is not known in southern Mexico, she is told that he is 'a Tijuana original. A martyr. An underdog' (*EBS*, p. 156). The situation and concerns of such underdogs, however, are never examined in detail, something evidenced by the clichéd depictions of prostitutes at the Pink Palace mentioned above.

The same unreserved celebration of multiculturalism pervades Esperanza's time in L.A., California. California is the U.S. state with the highest number of Hispanics, 4.5 million constituting 19 percent of its population according to the 1980 census (Davis, Haub & Willette, p. 17). An 80 percent of the 2.065.727

Hispanics in the area of Los Angeles-Long Beach –Esperanza’s destination and the territory with the greatest concentration of Hispanics- were of Mexican descent (Davis, Haub, & Willette, p. 19). Added to omnipresent toponyms and signs in Spanish, the first manifestation of the two cultures’ amalgamation is the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe found by Esperanza in an L.A. church, ‘formed by a composite of snapshots of the original painting hanging from the altar at the shrine of Mexico city’ (*EBS*, p. 229). It ‘looked fragmented but whole at the same time’; it was ‘a modern interpretation, different from what [she] had seen, but she liked it’ (*EBS*, p. 229).

A second embodiment of the place’s multiculturalism is the dance club to which Angel takes her the night they meet, a place ‘filled with young Mexican immigrants’ and displaying a ‘whole year’s worth of holidays reflected in the many mirrors that covered the walls’:

The ceiling had Valentine’s Day hearts and cupids. Saint Patrick’s Day four-leaf clovers, pots of gold, and leprechauns. Mexican Independence Day flags and ornaments. Halloween witches and ghosts. Día de los Muertos papier-maché skeletons and sugar skulls. Christmas stockings, pinatas, Santa Clauses, and reindeer cutouts’ (*EBS*, p. 206).

Angel is the personification of these cultural mixtures, having left Chihuahua to train in Mexico City and then have a successful career in Mexican wrestling in L.A. When Esperanza observes that he is ‘more gringo than a cheeseburger with fries’, he answers: ‘Yeah, but with a lot of jalapenos. I can’t just stop being Mexican, so I’ve become amphibious. I go back and forth from Mexican to American, depending on the situation’ (*EBS*, p. 224). His words fail to acknowledge that in a racially conscious society where one does not belong to what is seen as the mainstream culture, those shifts between “being American”

and “being Mexican” can be strongly determined by other people’s perceptions and prejudices. His words also blot out the fact that “becoming amphibious” often involves long and painful negotiations at personal, social and cultural levels.

6.3. Cultural and Literary Contexts

Contrasting with the other authors studied here, Escandón left Mexico as an adult having formed herself professionally and with several short stories published there. Escandón’s background and authorial standpoint, added to the thematics of some of her other work (her short story ‘The Christ of Iztapalapa’, for instance) place her more as a Mexican writer living in the U.S. than as a Mexican American one in the sense that Alvarez, García, and Santiago can be considered Dominican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican American writers, respectively. Moreover, despite its concern with women’s empowerment, *EBS* does not show the characteristics that have come to be expected in Mexican American fiction: a marked social awareness and a working class background and consciousness. I will now offer a brief literary contextualisation of the links of *EBS* with Chicana literature to provide a better understanding of its specificities.

As has been previously outlined, there is a long history of Mexican presence in the U.S. As Nicolás Kanellos reminds us,

there was a Hispanic literature in existence north of the Rio Grande before the United States was ever founded, and it was the political and geographic expansion of the United States that eventually resulted in the Hispanic literary tradition becoming encompassed within territories and states of the United States. (p. 1)

‘[E]ven in the nascent American republic’, Kanellos adds, ‘there were already Hispanic publications and literature as early as the 1820s’ (p. 1). Mexican American literature gained particular momentum in the 1960s and 1970s with the works of authors such as Rudolfo Anaya or Rolando Hinojosa during a Chicano Renaissance closely connected with the Chicano civil rights, labour, and student movements of the time.

While historically less conspicuous for socio-cultural reasons, there is also a long tradition of Mexican American women’s narratives receiving increasing scholarly attention. In Tey Diana Rebolledo’s words, ‘[t]he number of known texts written by Mexican American women in the United States between 1848 and 1960 is very small’, since ‘[i]n the early years (1848-1919)’ they usually ‘were unable to read or write unless they came from wealthy families’¹⁰⁷. ‘Although much is lost’, Rebolledo adds, ‘more and more material written by Hispanic women... is coming to light’ as a ‘culture of silence... until the Chicano Renaissance of the late 1960s effectively obscured these women who did write and who, for the most part, remain unread and unpublished’ (p. 11). She identifies several sources of Chicana literature in oral histories from California and the Southwest gathered by the historian Hubert B. Bancroft in the 1870s, oral stories and folktales recorded by the Federal Writers’ Project in the 1930s and 1940s, creative material appearing mainly in newspapers in Spanish from the 1870s onwards, and material published in English, mainly between 1920 and 1950 (pp. 11-12). Three figures stand out from the 1930s to the 1950s: New Mexican Hispanas Fabiola Cabeza de Vaca Gilbert, Nina Otero-Warren,

107. Tey Diana Rebolledo, *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Tucson & London: the University of Arizona Press, 1995), p. 11.

and Cleofas Jaramillo (Rebolledo, p. 29).

If in the 1960s the Chicano power movement attained a certain visibility and self-pride for Mexican Americans, it failed to ‘critically examine the patriarchal consciousness of the dominant system’, which ‘led to internal power disputes and to the creation of a cultural nationalism that duplicated the hierarchical power structures it opposed’ (Quintana, p. 19). Consequently, during the 1970s Chicanas experienced difficulties within their ethnic communities as they undertook a feminist examination of their sexuality and gendered identities. As Norma Alarcón states, their exploration of gender was complicated further by ‘[t]he supposed contradictory position of women of color, one that was between a male-identified class liberation struggle and a middle- or upper-class, white, female-identified sexual liberation struggle’¹⁰⁸.

In the 1980s, Mexican American women’s writing experienced a boom – in which Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* (1984) was perhaps the most prominent work- and has enjoyed an ongoing popularity. Among the fiction writers having achieved international recognition by critics and readers alike figure Ana Castillo, Denise Chávez, and Helena María Viramontes, among others. Simultaneously, Mexican American scholars and critics such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga have also attained widespread acknowledgment in the last three decades. However, in the mid 1990s Chicana scholars Tey Diana Rebolledo and Alvina Quintana pointed out the still scarce number of works of literary criticism by Chicanas on Chicana literature apart from anthologised essays. Rebolledo estimated that ‘Chicana literary critics in the United States

108. Norma Alarcón, ‘The Sardonic Powers of the Erotic in the Work of Ana Castillo’ in *Chicana Critical Issues*, eds. Norma Alarcón, Rafaela Castro, Emma Pérez, Betriz Pesquera, Adaljiza Sosa Riddell and Patricia Zavella (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993), p. 5.

remain a small group, probably numbering about twenty' at the time of her writing (p.1).

Apart from encompassing an increasingly wide range of themes and styles, the literature of people of Mexican descent in the U.S. includes the works of socio-historically different groups. As has already been mentioned, the Mexican population of the area that became the U.S. Southwest was there from the very beginning, and the numbers of people of Mexican background in the country have grown dramatically in successive waves of ongoing immigration. The former and latter groups show differences in authorial standpoint and thematic concerns, differences also present between first, second or third generation immigrants¹⁰⁹. Even within first generation immigrants, divergences in the choice and treatment of contents can be found between those who arrived in the U.S. as adults, "one-and-a-halfers" –to extrapolate the terminology introduced in Chapter 3- or little children.

The classification of the work of Escandón, a first-generation immigrant who arrives in the U.S. as an adult, is hindered by the fact that Chicana and Mexican American literature are often used as interchangeable terms, despite the different connotations of each. The term "Chicana" itself can '[signify] a specific ethnic or political identity or both' (Quintana, p. 13). Dating back to the early days of Mexican immigration to the U.S. at the beginning of the twentieth century, Chicano 'meant working-class Mexican immigrant' (Kanellos, p. 8). During the 1960s it was reclaimed by the Mexican American civil rights, labour and student movement to refer to politically aware Mexican Americans

109. Such differences can be clearly perceived by contrasting, for instance, Denise Chávez's novels *Face of an Angel* (1994) and *Loving Pedro Infante* (2001), set in New Mexico, Escandón's *EBS*, and second/third generation immigrant Michele Serros's *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* (2000).

(Kanellos, p. 8). As a result, not all Mexican American writers will necessarily see themselves as Chicanos, an expression with specific political overtones (Horno-Delgado et al., p. xiii). In this sense, while *EBS* could be considered to form part of Mexican American literature because of its author's immigration and its themes, considering it as Chicana writing could prove problematic.

6.4. Bad Girls, Good Girls, and Esperanza

Esperanza's journey reveals that the pious widow leading an ordered life until her daughter's disappearance is a woman full of courage, faith and good luck, aspects of herself that she was previously unaware of. In her search for Blanca, she works as a cleaning lady, a prostitute and a peep-show performer, frequents disreputable environments, runs risks, and gives herself to a new passionate lover. While she transgresses several taboos about women's gender roles, "proper" behaviour and sexuality, the circumstances and the end of her journey portray her as a much less radical figure than it seems.

The descriptions of the places that she lives in throughout the novel are often closely related to the different stages in Esperanza's evolution, connoting personal changes together with her shifting social roles and status. In Tlacotalpan, the main settings are her house, the hardware store where she works, the shops, Blanca's school, and the local church. These spaces both mark and reflect her situation as a working women, a housewife (first married and then a widow), and a mother in a Catholic community. The family house where she lives first with husband Luis and then with Blanca and her friend Soledad

appears depicted in particular detail. The building 'had stood for over two hundred years silently witnessing the lives of her family's generations. Many layers of paint covered it... Cobalt blue wrought-iron posts guarded the windows, anticipating the very unlikely possibility of a break-in' (*EBS*, p. 24). This depiction suggests that Esperanza occupies a personal and social space which, though familiar and comforting, also connotes restrictions and a need for renewal. The extent to which she understands her life in terms of her status as a widow is underlined through several references to the house's appearance: like Esperanza's existence, its colours, chosen by Luis, had remained unaltered since his death.

The kitchen, the domestic space traditionally associated with women, is depicted with special attention at a decisive time: the days following Blanca's funeral when Esperanza is grief stricken and realises the extent to which the girl's loss will alter her life. Acknowledging the untidiness of the place, she confesses: 'I would have been embarrassed if my mother had seen me. But ever since she passed away... I haven't had that feeling of embarrassment' (*EBS*, p.15). The pressure of tradition and society for Esperanza to fulfil her domestic duties in all circumstances, implied in these comments about her mother, is also evident in her impression on visitors coming to offer their condolences: they were also visiting 'to check out the kitchen', as they 'can't help but notice if you're tidy or not so they can talk behind your back' (*EBS*, p. 15).

Such portrayals of women's role in the domestic environment differ substantially from feminist re-evaluations of it as a space 'generally acknowledged to be a place of and for women... a haven in the house, a separate space where nourishment and creativity take place' (Rebolledo, p. 202).

Regarding Chicana culture, Rebolledo notes that '[w]omen are imaged as nourishers both physically and symbolically', affirming that "the concept of the writer as cook' appears as 'one area that is distinctly original' in 'the process of formulating an identity both ethnic and female' (p. 130). For Rebolledo, 'one way to express individual subjectivity (while at the same time connecting to the collective and community) is by reinforcing this female identity as someone who cooks' (p. 130).

Esperanza, contrastingly, acknowledges her failures when cooking pollo al chipotle for the funeral guests listing her mistakes: 'I can never get that sauce right... I put too much cream in the blender and it spilled over to the counter. I forgot to put onions in the chicken broth... I put in more salt than I was supposed to. I didn't take the seeds out of the peppers' (*EBS*, pp. 14-15). Since these remarks are followed by her admission of her lack of embarrassment at her domestic shortcomings since her mother's death, the impression she conveys is not so much of failing to perform her roles as a woman adequately but an awareness of the unsuitability of those tasks and environment, particularly in her circumstances following Blanca's disappearance. In the process of self-discovery underlying her search for Blanca, the kitchen does not provide the space and roles through which she can refashion her identity and negotiate the relationship between her individuality and the communal- a negotiation that, as I argue, is undertaken in fairly individualistic terms.

The dramatic transformation in Esperanza's life caused by Blanca's absence is once again conveyed through the changes in the house as seen by the protagonist's housemate Soledad: 'The whole house had suddenly become a big empty place... filled with heat and nothingness...Chairs and armoires and tables

had lost their purpose' (p. 32). No longer a mother, Esperanza too lacks purpose, and such a disruption in her world also affects Soledad. Having lived with the protagonist to offer companionship and help raise Blanca, Soledad now 'felt she didn't belong in Esperanza's house any longer' although 'if Esperanza was losing her mind, she would have to stay and take care of her' (p. 32). Losing Blanca also alters drastically Esmeralda's position in the community, exemplified by her participation in the girls' school activities: 'I'm in charge of publicity for the carnival coming up... I was supposed to get a new assignment at the next meeting, only now I have no daughter enrolled in the school. I won't have to go to meetings anymore' (*EBS*, p.18). The distressed protagonist's resilience, however, is announced with another reference to the house which, although undergoing cycles of destruction and renewal brought by yearly floods, has been prepared to endure the expected event (*EBS*, p. 59). This parallels the changes that Esperanza will go through the novel by taking initiatives again and opening herself to potential risks and losses.

Looking for Blanca, Esperanza enters social and psychological spaces traditionally assigned to "bad women" who make decisions by themselves and flaunt or trade in their sexuality. Rebolledo elaborates on the stereotype describing "bad women" as '[m]ujeres andariegas, mujeres callejeras, women who wander and roam, women who walk around, women who journey'; the terms 'imply restlessness, wickedness', since '[t]hese are women who don't stay at home tending to their husbands, children, parents. The terms suggest women without respect for other people' (*Women Singing*, p.183). These 'negative cultural stereotypes', Rebolledo adds, 'result from a patriarchal culture that wills women to be passive, self-denying, and nurturing to others' (*Women Singing*,

p.183).

The novel, however, makes it clear that Esperanza never ceases to be a “good” woman; she fails –or rather, never attempts- to subvert the dichotomy “good” woman/ “bad” woman, and her actions are far less groundbreaking than they seem. To start with, her faith and good luck save her from all the potential risks she faces in her search for Blanca. She narrowly escapes being raped by a patron at the motel where she works as a cleaner, she avoids Cacomixtle’s harassment in Tijuana and L.A., and, when working as a prostitute, her client judge Haynes buys her exclusivity without seeking to have sex with her. She never has to lose her principles or virtue, and when she finally has a sexual relationship it is with a man who loves her, whom she loves, and who will become her husband at the end of the novel.

As I have mentioned before, it is made clear that Esperanza ‘does not really count’ as an immigrant the first time she enters the U.S. Similarly, her circumstances set her apart from other fellow prostitutes in the Pink Palace, who are portrayed rather stereotypically. The factors that drove them to prostitution are hinted at as Esperanza gathers how Morena had been abused by her father as a little girl, Casimira had had a tragic love affair, La Mojadita ‘had been given away by her grandfather at age six to an old aunt who made her sell Kleenex and chewing gum to motorists on the street in order to pay for her room and board’, and Flaca ‘had killed the man she loved, entirely by accident’ (*EBS*, p.145). The reason that led Esperanza to work as a prostitute, however, is neither abandonment, abuse, or destitution but the good cause of finding her daughter Blanca. Esperanza befriends some of her colleagues after she hears them gossip and laugh the first time she meets them: she ‘hadn’t heard anyone laugh like that

in a long time... These women were actually having fun, and she felt a sharp, sudden need to be included' (*EBS*, p.116). However, she does not share or acquire the vulgarity of their speech and appearance, and when she leaves the Pink Palace she remains unscathed by her experiences. What is more, her lover Angel does not judge her negatively because of them, since '[h]e knew Esperanza had worked as a prostitute, but he also knew she wasn't one. It didn't take a detective to know that' (*EBS*, p. 252). It is also indicated that her stint at the Pink Palace has been enriching and liberating in a way, since 'she would never have walked up to El Angel Justiciero that night at the arena if she hadn't met those other men first' (*EBS*, p. 252).

In Rebolledo's words, wandering women are perceived as a threat and portrayed negatively in patriarchal societies since 'they cross boundaries' not being bound 'by societally construed morals, nor cultural practices', and therefore they must be 'those wicked sexual women seen as *putas*, or prostitutes... and worse, perhaps they don't need a man' (p. 183). As we have seen, though, Esperanza is not only bound by societally construed norms but almost embodies them; she only breaks them to find Blanca. While she is sensual, she only becomes sexually involved with two men who she truly loves and who love her back. She knows that Luis and Angel are the ones for her from the very moment of meeting them. Added to this, Esperanza reveals herself as brave and resourceful, but she never appears as demanding or self-satisfying. Although she does not seem to need another man after Luis's death, it is arguably because his presence still pervades all aspects of her life in Tlacotalpan. When she finds Angel, this new relationship seems to come as a recompense for the hardships undergone while looking for Blanca. Her abnegation is such that she is

willing to forfeit him to return to Tlacotalpan when she discovers that that is where the dead Blanca will manifest herself to her. Again, her sacrifice is rewarded as Angel follows her and convinces her to travel with him to L.A. also taking with them the bathroom tiles where Blanca makes her apparitions. The novel hints that their union will be sanctioned through marriage in Tijuana ‘so [she] can enter the country illegally’ (*EBS*, p. 250).

Throughout the novel, Esperanza rejects several men who attempt to objectify her by trapping her in passive roles as a sexual, romantic, exotic or mother figure (*EBS*, pp. 25-26 & 124). Angel, who accepts her past and her faith in saints, initially seems her ideal and equal partner. However, his thoughts about her sound as stereotyped and conventional as her other previous suitors’. We are told that, ‘[t]o him, she was like the soil of a rainforest, an enchantress, opulent and fecund... exuberant... plentiful’; these words expressing his love for her ‘were the only words he could think of aside from marriage, home, children’ (*EBS*, p. 212). He also imagines her ‘sleeping in his bed, immobile and peaceful. A child with no guilt’ (*EBS*, p. 251). Such terms of endearment image her in the dependent and vulnerable position assigned to women in patriarchal cultures.

Taking into account these points, Esperanza’s journey cannot be properly considered one of empowerment, unless such empowerment is understood as only partial. Her actions apparently destabilise “good” woman/ “bad” woman dichotomies, but under a closer look they never really reject conventions: the narrative makes it clear that she never ceases to be a “good” woman despite the difficult decisions that she has to make searching for Blanca. While she abandons the role of respectable wife, mother and widow, it is for a noble cause, and she is finally rewarded by finding her daughter in spirit form and finding true love

again. As a strong, independent figure of transgression, Esperanza shows considerable shortcomings. Besides, her endless good luck, her saints' active presence in her life, the lack of impact of bad experiences on her, and the way in which her plight is set apart from that of other immigrants and women make her impossible to follow as a role model, inspiring and exhilarating as her story might be.

6.5. Conclusion

EBS constitutes a humorous celebration of Mexican and Mexican American culture which, with its optimistic and light-hearted tone, sometimes arguably comes close to cliché and (self?) parody. A lack of socio-historical contextualisations gives a certain atemporality to its portrayal of Mexico as well to its depiction of immigration and life at the border. Its lack of engagement with the concerns of wider collectives (women, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Latinas, and immigrants, for instance) is accentuated by the many ways in which the protagonist's case is set apart from the situation of those around her. Well-written, warm and funny, Escandón's narrative can arguably be best described as a fable or an uplifting tale in terms of genre, themes and style. How *EBS* is evaluated, then, will depend greatly on how one understands the function of literature in society, a problem particularly complex in the case of authors seen as "ethnic" or as members of "minorities". Similarly, whether the reader takes into account the author's specific background when judging her use of specific themes, style and tone will also prove determinant, together with the literary

parameters and contexts chosen to locate her work.

Of the writers examined here, Escandón is the only one that left her country voluntarily and as an adult. This arguably makes her more a Mexican writer living in the U.S. than a Mexican American/ Chicana one in the sense in which Alvarez, Santiago and García have been considered, respectively, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban American in terms of cultural and literary identity. Also, and in connection to this last point, those who leave their country as adults already formed culturally and professionally experience perhaps less confusion –or, at least, a different kind of confusion- when having to renegotiate their identity in a new society than those arriving there as teenagers or children, or being born there to immigrant parents. Besides, Escandón seems to have lived fairly comfortably both in Mexico and once in the U.S., a factor that may make more understandable the narrative's obliteration of the traumatic experiences that physical, social, cultural, and linguistic displacements entail for many immigrants.

Similarly, an author's society and culture lend themselves more likely to literary ambivalences, parody, pastiche, and light humour the more established and plural they are, as is the case of the two traditions in between which *EBS* is placed. Mexican literature occupies a prominent position in Latin American letters, having also achieved recognition worldwide. Mexican American writing, in turn, is the oldest and most established about the emergent U.S. Latino/a literatures. As the diversity in authorial backgrounds widens, the kinds and degrees of social commitment and the political consciousness in Mexican American works will increase accordingly.

PART III.

LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION

The previous chapters have dwelled on the narratives' varying concerns with their main characters' cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Chapters 7 and 8 will deal with the role of language in the self-representation of the characters of Alvarez, García, Santiago and Escandón. An important part of the characters' linguistic identity is their status as Spanish-speakers in the U.S., and, in the case of the protagonists of Alvarez and García, as near-native speakers of English when in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. In this sense, the characters could be considered "linguistic hybrids" in that they need both English and Spanish to fully convey who they are. However, a consideration of the presence of Spanish in the texts makes it clear that they are written primarily in English with Spanish occupying a secondary position. If they are considered bilingual discourses it will be because they deal with two languages and cultures shaping their protagonists' identity and not because they are written in Spanish and English more or less equally.

At a thematic level, while Spanish is the mother tongue of the narratives' protagonists, for Pilar Puente and Yolanda García it is not the language that they speak best or most frequently, paralleling their conflicts with their mothers and their adult distance from their mother-cultures. As the mother tongue also connotes intimacy and true expression of one's feelings, I will consider how these associations intersect with questions of class, gender, age, and emigration in the authors' writings. I will also observe how this alleged intimacy and expressiveness contrast with the works' generally basic use of Spanish entries. Entries in other languages are much less frequent than Spanish ones. However, while scarce, these linguistic and cultural allusions point to the interactions between different countries or social groups and stress the resulting heterogeneity

of cultures, national populations, and characters' identities. Subsequently, I will consider their importance and distribution in the works without listing them comprehensively.

When including terms in other languages in their writing, authors have two main options. The first is making foreign concepts and practices understandable to monolingual, monocultural readers. The other is to leave these references unexplained placing monolingual, monocultural readers in the position of "outsiders" and forcing them to educate themselves if they want to understand those allusions. There are various possible degrees of explanation like clarifying a term partially, making its meaning obvious from the context, or giving an English equivalent. The works I am studying usually translate foreign entries and cultural allusions at least partially, indicating their general meaning. Only a few expressions are left without explanation, and these seldom play central roles in characterisation or plot development. The frequency and degree of translation ensure that, while monolinguals might feel like "the Other", they are not placed as "outsiders". Linguistic and cultural explanations familiarise this public with the characters' and authors' backgrounds, rather than making them educate themselves.

In these chapters, I am not judging whether the authors should have made a different use of non-English entries. I am not considering how "authentically" their writings portray other languages, or how "authentic" they become as Latina works. Such questions depend on each author's linguistic ability and personal choices as well as on the readers' varying perceptions. Although I borrow terminology from both disciplines, my approach is literary rather than linguistic or sociolinguistic, examining mainly how linguistic and cultural allusions fulfil

certain functions in the works' structure and thematic development. Chapter 8 gives an overview of the representation and roles of the different languages and cultures dealt with in the works, while Chapter 9 focuses more specifically on the Spanish entries studying their main semantic fields together with their translation.

CHAPTER 7

ROLES AND CONNOTATIONS OF ENGLISH, SPANISH, AND OTHER LANGUAGES.

Spanish, both as a theme and as a group of entries, fulfils various narrative functions. On the one hand, Spanish expressions have a mimetic purpose creating a “realist” effect in the depiction of Spanish-speakers’ environments and interactions. Thus, the works show more Spanish entries when dealing with Spanish-speaking settings and characters. While some entries appear in several works, the particularities of the Spanish used in each also convey the fact that Latinos are not a homogeneous group ethnically, culturally or linguistically.

References to Spanish also add an exotic “colour”, particularly for monolinguals. In that sense, using Spanish contributes to the narratives’ successful commercialisation as pieces of Latina writing. Spanish expressions can also increase the dramatic quality of a particular scene or statement for these readers. Leaving terms hermetic, translating them partially, or delaying their explanation creating suspense might make monolinguals both feel curious and experience their “otherness”, even when the texts are primarily addressed to English-speaking Americans. Bilingual audiences do not gain much privileged access to the narratives: ‘[p]aradoxical as it may sound, the bilingual readers lose from knowing Spanish, while the monolingual reader wins from not knowing it’¹¹⁰. The explanations that for monolingual readers put an end to suspense and acquire an ethnographic value, for bilinguals can awkwardly repeat the obvious. This is illustrated for instance by the construction ‘Papa Pio the Pope’ in Santiago’s *WIWPR*, which offers both the English and Spanish terms for the head of the Catholic church in redundant proximity, and ‘El Ratoncito Mickey Mouse’ in *AW*, another iterative construction reading for the bilingual reader as ‘the little mouse Mickey Mouse’.

110. Ernst Rudin, *Tender Accents of Sound: Spanish in the Chicano Novel in English* (Tempe: Bilingual Press/ Editorial Bilingüe, 1996), p. 225.

The strangeness that references in and to Spanish can produce in monolinguals also parallels the characters' process of learning English –albeit without the pressure to learn the new language, the consequences of not learning it well or quickly enough and the prejudices the latter experience. Also, quoting Rudin concerning several Chicano works, '[t]he switch from Spanish to English not only marks a division in the life of most protagonists; the two languages bring about divisions between characters' (p. 44). Language is a marker of ethnicity together with racial identification, also denoting divisions along socio-economic lines. The narrative opposition of the two languages serves as an analogy of the Anglo superpower vs. weaker Latin American countries under its colonial and neo-colonial influence in various ways and degrees. In U.S. settings, command of Spanish not only differentiates Latinos from Anglos, but also Americanised Latinas such as Alvarez's García girls or García's Pilar from their island relatives and from older generations within their U.S. families. It can also convey disparities between poor or working classes and higher-status or intellectual sectors both within U.S. Latinos and within Latin American societies.

Allusions to Spanish thus contribute greatly to characterization, sometimes through the evocation of clichés. Rudin observes the different values assigned to each language and states that 'Spanish vs. English marks in the texts love vs. business, the private vs. the public sphere, emotion vs. reason' and childhood vs. adulthood (p. 56). English is presented as a demanding and 'hard' language also seen as 'active' in that 'it takes you somewhere' (pp. 53-54). Spanish, on the contrary, is described as 'soft' and 'beautiful' (Rudin, p. 53), tends to be idealised and has more emotional and passive connotations (Rudin, p. 54).

Alvarez, Santiago and García counterbalance these perceptions inverting the associations given to each and showing that no connotations can be considered automatically and a priori more characteristic of one or the other. Although Spanish is seen as the “private” language contrasting with the “public” functions of English, many of the characters use both the latter and the former at home. If Spanish could be considered “the language of childhood” for Yolanda, Pilar, and Esmeralda, the first two - particularly Pilar- speak English much more fluently; this is also the language in which their early years are remembered and conveyed. Similarly, the narratives illustrate that the “empowering” language allowing one to “go places” varies according to individual circumstances and to where one wishes to go. In Santiago’s memoirs learning English runs parallel to academic and career development, while Pilar and Yolanda seek to reconnect with their mother tongue, carving a hybrid space out of the two languages as the condition for personal and artistic fulfilment. Added to this, the works do not present Spanish and English as monolithic entities but explore the different connotations and socio-historical backgrounds associated with various varieties of each.

An added function of Spanish entries is its significance as a political statement. The linguistic and cultural references to different Spanish-speaking countries express the intricate subjectivities of the protagonists of Santiago, Alvarez and García. While primarily American, they experience other cultures as integral components of this Americanness instead of considering them mutually exclusive. Spanish entries and allusions to Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican ways of life also place the narratives as pieces of American literature written in English but with other linguistic and geo-political referents figuring prominently

in their discourse. The works' validation of bilingualism both in the characters' U.S. lives and as a narrative strategy –however restricted- becomes particularly relevant in the context of '[m]ovements like English only, English First, and English Plus', the November 1986 referendum that declared English to be California's official language, the ensuing similar referenda in other states, and the ongoing controversy about bilingual education', events which 'indicate that the relationship between English and Spanish in the United States is not a neutral one' (Rudin, p. 6).

7.1. Spanish vs. English in García's *DC* and *TAS*

García's *DC* and *TAS* explore the importance of language in the configuration of national and cultural identities focusing on Cuban-American subjectivities. The topic is introduced at the very beginning of *DC* as Celia conveys Pilar's loss of her Cuban heritage by noting that the young woman 'writes to her from Brooklyn in a Spanish that is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw dice on green felt or asphalt' (*DC*, p. 7). The perceived relevance of language in preserving ethnic identities is stressed once again when Javier writes to Celia from Czechoslovakia that 'he spoke Spanish to his little girl so she'd be able to talk with her grandmother someday' (*DC*, p. 118).

A related aspect of Spanish and English in *DC* is that they signify the historical tensions between the U.S. and Cuba. Their politicisation and shifting status throughout the island's evolution are evidenced and concisely summarised in the scene where Ivanito explains that he 'started learning English from Abuelo

Jorge's old grammar textbooks' dating 'back to 1919, the first year [Jorge] started working for the American Electric Broom Company. At school, only a few students were allowed to learn English, by special permission. The rest of us had to learn Russian' (*DC*, p.145).

American encouragement of Cuban exile to the U.S. at various points of Castro's government is also conveyed in relation to the role of English in determining the characters' lives. Towards the end of the novel, for instance, Ivanito presumably leaves the island by plane after Lourdes takes him secretly to the Peruvian embassy, having heard that dissenters would be allowed to leave. Ivanito's chances of contacting Lourdes from wherever he is sent to in order to join her in Brooklyn are increased by the fact that he carries 'a statement neatly printed in English' by his aunt, stating his status as 'a political refugee from Cuba', and Lourdes's address in Brooklyn and intention to sponsor him.

The perceptions of the two languages held by immigrants in the U.S. are explored mainly through Pilar, who having arrived in New York as a toddler immediately experiences how not speaking English means seeing opportunities pass her by (*DC*, p. 32). However, Pilar also notes the historical presence of Spanish in areas like Florida, which is strengthened by the Cuban exiles: 'All the streets in Coral Gables have Spanish names... as if they'd been expecting all the Cubans who would eventually live here' (*DC*, p. 60).

DC both acknowledges and dismantles nostalgic perceptions of Spanish as more expressive and sensual than English. On the one hand, Spanish has nostalgic connotations for Pilar, being the language of her childhood in Cuba with Celia. She takes this cultural heritage, not nurtured by her own mother, as the basis on which to establish connections and identify affinities. For instance,

she thanks the shopkeeper of a Brooklyn shop in Spanish after identifying him as a speaker of the language, and ‘he’s surprised and wants to chat’ (*DC*, p. 197). Using Spanish triggers a moment of mutual cultural recognition and bonding. Its association with revealing one’s deepest feelings is also underlined when Pilar, not so fluent in her mother-language as she grows up, acknowledges that she envies Lourdes’s Spanish curses since ‘[t]hey make [her own] English collapse in a heap’ (*DC*, p. 59).

Spanish acquires two roles in Pilar’s love life, to facilitate a bond with another person drawing on a shared heritage and to enable her to express herself more fully. She describes her first encounter with a boyfriend at age seventeen saying: ‘He came over and started speaking to me in Spanish (his mother is Mexican) as if he’d known me for years. I liked him right away’ (*DC*, p.134). Its status as “the language of love” is confirmed by a later relationship with Rubén, a Peruvian that she meets her first day of college at Barnard and whose family, ‘like [hers], is divided over politics’ (*DC*, p.179). Pilar depicts their love stating: ‘We speak in Spanish when we make love. English seems an impossible language for intimacy’ (*DC*, pp. 179-180). However, when she goes to Rubén’s room unexpectedly, she finds him ‘fucking the Dutch exchange student... a pale, big-bosomed woman with enormous pink nipples’ (*DC*, p. 180). When Pilar freezes in shock, it is in Spanish that Rubén tells her, ‘Maybe you should leave’ (*DC*, p. 180).

Pilar’s dilemma, not knowing Spanish well enough but feeling that English does not convey fully all that she is, can be linked to her passion for painting through which she seeks a wordless language beyond clichés (*DC*, p. 139). The connection of her linguistic in-betweenness to her attitude towards

painting is reinforced by Pilar's views regarding painting that '[t]ranslations just confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English' (*DC*, p.59).

The portrayal of Spanish and English in *TAS* follows the lines set by *DC* while adding some significant nuances of its own. English appears again as a "hard" language in Reina's experience, 'she isn't sure she she likes the way English feels in her mouth, the press of her tongue against her palate, the lacklustre *r's*' (*TAS*, p. 233). Its awkwardness is augmented by the difficulties of learning it as an adult, by the political antagonism between Cuba and the U.S., and by her conflicts with her sister Constanca. However, Reina 'wonders if her English will serve her better... than her quotidian Spanish' (*TAS*, p. 234), noting the linguistic, ideological and temperamental differences between her and her sister manifested in their respective varieties of Spanish. The end of the novel is left open, hinting that the characters might finally reach understanding and fulfilment in a new linguistic and emotional space, but without offering the reassurance that this will happen.

The perception of Spanish as a private tongue associated with home and family is problematised by these divergences in the characters' use and evaluation of both the language and Cuban reality. While Ignacio, Blanca, Constanca, Reina and Dulce all speak Spanish, they do not speak the same language. The idea of Spanish as an intrinsically sensual "language of love" is also contested throughout a narrative filled with destructive and unrequited passions. The notion is further challenged by the fact that Reina, unable to orgasm and bond emotionally with partners for a while, rediscovers these feelings in Florida with an American, English-speaking man.

The connotations of English as “the language of business” that “takes people somewhere” is also parodied by the fact that Dulce has to pretend to talk English ‘to pass for an *extranjera*’ (*TAS*, p. 55) and be allowed into hotels where she can exchange sex for dollars with tourists. Once in Spain, it is also English that enables her to meet foreign clients. However, what facilitates her move to the country is an affair with a Spaniard whom she soon abandons. Dulce’s case suggests that both languages can become “the languages of business” depending on one’s circumstances, also indicating that “business” often equates need and exploitation. Similarly, although Constancia succeeds first as a cosmetics saleswoman and then as an entrepreneur in English, it is ‘her foreign accent and precise manner’ that ‘intimidate clients into buying whatever she suggests’ (*TAS*, p. 18).

Regarding the perceptions of Spanish and English in the U.S., ‘[f]rom a North American standpoint, Spanish is a language spoken by immigrant workers and in countries that the United States has seldom regarded as nations with equal rights, but rather as its hinterland’ (pp. 5-6). *DC* and *TAS* explore the conditions causing the characters’ different evaluations of the two languages and present Spanish as a multi-faceted tongue with a rich heritage. The novels’ quotations of pieces of music and literature from the Spanish-speaking world contribute to this endeavour.

7.2. Spanish vs. English in Alvarez's *GG*, *¡Yo!*, and *Butterflies*

After their sudden move to the U.S., the Garcías see English as a “hard” language to learn matching the difficulty of adapting to the new country. Laura recalls that ‘the hardest thing coming to this country... was the language’, adding: ‘For the longest time I thought Americans must be smarter than us Latins –because how else could they speak such a difficult language’ (*¡Yo!*, p. 21). However, she changes her mind, presumably after becoming used to living in an English environment: ‘After a while, it struck me the other way. Given the choice of languages, only a fool would choose to speak English on purpose’ (*¡Yo!*, p. 21).

While Laura considers that adapting to the new language and life is easier for the girls than for herself, Yolanda challenges this view depicting learning English as a difficult skill to command that makes her socially insecure for a long time. She recalls that during her boarding school years ‘English was ... still a party favor for [her] –crack open the dictionary, find out if [she]’d just been insulted, praised, admonished, criticized’ (*GG*, p. 87). Carla goes through a similar stage in which ‘her English wa still just classroom English, a foreign language’ (*GG*, p. 156), which she ‘hated having to admit... since such an admission proved ... that she didn’t belong’ in the U.S. (*GG*, p. 156).

As for the impression created on others by a character’s faltering English, the novel illustrates how the audience’s reaction depends on the context and on their own background and personality as well as on the speaker’s. Not speaking English “properly” can put characters in a position of inferiority in front of

representatives of the authorities or legal and social institutions. Laura is very aware of that when describing the situation in the island to a social worker ‘in [her] broken English that usually cuts [her] ideas down to the wrong size’ (*Yo!*, p. 32). Similarly, when she helps Carla give evidence about an encounter with a flasher, Laura comes across as ‘a small, accented woman’s voice among the booming, impersonal American voices that interrogated her’ (*GG*, p. 158). It also makes the family the object of racist reactions like those of a neighbour who calls them “Spics” and complains to their landlord that the Garcías speak ‘too loudly and not in English’ and their children ‘[sound] like a herd of wild burros’ (*GG*, p. 170).

Lack of fluency in English can lead to being stereotyped in ways that, while not so markedly racist, provoke feelings of superiority in listeners. When Yolanda’s father visits her college to inquire about her decision to leave the course to run off with a boyfriend, his imperfect English makes the professors see him as a stereotypical ‘irate Hispanic man’ still more pathetic due to his ‘broken English’ (*Yo!*, p. 75). The negative of the Spanish “otherness” tainting his English are manifest again at Yolanda’s graduation ceremony. When her partner snatches and breaks her diploma because it does not state her adopted hippy name, Yolanda’s college mentor describes how ‘the father, who had just barely contained himself all weekend, cursed the fellow roundly in loud, furious Spanish in front of quite a crowd’ (*Yo!*, p.79).

However, to his own daughters –used to hearing him talk in Spanish, and for whom his accent in their new language has different connotations than for the English-speakers above-, Carlos’s ‘broken English’ makes his anger ‘more frightening...As if he had mutilated the language in his fury –and now there was

nothing to stand between them and his raw, dumb anger' (*GG*, p. 145). Similarly, Sofía García's reaction to her husband's accented English differs greatly from the American professors' patronizing reactions towards Carlos. Sofía explains that Otto 'has a quaint way of saying things in his German accent that makes it hard to get angry with him', wondering 'why he calls up this tender tolerance in [her] when [she is] as much a foreigner as he is' (*¡Yo!*, p. 5). The tenderness that the man's accented English awakens in her presumably arises from its connotation of shared immigrant experiences. It may also suggest that it is through English, mother-language to neither of them, that they have communicated with each other and been able to develop a relationship. *GG* also shows how the inability to express oneself and be properly understood, together with the exoticism that this might convey can be used to one's advantage. When the Garcías' maid's daughter, Sara, starts attending the same school as the girls, she is able to keep her background secret precisely due to her initial lack of command of the language and the mysteriousness this suggests (*¡Yo!*, p. 61).

Finally managing to feel at ease in English is empowering and a cause for rejoicing, as Yolanda does when she writes a speech for her school's Teacher's Day celebrations: 'her eyes fill up with tears because she finally sounded like herself in English' (*GG*, p. 143). However, proficiency in the language is not enough to avoid being patronised and stereotyped by others, as she realises when she meets her college boyfriend's parents. They talk to her 'too slowly' as if she 'wouldn't understand native speakers', and they compliment her on her 'accentless' English commenting that her parents should be proud of her (*GG*, p. 100).

In the Dominican Republic, however, it is not knowing Spanish well enough that can make characters feel vulnerable or be looked down on. Yolanda, for instance, feels powerless and threatened when two local men approach her after her car breaks down on an isolated road. Not knowing their intentions, she tries to speak in Spanish but only English comes to her mouth, which the men do not understand (*GG*, p. 20). At another point in *GG*, a member of Trujillo's police searching the de la Torres' compound hears the American consul Victor Hubbard speak on the phone in what he describes as 'his marbles-in-his-mouth Spanish' (p. 214).

Commanding English also affects professional advancement and even a slight accent can be judged against one. This is illustrated by the letter of Yolanda's college mentor recommending her for a fellowship to translate Latin American writers. After stating that '[h]er first language, Spanish, would be indispensable to her in understanding the original texts', he vouches for her competence in English adding that '[t]hough still sporting a slight accent... she had a native's intuitive grasp of the language' (*iYo!*, p. 74). Speaking good English also conveys the privileged upbringing of Dominican elites, something humorously conveyed as Dexter Hays calls Yolanda's home on the island and 'a suave man's voice answers in perfect English... as if Dexter had called one of the British islands instead of the D.R. Then it dawns on him that his is probably the uncle running for president' (*iYo!*, p. 193). The perception of English as a valuable commodity permeates Carlos's reproach to his daughters that 'he was nothing to them now' despite having 'paid to straighten their teeth and smooth the accent out of their English in expensive schools' (*GG*, p. 36)

If Spanish or its traces may confirm ethnic clichés for English-speakers,

the novel shows how non-native-speakers also have their own subjective views on certain varieties of the language. Yolanda's friend Tammy, for example, finds it amusing 'how Yo, a native Spanish speaker, thinks of southern redneck talk as affectionate English' (*¡Yo!*, p. 142). Yolanda's boyfriend Dexter Hays also plays up to these impressions while visiting her family in the Dominican Republic by 'laying the Southern accent to make himself sound more ignorant and likeable' (*¡Yo!*, p. 207).

The mother tongue's mystique is also questioned in *GG* and *¡Yo!* as the novels suggest that the characters do not necessarily express themselves more authentically or instinctively in Spanish. Yolanda herself puts forward this question as she remembers a poet's statement that 'no matter how much of it one lost, in the midst of some profound emotion, one would revert to one's mother tongue' (*GG*, p. 13). This point is further elaborated on in *¡Yo!* as Yolanda's lover Dexter Hays notes that 'Yo is as American as apple pie. Well, let's say, as American as a Taco Bell Taco. She claims the litmus test is if you say Oh or Ay when you smash your finger with a hammer. There've been plenty of times when she's bumped into something... and let out a "shit!" He wonders what that proves about her, if anything' (*¡Yo!*, p. 194). Hays is right about Yolanda's Americanness, and what the anecdote proves about her is arguably that, while not her mother tongue, English is now her primary language. However, what his observation does not convey is that she still needs Spanish and Dominican culture in order to convey fully her different subjectivities.

The question posed by the poet is answered in sometimes contradictory ways throughout the narratives. Her collapsing relationship with monolingual John contributes to Yolanda's mental breakdown due to cultural and emotional

differences between them. This also causes her break-up with Dexter Hays, who is aware of their differences, but does not really understand or cope with their implications. The man with whom she finally settles down is practically monolingual but shows a marked interest in her language, country and culture while assuming that he might never understand properly some differences between them. *GG* and *¡Yo!* thus suggest that there is not a fixed language in which one “loves best”, it is the intimacy and understanding shared with someone that makes a specific tongue “the language of love”.

The novel stresses that the characters’ bilingualism is rarely a perfectly equal command of Spanish and English. For instance, while Yolanda feels that she finally has started being herself in English, the narrator notes that she and her sisters ‘were forgetting a lot of their Spanish, and their father’s formal, florid diction was hard to understand’ (*GG*, p.142). The point is posed again in *GG* during Yolanda’s visit to her Dominican relatives who, noticing her ‘halting Spanish’ and her impulse to revert to English, make her stick to the former since ‘[t]he more she practices, the sooner she’ll be back into her native tongue’ (*GG*, p. 7). Yolanda notes that achieving this goal considered desirable in the island will then mean that ‘when she returns to the States, she’ll find herself suddenly going blank over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase’ (*GG*, p. 7). That immigration at key stages can leave gaps in a person’s knowledge of their mother tongue is also underlined when Carla describes her encounter with a flasher but cannot find the name for male genitals: she ‘had come to this country before she had reached puberty in Spanish, so a lot of the key words she would have been picking up in the last year, she had missed’ (*GG*, p. 163).

When the García girls become fluent enough, English constitutes a tool of empowerment and rebellion against the Dominican relatives who look after them during their summer visits to the island. It allows them to ‘play with their [relatives’] names, translating them into literal English so that they sounded ridiculous’ (*GG*, p. 11). The empowering dimension of English also derives from the expressive possibilities of being able to convey the same referent by an English word and a Spanish one with meanings that do not coincide exactly. The girls make full use of the different connotations of English and Spanish terms by not calling Laura ‘Mom except when they wanted her to feel how much she had failed them in this country. She was a good enough Mami, fussing and scolding and giving advice, but a terrible girlfriend parent, a real failure of a Mom’ (*GG*, pp. 135-36). Knowing English also proves liberating for Laura in a different way, in the context of gender power struggles as opposed to parents vs. children ones. Coming from a better-off family than her husband’s, she ‘had gone to school in the States’ and ‘spoke English without a heavy accent’, which makes her ‘the leader now that they lived in the States’ (*GG*, p.176).

The novels show that both English and Spanish can become “secret” languages including or excluding certain audiences from conversations. In the Dominican Republic and while the girls are little, English allows Laura and Carlos to speak without being understood by them (*GG*, p. 256). Once in the States, Spanish becomes the “secret language” enabling the parents to communicate with their daughters in public without being understood by others (*GG*, p.176).

Since *Butterflies* is set entirely in the Dominican Republic, the novel raises questions of language and communication substantially different from

those of narratives in which geographical displacement triggers cultural and linguistic displacements too. The main opposition is not that of the English vs. Spanish tensions shaping the other works' U.S. settings. In *Butterflies*, socio-cultural lines are manifested through the use of different kinds of Spanish instead. The first instance of characters being characterized by the sort of Spanish they speak occurs during Minerva's first day at Inmaculada Concepción school. Both she and her future friend Sinita feel 'bored... with all the polite talk' of 'all those mothers complimenting each other's daughters and lisping back in good Castilian to the Sisters of the Merciful Mother' (*Butterflies*, p. 13). Mocking the "lisp" of the higher-class women for whom Castilian Spanish represents linguistic propriety distances the two characters from them as regards class and cultural leanings.

U.S. Dominicans like the "interview woman" are evaluated according to their command of Dominican Spanish and local ways. Dedé is amused by 'the imported nonsense' of the woman's 'confused Spanish' (*Butterflies*, pp. 4 & 172). The interview woman's Americanised Spanish is matched by a lack of familiarity with Dedé's way of life explicitly described by the latter: 'The woman will never find the old house behind the hedge of towering hibiscus at the bend of the dirt road. Not a *gringa dominicana* in a rented car with a road map asking for street names!' (*Butterflies*, p. 3). Their different uses of Spanish become obvious once again when the interview woman says "Texas" and Dedé "Tejas" (*Butterflies*, p. 172).

Their linguistic divergences convey dissimilar backgrounds that could potentially hinder the interview woman's understanding and reproduction of the Mirabals' story. The indication of socio-cultural gaps and potential

misrepresentations through linguistic differences occurs again when Patria's son leaves prison with other political activists in an event attended by Trujillo and documented by journalists which Patria describes as 'a stage show' (*Butterflies*, p. 224). She mentions in particular how 'a tall American draped with cameras approached and asked [them] in his accented Spanish what [their] feelings were today' (*Butterflies*, p. 224), which in the context acquires intrusive and exploitative connotations.

The characters' use of language and their reflections on it are also used to portray how Trujillo's dictatorship has permeated all areas of their lives, down to the places that they inhabit and their sense of humour. Noting that all the streets in the capital 'are named after Trujillo's family', for instance, Mate tells a 'joke about how to get to Parque Julia Molina from Carretera El Jefe. "You take the road of El Jefe across the bridge of his youngest son to the street of his oldest boy, then turn left at the avenue of his wife, walk until you reach the park of his mother and you're there"' (*Butterflies*, pp. 130-31). The theme appears again in the description of the Garcías' years in the island in *GG*, as Laura notices that her daughters 'are quickly picking up the national language of a police state: every word, every gesture, a possible minefield, watch what you say, look where you go' (*GG*, p. 211).

7.3. Spanish vs. English in Santiago's *WIWPR* and *AW*

In Santiago's memoirs, the protagonist's attitudes towards English and Spanish vary following the reconfigurations of Esmeralda's subjectivities as she enters

adolescence and leaves Puerto Rico for the U.S. During her childhood years in Macún and Santurce she is taught English at school and becomes aware of the political influence of the U.S. over her country. Filled with patriotic feelings, the girl decides never to learn English, a resolution that she abandons after emigrating to Brooklyn. Esmeralda's linguistic evolution comes full circle as she eventually becomes proficient in the language and uses her skill to convey her Puerto Rican childhood and Brooklyn adolescence to English-speaking audiences.

Despite having done well academically in Puerto Rico, her ability is measured in Brooklyn according to her initially poor knowledge of English. While she avoids being set back a year at school, she is put 'in a class for students who'd scored low in intelligence tests, who were behaviour problems [sic], who were marking time until...they could drop out' (AW, p. 8). The difficulty of English and the worth of learning it are stressed again when Pablo's ex-lover Provi and her daughter Margie visit Esmeralda's family in Brooklyn and boast of 'how they'd lived in the United States so long, they were forgetting their Spanish while still learning English' (AW, p. 77). English is thus portrayed as a "hard" language which, 'unlike Spanish', is not 'pronounced as written' (AW, p. 17). Situations in which not conveying or understanding information properly prove crucial inspire Esmeralda to 'learn English well enough never again to be caught between languages' (AW, p. 21). However, even after finishing school, 'spoken English still baffled [her]' to the point of agreeing to pursue an academic education 'not knowing what it meant and too embarrassed to ask' (AW, p. 35).

Her feeling of being "caught between languages" persists even at the end of the memoirs as she still has to rely 'on the speaker for clues other than

language to help [her] understand' and still '[translates] simultaneously from Spanish' (AW, p. 271). The uncertainty of having communicated properly is present even with lovers and increases when they are also foreigners using English as a mediating language. After a row with Ulvi triggered by his discovery that she has male friends, for instance, Esmeralda remains unaware of having done anything wrong and wonders: 'In channelling my English through Spanish, had something been lost? Did he misunderstand what I'd said as he translated English through German to Turkish? Or had I broken some Turkish taboo by spending an evening out with friends?' (AW, p.294).

However, English enables her to take liberties that she would not dare take in Spanish, like not accepting her school's decision to put her in a lower class. This refusal constitutes 'probably the first rebellious act... outside [her] usual mouthiness within the family' (WIWPR, p. 226). The narrator meditates on the cultural connotations of challenging her elders' dictates stating: 'In Puerto Rico, if I'd been that pushy, I would have been... sent home with a note to my mother. But here... I got what I wanted' (WIWPR, p. 227). This instance of self-assertiveness earns her Ramona's admiration at her ability to speak English instead of a condemnation of her disrespectful attitude. The potential for empowerment that English offers to Esmeralda is increased by the role reversal between her and Ramona, triggered by the latter's greater fluency in the language. Ramona comes to depend on her daughter's translation skills when dealing with institutions, particularly when asking for welfare benefits.

For Esmeralda, Spanish thus appears to as a private, "home" language spoken at home with relatives and Puerto Rican neighbours. It is also associated with the behaviour norms set by elder relatives with whom generational

differences are increased by cultural ones (*AW*, p. 27). In contrast, English is presented as the “public” language of school, Performing Arts college, and Esmeralda’s various jobs as well as of her social life with friends and lovers. It is also the marker separating different groups of Puerto Rican descent, particularly those born in the U.S. and those who have emigrated there. As they spend more time in the country the protagonist and her siblings undergo a similar process themselves which creates a gap between them and their elders (*AW*, p. 18).

7.4. Spanglish and Other Languages

7.4.1. Spanglish

Alvarez, Santiago, García and Escandón deploy various strategies to depict the characters’ use of English or Spanish and their varying degrees of proficiency in each. In this context, the lack of use of Spanglish in the portrayal of the characters’ U.S. environments is arguably quite remarkable. Santiago mentions it at various times in *WIWPR* and *AW*, although it generally does not appear as a bilingual group’s fully functional language but as a stage in the protagonist’s process of learning English. As she and her siblings strive to learn the new language, mixing it with their mother tongue in their conversation becomes inevitable, and the narrator recalls: ‘We invented words if we didn’t know the translation for what we were trying to say, until we had our own language, neither English nor Spanish, but both in the same sentence, sometimes in the same word’ (*AW*, pp. 17-18). Their hybrid speech is illustrated as Héctor asks

Edna for a blanket saying ‘Passing me esa sabanation’, while Edna shouts ‘Stop molestating me’ demanding that Norma stops bothering her.

Esmeralda and her siblings seem to engage in code-mixing, a process common among bilingual speakers whereby they ‘use both languages together to the extent that they change from one language to the other in the course of a single utterance’¹¹¹ with ‘such rapidity and density’ that it might not be ‘possible to say at any given time which language they are speaking’¹¹². This kind of linguistic interaction differs from cases like that of Esmeralda’s family in that these characters’ switches between languages are due to a lack of English vocabulary that makes them resort to their mother tongue.

Spanglish, i.e. the mixing of Spanish and English in conversation, is first mentioned in the memoirs when Esmeralda moves to a new school in Brooklyn and meets Yolanda, another new girl who had lived in New York for three years but knows as little English as the protagonist. The two girls speak in ‘a combination of English and Spanish in which [they] [hop] from one language to the other depending on which word [comes] first’ (WIWPR, p. 258). Their linguistic interaction is illustrated by the following dialogue:

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

“*Sí, pero, I didn’t know. Y tú?*”

“*Yo tampoco. He said, que I like to help people. Pero, you know, a mí no me gusta mucho la gente...*” I didn’t like people much (WIWPR, p. 258)

111. Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 106.

112. Peter Trudgill, *A Glossary of Sociolinguistics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 23.

Were it not for the explanation that both characters speak little English this would resemble code-mixing, which, quoting Wardhaugh, 'is often used by bilinguals, primarily as a solidarity marker and has become an established community norm in the Puerto Rican community in New York City' (p. 108). Code-mixing, Wardhaugh adds, is not the result of laziness or lack of linguistic skill and 'requires conversants to have a sophisticated knowledge of both languages and to be acutely aware of community norms. These norms require that both languages be used in this way so that conversants can show their familiarity or solidarity' (p. 108).

Spanglish is also presented as the communication tool between Esmeralda and a neighbourhood girl that she meets in Brooklyn. Natalia, born in New York and with a perfect command of English, 'spoke Spanish well enough so that [Esmeralda] could speak a mixture of both without confusing her' (*AW*, p. 38). However, when the girl has to emigrate to Puerto Rico due to family circumstances, the protagonist wonders about her future there worrying that 'Natalia's Spanish was really Spanglish', 'got the job done but was understood only by people who spoke both languages' (*AW*, p. 48).

The only time in which Spanglish is mentioned in relation to ethnic identity and artistic expression and not as a step towards bilingualism is Esmeralda's visit to Manhattan Community College. When she enters the centre's student lounge, she finds one side of the room 'vibrat[ing] with Motown music from a portable record player' as 'Black students sat or stood in small groups arguing politics'; from another corner, 'the mambo side of the room', Esmeralda hears how 'Eddie Palmieri's rhythms punctuated the sounds of Spanglish' (*AW*, p. 215). The ethnic divisions between the Black and Puerto

Rican groups at the school are thus portrayed through music and language.

As their U.S. lives involve interacting in both English and Spanish depending on the context, the characters of Alvarez, Santiago and García have to code-switch, i.e. to move back and forth between the two languages according to who the other conversants are and the conversation's circumstances and topics. What is most frequently portrayed is situational code-switching, i.e. the shift between Spanish and English 'coincid[ing] from one external situation (for example, talking to members of the family) to another (for example, talking to the neighbours)'¹¹³. Generally speaking, Spanish is used with relatives, neighbours, and friends from similar linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, while English is the language of school, the workplace and relations with those from other ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Esmeralda, for instance, deals in Spanish with her family and Puerto Rican neighbours in Brooklyn, while García's Pilar in *DC* communicates in that language with Celia as well as with Max, a boyfriend of Mexican descent, and Rubén, a later Peruvian boyfriend.

Alvarez's García girls speak Spanish with their parents and Dominican relatives, although code-switching also takes place due to their sufficient knowledge of English. *GG* offers various examples of code-switching within the family environment both in the U.S. and on the island. Code-switching occurs with Dominican relatives educated in U.S. boarding schools, perhaps most prominently when Yolanda visits her Dominican family and her cousin Carmencita remarks in English that the protagonist has become 'Older, not wiser' during her four-year absence (*GG*, p. 6). Carmencita then switches back to

113. R.A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 52.

Spanish in order to shift topics and talk about the plans discussed by the family to give her a special welcome.

Alvarez's own experience of code-switching and code-mixing is described in her essay 'My English' in *STD*, where she narrates how she and her sisters were sent to an American school in the Dominican Republic and one of the results of learning English there was that the language 'became all mixed up' with her Spanish (*STD*, p. 24). 'Mixed-up, or what's now called Spanglish' was her and her sisters' language for several years before actually moving to New York (*STD*, p. 24). However, *GG* and *¡Yo!* do not show any characters using Spanglish or hearing others do so, not even mentioning it at all.

7.4.2. Other Languages

The presence of languages other than English and Spanish in the narratives, though scarce, gives witness of the complex cultural interactions historically configuring Dominican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, and American identities, of which the emigration processes depicted by the authors are but the latest chapter. Pre-Columbian indigenous terms in the works consist mainly of toponyms and loanwords incorporated into the countries' respective varieties of Spanish, mainly names of plants, animals and food. In Escandón's *EBS* we can find "mariachi", while in García's *DC* and *TAS* the loanwords include terms like "guajiros", an indigenous word from the Antilles¹¹⁴, and "bohío", meaning from

114. Augusto Malaret, *Diccionario de americanismos* (Emecé editores: Buenos Aires, 1946), p. 447. Henceforth referred to as *Americanismos*.

“American hut” and coming from an Arawak dialect of the Antilles¹¹⁵. “Bohío” and “conuco” [etymology] also appear throughout Alvarez’s *Butterflies*, while *¡Yo!* mentions “jíbara”. “Jíbaro/a” and “bohío” are frequent too in Santiago’s *WIWPR* and *AW*. The former also offers entries like “guanime” and “güiro”, both indigenous entries from the Antilles¹¹⁶.

Toponyms, perhaps predictably, abound in the works as the authors strive to depict the settings where their stories take place. Santiago’s memoirs return repeatedly to Macún and El Mangle. References in *EBS* include the Papaloapan River, the Cumbres de Acultzingo ravine, Orizaba, Tijuana, and Chihuahua. *DC* presents toponyms like Camagüey, Soroa, or Baracoa, and *TAS* mentions Camagüey, the Batabanó Gulf, Bibijagua Beach, the Mayaguana Passage, Cozumel, the rivers Hanábana and Guamá, and a list of other Cuban rivers which notes ‘their whimsical names’, “[t]he Tana, the Najasa, the Jatibonico del Sur, the Toa, the Damují, the Saramaguacá’ (*TAS*, p. 33). In Alvarez’s *Butterflies*, we find the country’s pre-Columbian name Quisqueya, Higüey, Barahona, the river Yaque, El Cibao, or Jarabacoa, and *¡Yo!* mentions the river Yaque, Rio Ozama, and Jarabacoa.

Bird names in *TAS* include “camao” and “sijú”, while a character in *EBS* is called Cacomixtle after a weasel, and *WIWPR* mentions the “coquí” tree frog. Plants in *WIWPR* comprehend the ceiba, a giant tree typical of Caribbean coastal countries the name of which seems to proceed from the Taino language of Santo Domingo (Corominas & Pascual CE-F, p. 15). *Butterflies* includes “anacahuita”, from the mexican “Anacahuitl” meaning paper-tree, and *TAS* also mentions the

115. Joan Corominas and J.A. Pascual, *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico* (Madrid: Gredos, 1991), A-CA, p. 613.

116. Augusto Malaret, *Vocabulario de Puerto Rico* (New York: Las Américas Publishing Co, 1955), pp. 183-188.

ceiba. This tree also appears five times in *DC*, where it does have a subtle but remarkable link with the plot. Celia had been told as a child that “the ceiba is a saint, female and maternal” (*DC*, p. 43), and the character herself asks the tree a wish for Felicia. In a novel dealing with strong, gifted female characters whose bonds with one another are damaged, the references to the ceiba stress the central question of whether these women will fulfil their potentials, heal their wounds, and restore mother-daughter relationships.

Regarding food, *DC* mentions “guayaba” (guava, term originating from tropical America either from the Arawak language or the Carib, most likely from the first; Corominas & Pascual G-MA, p. 254) and “yuca” (originating from the Taino language of Santo Domingo; Corominas & Pascual, p. 20), which also appears in *TAS*. *WIWPR* mentions “yautía”, an indigenous term from the Antilles (Malaret, *Lexicón*¹¹⁷, p. 453 & *Vocabulario*, p. 291), and “achiote”, a name for annatto seeds derived from the nahuatl (Corominas & Pascual A-CA, p. 49). In *AW* we find “yautías”, “quenepa”, a fruit name indigenous from Puerto Rico (Corominas & Pascual, p. 167). *EBS* mentions “chipotle”. These terms indicate the legacy of cultures preceding the Conquest and practically erased in its aftermath. If in the works’ narrative present English appears as the language of (neo)colonialism, the traces of pre-Columbian cultures and languages serve as a reminder of the time in which Spanish occupied that position.

In García’s *DC*, items from African languages have a relatively considerable presence that, without reaching the frequency of Spanish, is more noticeable than that of indigenous entries. This amounts to an acknowledgment of the historical importance of slavery in the island’s development as well as the

117. Augusto Malaret, *Lexicón de flora y fauna* (Comisión Permanente de la Asociación de Academias de Lengua Española: Madrid, 1970).

effect of African culture in the configuration of its identity. The African language in the narrative is specifically identified as Yoruba (*DC*, pp. 147 & 187), and the most prominent semantic field is that of religion. The *orishas* or “guardian spirits” are mentioned three times by this collective denomination, and their supernatural status is manifested as characters ask for their blessings and give them offerings (*DC*, pp. 147-48). Changó is mentioned ten times, Obatalá nine, Elleguá four, and Oggún and Yemayá one each, and their attributes are explicitly explained at least once (‘Obatalá, King of the White Cloth’, *DC*, p. 14; ‘Elleguá, god of the crossroads’, *DC*, p. 14; ‘Oggún, patron of metals’, *DC*, p. 14; ‘Yemayá, goddess of the seas’, *DC*, p. 183; ‘Changó, god of fire and lightning’, *DC*, pp. 76 & 163).

When a santera initiates Felicia into the *elekes* [1], giving her necklaces related to saints to protect her from evil, the reader can infer that the term refers to some sort of ritual mystery (*DC*, p. 186). The “babalawo” [3S, 3P] officiating in various rituals throughout the narrative appears explicitly defined as ‘a high priest of *santería*’ (*DC*, p. 183). We also come across ‘[t]he *oddu*, the official *santería* prediction for this year’ (*DC*, p. 147), ‘a *panaldo*, an exorcism’ (*DC*, p. 190), ‘the *eggun*, a vertebra from the spine of a goat’ (*DC*, p. 148), ‘the *obi*, the divining coconut’ (*DC*, p. 184) and ‘the *ikin*, the sacred palm nuts’ described as oracles consulted by *santería* high priests (*DC*, p. 190). Omens related to the characters’ fates are clearly translated (‘the pattern of rinds fell in *ellife*, two white sides and two brown, a definite yes’, *DC*, p. 184; ‘the omen was the same. *Ikú*. Death’ (*DC*, p. 190). A few terms are not explained in detail such as ‘[t]he *opelé*’, and ‘[t]he table of Ifá’ listed as oracles consulted within *santería*, ‘the sacred *ota* stone’ (*DC*, p. 148), the santeras’ ritual ‘bath in the *omiero*’ (*DC*, p.

187), and the ‘ouanga bags’ mentioned among various elements of magic and religious practice (*DC*, p. 199). This is also the case with some elements of African origin like ‘the *melé*’ and ‘the *batá* drums’ (*DC*, p. 160). Even if readers are not told these items’ exact nature, the general class to which they belong is made clear enough.

TAS shows similar linguistic patterns with the semantic field of religion being most predominant. Gods’ names figure prominently within it, and references to the “orishas” are clear enough for readers to gather the term’s meaning. Oshún [9] is described as the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre’s ‘Yoruban name’ (*TAS*, p. 10), reflecting the interactions between the African and Spanish traditions shaping Cuban culture. Changó [3] is presented equally explicitly as the god of lightning (*TAS*, p. 34), Oyá [1] as ‘his first and favorite wife, [who] also owns the fire’ (*TAS*, p. 34), and Yemayá [1] as Oshún’s sister (*TAS*, p. 256). The “babalawos” [2 P] are described as being in charge of *santería* initiations, the “ochinchín” [1S] is defined as “the shrimp-and-watercress omelet” serving as a propitiation for Oshún (*TAS*, pp. 108-109), and omens about the future of Constancia and Reina are clearly translated: ‘*ofún*, where the curse was born’ (*TAS*, pp. 109 & 258), ‘*oddi*, where the grave was first dug’ (*TAS*, pp. 109 & 258), and ‘a *lariache*, a solution, a circumvention’ (*TAS*, p. 109).

In *DC* and *TAS*, Yoruban expressions generally appear in the form of scattered single words. Only two instances longer than one word appear in *DC*. One is translated (“*Eroko ashé*,”... It is done, with the blessings of the gods’, *DC*, p. 188) and the other is presented as a ritual song intoned during a *santería* rite but is not translated (‘*Kosí ikú, kosí arun, kosí araye*’, *DC*, p.15). *TAS* also presents only two Yoruban expressions of more than one word, a *santero*’s chant

during a purification ritual (*'Ochún yeye mi ogá mi gbogbo ibu laiye nibo gbogbo omo oricha le owe nitosi gba ma abukon ni omi didon nitosi ono alafia'*, *TAS*, p. 189) and a chant intoned during a sacrifice to a god (*'Ñaquiña, ñaquiña loro'*, *TAS*, p. 256), both left without translation. That Yoruba is only used in relation to religious rites and that the two occurrences longer than one word are not translated contributes to present the language as primitive and arcane compared to Spanish. While this probably reflects the perspective of characters and readers unfamiliar with Afro-Cuban culture, it can reaffirm some audiences' stereotyped preconceptions.

DC also mentions a Russian tongue-twister that Ivanito learns at school, *'Kolokololiteyshchiki perekolotili vikarabkavshihsyá viuholey'*, translated as "the church bell casters slaughtered the desmans that had scrambled out" (p. 145). The boy is taught Russian together with most of the other students due to the relations between the two countries' communist governments. This theme, however, is not developed further, apart from a succinct depiction of Javier's emigration to Czechoslovakia. *TAS* alludes to another cultural component in Cuba's history, mentioning Blanca's French-Haitian ancestry as the daughter of a mulatta descended from French colonists who fled Haiti for Cuba after 1791. The only French entries, though, are Blanca's mother's maiden name Sejourné and an aphorism (*'Au pays des aveugles, les borgnes sont rois'*, translated as 'In the country of the blind, the one-eyed men are kings', *TAS*, p. 185) loved by the woman and which Blanca liked to repeat. The aphorism stresses the half-truths and flawed knowledge upon which the novel's characters base their lives.

In the other narratives the presence of other languages, apart from Spanish and a few terms of pre-Columbian origin, is practically negligible. In

Alvarez's *GG*, for instance, "loa" [4S] or voodoo gods and "Damballah" [1], a serpent deity patron of the waters, are used by the de la Torres' Haitian maid Chucha regarding voodoo practices. While the first term's meaning can be inferred to be a supernatural force, the second is not clarified. Santiago's memoirs also show a few items in languages other than Spanish and English mainly when Esmeralda meets characters from different ethnic backgrounds conveying the multicultural composition of New York's population. A Jewish man that she dates describes her as a "shiksa" [3], defining this as 'A girl who is not Jewish' (*AW*, p. 186). Similarly, "liebchen" ("dear") is used twice by a German boyfriend of Esmeralda and can be interpreted as a term of endearment from the context. The German trace in his English utterances are also explicitly described: Esmeralda says that he speaks 'with a charming accent' (*AW*, p. 250) and commits occasional mistakes like omitting the indefinite article in the sentences 'I am not impulsive man' (*AW*, p. 253) and "Like schoolboy" (*AW*, p. 253). The same strategy is used to indicate the accented speech of Esmeralda's other German boyfriend, Otto, and of her German friend Regina.

7.5. Hispanicised English, Anglicised Spanish

Sometimes the narratives present the characters' utterances in English attempting to convey the way their pronunciation and grammar are influenced by Spanish. For instance, Esmeralda states that the American president is called 'Eekah', his surname is 'Ay-sen-hou-err', and that 'his wife's name is Mami' (*WIWPR*, p. 71), while Pablo corrects her saying that the 'name is pronounced Ayk, not

Eekeh' (WIWPR, p. 72). He explains that Puerto Ricans' pronunciation of English is the reason for their being called "spiks", since 'when someone asks them a question they say, "I don spik inglish' instead of 'I don't speak English'" (WIWPR, p. 73). He also teaches Esmeralda the meaning of the word "teeneyer" [3], explaining that '[i]n the United States, when children reach the age of thirteen they're called *teeneyers*. It comes from the ending of the number in English. *Thir-teen. Teen-ager*' (WIWPR, p. 205).

Other instances in which the text aims at reproducing a Spanish-speaker's accent occur during Esmeralda's English lessons in Puerto Rico. Children are taught the song 'Are ju slippin? Are ju slippin? Bruder John, Bruder John./ Mornin bel sar rin ging./ Mornin bel sar rin ging./ Deen Deen don. Deen deen don' (WIWPR, p. 77). The narrator reveals that their teacher, Miss Jiménez, liked to teach English through songs learnt 'phonetically, having no idea of what the words meant' (WIWPR, p. 77). The lines from 'America the Beautiful' 'for spacious skies' and 'amber waves of grain' are either heard or pronounced by the students as, respectively '4 espé chosk. Ay!' and 'am burr gueys oh fren' (WIWPR, p. 77). The teacher addresses the students saying 'Now gwee estody about de Jun-ited Estates gee-o-graphee' (WIWPR, p. 63). In these cases it is unclear whether this is the students' perception of their teacher's English words or how she actually pronounces them. The name of the United States as pronounced by Esmeralda is presented as "the Jun-ited Estates" four more times.

Another device showing Esmeralda's flawed English when she arrives in Brooklyn is to attempt to reproduce her syntax. Rather than being faithful reproductions of a Spanish-speaker's imperfect pronunciation and grammar, these examples of the girl's speech show how English-speaking audiences would

perceive her “broken” English. The following lines, for instance, are a fragment of dialogue in which Esmeralda negotiates with a member of staff which grade she should be placed in at her new Brooklyn school:

“Seven gray?... I no guan seven gray. I eight gray. I teeneyer”...
“I have A’s in school Puerto Rico. I lern good. I no seven gray girl”...
“Meester Grant,... I go eight gray six mons. Eef I no lern inglish, I go seven gray. Okay?” ...
“I good student. I lern queek. You see notes...I pass seven gray” (pp.226-27)

As the protagonist describes her family’s situation to a welfare officer, we also find the following statements: ‘My mother she no spik inglish. My mother she look for work evree day, and nothing. My mother she say she don’t want her children suffer. My mother she say she want work bot she lay off. My mother she only need help a leetle while’ (p. 249). A third depiction of Esmeralda’s pronunciation is her monologue during an acting audition: ‘Ju bee lohn to a type dats berry cómo in dis kuntree, Meessees Felps. A type off selfcent red pee tee in sun de boring tie grass wid on men shon ah ball pro klee bee tees on de side’ (p. 264)

Esmeralda must have had an imperfect grammar and a lingering accent for much of her time in Brooklyn covered by *WIWPR* and *AW*. Even after entering Performing Arts Esmeralda acknowledges speaking ‘Brooklyn English with a Puerto Rican accent’ (*WIWPR*, p. 68). However, except in the instances shown above, her speech is rendered in correct English. The examples of young Esmeralda’s “faulty” English nevertheless remain central to the narrative since they stress her Spanish-speaking background and they contrast with the authorial voice showing how far Santiago has come in her command of the language. *WIWPR* also shows various instances in which English words are borrowed and

Hispanicised by Puerto Rican characters living in Brooklyn, like “la marketa” [7], “el lanlor”, and “el bosso” [3]. Finally, in one case Hispanicised English is used to make it clear that an expression has been uttered in Spanish: when emigrating to Brooklyn, Ramona takes with her her towels, sheets, and pillows, ‘not new but still “decent-looking”’ (*WIWPR*, p. 216).

AW depicts the protagonist’s efforts to learn ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ by heart at her Brooklyn school having ‘no idea what the song said or meant’: ‘Ojo sé. Can. Juice. Y?/ Bye de don surly lie/ Whassoprowow we hell/ debt why lie lass gleam in./Whosebrods tripe sand bye. Stars?/True de perro los Ay!/ Order am parts we wash,/Wha sogal lang tree stream in’ (p. 10). It also shows her watching television and contrasting what she hears, ‘Shilbee cominrun demuntin whenshecoms, toot- toot’, with the subtitles offering the words’ written form, ‘She’ll be coming ‘round the mountain when she comes’ (p. 7). The narrative depicts Esmeralda’s attempts to pronounce written English, rendered in a way that allows a monolingual audience to gather how the words are mispronounced: “Ehr-RHAS-ser” for “eraser”, “Keh-NEEF-eh” for “knife”, “Dees” for “this”, “dem” for “them”, and “dunt” for “don’t” (*AW*, p. 17). Esmeralda comments on her views on the language stating that ‘English, unlike Spanish, wasn’t pronounced as written. *Water* became “waddah,” *work* was “woik”, and wordranintoeachother in a torrent of confusing sounds that had no resemblance to the neatly organized letters on the pages of books’ (*AW*, p. 17).

Examples of Esmeralda’s ungrammatical speech occur for instance as she takes books from the local library explaining they are ‘[f]or leetle seesters’, and she explains her mother’s unemployed status at the welfare office with the words: ‘Fabric no,... She work wants... My mother, she work want. Fabric

close... She no can work fabric no. Babies suffer. She little help she no lay off no more' (pp. 19-20). On other occasions, it is not clear whether her ungrammatical statements are meant to reproduce her use of English, or to convey the fact that the dialogue is taking place in Spanish. Thus, when her brother Raymond asks her 'Are you going to be famous?' she answers 'Leaf me a lone' (p. 39), and she takes part in a conversation in Spanish about a friend who has moved to Puerto Rico saying 'But she never bean there' (p. 48).

Ramona's efforts to speak English are reproduced in a similar way, as she addresses welfare office staff saying 'Plis, no spik Inglis' (p. 19), and she explains why Esmeralda is not working by stating 'She job school' (p. 104). In another occasion, she asks Esmeralda's employer: 'You take good care my daughter' (p. 236). The "broken" English of Esmeralda and Ramona adds dramatic strength to their statements. The characters also borrow and hispanicise English terms in their Spanish conversations (which the narrative renders in English). This is the case of being "leyof" [3] or "laid off", and "marketa" [2]. Finally, in one instance Spanish entries and grammatical flaws in English statements are used to convey a foreign character's command of Spanish. When Esmeralda's German boyfriend Jurgen introduces himself to Ramona, he tells her: 'I *mucho* love your daughter. Very *mucho*' (AW, p. 254).

DC does not present any occurrences of Hispanicised English or Anglicised Spanish, mainly because the narrative is presented either by Spanish-speakers in Cuba, or by Cuban characters having lived in the U.S. for a long time. The protagonist, Pilar, has grown up in the U.S. and has no problems speaking English. As neither she nor her mother Lourdes deal with a wider Spanish-speaking community in their adopted country, there are not as many

occasions to illustrate a character's tentative, imperfect use of English as in Santiago's works. Together with this, the text shows an authorial choice not to convey that a dialogue or thought process is taking place in Spanish by constructing English sentences in imitation of Spanish grammar.

In *TAS*, the presence of Spanish in the English narrative is felt mainly as it is evident that a part of the text presented in the second language was produced in the first. For example, the excerpt that Ignacio's father reads aloud in the 'Three Ducks' chapter is not identified but can be recognized as the first lines of Cervantes' *El Quijote* in English. Similarly, the title of a book written by Ignacio in Spanish is offered in English as "Owls of Oriente". It is unclear whether the same happens when Silvestre quotes two lines in English from an unspecified book of Spanish civil war poems, as we do not know whether he is meant to be referring to the original lines in Spanish or to an English translation. On a grammatical level, the trace of Spanish in a sentence presented in English is conspicuous when, speaking in Spanish according to textual indications, Constancia asks Silvestre, 'Be a little man and don't cry' (p. 80). The English words reproduce literally the Spanish expression 'sé un hombrecito', meaning 'be a brave young man'.

In *GG*, traces of Spanish in the English text can be found as Spanish, Catholic names appear translated into English, like 'Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows Convent School'. English translations of Spanish sayings also abound, for instance 'to go behind the palm trees', which is explained by an accompanying synonymous expression, "deflowering". The García girls joke in the U.S. about the literal meaning of the Dominican saying by stating that 'they would likelier be virgins than find a palm tree in their neck of the woods' (p. 65).

In the case of “no Moors on the coast,” an Island expression for the coast being clear’, the translation of the Spanish sentence is offered directly. Other times, a saying’s metaphoric meaning is deemed to be clear enough not to need further explanation, as in the case of ‘Let’s not anticipate where the coconut will fall when the hurricane hasn’t hit yet’, ‘No flies fly into a closed mouth’ or ‘cows will fly’.

A person’s non-English-speaking origin is also manifested by their confused use of English expressions, a device used to characterise Laura García’s imperfect language skills together with her inventiveness and ability to communicate despite the obstacles. Laura’s coinages include to be ‘safely sorry’ as well as ‘When in Rome, do unto the Romans’, ‘It takes two to tangle’, ‘He didn’t put all his pokers on a back burner’, ‘I kept telling you...my ship would pass me by in the night!’, ‘There is no use trying to drink spilt milk’, and ‘It was more sardines in a can than you could shake sticks at’. Laura’s daughters mimic this tendency of Laura once as they state that they have ‘escaped the horns of [their] dilemma to a silver lining, as Mami would say’. Laura also imports Dominican sayings into her English, such as ‘With patience and calm, even a burro can climb a palm’. Laura’s Spanish-speaking background permeates her English statements, giving a new twist to the meaning of standard expressions, in a way parallel to the novel’s narrative use of English with strong Dominican elements.

The characters’ accent when talking in English is also reproduced on a few occasions, for example when a group of youths mimic Carla by saying ‘Eh-stop!... Pleees eh-stop’. Similarly, an American friend of the de la Torreses notes that they pronounce “Yale” as “jail”. Laura’s accent, stronger than that of her

adult daughters, is also underlined in instances like “re-ah-lized” and “pick-a-nick”. Her faulty grammar is pointed out in sentences like ‘Your father did not mean to harm. You must pardon him. Always it is better to let bygones be forgotten, no?’ Carlos’s accent and flawed grammar are also brought to attention as he makes utterances like “Eh-speech, eh-speech!”, ‘What ees wrong with her e-speech?... It show no gratitude’, and ‘your father, he love you very much... He just want to protect you’. These situations, however, are counterbalanced by the inability of a lover of Yolanda to pronounce her name properly, saying “Joe-lan-dah” [2] instead of “Jo-laahn-dah”.

Among the English sentences in English in *¡Yo!* where the trace of Spanish can be felt, there are several translations of Spanish proverbs which are overtly indicated to be so. ‘[G]ossip is how God spreads the little news we might have missed’ is presented as a saying common among country people. ‘To go behind the palm trees’ [3] appears as a euphemism for a woman having pre-marital sex and ‘[ruining] her chances of a good marriage’ (p. 38), and its meaning is repeatedly made clear from the context. Another colloquial expression is ‘all the little sticks will fall for him’, indicated to be a saying from the island but not explained further. In other cases, a sentence in English attempts to reproduce the grammar of the Spanish, for example ‘You are the one who knows’ –which appears in *GG* in Spanish as ‘U’té que sabe’-, ‘I’m at your orders’, and ‘we are here at your service’.

Instances in which a character’s poor command of English is shown through ungrammatical sentences are ‘Pardon me the wrong number’, which appears again as an English speaker mimics the Spanish speaker’s incorrect use of language, and ‘You are confirmed but please to telephone to see if the plane

leaves tomorrow'. In other cases, a character who speaks English but not well enough chooses the wrong word for something or mixes up different expressions into a new one. This device is used to characterize the Garcías' mother Laura in particular, who makes statements like 'he has been working like a god', instead of 'like a dog', 'They do not see the forest or the trees', 'They are sick of home' instead of 'homesick' and 'We were living on the low end of the hog off what little savings we had left'.

¡Yo! shows two cases in which an English-speaker has a poor command of Spanish. When talking with a Dominican man set on emigrating to the U.S., Yolanda's husband Doug explains that his daughter Corey is not available stating 'No está... Soy padre de Corey... Corey no matrimonio' ('She is not here... I Corey's father... Corey no wedding'). He adds that the man's reverse calls are 'muy expensivo. No llamar, correcto?' ('very expensive. No call, right?'), and then explains: 'No puedo salvar mundo' ('I can't save the world'). These non-grammatical utterances are not translated, but their general sense can be inferred from contextual indications. Later, Doug makes a wish asking 'Por favor, Corey, felicidad'. At another point of the narrative, Yolanda's boyfriend explains to one of her Dominican relatives: 'No hablar español... Soy Dexter Hays' ('No speak English... I am Dexter Hays').

Other times flawed English sentences provide a way of representing an English-speaker's imperfect use of Spanish. The interview woman in *Butterflies*, for instance, makes statements such as 'I am so compromised... by the openness of your warm manner' which to Dedé's eyes are 'imported nonsense' (p. 4). Another example is the expression 'You must think I'm so outside of things', which is repeated in an also awkward Spanish as 'Tan afuera de la cosa'.

Names of food also reproduce Spanish originals that are not offered, like the drink that inspires a character's special recipe for a 'To Die Dreaming Cake' or 'Moors and Christians rice'. In another case, the English equivalent of "arroz con leche" ("rice pudding") is not given but its popular connotations are explained: we are told that those who share it will get married, and that it is part of a song which according to the translation in the text goes '*Arroz con leche/wants to marry/a clever girl/ from the capital/ who sews/ who darns/ who puts back her needle/ where it belongs!*' Further cultural translation of Dominican practices occurs as a character explains that she was 'tempted to bring out the broom and set it by the door, the country way to tell people it was time to go' (p. 260). Another instance of cultural specificity, however, is left unexplained when a character's mouth 'drops open like the *campesino* of the joke' (p. 130), but the joke itself is not rendered.

Another trace of Spanish in *Butterflies* is found in expressions in English reproducing Spanish terms related to Catholicism. In this group of words we find "Sisters of the Merciful Mother", "Holy Thursday" ("Jueves Santo"), "the Mass of the Rooster" ("la Misa del Gallo"), "Three Kings" ("Día de Reyes"), a festivity that is partially explained as coming after Christmas and New Year, and "January 21st, the day of the Virgin of Highest Grace" ("la Virgen de Altagracia"). The novel also makes one mention of the "Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception", explained as the "Saint's Day" of the Mirabal's school "Inmaculada Concepción", and "the Day of Lovers", specified to be February the 14th. In one instance, "Little Park of the Dead", a place's Spanish name also appears translated, and the titles of the songs played by a music box from Spain

given to Mate as a gift are also rendered in English as ‘The Battle Cry for Freedom’, ‘My Little Sky’, [and] ‘There is Nothing Like a Mother’.

Some terms of endearment are translations of Spanish ones, like “my sky” or “my treasure”. So are the characters’ answers to somebody of higher social status, ‘at your orders’ [1], ‘to serve you’ [2], and ‘You’re the one who knows’ [1]. *Butterflies* also shows translations of Spanish sayings not appearing in the text such as ‘You are going to argue with Saint Peter at the gate’ [1] -told to a very argumentative character-, or ‘to cross the Río Yaque’ [2] and to ‘go behind the the palm trees’ [1] -euphemisms for having sexual intercourse. Other colloquial sayings are ‘One must have a left hand’, meaning ‘one must know how to handle things’, and ‘to tread on the tail of the rabid dog’, which can be inferred from the context to mean ‘to strongly displease somebody’. Other colloquial sayings are ‘the clouds have already rained’, regarding the discussion of something that happened a long time ago, and ‘discussing Napoleon’s white horse’ [2], an ironic expression for a topic of conversation that the characters are certainly not having. Proverbs include ‘don’t annoy the bees’ [2], and ‘That *coco* fell right on your head’.

In other cases, what appears translated into English are excerpts from works written in Spanish. When Mate writes in her diary ‘I can write the saddest things tonight’ [2], for instance, she is paraphrasing a well-known line by poet Pablo Neruda. Other quotations like ‘And so it is of human life the goal to seek, forever seek, the kindred soul’ and ‘May the limitations of love not cast a spell/On the serious ambitions of my mind’, are overtly acknowledged, being ascribed to José Martí in this instance. Similarly, the words ‘Condemn me, it does not matter. History will absolve me!’ [2] are explicitly identified as part of a

speech by Fidel Castro. In another case, the fact that some poetry is meant to be written in Spanish is also made evident to the bilingual reader by the fact that it is not the English words that rhyme but their Spanish translations: Minerva reads the lines ‘Over a century, languishing in chains,/ Dare I now hope for freedom from my woes?’, where “chains” translates as “cadenas” and “woes” as “penas”.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with representation of Spanish and other foreign languages in the narratives of Alvarez, García, and Santiago, also studying their questioning of stereotyped, essentialist views of English as a “public” language and Spanish as a “private” one. Which functions, spheres and connotations are assigned to each depends on geographical, social and historical contexts as well as on a variety of individual factors. In their U.S. environments, the characters use English mainly in their work and social life and Spanish with family and, in the case of Santiago, neighbours. However, what the works point to is the series of conditions leading to this situation as well as circumstances in which each language’s uses and connotations are inverted, or in which binary linguistic oppositions are dismantled. As Reina observes in *TAS*, for instance, speaking Spanish is a prominent part of the identity and public life of the Cuban American communities portrayed in the novel. On the other hand, *¡Yo!*’s “The Student” shows the frustration felt by the wife of Yolanda’s old student at her confinement to domestic roles, suggesting that command of English does not automatically grant a public persona and voice.

Santiago’s memoirs present the need to speak an accentless English as a

requisite for academic and professional success in the U.S, views internalised to a certain extent by Esmeralda. However, her experiences at several Brooklyn High Schools and at Performing Arts also calls the readers' attention to educative systems that make this language's acquisition more difficult for her as a non-English-speaking teenager. They also point out mainstream society's lack of appreciation –and, indeed, stigmatisation- of her Spanish-speaking skills, and its prejudiced views on “foreign” accents when those who have them speak English fluently.

Similarly, the novels of Santiago, García and Escandón counteract the low status connotations of Spanish in the U.S. as the language of socio-culturally deprived immigrants by showing its rich cultural heritage –a device further examined in the next chapter-, and pointing out that its presence precedes that of English in the Americas. Added to this, they make historical references alluding to the U.S. involvement in the specific political and economic circumstances causing immigration from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic together with the benefits it has derives from it. The indigenous roots of some of the Spanish terms in the narratives also call attention to the privileginig Spanish culture and language over indigenous ones as a consequence of Spain's colonisation of the Americas. The tensions between Spanish and U.S. languages and cultures are exposed through the narratives' contraposition of the personal, ideological, and generational differences in the attitudes of mothers and daughters towards each.

Dealing with an exhilarating, stylised story of immigration, Escandón's *EBS* does not show such a concern with the tensions between Spanish and English in the U.S. This could be partially explained by the fact that the work is

not concerned with a more or less realist depiction of its characters' everyday concerns. It can also reflect the fact that, in contrast with Pilar Puente, Yolanda García and Esmeralda Santiago, Esperanza leaves Mexico as an adult who might thus be more certain of her cultural and linguistic identity. She is both motherless and daughterless, as befits a narrative that does not place her journeys to the U.S. in the context of Mexican and U.S. history, and does not hint either at the character's potential future difficulties of adjusting to the new country.

CHAPTER 8.

SEMANTIC FIELDS AND TRANSLATION OF SPANISH ENTRIES

In order to study the use, connotations and interrelations of Spanish entries in the narratives, I have identified twelve semantic categories that include most of them highlighting the different thematic foci emphasized by the authors. These are: terms of address; womanhood and manhood; food; clothes, accessories and tools; the body; physical and social spaces; flora, fauna and weather; terms of high emotional intensity; religion and magic; collective identities; art and culture, and long entries. However, I will pay attention mainly to those fields which present Spanish words the connections and contrasts among which engage productively with the main question at the core of this thesis: the tensions in the authors' representation of the characters' processes of individual and collective identity construction in the context of their immigration to the U.S.

This chapter does not offer a comprehensive listing of all the Spanish entries in the narratives. Even when examining selected semantic fields, I will concentrate mostly on those traits in the authors' use of language which are most relevant to the discussions undertaken in previous chapters, or which prove most distinctive in differentiating particular works from the rest. The total number of occurrences of a word in each work is given between brackets the first time that it is dealt with. When there is no indication of the number of occurrences, it is because I have considered that it did not add any relevant information to the points I am making in the different sections.

When studying the presence of Spanish in these Latina narratives in English, I will not examine loanwords incorporated into English and appearing in the second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. Undoubtedly, these terms have an important function evoking an atmosphere associated by authors or readerships with Spanish-speaking countries, acting as colourful "ethnographic

tokens”. However, their meaning and role is sufficiently obvious for English-speakers not to need clarification. I will consider such terms only when they are italicised or marked otherwise as Spanish entries, or are particularly relevant to plot or characterisation.

I will not focus on proper nouns either except for entries with meanings that show humourous or metaphorical dimensions or are clearly related to narrative developments. This is the case of proper nouns like “Esperanza” (“Hope”) or Ángel, or of toponyms like Los Angeles relevant within a narrative about faith and supernatural interventions like Escandón’s. I will also take into account Spanish or Hispanicised terms for place names that are originally English, for instance, when characters refer to New York as “Nueva York” in Santiago’s memoirs. Finally, when a word exists in the same form in both Spanish and English, it will be interpreted as belonging to the latter and excluded from my analyses unless it is marked by italics or commas, appears as part of a sentence in that language, or is particularly relevant to plot or characterisation.

I will also show how the narratives clarify the meanings of Spanish expressions for monolingual readers. One of the most common devices to do this is using appositions to introduce the terms’ explanations such as, for instance, ‘la compra, the Saturday grocery shopping’ (AW, p. 61). On one occasion translations are offered between brackets, when DC’s Pilar finds a shop selling oils called ‘*amor* (love), *sígueme* (follow me), *yo puedo y tú no* (I can and you can’t), *ven conmigo* (come with me), and *dominante* (dominant)’ (p. 199). In a few cases, a concept is made transparent through explanatory formulas such as “X means Y”. In *¡Yo!*, for example, “cuco” is defined as ‘An island endearment that means bogeyman’ (p. 260). When not presented as appositions, between

parentheses, or through explanatory formulas, translations may precede or succeed the item they refer to by several words, lines or pages. At other times, the Spanish terms can be inferred by contextual clues, a translation strategy usually creating the least stylistic awkwardness.

A related question is the degree to which the terms are explained. *WIWPR* shows the most marked effort to make references to Puerto Rican culture and Spanish entries accessible for monolingual readers by including a glossary. In the other narratives, the terms are partially translated in the text itself, i.e. the reader gathers an idea of their general meaning without knowing what they stand for specifically. In *¡Yo!*, for instance, Sarita remembers being sent back to boarding school because she was ‘becoming a jíbara like one of those Haitian children who’d never worn shoes’ (pp. 55-56). We understand that “jíbara” connotes a poverty and lack of sophistication which people look down on, but the term is not explained further.

At other times, the authors attempt to convey a term’s English equivalent either in the form of a single word if it exists or through paraphrases. The first possibility is illustrated by constructions such as ‘Señorita Miss Carla’ (*GG*, p. 44), and the second is exemplified by expressions such as ‘sancocho, a vegetable stew thickened with mashed tubers’ (*WIWPR*, p. 90). While over-translation is not common, in a few cases there is a sense of iteration as terms are explained more than once along similar lines. In *¡Yo!*, the word “cuco” is defined as ‘the Haitian bogeyman [that] would come and steal [the girls] away if they didn’t behave’ (p. 23) and then explained again as ‘[a]n island endearment that means bogeyman’ (p. 260); its affective use is further stressed through its apposition to English terms of endearment in expressions such as ‘cuca darling’ or “honey

cuca”, although it is not clear whether these constructions actually reflect the often striking mixture of Spanish and English in Laura’s speech.

Some entries, however, are transparent enough not to need translation. Some are etymological pairs with English terms, having originated from common words in other languages and consequently resembling their English counterparts enough to be understood by monolinguals without much problem. For instance, in *WIWPR* we find “centro comunal” while *AW* presents “artista”; *DC* features “microbios” and “perfecto”, while *TAS* includes the adjective “deliciosos”; *Butterflies*, *GG*, and *¡Yo!* show “factoría”, “directo” and “doctora”, respectively. Also transparent are words that have English counterparts due to borrowings from Spanish having entered the language in identical or similar forms. Among these figure “Yuca”, recurring in the works of Alvarez, García, and Santiago, and “rancho” in *Butterflies* or “plaza” in *DC* and *TAS*. While the Spanish and English counterparts in both etymological pairs and loanwords do not necessarily have the same meaning or nuances, their common general sense is sufficient for monolinguals to understand the Spanish item. Clichés that have become familiar to non Spanish-speakers are also transparent. These include interjections like “ay”, greetings such as “hola” or “hasta la vista”, and terms of affirmation and negation like “sí” and “no”, among other words.

This chapter will study only intranarrative translation, not dealing with the Spanish versions of the authors’ works. Together with questions of space limitations, the reason for this exclusion is the fact that these works have been rendered into Spanish in very different circumstances that I feel hinder a comparative study of their translations. While it is unclear whether Escandón’s story was first conceived in Spanish or English, Santiago translated her memoirs

herself after the success of the English version, and Alvarez's and García's works have not been translated by the authors themselves.

8.1. Terms of address

Terms of address refer here to words indicating the characters' social or emotional relations with others, as well as proper names when used as characterisation devices, nicknames and expressions of endearment. It also includes expressions conveying the nature and tone of the characters' interactions such as greeting, acquiescence, dissension, encouragement, giving orders (often through verbs in their imperative form), or asking for someone's permission. As I have examined in Part II, the authors establish significant metaphoric connections between their protagonists' relations with people in their immediate social circles such as family, lovers and acquaintances, and their membership of wider national and socio-cultural communities. Observing the main traits and referents in the characters' immediate social exchanges highlighted by the use of Spanish entries allows us to draw parallels between these complex interactions and the characters' ambivalent emotional bonds with their original and adoptive homelands. While all the works are concerned with familial and social bonds, examining their individual use of Spanish entries in connection with these bonds reveals their differences in the treatment of this topic.

García's *TAS* and Escandón's *EBS* differentiate themselves from the other works in that their characters' names have a metaphoric significance related to their personality, evolution, or role in the plot. In *TAS*, proper nouns convey the

weight of the past and of circumstances in a novel dealing with fate, cyclical patterns, change and redemption. Agüero, the protagonists' family name, means "omen", which connects with the fact that they are marked by a past that they struggle to understand. Ignacio's mother, who after being raped has to leave her town, is called Soledad, explained by the statement that 'she knew better than anyone the meaning of solitude' (p. 30). Blanca means "white", a colour suiting both her role as Ignacio's victim and her enigmatic personality. These aspects in Blanca's name and nature are stressed by her epitaph, 'In life and death, pure light' (p. 192).

Reina in turn translates as "queen", matching her self-assurance and the admiration she inspires in others. Her daughter's name and surname, Dulce Fuerte or "Sweet Strong", summarise the polarities in her personality: despite an underlying tenderness shown mainly towards the girl she nannies in Spain, she has toughened up to endure her complex family story and her dissatisfaction with Castro's Cuba. As for Constancia, it means "perseverance" as well as "proof" or "evidence". The first word could be related to her resilience despite maternal neglect and distressing love stories, while the second points out that, through her inheritance of Blanca's features, her own person signifies the missing parts of the family story. Constancia marries two brothers whose surname is "Cruz" or "cross", and her burden will pass on to her daughter Isabel: both women are left lovelorn and resentful as their partners abandon them during pregnancy. Finally, some workers at Constancia's factory are named as the 'ever feuding Odio cousins' (p. 230), a surname appropriate to their quarrelling since it means "hate".

The metaphoric anthroponyms in Escandón's *EBS* are yet more marked than those in *TAS*, as befits a novel resembling fables and parables. "Esperanza" means "hope", while her pessimistic and resigned friend is called "Soledad", meaning "Solitude" or "Loneliness". Esperanza's daughter, who dies just before entering adolescence, is called "Blanca" or "white", the colour of purity and innocence. The priest that comforts Esperanza during her search for Blanca is suitably named "Salvador" or "Saviour", while the lover that Esperanza finds in her journey is 'an angel. And his name is Angel' (p. 238). In the cases above in *TAS* and *EBS*, the meaning or connotations of names and surnames are not translated, placing bilingual readers in a slightly privileged position with respect to monolingual ones.

If *TAS* and *EBS* are distinctive for their use of proper names, Alvarez's *¡Yo!* is the only one that includes a personal pronoun in Spanish, placing it as the novel's title in addition to that. "Yo", or "I" as a title constitutes an affirmation of the protagonist's individuality while, since the work is a collection of other characters' impressions of Yolanda García, it simultaneously points out the importance of family, friends and acquaintances in the formation of her identity.

In Santiago, Alvarez, and García, terms for familial and other social relations occur more frequently than any other type of words. This mirrors their works' concern with the characters' families and social environments. Families in these stories, however, are portrayed as shifting entities that constitute sites of contention as the characters evaluate differently who belongs to it and how they experience these bonds. Words for "mother" and "father" in particular are the most common Spanish entries in each of these authors' narratives.

In Santiago's *WIWPR*, "Mamá" appears three times, and its affective variants "Mami" and "Mamita" 605 times and 4 times respectively. "Papá" appears only once but there are 239 occurrences of "Papi", and 9 of "Papito". *AW*, in turn, shows 566 instances of "Mami" and 25 of "Papi". *DC* shows 31 uses of "Mamá", 2 of "Mami", and 23 of "Papi", while in *TAS* "Mamá" is included 79 times in the narration, "Mami" 34, "Papá" 86, and "Papi" 43. Alvarez's *GG* presents 160 cases of "Mami", 16 of "Mamita", 79 of "Papi", and 16 of "Papito", whereas *¡Yo!* resorts to "Mamá" 58 times, to "Mami" 38, to "padre" once, and to "Papi" 24. Finally, in *Butterflies* we find "Madre" once, "Mamá" 383 times, "Mami" 9, "Papá" 184, and "Papi" 4.

In all narratives except *EBS* –which is not told from the perspective of a daughter character or narrator-, the most ubiquitous Spanish word is thus "Mamá" or one of its variants. This conveys the powerful influence that mothers play in the configuration of the characters' identities, despite conflictive relationships between them that are only resolved when the daughters leave, become adults, and reassess their elders from a different standpoint. The characters' intricate relationships with their mothers parallel their continually renegotiated bonds with their mother language, cultures, and countries.

The families portrayed in these works are however extended, complex units. Relatives, mothers, fathers and children remain an important part of the protagonists' lives even when different family branches might be physically apart as a result of some characters' emigration to the U.S. Thus, terms referring to uncles, aunts, cousins, grandmothers and grandfathers are also highly frequent. It is worth noting that in *AW*, which portrays Esmeralda's life with her siblings and her maternal family in the U.S., the term "Tata" [52] -an affectionate and

respectful term of address for parents or grandparents¹¹⁸ - appears a considerably greater number of times than any word for “father”. This reflects the fact that Pablo has remained in Puerto Rico and, as Esmeralda spends years without seeing him, he does not play such a central part in her everyday life anymore. Similarly, *DC* shows 97 cases of “Abuela” [97] or “grandmother”, which almost trebles the occurrences of words for “mother”. The difference between the two terms’ numbers of appearances illustrates the affinity that the main protagonist Pilar feels towards her maternal grandmother Celia as well as her antagonism towards her mother Lourdes.

The differences in the portrayal of family relationships conveyed by the works’ usage of Spanish terms illustrate that the way in which family is understood and experienced varies from case to case as well as from character to character. The contrasting relationships that Constancia and Reina have with their parents, for instance, are illustrated by the fact that the former calls their father “Papi” and their mother “Mamá”, while for the latter Ignacio is “Papá” and Blanca “Mami”.

The narratives’ use of Spanish entries also suggests that families are delimited by subjective boundaries defined by blood ties as much as by shared experiences. Close family friends, for instance, are sometimes addressed by the García sisters as “tío”, and 16 out of the 34 occurrences of this word in *GG* refer to non-relatives. Similarly, in *Butterflies* male adults who are close to each other sometimes refer to each other as “compadre” [3], the literal and figurative meanings of which are conveyed by a description of how a character addresses ‘his old business partner...as compadre even though neither one was godparent

118. Information taken from *Diccionario de uso del español de América y España* (Spes Editorial, 2002), p. 1830.

to the other's children' (p.187). "Compay", a variant of this word, also appears on one occasion. Similarly, in *Butterflies* there are several occurrences of "m'ija" [5], a contraction of "mi hija" which means "my daughter" but which can also be used in the sense of "love" or "darling" to address women usually younger than the speaker.

¡Yo! also shows how individuals might differ in their understanding of who is family and who is not. The word "familia" appears once in the novel, when Yolanda dedicates her college report to both the maid and the maid's daughter using the phrase "Sarita y Primitiva, parte de mi familia". However, Sarita disputes this claim, showing that Yolanda's perception of family and her own differ due to the financial and social differences between them.

The metaphorical associations of the family are brought to the fore in *AW*, where references to family bonds are used to comment on a person's wider background. Esmeralda explains that asking someone 'Y tu abuela, ¿dónde está?' ('Where is your grandmother?') serves as a reminder 'that in Puerto Rico claims of racial purity [are] suspect' (*AW*, p. 57). As we have seen in Part II, this metaphorical association between family ties and a person's historical, socio-cultural and national roots is central to the narratives' exploration of the connections between the characters' individual and collective identities.

Regarding numerical differences in the usage of Spanish family terms, *WIWPR* shows the highest occurrence of these kinds of words, as suits a work mostly set in Puerto Rico with a young girl as its protagonist. In *AW*, the word for "mother" appears on fewer occasions than in *WIWPR* but still surpasses the number of times words for "mother" or "father" appear in the other narratives. This suggests that, despite the dissensions between Esmeralda's family and the

protagonist seeking her own identity, there is a daily interaction within the domestic environment. *Butterflies*, also dealing with a Spanish-speaking setting and tightly knit family, shows the second highest number of occurrences of words referring to parents.

The lower use in *DC* and *TAS* of items concerning family can be linked to the physical and ideological distances separating the characters who stay in Cuba from those living in the U.S., together with the lack of mutual understanding tainting the relationships among members of each branch of the Del Pino family. It can also be linked to the fact that the main protagonist, Pilar, who left Cuba as a baby, has increasingly tenuous recollections of the place, and cannot develop a personal rapport with her island relatives until she returns there towards the end of the novel. Finally, it also reflects that, while living in Brooklyn, she is part of any Cuban-American or wider Latino communities apart from having two boyfriends of Spanish-speaking backgrounds also fluent in English. As for Alvarez's *GG* and *¡Yo!*, like *DC* they portray family relations mainly as they affect their protagonist, but focus on her social interactions depicting her dealings with friends, lovers, and various acquaintances. This is reflected in the novels' use of entries concerning bonds between relatives, also considerably lower than in Santiago's writings.

The importance of social interactions outside the family is made obvious by the frequent appearance of terms like "Doña", "Don", "Señora", "Señorita", and "Señor" throughout the works of Alvarez, García, and Santiago. Particularities of the characters' social life in each case are marked by the occurrence of particular sets of terms. In the episodes of *¡Yo!* reminiscing the Garcías' life in the Dominican Republic during Trujillo's time, the weight of

military and political hierarchies shaping every aspect of their lives is underlined by the appearance of the expression “El Jefe” [2] (“the Chief”), referring to the dictator. In *Butterflies*, mostly set during Trujillo’s regime, this term occurs much more frequently, appearing 93 times preceded by an article and another 17 times just as “Jefe”. Other expressions conveying the militarisation of the country under Trujillo’s regime are “Generalísimo Doctor Rafael L. Trujillo” [1], “Capitán” [3] and “oficial” [1]. The Catholic upbringing of the Mirabals in *Butterflies* is also underlined by the abundance of terms concerning religious posts such as “Padre” [39] or “Father”, and “Sor” [52] or “Sister”. Similarly, the use in *TAS* of “compañera” [3S] and “compañero” [2P], meaning “comrade”, remit to the specific socio-political environment of Castro’s Cuba.

EBS does not show any Spanish entries concerning family relations, which reflects the fact that its focus is not the protagonist’s development within a family environment or specific social community but her odyssey from place to place in search of Blanca, her faith, and her resilience. Accordingly, the terms “Doña” [75] and “Don” [15] also appear scarcely in comparison to the other works, and the respect and social distance these terms denote are explicitly explained in the text (p. 72). “Comadre” [5] also occurs in comparatively few instances, and is exclusively applied to Soledad stressing the reduced nature of Esperanza’s affective circle. It can be inferred from the context to be a term denoting intimacy applied to very close friends.

The importance of feelings –however misplaced, unrequited, or fatal– throughout the narratives is stressed by the frequent use in all the narratives of the affective diminutive suffixes “-ito” or “-ita” attached to anthroponyms or to terms of address fulfilling that function. Another diminutive suffix with similar

connotations in the narratives, but considerably more scarce, is “-ín”, which appears in the transformation of “Ramona” into “Monín” in *WIWPR*, “José” into “Pepín” in *TAS*, and “Mundo” into “Mundín” in *¡Yo!*

The nature of the characters’s interactions is also manifest in the nicknames that they use, are given, or give to others. In the narratives, nicknames belong to three main types that sometimes overlap: monikers showing endearment and familiarity; conveying power relations of different kinds among people; and encapsulating social or professional personae. The first group is particularly well represented in Santiago’s writings, where numerous domestic sobriquets manifest the rich, down-to-earth quality of Esmeralda’s family life. In *WIWPR*, for instance, Ramona gives each of her daughters affectionate nicknames like “Muñequita” or “Little Doll”, “La Colorá” or “the red girl”, and “Negrita”, a term of endearment for Esmeralda meaning “little black girl” which is frequently shortened to Negi.

Domestic nicknames also reflect the power dynamics and conflicts shaping the characters’ interactions. Esmeralda and her siblings, for example, secretly call their aunt “Titi Avena” or “Auntie Oatmeal” ‘because oatmeal was all she cooked for [them]’ (*WIWPR*, p. 183). The nickname conveys both the feeling of power and superiority that the children obtain from having deceived her into preparing their favourite food, as well as the resulting effects of fraternity and conspiracy among them. In *GG*, the girls convert their Dominican relatives’ real names into sobriquets by ‘translating them into literal English so that they sounded ridiculous’, transforming “Concha” into “Conchshell”, “Asunción” into “Ascension”, “Mundo” into “World”, and “Paloma” into “Pigeon”. While these practices manifest respectively generational and cultural

tensions, monikers can also convey gender inequalities as illustrated in *AW* by the name Esmeralda is given by her older lover Ulvi. Apart from intimacy, “Chiquita” or “Little girl” shows his infantilisation of her and his controlling attitude.

The second group of nicknames, those indicating power relations, are particularly well represented in *DC* and *TAS*. *TAS*, for instance, shows how Reina is known among her work colleagues as “Comanyera Amazona” or “Comrade Amazon”, due both to her efficiency as an electrician as well as to her sexual magnetism. Constancia’s first husband Gonzalo is similarly known as “El Gallo” (“The Rooster”) ‘for his success with the ladies and his willingness to take on any foe’ (p.125). The powers of figures involved in *santería* or familiar with the properties of plants are made to appear the more mysterious by the nicknames given to these characters. A *santera* in *DC* is called “La Madrina” or “the Godmother”, which is not translated, while a respected herbalist in *TAS* is called “La Sequita” which means “the little dried woman” but also left unexplained. This type of nickname conveying power and authority also include references to Castro as “El Líder” [48] in *DC*, “El Comandante” [1] or “El Caballo” [1] (“The Horse”) in *TAS*. This nickname is made partially clear by Dulce’s statement that ‘*El Caballo* has four broken legs, and no one has the courage to put him out of his misery’ (p. 51). As in *DC*, the fact that Castro is not alluded to by his name conveys the power that he indirectly holds over the characters’ lives.

In a similar way, *GG* makes references to “Trujillo’s hated nickname”, “Chapita” or “bottle cap”, originating from the dictator’s love for medals and translated in the text. The novel also presents an instance of nicknames connected with ethnic or social status, “Chino” or “Chinese man”, applied to a

member of the De la Torres' staff 'whose slightly slanted eyes have earned him his nickname' (p. 201). This use of nicknames to convey class distinctions also appears in *¡Yo!*, as the de la Torres name a maid "Primitiva" or "Primitive" when they hire her as "a young wild girl" from the countryside.

Monikers in *Butterflies* are mainly connected with the Mirabals' underground activism. "Las Mariposas" or "the Butterflies" fall obviously within the second type of moniker as does "Enriquillo", the code-name of Minerva's partner after a "great Taino chieftain". Other code-names of members of their underground group are "Palomino" (which could be translated as "Young pigeon", "palomino horse", or "pipsqueak"), "El Rayo" ("The Lightning"), "Águila" ("Eagle"), and "Niño" ("Kid"), which are left without translation in the text. Trujillo's nickname, "Chapita", also appears both translated and explained in the text. Finally, a friendly guard at the Mirabals' prison is nicknamed "Santicló" 'after the big, jolly American 'saint' who brings gifts even to those who don't believe in Jesus' (p. 247).

Nicknames in *EBS* are as numerous as terms concerning family bonds and formal terms of address are scarce. Most monikers in the novel belong to the third group, providing a means to separate the characters' work personae from their personal lives. People known by a moniker in the narrative are mainly pimps, prostitutes, and wrestlers that Esmeralda meets in her journey in search of Blanca. Her arch-enemy, for instance, goes by "Cacomixtle", which is translated as "weasel". Among the prostitutes at the Pink Palace are "Flaca", a term clarified by a previous description of the woman as "scrawny", and "Morena", a "dark-skinned" woman. The moniker of another prostitute, "La Mojadita" or "The Little Wet Woman", is left without explanation.

Wrestlers' names in *EBS* include Angel's sobriquet "El Angel Justiciero" or "The Avenging Angel", "Justiciero" not translated in the text; "Calambre", meaning "cramp" or "electric shock", left without translation; "El Santo", similar enough to its English equivalent to probably be accessible for monolingual readers; and "Vaca Sagrada" or "Sacred Cow", not translated in the text. There is also Angel's enemy "La Migra" or "immigration police", '[a] masked mastodon wearing dark green shorts, an INS officer's hat, and infrared glasses' (p. 200).

The characters' affectionate and romantic interactions are also depicted through their use of Spanish terms of endearment. There is a comparatively high recurrence of these entries in *DC* with respect to the other works responding mainly to the novel's thematic focus on thwarted passion through the lives of Celia, Felicia, Lourdes and Pilar. It is *GG* and *¡Yo!*, however, that show what is arguably the most interesting usage of a term of endearment in the narratives. In *GG*, Laura García refers to her husband as "Cuco" [2], and uses its female variants "Cuca" [3] and "Cuquita" [11S, 1P] to refer to her daughters. The term, indicated to be a generic pet name in the novel, is explained further in *¡Yo!*; the term, which also appears here both in its masculine form "Cuco" [3S, 2P] and in the feminine one "cuca" [2], is defined as '[a]n island endearment that means bogeyman' (p. 260). The fact that this same word can be applied to a figure causing fear and to a loved person suits well the nature of the relationships between Laura and her U.S.-raised daughters, a mixture of feelings of affection and antagonism that are continually renegotiated.

A final group of words punctuating the characters' interactions throughout the works of Alvarez, Santiago and García are greetings and expressions indicating petitions, gratefulness, hesitation, assent, disagreement or

negation. These kinds of terms of address are well represented in all the narratives. *TAS*, however, stands out in that it shows a high number of interrogative, imperative and subjunctive constructions deployed with the aim of checking that communication is being maintained adequately. Among these, for instance, figure “¿Me oyes?” [1] or “do you hear me?”, “Mira” [2] (“look”), “Oye” [2] (“listen”), “Concéntrate” [1] (“concentrate”), 136- “Really, mi vida, “Créeme” [1] (“believe you me”), “Cuéntame todo” [1] (“tell me everything”), and “Créelo” [1] (“believe it”). They are not translated although a few of these items are similar enough to their English counterparts to be understood without much problem. The frequency and variety of such expressions is the more poignant in a novel in which the antagonism, disagreements, and silence among the characters do not just stem from generational, political, or personality differences, but from the murder of Blanca that altered the Agüero sisters’ life forever.

8.2. Culinary terms

Specific foods and ways of cooking are a central element in the everyday life of national and socio-cultural groups, and occupy an emblematic place in the configuration of their identity. As Tey Diana Rebolledo states regarding representations of cooking in Chicana literature, ‘[t]he ingredients become the symbolic substances that make up “ethnic” identity. Cooking thus expresses an identity politics, coming to represent tradition, the breaking of tradition, the understanding of that tradition’ (*Women Singing*, p. 133). Taking into account

this link of food and cooking with ethnic and national identities, I will analyse in detail culinary terms appearing in the narratives as they illustrate the socio-cultural specificity of authors and characters together with the richness of their cultures of origin.

Except for *EBS*, the works are written from the perspective of protagonists who emigrate to the U.S. and remember their life before that displacement. In this context, the abundance of culinary terms amounts to an exercise of nostalgic remembrance together with a reclaiming by the characters of their ethno-cultural background as an integral part of their subjectivities in their U.S. presents. Added to this, as the everyday preparation of food has traditionally been an activity undertaken by women, the works' focus on culinary terms is in accordance with their gendered explorations of identity construction processes. Protagonists like Pilar, Esmeralda or Yolanda García are seldom portrayed cooking themselves, the importance acquired by food in the narratives in which they act as focalisers can be interpreted as a conscious link with women's history and culture. Cooking –or, in the case of these characters, appreciating the food that somebody has cooked for them-, constitutes 'a way of inscribing oneself into the collective representation of women's work' (Rebolledo, *Women Singing*, p. 133). Similarly, the fact that *EBS*'s Esperanza abandons cooking and other domestic activities after Blanca's death –and the resulting scarcity of Spanish terms related to these areas of experience in the novel- could be taken as a challenge of the roles traditionally assigned to women, even if this challenge is quite limited in its approach as shown in Chapter 6.

In *WIWPR* and *AW*, the detail in which ingredients and dishes are described symbolises the richness of Puerto Rican culture, contributing to

recreate the atmosphere of Esmeralda's environment both in Puerto Rico and in Brooklyn. Food also conveys the closeness of her family as meals are carefully planned and prepared by Ramona and Tata for the enjoyment of all. Added to this, it is at the core of social interactions, being exchanged with neighbours as a treat or in return of a favour or bought from shops or street vendors.

Among fruits and vegetables in *WIWPR* are "pomarroza" a fruit described in the glossary as a "[r]ose apple", and "malanga", a plant cultivated in low lands near pools and rivers with edible tubers of great nutritional value (*Diccionario del español*, p. 1178). The plant is not described or listed in the glossary. There are also occurrences of "ñames" [1S, 1P] or "yams" and "yautías" [1S, 1P], both specified as types of tubers in the text. *AW* makes references to "ñames" and "yautías" [2P] among 'other Puerto Rican vegetables' (p. 24), and "quenepa" [1S, 2P], described as a 'round, crackly skinned, slippery sweet, solid-centered' fruit (p. 167).

Esmeralda also refers to spices and sugar "del país", the meaning of which is not explained in reference to these condiments. However, it can be inferred to stand for "made in Puerto Rico" by looking at the expression "queso [cheese] del país", which figures in the glossary. A further condiment is "achiote", listed in the glossary as "A bright orange seasoning made from annatto seeds". Finally, there is a mention to "sofrito", appearing in the glossary as "[v]egetables, herbs, and spices ground up and combined", "[u]sed to season Puerto Rican food". *AW* mentions '*sofrito* sizzled into hot oil' (p. 25), "recao" or "ingredients" [1], and fragrant, roasted "achiote" [2], which are left without further explanation.

The most numerous type of food terms in the memoirs are however

cooked dishes. In *WIWPR* these include “alcapurrias” [1S, 2P], which the glossary defines as “[g]round plantain and green bananas stuffed with meat then fried”) and “pasteles” [3P] made out of a seasoned mixture of grated “green bananas, yautías and yucca... spooned onto roasted banana leaves” which are then ‘tied...with cotton twine, and dropped... into a huge pot of boiling water’ (*WIWPR*, p. 161). Esmeralda also describes “guanimes” [2], “cornmeal patties stuffed with cheese, wrapped in a banana leaf, and then boiled” (*WIWPR*, p. 179) and “morcillas” [2], “black sausages... roasted or fried” (*WIWPR*, p. 43). She also mentions “asopao” [6], a kind of soup more clearly explained in the glossary as “[m]eat or fish soup thickened with rice and potatoes”. “Sancocho” appears twice [1S, 1P], ‘a vegetable stew thickened with mashed tubers, with cornmeal dumplings floating on top’ (*WIWPR*, p. 90).

There is also a single occurrence of “arroz con pollo”, literally “rice with chicken”, shown to be a stew but not included in the glossary, and a “daily caldero of rice and beans”, “[a] special heavy pot for cooking rice” according to the glossary. *AW* shows “arroz con pollo” [2], clearly a cooked dish but left without further explanation, “asopao” [2S, 1P], and “a meaty *sancocho* or roster stew with red wine and lots of cilantro” (p. 91). It also features “alcapurrias” and “pastelillos” [2], obviously cooked food but not described further, and “pernil” and “queso del país”, similarly left without clarification.

Food references also convey the cultural and political tensions between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. In the communal centre opened in Esmeralda’s town, American experts instruct the locals on nutrition, but their ignorance about native particularities is made obvious as they talk of potatoes instead of “batatas” or sweet potatoes; “yellow wedges of cheese” instead of “white *queso del país*

wrapped in banana leaves”, translated in the glossary as “[c]heese made in Puerto Rico”; and square bread slices unlike the local “round *pan de manteca*” which the glossary explains as “lard bread” (*WIWPR*, p. 66). Esmeralda and her classmates are offered free breakfasts consisting of “huevos Americanos” [2] and “salchichas Americanas” (*WIWPR*, pp. 75-76), which both the context and the glossary translate as “eggs” and “sausages”, respectively. The link between food’s connotations and a certain cultural or ethnic group’s specificities is reinforced as Esmeralda imagines the prayer fragment “Give us this day our daily bread” as referring to ‘a long loaf of *pan de agua*, the kind the baker made with a coconut frond down the center of its crunchy crust’ (*WIWPR*, p. 100).

Desserts figure prominently among the food described in *WIWPR*, connoting nurturance and happiness in the girl’s childhood. The narrator describes “piraguas” [2P, 2S], “gleaming pyramids of ice” served in “white paper cones” and sweetened with “bright-colored syrup” by their seller, the “piraguero” (*WIWPR*, p. 38). “Arroz con dulce”, defined in the glossary as “[s]weetened rice spiced with ginger, coconut milk, and cinnamon”, appears three times, while “tembleque”, figuring in the glossary as “Cornstarch pudding made with coconut milk” is mentioned twice. Other delicacies are “a bar of Chocolate Cortés” (*WIWPR*, p. 235) and “coquitos”, not in the glossary but described in the text as made of ‘coconut milk... mixed with sweet evaporated milk, sugar, egg yolks, and rum’ (*WIWPR*, p. 161)

Among the drinks are “café con leche” [2], not in the glossary, “ron cañita” [1] or “homemade rum”, not in the glossary but clarified by an adjacent translation, and “mavi” [1] or “bark beer”, translated both in the glossary and in the text. *AW* in turn features “café con leche” [2] and “coquito”, made with ‘fresh

coconut milk and Puerto Rican rum' (p. 175). *AW* describes how, in the dancing clubs where Esmeralda goes with Ramona, 'one could buy a servicio, which consisted of a bottle of rum, two bottles of Coke,... ice, plastic cups, and sliced lemons' (p. 98). *WIWPR* and *AW* also mention other terms related to food like "the refillable aluminium canisters called *fiambreras*" and "la compra" [6], "the Saturday grocery shopping".

Food in *DC* includes "guayaba" [2]; "ropa vieja" [1], a meat stew with a tomato sauce which is not specified; "arroz con pollo", not translated but presumably cooked with the previously listed 'chicken, two pounds of rice, onions, [and] green peppers' (*DC*, p. 87); and "carne asada" ("roasted meat"), described as a cooked dish but not explained further. There are also "palomilla", which means meat from cattle's loin¹¹⁹ but is left unexplained, and "yuca". There is also one occurrence of "natilla" or "custard", a baked dessert not specified in more detail. Drinks include "yerba buena" ("mint") teas, left unspecified in the text, "guayabita del pinar", mentioned to be "a local drink", and the "guarapo", explained as "the sticky syrup" inside the sugar cane stalk.. There is also one occurrence of "Cuba libres"; although it refers to the English loanword since it is not italicised, it is highly significant as the drink is consumed by tourists seeing Cuba very differently from the anti-Castro Lourdes observing them, for whom Cuba is not "free".

The fact that *DC* shows less concern with food with respect to *WIWPR* and *AW* can be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand, its protagonist Pilar has fewer memories of Cuban cooking than Esmeralda, as she left her grandmother and the island as a baby and her mother cooks mainly American

119. Information taken from Constantino Suárez, *Diccionario de voces cubanas/ vocabulario cubano: Suplemento a la 14a edición del Diccionario de la R.A. de la Lengua* (Habana: R. Velsos, 1921), p. 396.

meals for which she does not like much. At the same time, and concerning the metaphorical connection between cooking and ethnic identity construction, Pilar's Cuban subjectivities are more tenuous than Esmeralda's Puerto Rican ones due to the former's weak recollections of Cuba and her lack of contact with a Cuban community while in the States.

Fruits and vegetables in *TAS* include "mangos" [2], "yuca" [3], "malangas" [1] –a type of tuber, not translated in the text- and "[u]na toronja" –translated through a previous mention to "a large grapefruit". References to cooked food abound, such as "chicharrones", translated as "crispy pork cracklings", and "torta a la española" (Spanish omelette????), left unexplained. There are also "chorizos" [2] –partially clarified by previously mentioning "sausages"-, and "empanadas" [1] –"pies" or "pasties", partly explained as a type of baked food filled "plump with spiced ground beef". The "medianoche" [2], a kind of sandwich, is described in detail as a character depicts 'the precise proportion of pork to ham to cheese, quick smears of mayo and mustard, three slivers of sour pickle, all grilled to melting perfection on a hunk of crusty bread' (p. 286).

More elaborate dishes include various rice dishes such as "arroz con frijoles", "arroz con pollo", "and "arroz con mariscos" which appear once each and mean respectively "rice with beans", "rice with chicken", and "rice with seafood" but are not described as cooked dishes. "Congrí" is defined as "a red-beans-and-rice-stew". Other meals include "caldo gallego" –Galician broth, left unexplained in the narration-, and "picadillo", the cooking of which is explained in detail as a sautéed mixture of garlic, onion, and green pepper to which beef meat, tomato sauce, pimientos, stuffed olives and raisins are added. More meaty

dishes in the novel are “palomilla” [1], “lechón asado” [1] and “carne asada” [1]. These entries, the last two of which mean “roasted suckling pig” and “roasted meat”, are not explained.

Desserts include “flan” [3], meaning “crème caramel” and partially explained as a dessert. The word does not appear italicised, probably because “flan” also exists in English although with a different sense. There are also “churros” [1] or sweet strips of fried dough, which are not explained but are presented as a type of sweet food by the mention of its usual accompaniment, “a hot chocolate”. Drinks include “cafesito” [1] and “café con leche” [1], made relatively accessible by the context, and “guarapo” [1], described as “treacly cane juice”. We also find mentions to “presidentes” [1], a type of Dominican beer, and Cuba Libres [1], explained to be alcoholic drinks. As neither of them is italicised but the first word is not a loanword having entered English, it is unclear whether the second is meant to be an English or Spanish entry. Food containers and measures are represented by “tinajones” or large earthenware jars, partially explained as “[e]normous” objects “filled with rainwater”, and “cucharadas” or “spoonfuls”, its meaning made clear by the mention of sugar before the phrase “sixty-two *cucharadas*’ worth”. That the references to food are more numerous than in *DC* suits *TAS*’s focus on the characters’ need for nurturance and their fixation with recovering and redeeming the family past, a theme arguably still more prominent in the later than in the former.

Fruits in *GG* are “guayabas” [2], translated through a previous mention of “guavas”, and “casabe” [1] or “cassava”, not explained except as food. Cooked dishes include “pastelón” [3S, 1P], misunderstood by a character as “pastolone” and described as “a casserole... with rice and ground beef”, and “camarones a la

vinagreta” [1], of which the first word is translated as “shrimp” while “vinagreta” is close enough to “vinaigrette” to be accessible. There is also one reference to baking a flan, which it is unclear whether the reader should consider a Spanish or an English entry since it is not italicised. Drinks include “cafecitos” [1S, 1P], described as a particular way of having coffee in the Dominican Republic in the form of ‘little cups... so full of goddamn caffeine and Island sugar’ (p. 206). Other drinks are “un refresco” [1] or “a soft drink”, indirectly explained by specifying its offer through the mention of “una Coca Cola”. It is also meaningful that Laura offers the government police agents sent to search the de la Torres’ compound “a Presidente, the common beer they all like”.

Fruits in *¡Yo!* include “guayaba” [1] and “plátano” [1], similar enough to “guava” and “plantain”, and “arroz con habichuelas” [1] and “rice with beans”, presented only as a kind of food. Among the desserts are “pudín de pan” [1] or “bread pudding”, not translated while drinks are only represented by the term “cafecitos” [1]. The number of food entries is greater in *GG* than in *¡Yo!*, matching the fact that in the former more of the action is either set in the Dominican Republic or narrated by or concerned with family members. In contrast, narrators in the latter include a wider array of Yolanda’s acquaintances and deal more with her U.S. present.

Butterflies, also concerned with a Spanish-speaking environment, shows again a relatively high number of food entries. Fruits are only represented by “coco” [1], resembling its English equivalent “coconut”. Cooked dishes include “sancocho” [6S, 1P], and “Pollo a la criolla” [1] or “Chicken Creole style”, neither of which is translated or explained, and “pastelitos” [3S, 2P] or “little cakes or pies”, not defined beyond being a kind of snack. There are also

mentions to “mangú”, a green plantain cooked in salted water, mixed some of the liquid and oil or lard and then kneaded (Malaret, *Americanismos*, p. 537), and “chao”, a “watery paste” taken for breakfast at the Mirabals’ prison. Desserts are exemplified by “dulce de leche” [2], a caramel spread made by boiling sugar and milk, and “arroz con leche” [3] or “rice pudding”. These dishes’ translation and ingredients are not offered, but the latter’s cultural significance is explained as Mate comments on the popular belief that one will marry the person one shares the dessert with. Drinks appearing in the novel are “limonada” [2], similar to “lemonade”, “cafecito” [4], “guanábana” [1] or “soursop” juice, and “limonsillo” [sic] [1] tea –“limoncillo” being the name for several plants that smell of lemon (Malaret, *Lexicón*, p. 277). “Guanábana” and “limonsillo” are left without explanation. There is also a reference to “another *cervecita*”, which could be translated as “another nice beer”; the word appears after a mention to drinks, but is left without further explanation.

Entries related to food in *EBS* include “pollo al chipotle” [1] or chicken cooked with a particular type of jalapeno chile, not translated and only presented as a dish that the protagonist bakes. There are also “churros” [1], which when they are two-day old look like crumbling columns (p. 68), and “horchata” [1], which in Mexico stands for a drink made from ground melon seeds and which is only described in the text as a kind of drink sprinkled with cinnamon and lots of ice. The relatively low number of food entries agrees with my interpretation that these are used in the narratives to evoke a particular culture, past, and family life from which the characters seek nurturance. *EBS*, as has been stated before, is not primarily concerned with family bonds, the domestic realm, the revision of the past, or the problematisation of cultural and national identities.

8.3. The Body

Spanish words related to the body in the works are usually connected with mother-daughter interactions, the characters' mental and psychological wellbeing, and the use of their physical entity as a metaphor for their cultural and national identities. Their bodies are the primary instruments through which the characters define their selves, interact with others, and are perceived, controlled or nourished by them. Although terms related to health and the body appear with varying frequency in all the works, in *TAS* they acquire particular prominence regarding both their number and narrative significance.

What is distinctive in *TAS* is the number of entries referring to different female body parts, mainly in relation to Constancia's line of cosmetic products. Her range of body products is called "Cuerpo de Cuba" [10], explained by the mention of its English translation, "body", in the previous sentence. It is composed of products for women such as "Cabello de Cuba" [1] or "Hair of Cuba", which 'will tame... hair' (p. 211), "Cara de Cuba" [3] or "Face of Cuba", described as an emollient but not specified further, 'an eye repair cream called Ojos de Cuba' [1] (p. 129), and "Cuello de Cuba" [2], a 'neck-mending potion' (p. 191). There are also "Décolletage de Cuba" [1], "Senos de Cuba" [1], "Codos de Cuba" [1], "Caderas de Cuba" [1] (also shortened to "Caderas" [1]), "Muslos de Cuba" [1], and "Rodillas de Cuba" [1]. While the first item is transparent as a French loanword also incorporated into English, the rest, meaning respectively "Breasts of Cuba", "Elbows of Cuba", "Hips of Cuba", "Thighs of Cuba" and "Knees of Cuba", are not explained. Finally, "Pies de Cuba" [2] or "Feet of Cuba" is indicated to be a footbath.

This detailed listing of the parts of the female body corresponds to a nostalgic desire to reconstitute and reclaim a national identity restoring continuity with a Cuban past that the exile community in the novel experience as severed. Each item in *Cuerpo de Cuba* embodies ‘the exalted image Cuban women have of themselves: as passionate, self-sacrificing, and deserving of every luxury’ (p. 129). These feelings are also manifest in the perfume Constanca creates, ‘Flor del Destierro’, translated as “Flower of Exile”. While Constanca seems to exploit her clients’ self-indulgence and need to reinforce their national and cultural identity, the fact that she experiences similar needs particularly in relation to her family story is evident from the logo she chooses for the product range: a cameo of her mother’s face, which has become her own.

8.4. Physical and Social Spaces

Entries concerning physical and social spaces abound in the narratives, conveying the rural and urban landscapes in which the stories are grounded. Words related to the countryside mainly refer to natural landmarks and farming. Urban landscapes are evoked mostly by terms referring to countries, towns, neighbourhoods, streets, and squares as well commercial establishments, places connected with work, education and healthcare, and those of religious, political, or cultural significance. These Spanish entries indicate the emblematic role of specific geo-social referents in the characters’ identity as well as the importance of social interactions in the works. Finally, in the case of Santiago’s *WIWPR*, Alvarez’s *GG* and *¡Yo!*, and García’s *DC*, Spanish place names also contribute to

recreate the nostalgia of the U.S.-living protagonists for the environments and language of their childhood. Finally, items denoting geographic and social environments in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic also convey a certain “ethnic” flavour to readers not familiar with these countries.

Within these common general patterns in the nature and connotations of Spanish entries related to places and environments, each work presents its own particularities as it uses certain Spanish terms to foreground specific thematic concerns. In Santiago’s *WIWPR*, for instance, toponyms in Spanish highlight the often contrasting referents in Esmeralda’s identity as a child in Puerto Rico, and the linguistic choice acquires cultural and political connotations. As a young girl, she learns that her mother country is an “Estado Libre Asociado” [2], immediately translated as “Free Associated State...the official name for Puerto Rico in the Estados Unidos” (*WIWPR*, p. 64). This term strongly contrasts with the patriotic connotations of “Borinquén”, the island’s pre-Columbian name. “Estados Unidos” occurs twice in the narrative, and New York appears as “Nueva York”, the more colloquial “Nueva Yor”, and the plural variant “los Nueva Yores” [2], used as an informal name for the city because ‘it’s so big and spread out’ (*WIWPR*, p. 57).

Rendering these entries in Spanish increases their impact on the monolingual reader, thus indirectly conveying the pervading influence that the U.S. has on Puerto Rican life and on the characters themselves. Their use of colloquial variants for “New York” also renders the relative sense of familiarity that they experience towards the place, a main destination in the Puerto Rican exodus towards the continent of which several of Esmeralda’s relatives -and eventually herself- become part. The weight of these terms contrasts with the

light and exotic connotations of places unknown to the characters like “Pakistán” [1] in *WIWPR*, which Pablo mentions in little silly rhymes that he makes when he is in a good mood. The occurrences in *AW* of “El Barrio” [3], a colloquial term for the Upper West Side, also point out the “Puertoricanisation” of the United States resulting from the movements of people from the island to the continent. This “Puertoricanisation” counterbalances the island’s “Americanisation” derived from the U.S. influence on its affairs, which is subtly conveyed by the use of “Estado Libre Asociado” as “the official name for Puerto Rico” in the U.S and is more directly described in various scenes of *WIWPR*.

The only occurrence of “Cuba” in *DC*, which is the only country name appearing in its Spanish form in the novel, also acquires political connotations. It appears as part of the tourism slogan ‘Cuba... alegre como su sol’ (‘Cuba... as cheerful as its sun’) printed on a postcard showing Cuban women rolling cigars that Felicia’s estranged husband Hugo sends to Luz and Milagro. The caption and the image encapsulate the connotations that Cuba has for foreign tourists, and strongly contrast with the everyday reality of the novel’s characters living there.

EBS exploits place names in Spanish in a very different manner, endowing them with metaphorical and comic value in the context of narrative developments. Buildings, for instance, are generally named in a humorous manner that only bilingual readers will perceive. The first brothel where Esperanza works is called “La Curva” or “The Curve”, suggesting both womanly curves and that working there provides a turning point for Esperanza. The first brothel that she visits in Tijuana is “El Atolladero”, which is not translated but means “mire” -reflecting its inhabitants’ moral quality- as well as an awkward situation -which Esperanza certainly experiences there being almost raped by the

owner. Judge Haynes picks up fights at “El Reventón”, presumably a pub and meaning both a riot and a jam or fix although it is not explained. The travel agency where Esperanza works is called “Viajes Paseo” or “Promenade Travels”, the light and leisurely connotations of which contrast with the business’ small size and shady operations.

The Catholic, Spanish-speaking background of areas that once belonged to Mexico is stressed when Esperanza examines a map of California. She notices city names like ‘San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Clemente, Santa Barbara, San Diego, San Juan Capistrano, Santa Monica, San Onofre, [and] San Bernardino’, which announce a positive outcome of Esperanza’s journey proving that ‘[her] saints are waiting for [her] in California’ (p. 155). The same accentuation of a Spanish-speaking heritage takes place as she reads during a trip ‘the freeway signs indicating the different towns between San Diego and Los Angeles: Del Mar, Escondido, Encinitas, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, [and] Santa Ana’ (p. 163). Esperanza’s return to Mexico through the border town of San Ysidro is also a good omen. Finally, she also notes the “hybrid town names” of Mexicali and Calexico, stressing the fluid and heterogeneous quality of the Mexico-U.S. border.

8.5 Flora, Fauna, and Weather terms

All the works I am dealing with except Escandón’s present a variety of fauna, flora and weather terms in Spanish that add local colour in a particularly effective way since some might not have exact English equivalents. Santiago’s

WIWPR and García's *TAS*, however, present a greater variety and number of these items than any of the other works, as the reproduction of natural landscapes in the two narratives engages with central structuring themes.

The abundance of Spanish flora, fauna and weather terms in *WIWPR*, set mainly in Puerto Rico and covering Santiago's childhood, conveys the child Esmeralda's passionate love for her mother country, encouraged by patriotic pieces of national literature studied at school. It also accentuates the drastic change of environments and ways of life caused by Esmeralda's emigration to Brooklyn –covered in the work's last three sections. Finally, these entries evoking landscapes left behind by the adult author give the narration a certain nostalgic tone –particularly since Santiago admits in the prologue having felt estranged from the places of her childhood during a visit to the island as an adult.

Plants in *WIWPR* include “moriviví” [2] and “acerola” [1], respectively defined in the glossary as “*Mimosa pudica*, sensitive plant” and “West Indian cherry”. There are also mentions of the “flamboyán” [2] tree, referring to a tall tree with white wood and reddish flowers originally from Madagascar (*Diccionario de uso*, p. 863) but not explained further or listed in the glossary. Pablo's lessons to Esmeralda include the fact that ‘a *macho* tree... needs a female to blossom’ (p. 199). As for animals, *WIWPR* presents the “coquí tree frog”, figuring in the glossary as a ‘[t]iny tree frog, native to Puerto Rico, named after its distinctive song’, and “colibrí”, translated as “hummingbird” in the glossary. Concerning weather terms, *WIWPR* mentions “vaguadas” [2], described as “heavy, angry downpours” and listed in the glossary as “[h]eavy rains”. *AW* features “moriviví” and “culantro”, an aromatic plant with red and white flowers (*Diccionario del español*, p. 560) of which the English equivalent would be

“coriander”. The only specific fauna entry is “coquí” [2], evidently an animal but not explained further.

The relative abundance of terms related to flora and particularly to fauna in García’s *TAS* responds to different narrative purposes. On the one hand, it constitutes a characterisation device which conveys the fascination with animals experienced by Ignacio, a zoologist. It also brings to the fore the themes of natural selection, adaptation, and disappearance of weaker species which Ignacio weaves into his meditations on human existence, and which provide an interesting interpretive approach to the development of the family saga. In this respect, the story of the Agüeros questions at what price and at whose expense people inflict or survive violence.

The novel’s enumeration of tree names includes “a *yagruma* tree” [1], a tall tree with pink flowers and medicinal leaves (*Diccionario de uso*, p. 1988), and “groves of *jata* and *cana* palms” [1]. Other plants include “the *malanguetas*, the great upstanding cow-lily leaves” [1], and “*ave del paraíso* orchids” [1] or “bird of paradise orchids”. There are also mentions to “Paraíso” [1], a tree all the parts of which are impregnated with a juice both poisonous and medicinal (Suárez, p. 400); “*tártago*” [1], castor-oil plant or *Ricinus communis* and *Jatropha curcas* (Malaret, *Lexicón*, p. 517); and “*rompezaragüey*” [1], the name for numerous medicinal herbs and bushes (Malaret, *Lexicón*, p. 389), which only appear explained as ingredients for spells.

Types of animals comprehend “a *siguapa* stygian owl”, “an earless owl called a *sijú*”, “*yaguasas*” [3S, 2P] -a variety of duck (*Diccionario de uso*, p. 1988) only described as a bird in the text-, and “*camao*” [2], depicted as a spectacular bird with a blue mantle. There also figure “a red-tailed hawk...

known locally as the *gavilán del monte*” [2], and “the *andaraz*, a large native rodent that inhabits the remotest forest of Oriente”. Other birds are “*hutías*” [1], “*periquito*” [2] (“parakeet”) and “*cordóníz*” [sic] (“quail”), but which kinds of birds these are is not specified further.

This listing of Spanish animal and plant names of birds thus transmits Ignacio’s concern with species in risk of extinction, which is presented in the novel as a gradual but ongoing process. Dulce remembers Reina’s account of how ‘the early explorers had come to Cuba with their pestilential pets and nearly killed off the island’s native species’ (TAS, 202). This decimation was continued by the need for arable land during subsequent centuries, which makes Ignacio regret that ‘[t]here were no bird sanctuaries in Cuba’ in his lifetime, ‘no sense that anything of value had been destroyed by the tractors and plows’ (TAS, 151). He observes that, while ‘the island could not support the luxuriant foresta real of Central or South America’ it ‘once sustained a heavy and varied sylvan growth’, contrasting with ‘only one true forest’ remaining at the time of his narration (TAS, pp. 114-115).

This sense of decay connects with the novel’s connection of the Agueros’ saga with the biblical myth of Adam and Eve’s fall from grace and expulsion from the garden of Eden. Ignacio tries to compensate for the disappearance of Cuban fauna by recording the animals’ characteristics and making their importance known through his zoology treatises. His killing and stuffing animals for the sake of scientific knowledge, however, taints his attempts to preserve knowledge of Cuban fauna with further violence. At the moment of his death, he does not know whether his efforts had been productive, and whether the species he so loves will escape extinction. Parallel questions regarding TAS’s

protagonists are left open at the end of the novel: the reader is left to hypothesise whether Reina and Constanca's knowledge -and acknowledgment- of their turbulent family history including their own part in it will allow them to redeem themselves and break the cycle of survival at the expense of inflicting violence on others.

8.6. Terms of High Emotional Intensity

I consider terms of high emotional intensity those that either transmit the characters' feelings or provoke strong reactions from listeners. They include interjections, rhetorical invocations to God and the Virgin, taboo words, insults, and swearwords, and terms communicating positive or negative feelings. Spanish entries belonging to this semantic field, well represented in all the works except *EBS* –which does not often resort to including words in Spanish for narrative purposes- serve a variety of functions. They contribute to the characters' characterisation and add drama to the narration, punctuating people's moods and qualifying the tone of their interactions. They also manifest the characters' socio-cultural distinctiveness, as some expressions do not have English literal equivalents or correspond to the particular Spanish of specific regions or countries. The impact of these words is potentially greater for monolingual readers, for whom they are not familiar items of everyday usage. However, the use of these terms can also strengthen stereotyped views of Spanish-speakers as more passionate and expressive, transforming their characterisation value into “exotic” appeal.

As terms of high emotional load are fairly evenly present in the narratives and are not used in a particularly distinctive way in any of them apart from fulfilling the functions outlined above, I will not make a detailed analysis of their appearance in each work. However, it is worth noting the appearance of rhetorical invocations to God and the Virgin in Santiago's *WIWPR*, considerably more frequent than in any of the other works in both variety and number of terms. This feature in a work mostly set in a Spanish-speaking country illustrates how the influence of Catholicism has permeated cultural practices and linguistic expression even in the case of those who, like Esmeralda's immediate family except for her maternal grandmother, are not practising Catholics.

8.7 Religion and Magic

The narratives present a range of expressions related to religion and magic which contribute to the characters' characterisation by showing their ethnic and cultural hybridity and reflecting the sometimes conflicting elements in their subjectivities. These religious and magic references illustrate the syncretic nature of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican cultures, as well as pointing to the specificities of each. Thus, the references to a heterodox Catholicism in Santiago's memoirs contrast with this religion's fusion with popular beliefs in mediums depicted in Alvarez's *Butterflies*. Catholicism presents different variants in *GG*, where its links with voodoo are pointed out through the figure of the Garcías' Haitian maid Chucha. García's works, in turn, show its historical interactions with santería.

Practices of Catholicism, voodoo and santería have obviously undergone transformations from their respective origins in Spain and Africa to their manifestations in the countries portrayed in the works. This point, evoked by the religious references in the narratives, brings to the fore the evolutions of communal identities –religious or otherwise- due to the passage of time as well as to adapting to new geo-social settings. These transformations both precede and validate the changes in the characters’ self-imaging as they move to the U.S.

Finally, religion and magic constitute alternative ways of apprehending and evaluating the characters’ lives which contrast with those provided by history, politics and, particularly in the case of *TAS*, science. At the same time, as the works show the interconnections of these different fields of experience and perception, they blur the limits between each and point out their common status as (meta)narratives. Added to this, the characters’ differing understanding of history, politics, science and religion illustrates that these constitute sites of contention as much as of communal knowledge and identity.

Santiago’s *WIWPR* includes entries like “Papa Dios” [4] (listed in the glossary as “Father God”), “velorio” [1S, 1P] (“wake” according to the glossary), the redundant construction “Papa Pío the Pope” [1], “El Cura” [1], translated as “The Priest”, “Aleluya” [3], and “agua florida” [1], translated in the glossary as “Flower scented water from Florida” and used in a funeral in the narrative. There is also an invocation to God formulated as “Ay, Santo Dios, bendícemela!” [sic], translated as “Oh, dear God, bless her for me”. In *AW*, Esmeralda remembers her paternal grandmother uttering the initial words of the rosary, “Santa Maria, madre de Dios” (translated a few lines afterwards as “Holy Mary, Mother of

God”). Apart from the interjections listed in a previous section, there is also a single mention to “Dios” and “the Vírgenes”.

In *DC*, there are mentions to “La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre” [2], one of the Virgin’s manifestations, and to “Santa Bárbara” [2], “the Black queen”. Together with Catholic references, the novel shows abundant allusions to the Cuban cult of “santería” [6] through terms like “santero” [11S, 2P], “santera”, [9S, 4P], and “asiento” [2], suggested by the context to be an initiation into the cult’s mysteries. There are also references to “casa de santo” [2], a place of santería worship from the context. Words related to magic in *DC* include the names of “five special oils” sold in a shop that call Pilar’s attention: ‘*amor* (love), *sígueme* (follow me), *yo puedo y tú no* (I can and you can’t), *ven conmigo* (come with me), and *dominante* (dominant)’ (*DC*, p. 199). *DC* thus shows references to a hybrid Catholicism which sometimes overlaps and in other occasions contrasts with *santería* and magic, while in Santiago’s works it is much more orthodox.

Religious terms in *TAS* include “La Virgen” [6], “La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre” [9] –identified as ‘the island’s patron saint’ (p. 8)- and, in vocative uses, the expression without the article, “Virgen” [1]. The word “milagros” is made transparent by the mention of its translation, “miracles” [1], as well as from the context. Terms related to “santería” [1] also appear in the novel, such as “santeros” [2S, 1P], its meaning of santería priests made clear throughout the story, Other terms related to santería are translated either directly through appositions like “the limpieza, the cleansing”, or indirectly as in the case of “sahumerio” [1] (“aromatic smoke” or “aromatic substance”), prepared to ‘smoke out the evil’ with ‘[i]ncense, storax., mastics’ (p. 189). The words

“¡Fuera, diablo!” or “Go away, devil!” are uttered during an exorcising ritual, although their meaning is left unexplained.

Religious references in *GG* include the “Gran Poder de Dios” [1], “La Virgen” [2], “santo” [4S, 4P], “San Judas” [3], “patron of impossible causes”, and “promesa” [1]. There is also a mention of “agua florida” [1], partly translated as a ritual with which a character washes herself. “Santería” [1] also makes one appearance in the novel. *¡Yo!* presents invocations to God which have more content than the rhetorical formulas studied above. The characters’ references to “Dios santo” [5], or “Dios mío” [2], for instance, appear accompanied by petitions that he gives them patience (p. 120), or keeps them from trouble (p. 305). There are also allusions to the “Gran Poder de Dios” [3], meaning “Great Power of God” but left without translation, and to “Papá Dios in heaven” [1]. Invocations are also made to the “Virgencita” [5] or “dear Virgin”, her manifestation “la Virgencita de Altagracia” [1], and “santos” [3] or “saints” like “Santa Marta” [2] and “San Judas” [1]. Another religious term is “promesa” [1] or “vow”, similar to “promise” in its spelling and explained as something that a character may do “because of a great sorrow”. References to witchcraft include “mal ojos” [1] or “evil eyes”, partially explained by the fact that they “need to be dispersed” and are mentioned among “power bundles” and “the remains of spells”. At a more general level, there are many references to “destino” [8], close enough to “destiny” not to need further explanation.

Mentions to Catholic icons in *Butterflies* include “Dios” [1] in the slogan “Dios y Trujillo”, implying that the power of the dictator is equivalent or only second to that of the divinity. To this kind of words also belong “Virgencita” [28], and “La Virgencita de Altagracia” [1] in the postscript. Allusions to saints

comprehend “San Juan Evangelista” [3], “San José” [1], and “San Zenón” [1], who “[makes] the day sunny”, and “Santa Lucía” [4], described as having curative powers. “San Cristóbal” [2] is also referred to by his English name as the narrative alludes to the practice of carrying a St. Christopher’s medal to protect people in their travels. Invocations to God stronger than rhetorical formulas include “Por Dios” [4] or “for God’s sake”, explicitly indicated to constitute a plea, “Si Dios quiere” [2] or “if God wills”, and “Dios te bendiga” [2] or “God bless you”, the last two of which are not explained. There is also one allusion to the Taino “god of thunder Huracán” (“Hurricane”).

Words related to religious practices include “promesa” [4S, 1P], the meaning of which is clarified by the context. There is also “la bendición” [3], a “blessing” (p. 288) that younger people ask from their elders. In this group also figures to be “de luto” [1] or “mourning”, partly explained as a time in which some behaviours are not appropriate as a character’s relative is still ‘fresh in the ground’ (p.122). Terms concerning magic and popular beliefs include the use of “azabaches” [1] or jet pieces to “charm away” harmful people, and “alelá” [1], a variant of “alelada”. This means “dazed” or “transfixed”, being the word of “country people” for “spirit babies” with their “mind,... heart, [and] soul in the clouds” (p. 44). There is also a mention of “pega palo”, defined as “a special brew” a character’s “brujo” [2] or “witch doctor” ‘cooks up to keep him sexually potent’ (p. 95)

Central to *EBS*’s Esperanza’s faith in her “santitos” [1], her “beloved little saints”, and in finding Blanca, whom she considers her “santita” [1], her “own little saint” (p. 245). There are a total of fifty-six references throughout the novel to twenty different saints, the specific attributes of which are often

specified. Different manifestations of the Virgin Mary are also alluded to, mainly “the Virgen de la Candelaria” [4], “patron saint of Tlacotalpan”, and “the Virgen de Guadalupe” [1].

8.8 Collective identities

This group comprehends words indicating membership of various national, ethnic, racial, socio-cultural and occupational sectors with sometimes conflicting interests. The variety of terms belonging to this field included in the works calls attention to the wide range of collective referents and “imagined communities” interacting to shape each character’s sense of self. Together with this, if the configurations of these factors shaping individual identities vary, they also differ substantially from country to country and from one collective to another within each country. Terms like “jinetera” or “gusano”, for instance, immediately evoke Cuba’s specific socio-political circumstances, while “trujillista” reminds us to the Dominican Republic’s particular history. The way the Spanish entries underline national and socio-cultural specificities is the more relevant since characters and authors are very likely to be grouped as “Hispanic” or “Latinas” by the monolingual American audiences to which the works are primarily addressed.

In *WIWPR*, Puerto Rican identity is discussed in relation to the terms “jíbara” [16], “jíbaro” [12S, 8P], and “bohío” [2]. It is also connected to concepts like “dignidad” [2] or “dignity”, and “buenos modales” or “good manners”. It is often presented in conflict with the more powerful U.S., and terms denoting this nationality abound in the narrative, from “Americano” [8S, 13P], “Americana”,

and “Americanitos”, to the pejorative “gringo” [2S, 7P]. Similarly, the expression “el presidente” [3] appears in reference to the United States’ president, and contrasting with the fact that Puerto Rico only has its own governor.

Race and ethnicity are conveyed by terms like “pasita” [1] or “raisined” hair or the “*café-con-leche* complexion” of some of Esmeralda’s siblings, or the mentions to U.S. “morenos” [1S, 5P] and “morenas” [1S 1P] (“dark men” and “dark women”) contrasting with Puerto Rican “negros” or “black people”. There are also a few words referring to class like “una gente rica” [2], translated as “rich folks”, and “gente mala” [2], translated as “bad people” and referring to Esmeralda’s Brooklyn neighbourhood. A final term related to social identity is “clase” or “class”, used by Esmeralda’s teacher to address her and her classmates. There is also an occurrence of “sacristán” as part of a humorous rhyme playfully made by Pablo.

In *AW*, we find “jíbara” [1] and “jíbaros” [1], and, in the acknowledgements, the term “dignidad” applied to the author’s family. Similarly, ethnic and racial considerations are conveyed through terms like “café-con-leche” [2], “trigueña” [1], translated in the text as “wheat-coloured”, or kinky “bad” hair, which at its tightest was called *pasitas*, raisins’ (*AW*, p. 57). As this part of the memoirs is more concerned with Esmeralda’s U.S. life, new terms appear such as “compatriota” [1S, 1P], easily identifiable as “compatriota”, “blanquitos” [5] (“whities”), a notion explained in the text as conveying both whiteness and wealth; and the question “Tú eres hispana?” (“Are you Hispanic?”; the term is explained throughout the narrative) by which an unknown, Spanish-

speaking girl initiates a rapport with Esmeralda in Brooklyn. There is only one term related to professional occupations, “artista” [3S, 2P].

Terms indicating nationality in *DC* include the pejorative “yanquis” [1] and “gitanas” [1] or “gypsies”. Entries conveying ideological positionings include “compañero” [5S, 2P] and “compañera” [8S, 2P], and “plantados”, ‘the political prisoners who’ve been in jail [in Cuba] almost twenty years’ (*DC*, p. 233). Within this category also falls “gusano” [2], translated as “worm”; its figurative sense as a name for Cuban dissidents is also made clear as Celia guards Santa Teresa del Mar’s coast looking for signs of “*gusano* traitors” (p. 3). On the other hand, Lourdes is enraged by graffiti she finds in Cuba such as ‘socialismo o muerte’ (“socialism or death”), which she wants to change into ‘socialismo es muerte’ (“socialism is death”) (p. 222). As the play on words is not explained, it might remain only within the reach of readers having some familiarity with Spanish. Jobs include “campesinos” [1S, 1P] or “peasants”, not directly translated but clarified by contextual references such as ‘their ungainly hands’ (p. 92) and descriptions of them working the land. “Guajiro” [1S, 1P], also meaning “peasant”, is left without explanation. Other work-related words are “machetero”, mentioned after an allusion to a man slashing someone with a machete while working the sugarcane fields, and “artista” [2].

The differences in the kinds of collective identities emphasized by the Spanish entries in each writer’s work reveal that, while Santiago’s memoirs show a greater concern with issues of racial perceptions, *DC* does not deal with this question to the same extent, possibly due to the fact that most of its characters present a relatively light complexion except for Luz and Milagro. *DC*, however, explores more the political positionings dividing the novel’s Cuban characters

both in the island and in the U.S., showing divisions in the communities along ideological lines which do not have an equivalent in the Puerto Rican groups portrayed by Santiago.

Social and professional terms in *TAS* include “comerciante” or “trader”, clarified by a reference to the person’s liking for yields. There is also “despalilladora” [4], someone “whose speciality was to strip the stems from the leaves” of tobacco in the cigar-making process, “lector” [4S, 1P] or “reader”, an occupation depicted as involving reading to factory staff while they work. In this group of words also falls “guajiros” [2S, 2P], described as “farmhands” (p. 214). Other terms referring to how people earn their living are “jinetera” [1] and “jineteros” [1], people who ‘make a living from the hustling’ (p. 86), and “bruja” [1] or “witch”, defined by the context as someone who sells preparations to cure people’s afflictions.

Items regarding nationality include “extranjera” [1] or “foreign” as opposed to Cuban, “yanqui” [2], “gringa” [1], “cubano” [1S, 1P] and “cubanas” [1S, 1P], while the Spanish coin units “pesetas” could also be seen as connected to national identity. More local identities comprehend “habanera” [1], “madrileño” [1], “dominicana” [1], and “chinito” [1] or “little Chinese man”, a word clarified by a mention to “the Chinese man” (p. 217). The latter could also be interpreted as indicating ethnicity, being grouped with “negrito” [1] or “criollos” (“Creoles”), the meaning of which is explained when Constanca identifies herself as one because of her Spanish, cultured paternal grandfather. Words conveying ideology comprehend “[dictator] Machado’s cronies, the *porristas*” [1], “balseros” [1], meaning from the context those who leave Cuba for the U.S. on rafts, “gusanos” [1], a term explained by a previous mention to

exiled dissidents from Castro's regime, and "La Brigada Caimán" [2], Gonzalo's "underground exile group". The main ideological differences separating the characters concern their attitudes towards the "revolución" [2] and "el exilio" [1].

In *GG*, nationality and ethnic terms include "Americana"[3], "Gringas" [1P], "Dominicana" [1], and "un dominican-york" [1]. The only expression concerning race is a "Dominican café-con-leche black" [1] complexion, contrasted with the darker "Haiti blue-black". Mentions to the "Conquistadores" [1S, 4P] reinforce notions of national and ethnic identities, as does the Dominican relatives' insistence that the García girls speak "¡En español!" Words indicating different types of work are "el doctor" [2], "el patrón" [1] or "the boss", "campesino" [2S, 2P], described as someone who leads 'a solitary and humble life in a hillside' (p. 12), "una mujer del campo" [2], translated as "a woman from the countryside" and "guardias" [8S, 4P], indirectly translated through an explanation that they wear uniform and can carry guns legally. Together with the references to the poverty of "campesinos", the only other allusion to class is 'the alta sociedad, the high-class ladies of the oligarchy who form a kind of club' (p. 119). Words concerning ideology or activism include "Operación Zapatos Tenis" or "Operation Tennis Shoes", the escape plan the Garcías have designed in case their involvement in the anti-Trujillo underground is discovered, and "la situación" or "the situation" in the Dominican Republic.

Entries concerning nationality in *¡Yo!* include "Americano", as well as "gringa" [1] and "gringo" [2S, 1P]. The shifting quality of perceptions of national and cultural identities becomes manifest when the second term is used by the Dominican cousins in relation to the García girls, while the third is applied by Yolanda to her American lover Dexter. The only expression concerning skin-

colour is “café-con-leche” [1]. Items conveying socio-cultural status include “jíbara” [1], not directly translated but showing connotations of poverty and lack of education from the context, and “los ricos” [1] or “the rich ones”, the meaning of which is made obvious as a peasant contrasts his situation with “the privileges and comforts” of that social group. Occupations in the novel are “campesinos” [1S, 3P], only described as people living “on the south side of the mountain... squatting on government lands”, “guardías” [1], similar to the English “guards” and made clear by the context, “Policía” [1], “Patrón” [2] and “patrona” [3], meaning “master” and “mistress”, “Profesor” [1], and “doctora” [1]. Terms indicating ideological positionings are illustrated by “compañero” or “comrade” [1].

Words related to nationality in *Butterflies* include “Yanqui” [4S, 5P] and so do indirectly “peseta” [1] and “centavos” [1] or “cents”. Ethnicity is conveyed by entries like “gringa dominicana” [1] and “Tainos” [2S, 1P]. Terms indicating more local identities are “cibaeña” [1], a woman from the town of Cibao, and “capitaleño” [1] or a man from the capital. Class entries are represented by “tutumpotes” [1], (Malaret, *Americanismos*, p. 802) while occupations comprehend “campesino” [7S, 16P] and its female form “campesina” [1] -easily inferred to mean somebody living or working in the country-, and “marchantas” [1] or “stallholders” who ‘come up to offer... their wares’ until people ‘tempted by a sample taste of a small, sweet orange... buy a whole sack of them’ (p. 116).

In this category also figure “guardia” [6S, 10P], “guardona” [1], a derogatory female derivation of “guarda”, and “calíes” [4S, 6P], explained to be members of Trujillo’s SIM forces. Political positionings are denoted by “trujillista” [2] or “pro-Trujillo”, “Acción Clero-Cultural”, the religious activist

group joined by Patria, and “gavilleros” [2P] and its female singular form “gavillera” [2], defined as “bands of *campesinos* who took to the hills to fight the Yanqui invaders” (56). In this group are also “compañeros” [1S, 2P] or “comrades”, its female counterpart “compañeras” [2P], and the characters’ varying notions of what “libre” [2] or “free” means.

The only term regarding geo-cultural origins in *EBS* is “Jarocha” [8] or “originary from Veracruz”, which is not explicitly explained. However, its regional character can be inferred from the fact that it is applied to the costumes that Soledad makes ‘for weddings, parades, and pilgrimages’ (p. 19), being described as ‘a circular white skirt, an embroidered black apron, a spectacular headpiece, made stiff by starch’ (p. 50). The lack of entries related to collective identities in *EBS* parallels the work’s unconcern with portraying the exploration of historical, socio-cultural and political tensions shaping its characters’ lives.

8.9 Art and Culture

Terms concerning artistic and cultural expression cover many elements in the characters’ everyday environments, giving the reader an idea of the characteristics of their ways of life. Some of them are names of famous people that, as points of reference in the characters’ self-image, reveal important aspects about their identities. As the main historical and political figures in the works have already been discussed in Part II, this section will consider individuals in the arts and sciences the allusion to whom is particularly relevant in the protagonists’ characterisation.

WIWPR mentions several popular types of music such as the “chachachá” [3S, 1P], “bolero” [1S, 4P] and “merengues” [2]. The last two terms appear italicised despite having entered English with the same spelling but are not in the glossary. There are also references to “guarachas”, included in the glossary as a “type of dance music popular in the Caribbean”. One of Esmeralda’s favourite tunes is ‘Cielito Lindo’ or ‘My Pretty Sky’, not translated. Music instruments appear recurrently, like the “maracas”, the “cuatro”, a “typical Puerto Rican stringed instrument, smaller than a guitar” according to the glossary, and the “güiro” [1S, 1P], defined in the glossary as a “[m]usical instrument made out of dried gourd across which metal tines are rubbed to produce a scratchy sound”. Communal activities are “aguinaldos” [2], ‘songs about the birth of Jesus and the joys of spending Christmas surrounded by family and friends’ (*WIWPR*, p. 40), or “parrandas” “in which people went from house to house singing, eating, drinking and celebrating’ (*WIWPR*, p. 40). Social practices include “siesta” time [2], a loanword appearing in English dictionaries but written in italics indicating its presence as a Spanish entry. Popular art forms are represented by “artesanías”, explained in the glossary as “[c]rafts”. There are also references to *El Diario* [2], the Spanish newspaper read by Esmeralda’s family in Brooklyn.

The appreciation of the Puerto Rican landscape and way of life permeating *WIWPR* is stressed by the quotation from a poem by Puerto Rican author Luis Lloréns Torres at the beginning of the work, as well as by references to his writing later on in the narrative as patriotic literature inspiring Esmeralda to love her country. Similarly, Puerto Rican song composer Noel Estrada’s ‘En mi viejo San Juan’, Esmeralda’s “favorite patriotic song” dealing with leaving for the U.S., both expresses her attachment to the place and announces her own

departure from it. The girl's fondness for the popular culture transmitted through radio is also stressed as she names Puerto Rican radio and television host and comedian José Miguel Agrelot and Puerto Rican actor and director Jacobo Morales as 'two of [her] favorite radio voices'.

Popular music in *AW* includes "merengue" [1S, 5P], "chachachá", "bolero" [3S, 3P], Mexican "corridos" [1] and "rancheras" [1], "salsa" [3] and the Puerto Rican dance "plena" [1]. Other manifestations of Puerto Rican culture are the game of "bolita" which Tata likes to play and which is left unexplained, and the "telenovela" [1] or "soap opera" and radio "novelas" [1] that Esmeralda likes. The mention of the Puerto Rican actors with U.S. careers Rita Moreno, Chita Rivera and José Ferrer validates Esmeralda's wish to be an actress –cum– dancer. There is also a mention to Eddie Palmieri's music as the kind of rhythms listened by students of Puerto Rican descent in a Brooklyn school visited by Esmeralda. The salsa pioneer, of Puerto Rican origin but born in New York, acts as an emblem of the mix of Puerto Rican and U.S. subjectivities characterising mainland Puerto Ricans. Also significant are the allusions to Bobby Capó and Tito Puente: the former was a Puerto Rican composer and musician and the latter, an internationally acclaimed musician and composer of Latin rhythms, was born and died in New York. The two exemplify the wide spectrum of cultural and national subjectivities embodied by Puerto Rican music, validating Esmeralda's own U.S. Puerto Rican consciousness as well as her writing.

Allusions to celebrities from other Spanish-speaking countries are also shown with varying degrees of transparency. Ricky Ricardo, Lucille Ball's husband played by Desi Arnaz, in the series 'I Love Lucy', figures in the conversations of Esmeralda's conversations with her siblings being mentioned as

a Cuban singer (*AW*, p. 35) appearing on television (*AW*, p. 47). Jorge Negrete is referred to as ‘the Mexican movie star’ in *WIWPR* (p. 202), and as ‘the Mexican singer and movie star’ in *AW* (p. 11). The occupation of Mexican actress Maria Félix is easily inferred by Esmeralda’s memories of films in which she is Negrete’s love interest (*WIWPR*, p. 203). Mentions of “Corín Tellado romances” about love and marriage occur in both parts of the memoirs (*WIWPR*, p. 202 & *AW*, p. 194), although it is not made clear whether the name refers to the romances’ protagonist or author. The second possibility is in fact the right answer, as Tellado is a prolific Spanish writer of romantic literature. Equally opaque is Esmeralda’s statement that she wants to own a radio to listen to La Lupe on the Spanish station (*AW*, p. 58), as no further details about the Santiago de Cuba-born Caribbean and soul music singer are offered.

DC describes Celia watching “*Mujeres de Fuego*, with Bette Davis, Ann Dvorak, and Joan Blondell”, which by its main actresses’ names is obviously the Spanish title of a film originally in English, most likely the 1932 piece ‘Three on a Match’. It also mentions “novelas” [1S, 2P], indirectly explained as popular melodramatic television programmes. There is also one occurrence of “*El Mundo*” and “*Diario de la Marina*”, newspapers that Celia’s aunt buys in Havana. Different kinds of dances also appear repeatedly, like “danzón”, a dance of Cuban origin (*Diccionario del español*, p. 571), “guaracha” [2], a popular Cuban dance, and “cha-cha-chá”, which is not italicised although in English it does not bear an accent. As for Cuban artists, there are eight mentions of Beny Moré, the Cuban composer and singer.

References to Spanish flamenco dancing and culture also take place in relation to Celia’s fascination with Lorca’s poetry. “Cante jondo” [1], for

instance, is explained in the novel as the character remembers the poet's explanation to the audience that "the cante jondo was a primitive flamenco from his native Andalusia, a region enriched by Moorish invaders, and that the songs had inspired his own gypsy ballad poems" (95). Similarly, "duende" [3], meaning a magical quality, charm or inspiration, is not clearly defined but its meaning is suggested as Celia hears its 'black sounds... [shiver] in the air with mystery and anguish and death' (p. 95).

In *TAS*, popular celebrations are represented by the "quinceañeros" [1] or parties celebrating a person's fifteenth birthday, presented as a special occasion but not defined further. Music is illustrated by "cha-cha-chá" and "cha-cha-chá-ing" -not italicised although in English they do not bear an accent-, "danzón" [1], "guarachas" [1] and "boleros" [1], all depicted as tunes to which people dance. Television programmes include Constancia's favourite show, "La Hora de los Milagros" [4] or "The Hour of Miracles", which is described as focusing on supernatural occurrences, and 'a Miami cable TV show called *Mi Fortuna*, about Latino success stories' (p. 230).

Among references to means of communication is "Radio Martí" [2], named after the Cuban poet and created in 1985 by the U.S. Congress, which has become a strong support for Cuban dissidents. There are also the humorously named exile radio stations "Radio Asf" [2] or "Radio This Way", and "Radio Pa'lla" [1], which could be translated as "Radio That Way" or "Radio Over There". There is also a mention of "the *Boletín de Torcedor*, the cigar worker union's newspaper' (p. 112). Literary references include 'El Cid, that great medieval epic poem' (p. 29), and an allusion to Cervantes and 'the poetry of Miguel de Unamuno and Rubén Darío, especially the poems in *Cantos de Vida y*

Esperanza' (p. 147).

The only musician mentioned is the composer and orchestra director José Ardévol, born in Barcelona, Spain, but nationalised Cuban. Like alluding to Cervantes, naming this figure conveys the historical links between the two countries and also illustrates a fluidity of national and cultural identities also experienced by the characters. A trait differentiating *TAS* from the other works is the relatively numerous occurrences of scientists' names connected both to Ignacio's profession and to narrative concerns with the influence of family background and social environment on characters' paths and personalities. Among the scientists mentioned are Dr. Mario Sánchez Roig and Carlos de la Torre, who was the head of the Academia de Ciencias Médicas, Físicas y Naturales de La Habana.

GG makes a mention of *Don Quijote* and a reference to the popular practice of buying "lotería tickets". As for *¡Yo!*, references to popular folklore include "el cuco" [2S, 2P], defined as "the Haitian bogeyman" who "would come and steal [children] away if they didn't behave". Festivities are represented by "quinceañera" [1], partly explained by the context as it is listed among other celebrations like birthdays and a person's saint's day. Music is represented by "ranchera" [1], a type of Mexican folk song, which can be identified as a kind of music from the context but is not described further. Another reference to popular culture is "novela" [1], presented only as a television programme. Literary references include Spanish writers Cervantes [1] and Calderón de la Barca [1].

Folklore entries in *Butterflies* comprehend "el cuco" [2], only explained as something scaring people, while popular celebrations are represented by "quinceañera" parties [3S, 1P], mentioned as a party that teenagers can attend

only at a certain age. Music references include mentions to Dominican music and composer Luis Alberti and his piece “Fiesta”, and the popular song “Adios con el corazón” or “Goodbye with All My Heart”, indicated to be fit for goodbyes since the Mirabals sing it to two women leaving prison. There is also an allusion to Bidó, a Dominican painter of impressionist style.

Literary references in the novel are ‘[a] poetry book by someone named Gabriela Mistral’ and mentions in the postscript to ‘William Galván’s *Minerva Mirabal*, Ramon Alberto Ferreras’s *Las Mirabal*’ and ‘Pedro Mir’s poem “Amén de Mariposas”’. Entries related to the press include “diario” or “daily newspaper”, “Vanidades”, a magazine from the context, “El Foro Público” (“The Public Forum”) explicitly defined as a “gossip column in the paper” and which Mate humorously plays upon calling her own diary excerpts “El Foro Privado” (“The Private Forum”), and “El Caribe”, easily inferred to be a newspaper from the context. Radio stations in the novel are “Radio Rumbos”, referred to as “that outlawed station”, and “Radio Rebelde in Cuba and Radio Rumbos from Venezuela”.

Regarding music entries, *EBS* presents “Aventurera” [2], Esperanza’s favourite song. The title, meaning “adventurous”, is not translated, but its daring connotations are manifest as she chooses it as a soundtrack both to her memories of Luis and to her first sexual encounter with Angel. There are also mentions to “norteña” music [2], a kind of music from northern Mexico, which are left without translation. As for the media, we find “El Dictamen”, implied to be a newspaper, and “Los Ilegales”, specified to be a film title. Entries related to other cultural practices include “Día de los Muertos” or “Day of the dead”, partially explained by the mention of “papier-maché skeletons and sugar skulls” used in it.

There is also a reference to the “Quince Años dance” [2], indirectly explained when Esperanza notes that Blanca’s should take place “three years from now”, when the girl dies as a twelve-year-old.

Famous names in *EBS* are “the late Mexican movie Pedro Infante”, and Silvia Pinal, who we are told appears in Mexican films (p. 108), and is a famous actress born in 1931 in that country. There are also references to Juan Diego, the peasant to whom the Virgin of Guadalupe first revealed herself, and the Mexican composer Agustín Lara. He is mentioned by Esperanza as a native of Tlacotalpan, a town which he often called his birthplace although he was actually born in Mexico City.

As we have seen, the range of terms related to arts and culture in each work shows the richness of characters’ individual universe of reference. This type of entry includes references to both “high” and “low” or “popular” culture, including manifestations traditionally associated with women such as soap operas. Similarly, the allusions to the artistic manifestations and celebrities from one place in a work set in a different one illustrate the cultural interactions between Latin American countries as well as between these and Spain. The fact that the significance of people’s names quoted in the narratives is sometimes not made clear also marks the cultural distance of non-Spanish-speaking, monocultural audiences with respect to the worlds portrayed in the stories.

8.10 Long entries

Spanish long entries in the narratives, which I consider to be those of five words

or more, are mainly songs, extracts of poems, and proverbs. Like the previous category of artistic and cultural short entries, these items convey the richness of the cultures of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Mexico, from their literature to their popular culture and traditions. Simultaneously, they bring to the fore Spanish-speaking cultural and literary frames with which the works claim a continuity despite being written in English and dealing with their protagonists' americanised perspectives.

The importance of this background in Santiago's memoirs is clear from their very beginning, a fragment of poem 'Claroscuro' by Luis Lloréns Torres. It appears both in Spanish and in an English prose translation, reflecting the bicultural nature of Santiago's writing. *WIWPR* also presents a children's rhyme, made accessible to monolinguals by its immediate translation: 'Que llueva, que llueva!/ La Virgen en la cueva,/ los pajaritos cantan,/ la Virgen se levanta./ !Que llueva, que llueva!', or 'Let it rain, let it rain!/ The Virgin in the cave/ Birds sing,/ The Virgin rises/ Let it Rain, let it rain!' (*WIWPR*, p. 59). A bilingual song that Esmeralda learns at school also figures in the memoir: '*Pollito*, chicken/ *Gallina*, hen/ *Lápiz*, pencil/ y *Pluma*, pen/ *Ventana*, window/ *Puerta*, door/ *Maestra*, teacher/ y *Piso*, floor' (*WIWPR*, p. 64).

Popular songs are well represented, and for instance *WIWPR*'s 'Dreams of a Better Life' section is introduced by one: 'Adiós Candelaria Hermosa/ las espaldas te voy dando/ no siento lo que me llevo/ sino lo que voy dejando', translated as 'Goodbye lovely Candelaria/ I turn my back to you/ I feel not for what I take,/ but for what I leave behind' (p. 189). Other times, the title is given in Spanish while the contents are reproduced or summarised in English as in the case of Esmeralda's favourite patriotic song 'En mi viejo San Juan'. It is

presented as a piece ‘in which a poet says good-bye to Old San Juan’ (*WIWPR*, p. 77). As for the chachachá tune ‘Black Eyes, Cinammon Skin’ (‘Piel Canela’, by Eddie Gorme y Los Panchos) both the title and part of its lyrics are rendered only in translation, although the piece is originally in Spanish: ‘I like you, and you, and you, and no one else but you, and you, and you’ (*WIWPR*, p. 88).

The most numerous sort of long entries are proverbs, which head each chapter of *WIWPR* or are uttered by the characters. They function as repositories of popular culture and denote a background shared by speakers and listeners who must be aware of the sentences’ metaphorical meanings. At the same time, they embody the innovative potential of social interactions as conversants apply them to new circumstances. Finally, they might present an exotic flavour for monolingual readers. The proverbs heading *WIWPR*’s chapters constitute a reevaluation of Esmeralda’s life both in the island and in the U.S. through the prism of Puerto Rican popular wisdom, reaffirmed and transmitted to new audiences by this very act. They are followed by an English translation ensuring that monolingual readers gather their meaning and relation to the memoir’s episodes.

They are ‘Barco que no anda, no llega a Puerto/ A ship that doesn’t sail, never reaches port’, ‘Al jíbaro nunca se le quita la mancha de plátano/ A jíbaro can never wash away the stain of the plantain’, ‘Enamorado hasta de un palo de escoba/ He falls in love even with broomsticks’, ‘Borrón y cuenta nueva/ Erase and start over’, ‘Lo que no mata, engorda. What doesn’t kill you, makes you fat’, ‘La verdad, aunque severa, es amiga verdadera./ Truth, although severe, is a true friend’, ‘Con el agua al cuello y la marea subiendo/ With water to the chin and the tide rising’, ‘De Guatemala a guata-peor/From Guatemala to guate-worse’,

‘Con la música por dentro/With the music inside’, ‘El mismo jíbaro con distinto caballo./ Same jíbaro, different horse’, ‘Ahí fue donde la puerca entorchó el rabo/ That’s where the sow’s tail curled’, ‘Dime con quien andas y te diré quién eres/ Tell me who you walk with, and I’ll tell you who you are’, and ‘Te conozco bacalao, aunque vengas disfrazao/ I recognize you salted codfish, even if you’re in disguise’.

In *AW*, only the first chapter is headed by a popular saying, ‘Martes, ni te cases, ni te embarques, ni de tu familia te apartes’ (‘On a Tuesday, do not marry, do not sail, do not leave your family’), not directly translated but easily inferred from the context. The fact that there is one instance of popular sayings introducing the chapters shows both continuity with the memoirs’ first part and the disruption that leaving for the U.S. introduces in Esmeralda’s life as new cultural referents affect her development and sense of identity.

If the proverbs heading the chapters act as retrospective meditations on Santiago’s evolution while educating readers in Puerto Rican culture, there are several instances in which adults introduce Esmeralda to her country’s popular wisdom. Her neighbour Doña Lola in particular is prone to the use of “refranes” [1] or ‘sayings she came up with in conversation’ (*WIWPR*, p. 56). These include ‘A otro perro con ese hueso’, explained in the glossary as ‘Literally, another dog for that bone. Used to dismiss a story one knows to be untrue’; ‘Del dicho al hecho hay un gran trecho’, which Esmeralda rephrases as ‘there’s a long way between people say and what is’ (*WIWPR*, p. 55); and ‘Yo conozco al buey que faja y a la víbora que pica’, which she translates as ‘I know the bull that charges and the serpent that stings’ and takes to be a reference to Lola’s distrust of Americans due to personal experiences (*WIWPR*, p. 56).

Similarly, Doña Lola dismisses rumours of governmental financial aid to the area with the expression ‘¡Sí, cuando las gallinas meen!’ Esmeralda understands what ‘when hens learn to pee’ means, having ‘been around enough hens to know they never would’ (*WIWPR*, p. 110). At a different point of the narration, a member of staff whose mouth opens in shock at Esmeralda’s rejection of American food at the communal centre is cheekily told by other students ‘Close it, or you’ll trap flies!’.

In *AW*, the one instance of the characters’ use of proverbs in their interactions is Esmeralda’s relatives’ judgement that her cousin Lólin, who had eloped with a lover, had acted like the perfect daughter for a long time ‘[p]ero llevava [sic] la música por dentro’. Esmeralda translates these words explaining that when adults said that Lólin carried ‘the music inside her’, they meant that when younger people ‘were too well behaved, they suspected [they] were up to no good’ (*AW*, p. 209). There is also one instance in which a long Spanish entry is not a song or proverb but is introduced to add dramatism to a scene by delaying its translation into English. When Esmeralda has difficulties to understand her family’s news that ‘A Neftalí lo llamaron del servicio’, which she interprets as ‘Neftalí was called by the service’, Delsa explains the words the words saying that the protagonist’s potential boyfriend has ‘been drafted’ (*AW*, p. 161).

The long entries in Spanish appearing in *DC* correspond mainly to fragments of popular songs and poetry. In all cases but one, these quotations are left without translation so, although understanding their meaning is not essential to follow the plot, they constitute a sign of complicity for the bilingual/bicultural reader who will understand the lyrics and is likely to identify the songs. ‘Ese

lunar que tienes, cielito lindo,/ junto a la boca.../ No se lo des a nadie, cielito lindo, que a mí me toca' (p. 36), is an extract from the popular song 'Cielito Lindo' which translates as 'that mole you have, my darling,/ by your mouth.../ Don't give it to anybody else, my darling/ because it's meant for me'. A few lines are quoted from 'Corazón Rebelde', attributed in the copyright acknowledgments to Alberto Arredondo: 'Quieres regresar, pero es imposible/ Ya mi corazón se encuentra rebelde/ Vuélvete otra vez/ Que no te amaré jamás', which translate as 'You want to come back, but that's impossible/ Now my heart has turned rebellious/ Go away once again/ Because I will never love you'. Although there is a later mention to the piece as 'a Beny Moré song called "Rebel Heart"' (p. 83), the lines in Spanish are not overtly linked with the English title so the connection is only for the biligual reader to make. There is also a fragment of 'Tratame como soy' [sic] by Pedro Brunet: 'Mírame, miénteme, pégame, mátame si quieres/ Pero no me dejes. No, no me dejes, nunca jamás', or 'Look at me, lie to me, hit me, kill me if you want/ But don't leave me. No, don't leave me, never ever'.

DC also presents the poetry lines 'Por las ramas del laurel/vi dos palomas oscuras. /La una era el sol,/ la otra la luna.', or 'by the branches of the bay tree/ I saw two dark doves/ One was the sun,/ the other one was the moon' (pp. 109-110). The copyright acknowledgments indicate that the lines are taken from Federico García Lorca's 'La Casida de las Palomas Oscuras' [sic]. The novel also includes the verse from the piece 'Poema de la Seguiriya Gitana': 'El campo/ de olivos/ se abre y se cierra/ como un abanico./ Sobre el olivar/ hay un cielo hundido/y una lluvia oscura/ de luceros fríos.', identified in the text as being written by Lorca. The lines are translated at a different point of the story as

'The field/ of olives/opens and shuts/ like a fan./ Over the olive grove/ in a sunken sky/ and a dark rain/ of cold evening starts.' [sic] (*DC*, p, 243). However, as the English lines are not explicitly linked to the Spanish original verse in the narration, most probably only bilingual or very attentive readers make the connection.

Written by a Spanish poet who visited both Cuba and New York, the two poems offer a stylised vision of gipsy and Andalusian scenes. They are read by a Cuban woman, Celia, who shares his language due to colonization and reappropriates the poems as reflections of her own memories and nostalgia. Celia's life and letters are in turn pieced together by her Cuban American granddaughter Pilar, whose main language is English, in a novel written in the same language for an English-reading audience. The poems' hybrid cultural and linguistic history thus parallels the complex backgrounds and identity reconfigurations of the novel's Cuban and Cuban American characters.

Long entries in *TAS* include Reina's personal motto, 'Vive de la vida lo sublime', which could be translated as 'Live enjoying what is most admirable in life' and is partially explained by her determination to 'celebrate what she could grasp with her own senses' (p.10). The only literary fragment quoted is a fragment from José Martí's poem 'Pollice Verso', 'Que en blanca fuente una niñuela cara,/ Flor del destierro, cándida me brinda,/ Naranja es, y vino de naranjo', which means 'The flower of exile that a dear girl/ gives me in a white try/ is orange, and orange tree wine' but is left unexplained. Popular tunes include a children's song sang by Blanca to Reina, 'Naranja dulce/ limón partido, / dame un abrazo/ que yo te pido. / Si fuera falso/ mi juramento/ en poco tiempo/ se olvidará. / Toca la marcha/ mi pecho llora;/ adios señora/ yo ya me voy'. The

verses, not translated, could be rendered as ‘Sweet orange/ split lemon,/ give me a hug/ I am asking you for it/ If my oath/ is in vain/ in a short time/ it will be forgotten./ The music is playing/ my chest is crying/ good bye, my lady/ now I depart’. Finally, what is identified as a ‘melody, a traditional *changüü*¹²⁰ from Oriente [Reina] once heard a *negrito* sing’ presents the lyrics ‘He nacido para ti, Nengón. Para ti, Nengón’, which are not explained but can be translated as ‘I was born for you, Nengón. For you, Nengón’ (p.158).

In *TAS*, long entries that are not literary quotations serve to punctuate particularly dramatic moments in the narration. During a ceremony in which Constanca tries to have her future devinated, a *santero* states ‘Se me fué el caracol de la mano’ or ‘the conch slipped from my hand’, which summarises a scene previously described. At another point of the story, country people watching Ignacio hunt exclaim ‘¡Extraño ver personas tan grandes cazando animalitos tan chiquitos!’, the meaning of which is immediately revealed by the narratorial statement ‘Strange indeed it must have seemed to them to spy two grown people hunting such tiny game’. The comment serves as a narrative device announcing his murder of Blanca. There is only one sentence in the novel not translated either directly or indirectly: when she returns to Cuba to her childhood home to find Ignacio’s manuscript, the secrecy of her enterprise is stressed by her demand to rent a vehicle ‘Sin preguntas y sin compañía’, ‘no questions made [sic], and nobody else involved”’

The only long entry in *¡Yo!* is the colloquial expression ‘¡Cuántas curvas y yo sin freno!’, translated as ‘So many curves and my brakes are shot’ as a character repeats in English these Spanish words previously said by another.

120. A type of dance popular among poor people in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Information taken from *Diccionario del español*, p. 392.

Long entries in *Butterflies* are represented by two proverbs, ‘Un clavo saca otro clavo’, translated as ‘One nail takes out another’ and repeated once more in its English form, and ‘Voz del pueblo, voz del cielo... Talk of the people, voice of God’, the translation of which is repeated twice more.

8.11 Conclusion

The narratives’ use of Spanish items reinforces their portrayal of the language and its status with respect to English in the U.S. studied in the previous chapter. Though the works are predominantly written in English, the short and long entries in Spanish present it as a fully functional language with a rich heritage, conveyed through cultural and literary references. These Spanish terms and the cultural and literary allusions in particular convey both the common referents to Spanish-speaking countries and the particularities characterising Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. Stressing these differences counteracts the erasure of national specificities often caused by subsuming all U.S. people who are or descend from Spanish-speakers under terms like Hispanic or Latino. The works also underline how their characters’ Spanish varies according to class lines. Santiago’s memoirs, for instance, present numerous popular sayings and proverbs. García and Alvarez, from more educated backgrounds which are mirrored by their characters’, combine in their works references to science and “high” forms of artistic expression with allusions to popular tunes, television and radio in the case of García, and to sayings from the rural world in Alvarez’s.

The nature of the Spanish terms included in the narratives also disrupts views of Spanish as a “private” language in the characters’ U.S. lives. The most widely represented semantic categories are not those referring to the domestic environment but to family –the environment where people’s socialisation starts-, social relations, and elements shaping ethnic and national identities such as landscapes, costumes, gastronomy, the arts, and emblematic place names which act as strong geo-political referents. The very insertion of Spanish terms in the works constitutes a political, “public” positioning towards the validation of the presence of Spanish in U.S. life and culture.

The works of Santiago, Alvarez, and García do not make a highly experimental use of Spanish. While bilingual readers will understand more nuances than monolinguals, there are few instances in which they gain privileged access to important narrative or thematic developments, and this slight advantage is balanced out by the sense of iteration that the translation of terms into English might produce in them. The works are written from an American, English-speaking consciousness, and are made accessible for monolingual audiences rather than instigating them to find out the meanings and references they would otherwise miss. However, their inclusion of Spanish entries claims it as a rightful component of the American English of some of the U.S. population. Added to this, with their use of Spanish these works are placed in a continuum which sees an increasing and more sophisticated presence of the language by bilingual works like the essays and poetry of Gloria Anzaldúa or Margarita Cota Cárdenas’ novel *Puppet*, and the work in Spanish by some Latina authors.

Escandón’s *EBS*, once again, stands out as a different case being experimental in that, being rewritten in Spanish, English and as a film script, it

simultaneously aims at several English- and Spanish-speaking audiences. However, in its form as a novel in English it does not resort much to Spanish, and when it does it is not in any creative or particularly remarkable ways. The linguistic tensions between English and Spanish and the immigrant's experience of them are not explored at all in the narrative, which is consistent with the narrative's celebratory but unquestioning treatment of physical displacements and cultural hybridity.

CONCLUSION

This thesis studies how the woman-centered works of Alvarez, Santiago, García and Escandón represent personal and cultural identities, U.S.- Latin American historical relations, and the linguistic tensions felt by U.S. immigrants from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. These questions are posed through generational and personal differences between women from a single family, particularly through mother-daughter relations. The development of familial bonds in the works also extends to the symbolic realm conveying the protagonists' reassessments of the mother figure, mother language and mother culture.

These narratives explore what "home" means for their characters - whether the country of origin, the country of adoption, or both. Rather than focusing on the disruption caused by the Conquest on the Latin American life and psyche, a topic extensively explored by previous Latin American writers, the authors deal with questions about origins and identity triggered by contemporary emigration to the U.S. Their characters reexamine the feelings of groundedness and belonging experienced in their countries of birth from a U.S. perspective.

Regarding their treatment of history in the narratives, the authors explore how certain events affect a community's circumstances and depict how their significance is often a source of contention. They are also highly aware that other versions of the past have been obliterated to the point of irrecoverability except through hypothesis and imagination. These absences make the sets of facts and interpretations that have prevailed as "historical" equally biased ones. The works of Santiago, García and Alvarez contemplate the power relations sustaining and sustained by the prevailing historical accounts, examining what is at stake in counterbalancing them with creative renderings of the past.

Part I studies the implications of the personal interest and sense of duty

that these three writers manifest when dealing with certain socio-cultural questions. Such attitudes go hand-in-hand with an awareness of the authorial intentional fallacy as well as of the dangers of becoming the spokesperson for a wider group. Santiago's memoirs also explore the problems of refusing to depict herself as a representative member of her community. Escandón's *EBS*, on the other hand, could be read as an assertion of the artistic right to deal with cultural identities without having to dwell on the complexities of their historical backgrounds -a right automatically held by white mainstream authors but problematic for "ethnic" and "minority" ones.

The four authors' works depict the question of one's origins and identity mainly in the context of immigration to the U.S. This displacement makes authors and protagonists lose everyday contact with important referents in the shaping of national and cultural subjectivities such as the land and culture of birth. It can also mean not using the mother language anymore beyond the home environment. The inevitable adaptation to life in the U.S. includes the adoption of some American habits and values together with the abandonment of others belonging to the mother culture. This shift, often described as "Americanisation" or "acculturation", can be seen as a betrayal of the mother country.

The writers counteract these notions -together with any ideas of racial and cultural "authenticity"- by presenting identities as heterogeneous constructs in constant change. They portray diverse immigration experiences to the U.S. showing that immigration and "Americanisation" do not start with the crossing of physical boundaries: they are lengthy processes affected by complex personal, socio-cultural, political and economic factors. Consequently, the works study immigration in the context of a long history of socio-economic exchanges and

movements of people between the U.S. and the countries of origin. These and other factors make the countries and cultures of origin change throughout time.

The effects of these factors in people's self-imagining and stories of immigration lead both to an "ethnic" sensibility and a sense of difference from mainstream America. How these feelings are experienced creates marked contrasts between first-generation adult immigrants like Escandón and her Esperanza; the hyphenated American children or teenagers called "one-and-a-halfers" by Pérez Firmat, like Santiago's Esmeralda; and the second generation who, like García and her Pilar Puente, either emigrated as babies with their families or were born in the U.S. from immigrant parents. Those in this last group could be considered "ethnic Latin Americans", extrapolating Alvarez Borland's terminology.

The works present the mother country and the U.S. as two points between which there is a continuum of potential subject positionalities -none of which is more "authentic" than the rest. Santiago, García and Alvarez expose how people remaining in the country/ culture of origin experience their land and language through collective ideological constructions as elaborate as the immigrants' (re)construction of their Mexicaness, Puerto Ricanness, Cubaness, and Dominicaness.

Part III engages with these issues examining the languages used by characters and authors throughout the narratives. The works are mainly written in English with a noticeable presence of Spanish and a much smaller number of indigenous items. This last group of terms does have philological relevance, but it has been assimilated into Spanish; its presence in the narratives thus lacks the political impact of the tensions between Spanish and English explored by the

works. However, these indigenous items contribute to the creation of the multilayered narrative language characterising the stories, which evokes the socio-cultural changes that have shaped U.S. Latino collectives.

In these U.S. Latina works, English is presented in a very similar way. It is the language of the land whose imperialistic policies have shaped the characters' lives in their place of birth and whose prejudices have affected their situation. However, once in their adopted home, the characters' circumstances have made English their language. Even if reduced in number, Spanish items play a prominent role in this English the same way that words in other languages are central to the Spanish spoken by authors and characters in their motherlands. Added to this, the portrayal of Spanish as an appealing tongue with a rich cultural heritage counteracts the potential stereotypes and misconceptions of an uninformed reader.

However, most of the actions supposed to happen in Spanish are rendered in English, the number of items in the actual language is relatively small, and their meanings are usually made accessible through diverse translation techniques. This makes the experience of facing an unknown language easy, comforting and effortless for monolingual Anglophone readers. Generally speaking, the narration does not put them in the uncomfortable position of outsiders who have to accept being partially left out due to their lack of linguistic skills. Moreover, the insertion of Spanish items and Latin American cultural references has become a marker of U.S. Latina literature, which helps the works' marketing and potential commodification. While having important narrative functions and portraying Spanish in an attractive, multilayered manner, the

bilingual strategies deployed by the authors need to be assessed carefully in the light of the overwhelming predominance of English throughout the stories.

Adapting Alvarez Borland's terminology, for U.S. "ethnic" Latinos of the second and further generations, regular physical presence in the land where a certain culture originally arose has been substituted by a powerful bond with that land as an iconic referent in the shaping of their identities. The cases of Pilar and the García sisters show how the importance of this referent may be renewed by visits to the mother country, and by contact with other U.S. immigrants from a similar background. Arguably, the same happens with other elements commonly seen as determining national, ethnic and cultural "authenticity" such as language and certain worldviews and practices. While individuals of ethnic origins might eventually assimilate to mainstream American culture, ongoing waves of immigration allow us to foresee the continuing visibility and distinctiveness of Latino/a communities in the U.S. As their numbers increase, they could also play a potentially growing role in reshaping the country's self-image.

While showing varying thematic interests and narrative strategies, the works of Escandón, Alvarez, Santiago and García suggest that there are different ways of being Mexican, Dominican, Puerto Rican and Cuban. They also imply that these identifications can survive and extend beyond geographical boundaries or the command of a language. They present ethnic and cultural identities as based not so much 'on a geographic location as on a shared horizon of references' which would '[deal] not only with common origins but also with perceived differences that come to the fore only when they are far from the original "home" and put into direct contact with a reality perceived as alien' (Hernández, p. 14). This redefinition of traditional notions of belonging is by no

means exclusive to Puerto Ricans or Latinos, since '[m]igratory groups worldwide are conforming geo-cultures that, more than geo-nations, define them' (Hernández, p. 14). The questions of identity posed by these authors' literary proposals thus reflect the tensions generated by the increasingly conspicuous importance of transnational communities which 'spread across borders, have an enduring presence abroad, and take part in some kind of exchange between or among spatially separated groups'¹²¹.

If these are the contested issues at stake in the consideration of the authors and their work as U.S. Puerto Rican, Dominican American, Cuban American, and Mexican American (or, regarding Escandón, Mexican in the U.S.), approaching them as Latina writers and narratives highlights further elements of debate. On the one hand, as it becomes evident when examining and comparing the works of Alvarez, García, Santiago and Escandón, there are some concerns that can be identified as often shared by U.S. populations of Latin American descent: among them, for instance, one could list factors examined in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 such as a historical memory of the effects of the Conquest and of the colonial and neo-colonial intervention of the U.S. in Latin American countries; experiences of racial, cultural and linguistic discrimination once in the U.S.; and a questioning by oneself and by others of the immigrant's right to claim the U.S. as "home" while not renouncing to belonging to the countries and cultures of origin. An awareness of these concerns allows the identification of common spaces for political action. Identifying as Latinos rather than as separate communities on the basis of their specific countries of origin also gives U.S. people of Latin American descent a greater numerical strength and thus the

121. Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p. 242.

potential to make such political action more effective.

However, the use of this amalgamating term can lead to an erasure of specificities simplifying and obliterating the particularities of each group's backgrounds. As the authors' works illustrate, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic have very different histories, having evolved in different ways and having developed different relations with the United States. The presence in the U.S. of ethnic groups originating from these countries and cultures also varies in the length of time that they have been in the place as well as in their number and socio-economic status –which, in the case of Puerto Rico, includes American citizenship by birthright. Similarly, it can obscure further the socio-cultural differences within different sectors within each group.

As I stated in Chapter 6 when examining the work of Escandón, for instance, there are important differences between the Mexican community of the U.S. Southwest that originally belonged to Mexico but became part of the U.S. as the latter acquired this territory, and the Mexicans who moved to the country in various waves of immigration. Alvarez's works also depict the dissimilar circumstances of exiles like the Garcías, educated members of a well-off Dominican clan, and immigrants like their uneducated, poor maid Primitiva and her daughter Sarita. The case of Esmeralda Santiago also illustrates the complex questions of identity and belonging triggered by the upward social mobility of a poor immigrant from a U.S. Puerto Rican urban ghetto. There is also a multiplicity of other factors such as race, gender, age of immigration, and sexuality that combine with the ones previously mentioned to dismantle any notions of universal experiences of Latino/a immigration to the U.S.

The four authors portray their characters' racial and cultural hybridity

both as Latin Americans and as U.S. Latinas not as simply implying the loss of one culture and the adoption of another one –“Americanisation”-, but as potentially enabling new, rich forms of cultural identity and expression. As these writers explore possible acts of self- and collective recreation triggered by the characters’ coming to terms with their hybridity, their novels also call attention to the historical heterogeneity and syncretism of the U.S.

As Friedman observes, ‘[a]ll populations, no matter how bounded, are culturally mixed in terms of the genealogies of the meanings that they use’; consequently, ‘hybridity only exists as a social phenomenon when it is identified as such by those involved in social interaction... where people do not so identify, the fact of cultural mixture is without social significance’¹²². The emergence of discourses of “cosmic races”, hybridity, creolisation, and other related concepts is then ‘a social phenomenon and not the reflection of a neutral fact that has finally been discovered’ (Friedman, *Hybridization*, p. 249), and which forces us to examine who identifies whom as hybrid as well as when and how this happens. The narratives of Alvarez, Santiago, García and Escandón reclaim in different ways the hybridity previously ascribed to Latin Americans and Latinos/as in a derogatory or exoticising manner. At the same time, they also portray U.S. culture and society as intrinsically hybrid too and present it as equally susceptible to reverse processes of exotisation, demonisation, and harsh criticism from its “less developed” neighbours –for instance, by the García girls’ Dominican relatives in Alvarez’s novels, or by Celia in García’s *DC*.

There is, however, a substantial difference in Escandón’s portrayal of hybridity with respect to that of the other three authors. The latter explore at

122. Jonathan Friedman, ‘The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush’ in *Spaces of Culture*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, p. 249.

length the particularities and painful dilemmas of their characters' experiences of hybridity, showing an awareness that the term 'as an objectified concept eliminates the tension and the real contradictions that might be said to exist at the borders, in the diasporas, in situations of social transformation' (Friedman, *Hybridization*, p. 251). In this sense, metaphors such as liminality, while underlining 'the in-betweenness of the immigrant situation', run the risk of 'homogeniz[ing] this in their celebration of just this state of affairs' (Friedman, *Hybridization*, p. 251). The writings of García and Alvarez in particular also evidence an authorial acknowledgement that 'the inbetweenness that is celebrated for its creativity by those who can afford to make use of it is, for the larger majority of those involved, a field of contradictory forces, of misconstruals, and anxieties' (Friedman, *Hybridization*, p. 251).

Santiago's individualism and self-celebration and, to a much greater extent, Escandón's celebration of hybridity and displacement which papers over the confusion, alienation and oppression that often accompany these experiences obscure the fact that 'while intellectuals may celebrate border-crossing, the lumpenproletariat real border-crossers live in constant fear of the border and express a very different view of the matter' (Friedman, *Hybridization*, p. 254). Hybridity inherently implies constant transition and negotiation, since '[p]eople's lives may indeed span different worlds, and individuals may learn to cope with several worlds, but they still move from world to world and are not simply located at some ideal meeting point' (Friedman, *Hybridization*, p. 251).

As they both reflect and examine the plight of people who are not "simply American" but are not "just Latin American" wither, the writings of the four authors illustrate that, like all communities, imagings of national, ethnic and

cultural formations are by definition formed by intricate sets of inclusions and exclusions. Experiences of national, ethnic and cultural “community” are thus affected by a variety of factors among which gender, race, class, sexuality, and age figure prominently. How membership of these communities is determined and understood is a site of contention, and each in their own way Escandón, Santiago, García and Alvarez are entering the debate on the definition and reconfiguration of Latin American, American and U.S. Latina identities with works that consciously engage with the three of them.

Their depictions of hyphenated and “ethnic” American sensibilities illustrate how national and socio-cultural groups can be understood as ‘imagined communities’ which are ‘[i]maged not because [they are] not “real”, but because [they suggest] potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries’¹²³. The alliances and collaborations promoted throughout the books’ portrayals of Latin American, U.S. Latina and American communities take place both within and across these groups. They include various processes of dialogue and reassessment: among women and between men and women, between different generations and ideological positions, and between different class identifications. However, placing the authors and their production as bridges between these collectives –a position that works like Alvarez’s and García’s seem to claim for themselves- poses in turn complex questions regarding authenticity, representation, the demands on “ethnic” literature, and a potential self-exotisation in reaction to those demands.

At the same time, the “imagined communities” envisioned by the authors, however flawed they might be considered, show an inclusive attitude, an

123. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism’ in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991), p. 4.

acknowledgment of the person's multiple, shifting allegiances, and a rejection of definitive statements. The notion of imagined community is useful precisely in that it leads us away from essentialist notions of identity and belonging and suggests political rather than biological and cultural bases for alliance (Mohanty, *Cartographies*, p. 4). Each in its own way, the narratives challenge readers to examine how the authors and they themselves imagine Latin American, hyphenated American, and U.S. identities, pointing out the political implications of such stances. Reflecting on the questions of language, immigration, identity and representation posed by the works of García, Alvarez, Escandón and Santiago also makes varied readerships reassess how they understand their own group allegiances together with the very notion of "community" itself.

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