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Maria Cláudia Simões

Entangled cultures and hybrid identities: the construction of the female diasporic subject in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Achy Obejas's *Memory Mambo*

Rio de Janeiro
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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

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Banca Examinadora:

_____

Profª. Drª. Peonia Viana Guedes (Orientadora)
Instituto de Letras da UERJ

_____

Profª Drª Marci Doria
Faculdade de Letras da UFRJ

_____

Profª. Drª. Leila Assumpção Harris
Instituto de Letras da UERJ

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To my father (*in memoriam*) for showing me how rewarding the search for knowledge is.

To my mother for giving me more love and support than I can ever imagine.

To my husband for fulfilling me with immense love and support.

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The history of an exile does not begin the day we leave the country, but on the day we feel that the country has abandoned us.

Madelín Cámara, “Words Without Borders”

RESUMO

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O objetivo desta dissertação é analisar os romances *Dreaming in Cuban*, de Cristina García, e *Memory Mambo*, de Achy Obejas. Este trabalho investiga como o exílio e hibridismo podem interferir nos relacionamentos familiares. Em ambos os romances, de escritoras contemporâneas cubano-americanas, os personagens têm que negociar com suas próprias famílias e com diferentes culturas. Nesses romances, a construção de identidade do sujeito diaspórico feminino é intensivamente permeada por relacionamentos familiares e pela política, apesar de as famílias poderem estar ou não separadas por questões políticas. Em *Dreaming in Cuban*, por meio de estratégias narrativas pós-modernas, Cristina García insere vozes silenciadas pelo patriarcado, descontruindo a história oficial e fornecendo ao leitor uma perspectiva feminina dos eventos. Em *Memory Mambo*, a memória tem um importante papel na narrativa, demonstrando que a memória pode ser contraditória e que história é uma construção social. Ambos os romances desafiam modos tradicionais de representação e oferecem um fascinante retrato da vida nos cruzamentos de culturas.

Palavras-chave: Cruzamentos de culturas. Exílio. Hibridismo. Relacionamentos familiares.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the novels *Dreaming in Cuban*, by Cristina García, and *Memory Mambo*, by Achy Obejas. This work investigates how exile and hybridity may interfere in family relationships. In both novels, by contemporary Cuban-American writers, the characters have to negotiate with their own families and with different cultures. In these novels, the construction of identity of the female diasporic subject is intensively permeated by family relationships and politics, even though families may or may not be separated by political issues. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, by means of postmodern narrative strategies, Cristina García inserts voices silenced by patriarchy, deconstructing official history and providing the reader with a female perspective of events. In *Memory Mambo*, memory plays an important role in the narrative, demonstrating that memory can be contradictory and that history is a social construct. Both novels challenge traditional modes of representation and offer a compelling portrait of life at the crossroads of cultures.

Keywords**:** Crossroads of cultures. Exile. Hybridity. Family relationships.

SINOPSE

Investigação sobre cruzamentos de culturas, exílio, hibridismo, relacionamentos familiares e construção de sujeitos femininos diaspóricos nos romances *Dreaming in Cuban*, de Cristina García, e *Memory Mambo*, de Achy Obejas. Análise de ambas as obras, baseada em estudos pós-modernos e pós-coloniais sobre identidade assim como em teorias feministas.

SYNOPSIS

Investigation about crossroads of cultures, exile, hybridity, family relationships and the construction of the female diasporic subject in the novels *Dreaming in Cuban*, by Cristina García, and *Memory Mambo*, by Achy Obejas. Analysis of both novels based on postmodern and postcolonial studies about identity as well as on feminist theories.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	INTRODUCTION…….	10
1	**MULTIPLICITY OF IDENTITIES AND HYBRIDITY: RECOGNITION AND INSERTION OF SILENCED VOICES**…….……..	14
2	**CUBA AND THE UNITED STATES: A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP**……..….	26
2.1	**Cuba: from Spanish colony to American protectorate**……...……..	28
2.2	**The Coup d'État and the Revolution**……...……....	38
2.3	**A brief view of Cuba after the collapse of communism**…….....	45
3	**HYBRIDITY AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE DIASPORIC SUBJECT IN *DREAMING IN CUBAN***……..…	48
4	**AN ANALYSIS OF *MEMORY MAMBO*: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, SEXUALITY AND POLITICS AT THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURES**…….……..	74
5	**CONCLUSION**……...……...	94
	REFERENCES……..……	97

INTRODUCTION

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio,
estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Modern nations are constituted by individuals of different origins and ethnicities as well as of multiple cultures. The United States of America may be seen as a prime example of this multicultural situation. In Mr. Barack Hussein Obama's Victory Speech on November 5th, 2008, the then elected President of the United States of America declared that the country was composed by "young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disable and not disabled".[1] In this sense, Mr. Obama's speech acknowledges that American society is constituted by people that do not simply belong to the mainstream. Mr. Obama's words encompass a variety of citizens in terms of ethnicity, political option, social class, and sexual orientation. The complexity that constitutes individuals is a significant element of the constitutions of nations as well.

Even though the word Hispanic is a term that erases the specificities of individuals with Latino origins, which will be discussed later in this dissertation, its utilization demonstrates the recognition of the relevance of these communities. The Cuban-American community, for example, is so important to the American political scenario that presidential candidates pay cyclical homage to the community. The contemporary American literary landscape displays innumerous writers with Cuban origins who provide an interesting portrait of dwelling at the crossroads of cultures. These authors offer their readers an important contribution to the discussion of issues that are connected to the fact of leaving one's motherland and moving to a society that is often hostile to them.

This dissertation deals with two novels by Cuban-American female writers, women who were born in Cuba and went to the United States when they were infants. *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), by Cristina García, and *Memory Mambo* (1996), by Achy Obejas, portray the complexity of leaving one's mother country and of having to negotiate with the host society.

[1] *The New York Times*. Transcript of Victory Speech of Mr. Barack Hussein Obama, elected President of the United States of America, November 5th, 2008.

In the light of discussions by Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall, this dissertation intends to investigate hybridity and the construction of the female subject in these literary works, making use of feminist approaches. The secondary sources also include the works by postmodern and postcolonial theorists and critics.

I would like to state that, in the title of this dissertation, what I mean by "entangled cultures" is the intertwining that takes place when individuals who have origins in one culture live in another one. The fact that these subjects dwell at the crossroads of cultures may interweave these cultures as those individuals strive in search of their identities. Inhabiting entangled cultures may lead to the development of hybrid identities, as I hope to have managed to discuss in this dissertation with the support of the theorists and critics selected. I would also like to point out that exile affects not only the subjects who leave their homeland but also the ones who remain in their native soil, an issue that will be discussed in this dissertation, which deals mainly with female diasporic subjects.

In "The Landscape of Postfeminism: The Intersection of Feminism, Postmodernism and Post-colonialism", Ann Brooks states that "Feminist and post-colonial theorists have recognized the potential of postmodernism to advance debates around identity, nationality and difference already articulated within these political and cultural movements." (BROOKS, 1998, p. 92). In the novels discussed in this dissertation, postcolonial themes and approaches are present along with some postmodern concepts and strategies and the investigation adopts a feminist point of view. Even though the Cuban-American diaspora presents a peculiar experience in terms of motives and circumstances of subjects' displacements when compared to that of other peoples in the world and even in the American territory, Cuban exiles in the United States share some similarities with other groups that will be discussed later on.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, "Multiplicity of Identities and Hybridity: Recognition and Insertion of Silenced Voices", I discuss issues related to diaspora and the fragmentation of the subject, which are present in the novels selected for investigation. In the light of the discussions developed by Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall, this chapter deals with the effects of exile and displacement upon the construction of one's identity. With the support of other theorists and critics, such as Bill Ashcroft, Linda Hutcheon, Gayatri C. Spivak, and Gloria Anzaldúa, this chapter briefly discusses postmodern and postcolonial issues. Even though the chapter does not have the intention of covering every aspect of those movements, it aims at providing the present dissertation with some elements for further discussions throughout the text.

Since the Cuban historical and political background is significantly present in the novels investigated in this dissertation, the second chapter of this work, “Cuba and The United States: A Close Relationship”, is dedicated to Cuban history and the intertwining that occurred between Cuba and the United States. As Professor Leila Assumpção Harris points out, studies about diasporic journeys need to consider the historical, political and cultural specificities of the subjects and cultures involved. (HARRIS, 2008, p. 54-55). Some major Cuban historical and political events are mentioned in the novels selected for analysis as they play an important role in the lives of the characters. This chapter relies on historians Richard Gott and Clifford L. Staten as its main sources.

In the third chapter, “Hybridity and the Fragmentation of the Diasporic Subject in *Dreaming in Cuba*”, I discuss Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992). The author of the novel was born in Havana in 1958 and raised in New York, having been a finalist for the 1992 National Book Award for *Dreaming in Cuban* (LÓPEZ, 2003, p. 102). García’s other novels are *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), *Monkey Hunting* (2003) and *A Handbook to Luck* (2007). This chapter takes into account how politics may interfere in family relationships and how political disagreements may reinforce the separateness that may already exist among members of a family.

In the fourth chapter, “An Analysis of *Memory Mambo*: Family Relationships, Sexuality and Politics at the Crossroads of Cultures”, I discuss Achy Obejas’s *Memory Mambo* (1996). Like García, Achy Obejas was born in Havana in 1956 and moved to the United States as a child. Her literary works include *This Is What Happened In Our Other Life*, a collection of poems, *We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?*, a collection of short stories, *Days of Awe* (2001) and *Ruins* (2009), novels. As it will be pointed out, when discussing works that involve groups that do not belong to the American mainstream, ethnicity should be taken into consideration. Obejas’s novel provides an interesting portrait of how ethnicity and politics may affect personal matters. In addition to this, the issue of sexual orientation is significantly present in this novel, representing the ways families deal with their members’ homosexuality.

Gayatri C. Spivak claims that if, “in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.” (SPIVAK, 1997, p. 28). Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida states that “if the female subaltern cannot speak, as Spivak claims elsewhere, there is the need to create the space and conditions so that when she speaks she can be heard, and, above all, we have to learn to listen.” (ALMEIDA, 2005, p. 168). The novels investigated in this dissertation offer female subjects a

relevant chance to be heard. The Cuban-American female writers whose works are discussed in this research offer us the possibility of listening to previously silenced voices. Sonia Torres states that “the process of establishing themselves in the multicultural literary scenery of the USA is just beginning for Cubans”.[2] (TORRES, 2001, p. 140, my translation.). The novels discussed in this dissertation have enriched Cuban-American literary landscape, providing the readers with an important opportunity of discussing the construction of hybrid identities.

[2] The original text is: “[...] o processo de estabelecer-se no cenário literário multicultural dos EUA está apenas começando para os cubanos.”

1 MULTIPLICITY OF IDENTITIES AND HYBRIDITY: RECOGNITION AND INSERTION OF SILENCED VOICES

> The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily.
>
> Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity"

> If the effect of the colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs.
>
> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

Peoples from different cultures, for a variety of reasons, and in various periods of time, have been compelled to live in other societies. By doing so, they develop feelings of not belonging to their new environment, especially if their experiences involve political and/or economic reasons. In that new environment, different cultures should learn how to coexist. Diaspora discourses may be seen as an important instrument to understand how different cultures dialogue. Khachig Tölölian states that "the term [Diaspora] that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community." (Khachig Tölölian apud CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 245). The term diaspora is currently connected with communities that have experienced dispersal, memories of the homeland and desire for eventual return. In "Diasporas", summarizing William Safran's discussion of the term, James Clifford states that:

> These, then, are the main features of diaspora: a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship. (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 247).

It is important to acknowledge that not necessarily all the features described above appear in all diasporic experiences. Each group and each individual may undergo specific experiences that may contribute to the construction of one's self. In "New Ethnicities", Stuart

Hall states that it is necessary to recognize “that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture.” (HALL, 1997a, p. 227). Hall also claims that “We are all, in that sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are.” (HALL, 1997a, p. 227. Italics in the original.). Different experiences and histories contribute to the formation of one’s identities and the intertwining of cultures is another issue that plays a relevant role in this construction.

The experience of exile may constitute an important instrument in the exposing of the individual to different cultures, as he/she may be inserted into a different culture. In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Ashcroft et al state that “The condition of exile involves the idea of a separation and distancing from either a literal homeland or from a cultural and ethnic origin.” (ASHCROFT et al, 2002, p. 92). Exile communities may have to struggle in order to maintain the connection to their places of origins and to preserve their homelands traditions, since the dominant cultures tend to force their patterns into the dominated ones.

The dominant cultures’ anxiety to conquer and to exploit the dominated ones has been present at the formation of modernity. Hall et al state that:

> Modernity developed at the intersection of national and international conditions and processes. It was shaped by both “internal” and “external” forces. The West forged its identity and interests in relation to endogenous developments in Europe and America, and through relations of unequal exchange (material and cultural) with “the Rest” – the frequently excluded, conquered, colonized, and exploited “other”. (HALL et al, 2005c, p. 426).

The development of modern societies has witnessed the exploitation of the so-called “others”. The groups that do not belong to the monolithic culture are undermined by the dominant culture. It is important to acknowledge that the ones that are considered the “Rest” should have their voices heard. Postcolonial theory deals with effects of empires over dominant societies and cultures. Although there is no consensus over the definition of the term, the core of analyses around postcolonial issues provides a possibility of examining other narratives that do not involve European imperial narratives. Postcolonial studies encompass discussions over culture, history, literature, and politics among other issues that involve former colonies of the European empires.

Jonathan Hart and Terry Goldie state that “post-colonial criticism offers a counter-narrative to the long tradition of European imperial narratives”. (HART; GOLDIE, 1993, p. 155). Postcolonial studies defy the solidified concepts of society that have been constructed based on patterns established by dominant powers, challenging the supposed superiority of colonizer societies and their alleged mission of taking civilization to their colonies.

It is important to mention, though, that even the utilization of a hyphen represents a significant discussion over the term. Ashcroft et al state that many critics, focused on the material effects of the historical condition of colonialism and on its discursive power, insist on the use of the hyphen in order to distinguish postcolonial studies *as a field* from a colonial discourse theory *per se*. (ASHCROFT et al, 2002, p. 187. Italics in the original.). Ashcroft et al add:

> Post-colonialism/postcolonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities. While its use has tended to focus on the cultural production of such communities, it is becoming widely used in historical, political, sociological and economic analyses, as these disciplines continue to engage with the impact of European imperialism upon world societies. (ASHCROFT et al, 2002, p. 187).

Postcolonial studies provide a significant terrain in which literatures of once colonized groups may be investigated, offering an important opportunity in which groups that have been marginalized may be recognized and inscribed. Postcolonialism and postmodernism display relevant similarities, showing a close relation between them.

As Ann Brooks states, there is an intersection of feminism, postcolonialism and postmodernism. Brooks claims that "all three movements have in common the process of dismantling or subverting dominant hegemonic discourses. In the process all three seek to challenge traditional epistemologies and to reestablish marginal discourses." (BROOKS, 1998, p. 105). In this way, feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism aim at offering marginalized subjects a relevant opportunity to have their voices heard. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Linda Hutcheon states that:

> The center no longer holds. And, from the decentered perspective, the 'marginal' and […] the 'ex-centric' (be it in class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity) take on new significance in the light of the implied recognition that our culture is not really the homogeneous monolith (that is middle-class, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed. (HUTCHEON, 2000, p. 12).

Postmodern writings are an important instrument to represent ex-centric cultures. They are able to deconstruct the monolithic concepts that are solidified in society. Postmodern writings acknowledge the differences that tend to be overshadowed by the dominant cultures. This recognition is important to insert the ex-centric ideology into the West, subverting the canonical representations of the hegemonic cultures. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon states that:

> Postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and the presuppositions it appears to challenge. […] [T]he postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. (HUTCHEON, 2003, p. 1).

Postmodernism works to deconstruct the patterns imposed by dominant societies and entities. It attempts to de-naturalize hegemonic concepts that may be considered intrinsic to societies. Adapting Barthes's notion of "doxa" as public opinion or the "Voice of Nature" and consensus, Hutcheon states that "postmodernism works to 'de-doxify' our cultural representations and their undeniable political import." (HUTCHEON, 2003, p. 3). Hutcheon adds that "Difference and ex-centricity replace homogeneity and centrality as the foci of postmodern social analysis." (HUTCHEON, 2003, p. 5). Postmodern discourses have taken into consideration the marginalized subject, offering him/her voice to be heard.

Hutcheon adds that "postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges." (HUTCHEON, 2000, p. 3). Not only the definition of the term is controversial but also the term itself. Theorist Ihab Hassan considers that the term postmodernism by itself already evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism. Hassan adds that the term "denotes temporal linearity and connotes belatedness, even decadence, to which no post-modernist would admit". (HASSAN, 1993, p. 276). Concerning the terms postmodern, postmodernity and postmodernism, there is no consensus among the theorists and critics. The contradiction over postmodernism claimed by Hutcheon is also present in the term itself. Hutcheon states:

> ["Post" in postmodernism] signals its contradictory dependence on and independence from that which temporally preceded it and which literally made it possible. Postmodernism's relation to modernism is, therefore, typically contradictory […] It marks neither a simple and radical break from it nor a straightforward continuity with it: it is both and neither. (HUTCHEON, 2000, p. 17-18).

Concepts that we may have assumed as natural are actually constructs that have been defied. In "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power", Stuart Hall discusses the terms West and western. Hall reminds us that, although the terms may seem to be about matters of geography and location, they are also used to refer to a type of society, a level of development. Hall argues that the "West" is no longer only in Europe and not all of Europe is in "the West". At the same time, Eastern Europe does not properly belong to the West while the United States does. Technologically speaking, Japan is "western" whereas, by comparison, Latin America, in the western hemisphere, belongs economically to the Third

World and struggles to catch up with the “West”. (HALL, 2005a, p. 185). Hall adds that “‘the West’ is a historical, not geographical, construct. It is therefore also an idea, a concept.” (HALL, 2005a, p. 186).

According to Hall, “Terms like ‘the West’ and ‘the Rest’ are historical and linguistic constructs whose meanings change over time. More importantly, there are many different discourses, or ways in which the West came to speak of and represent other cultures.” (HALL, 2005a, p. 188). Although the term West implies unification and homogeneity, it is important to be aware of the fact that the West has always contained many internal differences. Hall argues that Jews, for example, are frequently excluded and ostracized; that West Europeans often regard Eastern Europeans as “barbaric”; and, that, throughout the West, western women are represented as inferior to western men. (HALL, 2005a, p. 188-189). Hall adds:

> Without the Rest (or its own internal “others”), the West would not have been able to recognize and represent itself as the summit of human history. The figure of “the Other”, banished to the edge of the conceptual world and constructed as the absolute opposite, the negation, of everything which the West stood for, reappeared at the very center of the discourse of civilization, refinement, modernity, and development in the West. “The Other” was the “dark” side – forgotten, repressed, and denied; the reverse image of enlightenment and modernity. (HALL, 2005a, p. 221).

Hall explains that “the Rest” is a term which also covers enormous historical, cultural, and economic distinctions, including, for example, the middle East, the Far East, Africa, Latin America, indigenous North America, Australasia, some societies of some North American Indians and the developed civilizations of China, Egypt, or Islam. (HALL, 2005a, p. 189). According to Hall, the discourse of “the West and the Rest”, a term coined by the theorist, represents things which are in fact very differentiated (the different European cultures) as homogenous (the West) and asserts that these different cultures are united by the fact that they are all different from the Rest. Similarly, the Rest, though different among themselves, is represented as the same in the sense that they are all different from the West. (HALL, 2005a, p. 188-189).

Hall adds that the discourse of “the West and the Rest”, “as a ‘system of representation’ represents the world as divided according to a simple dichotomy – the West/Rest”. According to Hall, that “is what makes the discourse of ‘the West and the Rest’ so destructive – it draws crude and simplistic distinctions and constructs an over-simplified conception of ‘difference’”. (HALL, 2005a, p. 189).

The insertion of “the Rest”, of the “Other”, of the ex-centric, marginalized character may be an important instrument of acknowledging the diversity of identities in modern societies as well as inscribing the hybrid cultures. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha states that “all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation [the Third Space of enunciation].” (BHABHA, 1994, p. 37). Bhabha adds that:

> It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory […] may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the people’. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (BHABHA, 1994, p. 38. Italics in the original.).

The acknowledgement of the cultures in the Third Space of enunciation is an important step so that the recognition and the inscription of the hybrid subject may occur. Bhabha claims that “Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal […].”(BHABHA, 1994, p. 112). He also states that “Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects.” (BHABHA, 1994, p. 112). Hybridity subverts the supremacy of homogenous monolith over dominated cultures and the acknowledgement of hybrid subjects may contribute to a more comprehensive and faithful analysis of modern societies.

Homi Bhabha states “The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’”. (BHABHA, 1994, p. 12). Bhabha adds that “The centre of such a study would neither be the ‘sovereignty’ of national cultures, nor the universalism of human culture, but a focus on those ‘freak social and cultural displacements’”. (BHABHA, 1994, p. 12). The study of literature should focus on the narratives that re-examine traditional representations of society and deal with ex-centric ideologies. It is important to analyze cultures that represent minority groups. In investigating cultures, it is necessary to analyze the different processes that groups or individuals may undergo in order to develop their own identities. Besides, it should be acknowledged that subjects display identities that are not hermetic and may be altered throughout time.

The transformation that has occurred in modern societies in the twentieth century has shaken the structure of cultural scenarios that once was believed to be immutable: for example, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and race. The fragmentation that has taken place affected societies and individuals, leading to the alteration of scenario that shifted personal identities, diminishing "our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects". The deprivation of a stable 'sense of self' is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject. (HALL, 2005b, p. 596-597). According to Hall, "This set of double displacements – de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves – constitutes a 'crisis of identity' for the individual." (HALL, 2005b, p. 597).

Stuart Hall distinguishes three different conceptions of identity: those of the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject. The notion of Enlightenment subject was based on a concept of the "human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason". The concept of the sociological subject displayed the consciousness that the subject was not self-sufficient but forged according to "significant others", who mediated to the subject the worlds he/she inhabited. In this way, identity stabilizes subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit. (HALL, 2005b, p. 598-599). However, neither the subjects nor the environments they live in are solidified entities. Hall adds:

> The subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented: composed, not of a single, but several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities. […] The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable, and problematic. This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity. […] [Identity] is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self". Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or "narrative of the self" about ourselves. (HALL, 2005b, p. 598).

Postmodern discourses tackle issues related to the representation of the subject and the construction of identity. Hall offers five advances that occurred in the period of the late-modernity (the second half of the twentieth century), which resulted in the dislocation of the Cartesian subject, problematizing the representation of the subject. The first major de-centering involves the Marxist thought. Marx's nineteenth-century writings were revisited in the light of his argument that Man makes history based on conditions that are inherited from antecessors. In this way, Marx's re-readers claimed that individuals could not be the agents of

history since they could only act based on the historical, material and cultural conditions provided by prior generations. (HALL, 2005b, p. 606).

Sigmund Freud's discussion of the unconscious constitutes the second of the great de-centerings in the twentieth-century western thought according to Hall. Freud's work contributes to the disruption of the Cartesian subject since his theory considers that "our identities, our sexuality, and the structure of our desires are formed on the basis of the psychic and symbolic processes of the unconscious". The assumption of a rational and coherent subject with stable and unified identity collapses. (HALL, 2005b, p. 607).

Ferdinand de Saussure's theories of language form the third moment in which the dislocation of the subject occurred. Saussure's work argues that language is a social system, not an individual one. The language we use is produced under the rules and systems of meaning that were constructed before us. Saussure's theory suggests that human beings articulate language but they are not the authors of it. (HALL, 2005b, p. 608-609).

The fourth moment of de-centering of the subject is constituted by the work of French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. His theory approaches the power accomplished by institutions that regulate individuals. Disciplinary power, a term coined by Foucault, involves the surveillance and regulation of populations and of the individual and the body. As Hall states, "the more collective and organized is the nature of the institutions of late-modernity, the greater the isolation, surveillance, and individuation of the individual subject." (HALL, 2005b, p. 609-610).

The impact of feminism, as theoretical critique and social movement, constitutes the fifth de-centering discussed by Hall. Feminism's slogan was "personal is political", questioning the distinction between "inside" and "outside", "private" and "public". Besides, feminism discusses how we are produced as gendered subjects. Hall claims that feminism "challenged the notion that men and women were part of the same identity – 'Mankind' – replacing it with *the question of sexual difference*." (HALL, p. 2005b, p. 610-611. Italics in the original.).

The dislocation of the subject has contributed to the alterations of perception towards individuals, identities and societies. Not only the subject and his/her identity has been displaced but also the environment in which he/she dwells has been affected by this de-centering. Societies and individuals are not hermetic entities and may even be contaminated by events, subjects and institutions, especially due to the effects of globalization. In "A Global Society?", Anthony McGrew states:

> Globalization refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation-state (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern system. It defines a process through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe. (McGREW, 2005, p. 470).

The constant transformation that individuals and societies undergo defies the very definition of nation, since it seems that any of its definitions may have elements that are connected to the people. As the inhabitants of a nation are not unified subjects, the nation itself may lack unity as well. According to Benedict Anderson, for example, nation "is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 6). The critic affirms that it is imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 6). Anderson adds:

> The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. […] It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. […] Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 7. Italics in the original.).

Discussions over the definition of nation have been present in academic circles. In *By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women's Journeys in and out of Exile*, Maria de los Angeles Torres, for example, presents a definition in which nation and home share a close relation: "If exile is to live in a place where there is no house in which we were children, nation must be the place where this house still exists. […] [N]ations also live in our memories, not only in politically fractured geographical zones." (TORRES, 2003, p. 4-5). Torres adds: "Nations are, after all, our souls. They are where our past and present meet to imagine a future, create new homes." (TORRES, 2003, p. 5). It is important, though, to perceive that modern nations are formed by individuals that may be influenced by more than one nation, more than one culture. As Hall states, "*Modern nations are all cultural hybrids*." (HALL, 2005b, 617. Italics in the original).

Modern nations and identities should not be perceived as solidified entities. Perspectives may change according to time, place or backgrounds, for instance. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall states that "instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact […], we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never

complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation." (HALL, 1997b, p. 110).

Concerning the construction of identity, an important element in this process is the environment that the subject dwells in. Inhabiting at the crossroads of cultures may foster the instability of the subject's identity. Since the borderlands of cultures may intertwine, the process of identification may never be completed. The term borderland may be addressed with various definitions. Throughout this dissertation, the term borderland will be utilized based on the discussion developed by Anzaldúa. In the Preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera:* The New Mestiza, Anzaldúa states that "In fact, 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." (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 19). The new diasporas have contributed to the development of scenarios where cultures may mingle; however, there is an important feature of the new diasporas that should be mentioned.

In "Diasporas Old and New: Women in Transnational World", Gayatri Spivak claims that the only significant difference between the old and the new diasporas is "the use, abuse, participation, and role of women." (SPIVAK, 1996, p. 250). The acknowledgment of the gendered aspect of the new diasporas is a relevant step in recognizing the importance of women in the development of modern nations. Critic bell hooks has stated that women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression and that, as with other forms of oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures. Critic hooks adds: "We [women] are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience." (hooks, 1997, p. 396). The recognition and inscription of female experiences contribute to form a richer and more precise landscape of peoples' experiences.

However, the gendered characteristic of the new diasporas has failed to erase the labels applied towards women. According to their ethnic background, for example, women may be stigmatized by individuals and institutions from dominant culture and society. Women from ethnic communities may be denominated Third World women or women of color. Although the term "women of color" may have received different definitions, this dissertation will adopt the definition provided by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism Without Borders*:

> This term ["women of color"] designates a political constituency, not a biological or even sociological one. It is a sociopolitical designation for people of African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the United States. It also refers to "new

> immigrants" to the United States in the last three decades: Arab, Korean, Thai, Laotian, and so on. What seems to constitute "women of color" or "Third World women" as a viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications. Similarly, it is Third World women's oppositional political relation to sexist, racist, and imperialist structures that constitutes our potential commonality. Thus, it is the common context of struggles against specific exploitative structures and systems that determines our potential political alliances. (MOHANTY, 2004, p. 49).

The struggles carried out by Third World women against societies' solidified structures play a relevant role in offering voice to silenced subjects. The same opportunity is given to marginalized female subjects by means of autobiographical practices. As Tess Cosslett et al state, "If women have been categorized as 'objects' by patriarchal cultures, women's autobiography gives an opportunity for them to express themselves as 'subjects', with their own selfhood." (COSSLETT et al, 2000, p. 5-6). In autobiographies, memory may be seen as a significant tool of connecting past and present. Linda Anderson has stated that "memory is a space in which the self can be remade by women autobiographers." (Linda Anderson apud COSSLETT et al, 2000, p. 8). Testimonies, diaries, memoirs, oral history, confessional writing and personalist criticism are categories of autobiographical practices. (COSSLETT et al, 2000, p. 9). Those practices provide a relevant opportunity of recording female experiences that shape families and nations.

An important example of autobiographical elements may be seen in *Dreaming in Cuban*. The novel presents elements of autobiographical narratives such as letters and diaries, reconstructing history through a personal filter. In an interview to Professor Scott Shibuya Brown, Cristina García has stated she wanted to capture something of the lost connection with her own grandmother in the relationship between Celia and her granddaughter Pilar. García adds that when she finally met her own maternal grandmother in Cuba in 1984, she was flooded with a sense of loss for everything that they had not experienced together. Besides, Cristina García declares that, since so much history is written by and about men, she wanted to focus primarily on women, exploring the more personal repercussions of the Cuban revolution. (GARCÍA apud BROWN, 1992, p. 250-251). As María de los Angeles Torres states, narratives of female experiences may enrich investigations about societies:

> It had been women from many different perspectives, after all, who had played important roles in forging a paradigm of politics and identity that was inclusive of both home and host countries, mindful of multiple points of reference. Surely, men have been involved, but women have been most critical to the endeavor and have seldom been recognized publicly. (TORRES, 2003, p. x).

Women play an important role in forging national identities. In this sense, collections of memories contribute to this process as well. In *The Tears of Hispaniola: Haitian and*

Dominican Diaspora Memory, Lucía M. Suárez states that memories "refocus our attention on political blunders and individual models of survival and resistance. Creative writing in the Cuban diaspora serves as a venue for public discourse, political denunciation, and call for a change." (SUÁREZ, 2006, p. 4).

Discussing the process of formation of the subjects in the postcolonial moment, Catherine Hall states that "History and memory are central to that process. […] It is a history which involves recognition and the re-working of memory. A history which shows how fantasized constructions of homogeneous nations are constructed […]". (HALL, 1996, p. 76). The process of the construction of the subject undoubtedly involves memory and history. The acknowledgement of the multiplicity of identities and the existence of hybrid subjects is a relevant step towards the recognition and the inscription of voices that have been silenced by dominant power. Literary works by Cuban-American writers provide a rich terrain for this insertion, as I intend to discuss in the following chapters.

2 CUBA AND THE UNITED STATES: A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP

> The development of consciousness of "Cuban" was not a simple political formulation, of course. It had deeper meanings and larger associations with implications that transcended the pursuit of a free Cuba for Cubans. Also involved was a search for new ways to articulate power, which implied the need to devise different possibilities through which envisage a new future. This endeavor found its dominant expression in an affirmation of modernity, progress, and above all civilization, much of which derived its main characteristics from North American sources.
>
> Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*

On July 31st, 2006, Fidel Castro temporarily relinquished power to his brother Raúl Castro due to a surgery. The news of Castro's temporary giving up power generated reactions inside and outside Cuba. According to James C. McKinley Jr., the seriousness of Mr. Castro's condition was still unclear but news he had relinquished power set off celebrations among Cuban exiles in Miami, while a couple hundred demonstrators also rallied Havana to show support for Castro, calling him "the father of the people" and "the soul of the country". Illustrating American attention towards Cuba, a month before Mr. Castro's surgery, President George W. Bush established the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, which recommended that the United States should act quickly to help foster a transitional government in Cuba once Mr. Castro died. (McKINLEY JR., 2006).

When Fidel Castro resigned as Cuba's President on February 19th, 2008, this news was present in the headlines of major American newspapers. This event was even worth of the American President's comments. According to James C. McKinley Jr., while traveling in Rwanda on a tour of African countries, President George W. Bush said that "the resignation should be the beginning of a democratic transition in Cuba that should lead to free elections." (McKINLEY JR., 2008a). Mr. Bush added that "The United States will help the people of Cuba realize the blessings of liberty." (McKINLEY JR., 2008a). Besides the commentaries on Cuba's future after Castro's resignation, it is also possible to observe, in the words of the former U.S. President, the alleged American obligation to take their political and economic agenda to other countries. Castro's stepping down was significant not only to Cubans but also to the American society. Peter Baker declared that "it [Castro's resignation] was the moment that nine other American presidents waited for but never saw." (BAKER, 2008).

Nonetheless, Fidel Castro's resignation did not imply that any significant change would occur in the Cuban political landscape. Castro's brother, Raúl Castro, was confirmed as the President of Cuba on February 24th, 2008, by the Cuban National Assembly, which

ensured the continued power of Cuba's old guard by electing another veteran of the revolution, Mr. José Ramón Machado Ventura, as the first vice-president. In his first words as president, Raúl Castro promised to consult his brother on every important decision. In the United States, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged Cuban government to release all political prisoners, to respect human rights and to create a clear pathway towards free and fair elections. (McKINLEY JR., 2008b). Cuban politics is an issue that is considered in the U.S. scenario, corroborating that the interests of both nations are undeniably intertwined.

Even personal matters may escalate to political agendas of both nations. The Elián González case, for instance, received significant attention of both governments, something that would not probably occur had it involved other countries. Elián González was a five-year-old boy who was found in the waters off Florida in November 1999, after the boat in which he was capsized. His mother and eleven people died. González was taken to his relatives in Miami, who offered him a permanent home, while his father, who remained in Cuba, wanted him to be returned to his family in Cuba. (GOTT, 2005, p. 310). This family matter was given the proportions of an event of national interest. According to Clifford L. Staten:

> This [the Elián González case] is a clear illustration of how what should have been a low-profile "nonevent" became a major international story that mobilized Cuban American groups in southern Florida, dominated debate in the U.S. Congress, forced the U.S. attorney general to become involved and directly affected a presidential campaign. (STATEN, 2003, p. 3).

This episode represents the complex relationship that exists between Cuba and the United States. The intertwinement of both countries has its roots back in the nineteenth century. By 1818, Cuban ports were opened to all nations and it was necessary to improve their technology in producing sugar in order to compete in the European markets. (STATEN, 2003, p. 22). Staten adds that "New technology and investment funds from the United States began to transform the sugar industry and Cuba's trade relationships. Cuba became more and more oriented toward the United States." (STATEN, 2003, p. 22). The close relationship between these two countries is reflected on the history of both nations.

Furthermore, political issues that involve both countries are so relevant that they may be significantly present in literary works by Cuban-American writers. In the novels analyzed in this dissertation, political affairs affect the characters' lives. Thus, in the following sections, a brief historical discussion will be carried out in order to attempt to display how Cuban and American histories have been connected.

2.1. Cuba: from Spanish colony to American protectorate

At the present time, it is commonly said that events in the world may be interconnected due to globalization. Nonetheless, it is not new that events in some place of the world may have impact at other regions. Clifford L. Staten declares that "during the four centuries of Spanish rule over Cuba (1492-1898) one can easily see how events in the Caribbean, Spain, greater Europe and the United States directly affected the island." (STATEN, 2003, p. 11). To begin with, because of Spanish expansionist policy, the quantity of Cuba's inhabitants was dramatically affected.

According to Staten, when Christopher Columbus arrived in Cuba in 1492, there were between 50,000 and 300,000 indigenous peoples at that time, composed by the Tainos, the Ciboneys and the Guanajatabeyes. The Tainos, the largest indigenous group, had arrived at Cuba around 1250. Despite their prior presence on the island, the indigenous peoples were almost decimated by the Spaniards as well as by epidemics: "In the next seventy years [after Columbus's arrival], most of the indigenous peoples on the island were killed largely due to Spanish cruelty and diseases such as smallpox, typhus, influenza and measles." (STATEN, 2003, p. 13).

After the arrival of the Spaniards, the colonizers did not pay much attention to Cuba, since the colony did not have the valuable mines Spain desired. Staten adds that the "*conquistadores*, after discovering the island did not have significant deposits of gold and silver, quickly moved on to the immense wealth and treasures found in the Aztec and Inca empires in what is today Mexico and Peru". (STATEN, 2003, p.12). Staten adds:

> Thus, for nearly 300 years the island of Cuba was relegated to serving merely as a stopping over point between Spain and the riches from its colonies in Spanish America (Mexico and Central and South America). Little change would take place until several events in the late 1700s set the stage for the island's transformation. These included an eleven-month occupation of Havana by the English in 1762, the emergence of the United States as a market for Cuba, the Spanish Crown's liberalizing trade reforms of 1778 and 1791, and, perhaps most importantly, a slave rebellion in St. Domingue (Haiti) in 1791 that dramatically affected the world market for sugar. (STATEN, 2003, p. 12).

The first permanent Spanish settlement in the Caribbean was established at the port of Santo Domingo, on the island of Hispaniola (Nowadays, Haiti and Dominican Republic). Richard Gott states that "Not until 1511 was an expedition sent out from Hispaniola to Cuba." (GOTT, 2005, p.13). Diego Velásquez, a Spanish conqueror, was sent to Cuba in order to conquer and settle the island. Velásquez had already demonstrated his effective military commander abilities in "the genocidal campaigns against the Indians of Hispaniola." (GOTT,

2005, p.14). Gott adds that Velásquez's men were received with resistance by the Indians, which lasted for several decades. (GOTT, 2005, p. 13). However, Velásquez managed to establish settlements despite the Indians' attacks.

Velásquez captured Hatuey, a Taino *cacique* or chieftain, and burnt him alive. Hatuey became the iconic representative of the aboriginal Indian population of Cuba. Gott states that the scene of Hatuey's death is recorded in *A Short History of the Destruction of the Indies*, a book written by Bartolomé de Las Casas, the priest and landowner who accompanied Velásquez's invasion force. The Christian invaders tied Hatuey to a stake and gave him a brief outline of the Christian myths, since they wanted him to be converted to their faith:

> The friar told him [Hatuey] that, if he would only believe what he was now hearing, he would go to Heaven there to enjoy glory and eternal rest, but that, if he would not, he would be consigned to Hell, where he would endure everlasting pain and torment. Hatuey thought for a short while and then asked the friar whether Christians went to Heaven. When the reply came that good ones do, he retorted, without need for further reflection, that, if that was the case, then he chose to go to Hell, to ensure that he would never again have to clap eyes on those cruel brutes. (Bartolomé de Las Casas apud GOTT, 2005, p. 15).

Bartolomé de Las Casas, the "The Apostle of the Indians", recorded some of the slaughter carried out by the Spanish conquerors. Eventually, Las Casas "abandoned the lands he had been given on the island, and devoted the last 50 years of his life to the Indian cause." (GOTT, 2005, p.19). It is ironical that Las Casas's efforts to take the atrocities that were committed towards the Indians before the Spanish Crown's attention led to the Indians' protection and later to the introduction of black slavery. Hugh Thomas states that, when the abolishment of slavery was discussed in the nineteenth century in Cuba, Bartolomé de Las Casas's deeds were revisited and he was even considered the initiator of the slave trade in the island. (THOMAS, 2005, p. 98). The impact of black slavery in Cuba would be perceived throughout its history. The composition of Cuban society would be marked by blacks and mulattos. Richard Gott states:

> Cuba's future as a black and mulatto country was assured. The forced migration of these black slaves from Africa – coupled with the landing and settlement of Spaniards in the sixteenth century, and the subsequent dispossession and gradual elimination of most of the indigenous peoples – was to have a profound and lasting impact on the island's history. Cuba's society, its culture and its economy, as well as the physical make-up of its people, were to be irreversibly affected by this historic population transfer. (GOTT, 2005, p. 24).

Back in the sixteenth century, in order to control the Indians, Diego Velásquez issued *encomiendas*, a system that legally tied the indigenous peoples to the Spaniards. Through this system, the indigenous peoples served the Spaniards settlers as laborers and, in return, were

converted to Christianity. (STATEN, 2003, p. 14). Staten adds, “Cruelty, physical abuse and overwork were common practices by the Spanish *encomenderos*. The indigenous population of Cuba was so small by 1513 that the first Africans were imported as slave laborers.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 14). By the middle of the sixteenth century, “the focus of the Spanish power shifted from the Caribbean to Mexico and South America largely due to the vast amounts of gold and silver found there and the realization that there was little to be found in Cuba.” (STATEN, 2003, p.14).

Many of the island’s inhabitants left Cuba for Mexico and South America in their pursuit of fortune. According to Staten, “By 1544, there were no more than 7,000 people on the island and of these 660 were Spanish, 800 were slaves and the remainder were indigenous peoples.” Staten adds that Havana became “a transition point for the riches taken from the Americas that were going to Spain because ships could take advantage of the Gulf Stream that helped to carry them eastward and the shifting trade winds between winter and summer.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 14). For approximately a month each year, the Spanish fleet waited in Havana for the treasure ships that went from Mexico and Central and South America and escorted them to Spain. Staten adds: “As a result, Havana became a military and shipbuilding center, a provider of supplies (salt beef, leather, vegetables and fruit) for the fleet’s return trip to Spain and a naval seaport. […] Shipbuilding became one of the major industries in the late 1500s.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 15). However, the vast wealth and riches of Mexico and South America bypassed the island, leading its inhabitants to turn to the island’s other economic potentiality: its land. Even though sugar cane was introduced in Cuba at Columbus’s second voyage, only a few mills were founded in the 1520s. (STATEN, 2003, p. 14-15). The Spanish Crown and the settlers in Cuba had a conflict of interests:

> The colonial governing structure in Cuba was headed by a governor who was appointed by the Crown. Initially, the local governing institution of each settlement – the *cabilido* – was given significant autonomy. Members of the local *cabilido* elected a *procurador* who met annually with other *procuradores* in Santiago. These individuals discussed local grievances and issues of importance to their settlement and the island as a whole. This group elected a representative to present these issues and grievances to the governor, the Crown’s representative. This practice came to an end in 1532 as the governors sought to centralize the political processes in the Spanish colonies in the New World. The Crown’s administrative control over Cuba and the rest of its New World colonies came to reside with the *peninsulares*. Local administrative positions were sold by the Crown at auction. Corruption and patronage became common practice. Creoles rarely achieved political positions of high rank. Over time, this inability of Creoles to participate in the decision-making processes created a growing resentment toward the *peninsulares* that manifested itself in the growth of nationalism and the desire for independence in the second half of the nineteenth century. (STATEN, 2003, p. 15-16).

It is interesting to observe that events that occurred in the sixteenth century, for instance, would have repercussions centuries later. Besides, as Staten points out, from the middle of the 1500s and throughout the seventeenth century, England, France and the Netherlands competed with Spain for control of the Caribbean, seeking for new colonies in the region, by the early 1600s. (STATEN, 2003, p. 16). The hostility among those countries led them to create their own buccaneers, mercenaries who engaged in piracy during nonwar periods, in order to attack each other's settlement and colonies. Cuba, for instance, was attacked by the English buccaneer Henry Morgan while Spanish buccaneers frequently attacked Jamaica, an English colony, and St. Domingue, a French one. (STATEN, 2003, p. 16).

Due to the possibility of losing revenues because of the attacks, England and Spain sought to end the hostilities and trade peacefully. Clifford Staten adds that, in 1670, "Spain recognized England's colonies in the Caribbean and in 1697 France agreed to end its buccaneer raids in the Caribbean in exchange for recognition of its authority over St. Domingue" (Nowadays, Haiti). (STATEN, 2003, p. 16). Due to increasing demand in Europe, tobacco replaced leather and hides exports in Cuba by the early 1700s, contributing to the modifications of the layers of Cuban society. During the eighteenth century, the top of Cuban society was formed by the cattle ranchers, the tobacco and sugar planters and the merchants in the urban areas, followed by the small landowners, usually tobacco growers, lawyers and skilled tradesmen. Below this group there was a large number of people who worked for wages and did not have resources to own land: Europeans, mulattos and freed slaves. At the bottom of the class structure were the slaves. (STATEN, 2003, p. 16-18).

The quarrels among Britain, Spain and France eventually would affect their colonies. According to Gott, France and Britain were again at war in 1754 and the conflict in the years between 1754 and 1763 became familiar to Americans as 'the French and Indian War' and to Europeans as "the Seven Years" War. (GOTT, 2005, p. 41). Spain remained neutral at first, but later joined its forces with France. Gott adds that, although Cuba was not touched at the early years of the war, the island was inevitably affected. (GOTT, 2005, p. 41).

During the Seven Years War, Havana was controlled by Britain for just ten months. When the Treaty of Paris was signed in February 1763, the formal end of the war was accomplished and the French and Spanish defeat was recognized. The brief British possession over Cuba is often perceived by historians as the moment when Cuba entered the modern age, since the port of Havana was open to foreign commerce. (GOTT, 2005, p. 41-42). As some of the results of the British occupation, it could be mentioned that American merchants

established themselves legally in Havana and Cuban traders headed off to North American ports, a relationship which had an important role in the American Revolution: “These contacts survived the British departure and were revived and strengthened when the American Revolution exploded in 1776. Havana became an important meeting-place for war fleets sailing to mainland.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 42).

With the British occupation of Havana, Cuba benefited from the “enlightened despotism” of Charles III, who ruled Madrid from 1759 to 1788. Obviously, Spain itself was affected by the reforms carried out under Charles III. Those reforms reached the Church, education, taxation, the land tenure system, roads, and agriculture. Metropolitan reforms spread throughout Spain’s colonies and Madrid began to take a fresh interest in its colonial empire. Besides, after the withdrawn of the British soldiers, Cuba experienced an emergent interest by Spain. Scientific expeditions were sent out to explore it and to research future economic possibilities. Throughout Spain, more than 70 Sociedades de Amigos del País were founded, government-supported institutions whose members were local notables that promoted economic and social research, local educational initiatives and technological innovation. (GOTT, 2005, p. 42-43). Some of the changes that took place in Spain reached its colonies, including Cuba: “A Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País was formed in Havana in 1793, on the Spanish model, its membership including the 27 most powerful sugar magnates.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 43). The Consulado Real de Agricultura y Comercio was established in 1794 and a daily newspaper, the *Papel Períodico*, was inaugurated. According to Gott, “These institutions allowed the Cuban elite to feel that they had some input into the way the country was run […].” (GOTT, 2005, p. 43).

In 1778, King Charles III signed the Decree of Free Trade, permitting the twenty-four ports in Spanish America to trade freely among themselves and with any port in Spain. In 1791, Charles III allowed the free and unlimited importation of slaves, which contributed to the significant increase of the number of slaves in Cuba. (STATEN, 2003, p. 19). The slave rebellion that occurred in the French colony of St. Domingue in 1791 affected Cuba as well. St. Domingue was the largest producer of sugar at the time and, after the slaves’ uprising, many of the sugar and coffee plantations were destroyed and sugar exports declined tremendously, generating an important opportunity for the expansion of the Cuban sugar industry. Besides, many French planters fled to Cuba and took their sugar expertise with them. (STATEN, 2003, p. 19). Richard Gott states:

> With this injection of migrant energy, Cuba changed from a underdeveloped settlement of small towns, cattle ranches and tobacco farms, into what would later be described as "agribusiness" – large, semi-industrial plantations of sugar and coffee, characterized by the use of slave habour on a hitherto unimaginable scale. […] This was to be the most prosperous century in the island's history. […] The development of the sugar industry was to have a significant impact on the politics and culture of the island, since it led to a huge increase in Cuba's slave population. This in turn helped to fuel the growth of the island's white racism. […] Many whites in Cuba felt that they lived permanently in the shadow of a slave rebellion on the Haitian model. They were not altogether wrong, for many Cuban blacks found inspiration in the Haitian example. (GOTT, 2005, p. 45-46).

The first movements that defied the Spanish Crown were performed by black rebels. In 1795, Nicolás Morales, a free black, began to organize a movement that sought to unite black and white, to abolish taxes that oppressed the poor and to send priests back to the their convents. However, he and his group were betrayed by a mulatto militiaman, who was rewarded with 200 acres of land. (GOTT, 2005, p. 48). Other more organized attempts at independence occurred. In 1810, a number of free black people of a black militia joined a white independence movement. However, the movement searched for independence without altering the Cuban social structure, maintaining slaves as slaves and whites as the Cuban elite. The rebellion of 1810 served to mobilize Havana's white population against the black militia. The rebellion was crushed by the "empire loyalists". (GOTT, 2005, p. 49).

Another important movement was the black rebellion of 1812, which was also inspired by the example of Haiti, organized by free people of colour, and aimed at Cuba's independence. The rebellion was fiercely crushed and the repression "put a stop to further rebellions for more than a decade". (GOTT, 2005, p. 51). Cuba's economic elite was conservative and afraid of the possible economic and social consequences of a rupture from Spain. The elite's reticence in rebelling was strengthened by the fact that Spanish authorities permitted certain economic autonomy. Gott states that "Spain finally liberated the island's trade, abolished the controversial tobacco monopoly and allowed prominent Cubans to hold positions of influence in the direction of the island's economic affairs." (GOTT, 2005, p. 52). The planters feared that without the support of the Spanish Crown, they would not be capable of maintaining the slavery system and of crushing the black rebellions.

It is interesting to mention that American interest in Cuba did not start in the nineteenth century. Actually, the United States had been interested in the island since 1776. Gott points out that, after the annexation of Spanish Florida in 1821, the USA perceived that Cuba would be closer to their frontiers and the "question of who owned Cuba was now perceived as a matter of US national security." (GOTT, 2005, p. 57). In 1823, for example, former President Thomas Jefferson wrote to the then President James Monroe in order to discuss the possible acquisition of "any one or more of the Spanish provinces". According to

Gott, his letter reflected “the long-running ambiguity of the United States about whether Cuba should be annexed and taken over, or allowed to be independent.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 58).

Concerning the slave trade, Cuba began to become isolated in this commerce. Britain had shut down the trade in their colonial empire in 1807. In 1808, the United States abolished the slave trade. In 1817, Britain persuaded Spain to abolish trade slave. According to their agreement, trade slave would be banned from Spanish colonies by the year of 1820. Nonetheless, “African slaves continued to pour into Cuba on an ever-increasing scale, to the dismay and irritation of the moralising British.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 59). Even though the slave commerce was prohibited, Cuba continued to trade.

According to Staten, it is estimated that approximately 400,000 slaves were imported illegally into Cuba after 1820. Besides, “Major slave rebellions occurred in 1826, 1837, 1843 and 1844.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 25). By 1865, the first actual slave strike took place: “Slaves demanded payment for their work and peacefully asserted their right to freedom because they had arrived in Cuba after 1820. Troops ended the strike but this was a clear indication of the growing difficulty of using slave labor for Cuba’s main export.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 26).

Although Cuba’s economic growth during the first half of the nineteenth century was impressive, this affluence was not shared by the Cuban population in general, and in particular by the slave population. Besides, the Cuban elites would pursue economic and political liberty that was not allowed to them and by 1868 “many Cuban elites had come to the conclusion that only a break with Spain would give them the political and economic freedoms they so desperately sought.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 29). In addition to this, the slave population’s mobilization for the abolishment of slavery “served as a threat to the economic well-being of wealthy planters who continued to defend the use of slaves in the production of sugar.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 29). In order to obtain liberty from the Spanish Crown, Cuba had to face many events that affected its population altogether. In *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture*, Louis A. Pérez Jr. states that:

> *Cuba Libre* cost Cubans dearly. Not all suffered equally, of course, but most suffered some, and many suffered much. These were the decades of recurring cycles of Cuban rebellion and Spanish repression, first the Ten Years War (1868-78), then the Little War (1879-80), and finally the War of Independence (1895-98): in all, thirty years of intermittent revolution and repression, random depredation alternating with systematic devastation, successive acts of reprisal and revenge, of pillage and plunder, of homes destroyed and lives disrupted. (PÉREZ JR., 1999, p. 97).

Before Cuban Independence from Spain, the United States had already meddled in the island. In 1890, the McKinley Act abolished U.S. duties on raw sugar and molasses. This Act

facilitated the increasing commerce between the United States and Cuba. According to Clifford Staten, “By 1894, the United States had invested more than $50 million in Cuba, purchased 87 percent of Cuba’s exports and accounted for almost 40 percent of the island’s imports.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 36). Staten adds that, in the early 1890s, a decline in the world’s economy reduced the demand for Cuban sugar and many “Cubans and American investors in Cuba came to blame Spanish imperial authority for their problems”, which contributed to another rebellion. (STATEN, 2003, p. 36).

Acknowledging the cost of continuing the war, since Spain was also fighting a rebellion in the Philippines and fearing American intervention, Spain modified its policy toward Cuba, permitting limited autonomy within the Spanish empire, self-government and universal suffrage. The American President and most U.S. businessmen who had investments in Cuba preferred a political settlement. Nevertheless, Cuban rebels could not accept a political settlement without entire independence. (STATEN, 2003, p. 38).

Staten adds that “Rioting broke out in Havana by rebels supporters who were opposed to a limited political autonomy settlement. President McKinley believed that U.S. citizens and property were in danger.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 38). In January 1898, President McKinley sent the battleship USS *Maine* to Havana in order to contain the rebellion. (STATEN, 2003, p. 38). Staten points out that:

> On February 15, 1898, the *Maine* blew up in Havana harbor. Two hundred sixty men out of 355 died. Although the cause of the explosion was never satisfactorily explained, the sensationalistic U.S. press with its yellow journalism blamed Spain and created a near anti-Spanish hysteria within an American public that already disliked the Spanish. The hysteria played into the growing imperialistic desires of many leaders in the United States such as Theodore Roosevelt, the deputy secretary of the navy. (STATEN, 2003, p. 38-39).

Encouraged by the American press, the war was sealed. Richard Gott claims that, despite negotiations between Spain and the United States and the plea of European countries other than Spain for both sides to accept an agreement, “War was declared on Spain on 25 April 1898 and US officers were told to prepare for an invasion, not just of Cuba, but of Spain’s other island possessions in the Caribbean and in the Pacific.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 99). Gott adds that “The United States was soon engaged in a far more ambitious project than simply securing the freedom of Cuba.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 99). The U.S. economic and political interest in Cuba stimulated the increase of their influence over other Spanish colonies.

It is interesting to observe the intertwinement of both Cuban and North American histories. On July 1, 1898, during American invasion of Cuba, “units of the United States army fought the only significant land battle against Spanish forces.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 97).

The fight lasted a day and was unequal, with less than 1,000 Spanish defenders and more than 3,000 American troops. Gott adds that the “event is well remembered by Americans on account of the presence at the battle of Theodore Roosevelt, then the US assistant secretary of the navy and soon to be the President.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 98).

The *Maine* event was an excuse for the American expansionist intent. According to Staten, Cuban officials were not asked to participate in the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which officially marked the end of the war on December 10. And this “exclusion of Cubans from the decision-making process at the end of the war foreshadowed future Cuban relations with the United States.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 39). Nevertheless, Cuba did not have enough strength to nullify the American power over the island. The war against Spain consumed the Cuban economic infrastructure, as almost one-third of the sugar plantations had been burned, and the few remaining sugar elites were in debt. Staten adds that it “is estimated that more than two-thirds of Cuban wealth had been consumed during the war. Given its vulnerable situation and desperate needs, Cuba was unable to counter the growing power and manifest destiny of the United States.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 40).

The outcomes of the Cuban War of Independence did not match with the end desired by Cubans. Louis A. Pérez Jr. states that the U.S. intervention of 1898 changed everything they had envisaged. Pérez Jr. adds that “The separatist project had been successful on every count except perhaps the one that mattered the most: it failed to produce power.” (PÉREZ JR., 1999, p. 103). Though free from Spain, Cuba did not manage to govern its own future.

The U.S. occupation of Cuba lasted four years, from 1898 to 1902. Staten affirms that the American occupation had interrelated goals: “to maintain political stability, to rebuild the primary economic infrastructure of the island and to attract U.S. investments and to keep Cuba within the sphere of influence of the growing political and economic power of the United States.” (STATEN, 2003, p. 40-41). Under American military occupation, Cuba experienced a period in which port facilities and the sanitary and health conditions were improved. Roads, bridges, and railways were rebuilt. Hospitals were built. General Leonard Wood, who ruled Cuba from December 1899 until May 1902, began to organize the educational system based on the U.S. public school model. (STATEN, 2003, p. 40-41). Spain was substituted by the United States as a point of reference for most Cubans, leaving the dream of free Cuba as just a dream.

In December 1901, Tomás Estrada Palma was elected the first president of the Republic of Cuba; however, “the stage was set for the United States to dominate the political

and economic processes of the island and to reshape its politics, economics, society, culture and identity." (STATEN, 2003, p. 43).

José Martí, a Cuban revolutionary and freedom fighter, refused this American political and economic control. Before the American intervention, Martí had been exiled to Spain due his proindependence activities, after he founded his first newspaper, *Patria Libre*, in 1869. After living in Mexico, Martí returned to Cuba in 1878-1879 and then moved to New York where he lived with the exiled Cuban community. He was the founder and leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Committee of New York, strongly opposing the idea of the U.S. annexation of Cuba. Preoccupied with U.S. agenda of expansionism, Martí returned to Cuba in 1895 to renew the Cuban struggle for independence. At the age of 42, Martí died in a battle near Bayamo in May 1895 and became a martyr of Cuba Libre. His concerns about the future of Cuba would be confirmed by the Platt Amendment. (STATEN, 2003, p. 43-44).

Richard Gott states that the Platt Amendment, 1902, or the Enmienda Platt, represented the humiliation of the settlement imposed on Cuba by the United States. The Amendment would guarantee an American form of control over Cuba, even after the U.S. occupation was withdrawn and Cuba obtained its independence. According to Gott, "With its assumption of the superiority of US civilization, and its blindness to the sensibilities of the Cubans, the Platt Amendment was one of the defining documents of the imperial era." (GOTT, 2005, p. 110). Gott adds:

> The first of the Platt Amendment's seven paragraphs was framed to ensure that Cuba could make no treaty with foreign powers, or permit foreign military bases on its soil, without the permission of the United States. […] The sixth left the legal future if the Isle of Pines pending, while the seventh gave the Americans a right to establish permanent military bases on the island. […] The US base at Guantánamo Bay, still functioning a century later, was the fruit of the seventh paragraph. […] Although the Platt Amendment was eventually repealed in 1934, it had a baneful effect on Cuba's political development during the first three decades of the Republic and clouded US-Cuban relations until the end of the twentieth century. The United States intervened in Cuban politics with military units from 1906 to 1909, in 1912 and from 1917 to 1923. […] American soldiers often arrived to solve problems in Cuba that a genuinely independent government would have been obliged to sort out on its own. The resentment created was to explode in 1933 and again in 1959. (GOTT, 2005, p. 111-112).

The Platt Amendment represents the American quest for dominance over countries that could provide them with any sort of economic and/or political benefits. By the terms of the Platt Amendment, the Isle of Pines was excluded from Cuban territorial boundaries, on which pended future negotiations between Cuba and the United States. (PÉREZ JR., 1999, p. 110). The US base at Guantánamo Bay was an outcome of the seventh paragraph. This paragraph states: "[…] to enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people […], the government of Cuba will sell or lease the United States lands

necessary for coaling or naval stations […] to be agreed upon the President of the United States." (GOTT, 2005, p.328).

Louis A. Pérez Jr. states that in the years after the Platt Amendment, even as the Isle of Pines continued under nominal Cuban administration, "hundreds of North American families acquired nearly $22 million in property holdings. An estimated 4,850 registered U.S. property owners claimed to own more than half of the island. North Americans established a ubiquitous presence." (PÉREZ JR., 1999, p. 110). The end of the US intervention in Cuba did not guarantee the end of its influence over the island.

Cubans had fought for its independence from Spain, envisaging founding a free country for them. Nonetheless, Cuba would have to face the humiliating position of an American protectorate, a country controlled by and a dependent government, of the United States. Throughout five centuries, Cuba fought to forge its liberty and, yet, it would have to walk a very long path.

2.2. The Coup d'État and the Revolution

Political instability was considered a threat to the Cuban political and economic elites and to American investors on the island and the United States assumed the country should be involved in Cuba's political matters. According to Staten, when Ramón Grau San Martín became president of Cuba in 1933, his nationalistic reforms were not welcome, on one hand, by the United States and the Cuban military and economic elites and, on the other hand, by radical students who considered his reforms too much moderate. Grau's intents involved proposals for agrarian reform and pro-labor policies such as "granting women the right to vote, establishing twelve-week maternity leave to working mothers, mandating provided child care for infants and prohibiting the practice of firing women from their jobs simply because they were married." (STATEN, 2003, p. 61). Grau's agenda was supported neither by the Cuban elite nor by the United States, which did not recognize Grau's government. Staten adds that "By 1934, the United States came to see General Fulgencio Batista and the military as the only guarantee for the necessary political stability and the protection of the vast U.S. interests in the island." (STATEN, 2003, p. 46). Fulgencio Batista was aware that the American recognition was crucial to Cuban government. Staten affirms:

> In January 1934, Batista informed Grau that the army was no longer able to support him. A general strike on January 17 led Batista to install Mendieta, the U.S. favorite, as president of

> Cuba the very next day. Five days later, the U.S. government recognized the new Cuban government, although, most realized that the real power in Cuba was Batista and the army. (STATEN, 2003, p. 62).

As Gott states, “With a new, more conservative president in place, the United States was content to recognize his government.” (GOTT, 2005, p. 141). Although Batista only became president in 1940, his influence over Cuban government was a fact even before his election. On March 10, 1952, Batista enacted a coup. At that time, Carlos Prío Socarrás was the President and his government was being accused of corruption. Thus, Prío’s call for resistance was not supported by the Cubans and, in the end, the coup was accomplished without a shot being fired and Batista’s new regime was welcomed. (GOTT, 2005, p. 145-146).

Batista’s dictatorship was marked by the suspension of all constitutional guarantees and the right to strike, a pay increase for military personnel, and his right to deny freedom of speech, press and assembly at any time for forty-five days and no recognition of political parties. On the other hand, the political stability granted by Batista made the terrain for support from economic elites and foreign investors. The American investment in mining, for example, increased. On March 27, the U.S. government recognized the new Cuban government. (STATEN, 2003, p. 72).

Due to repression and censorship, many students believed that the only possible solution to overthrow Batista from government would be with an attack. On 26 July, 1953, an armed attack occurred at Moncada, led by Fidel Castro. On the same day, there was also a move against the Barracks at Bayamo. Despite the failure, Moncada was a challenge to Batista’s regime and would be the ground for a revolutionary organization, the July 26 Movement, which would seize power years later and make the name of its leader known across Cuba. (GOTT, 2005, p. 147). Staten claims:

> The attacks at both the Moncada and Bayamo Barracks were doomed from the very beginning given that Castro’s group was outnumbered more than ten to one and poorly armed. Only a few were killed in the actual attack, but sixty-eight were captured, brutally tortured and executed. Thirty-two ended up in prison and another fifty escaped. Castro escaped initially but was later captured by Lieutenant Pedro Sarria, who did not approve of the torture that was taking place at Moncada Barracks. He took Castro to the civil prison in Santiago under the spotlight of the local media. This probably saved Castro from torture and death. Castro was tried in October and acted in his own defense. He gave an impassioned plea ending with the statement, “Sentence me, I don’t mind. History will absolve me.” The speech would later be smuggled out his jail cell sentence at a time on matchbox covers. Later, it would be rewritten and his “History Will Absolve Me” speech was put into a pamphlet and used as an effective propaganda tool. Castro, his brother Raúl and the other conspirators who were not executed were sentenced to prison on the Isle of Pines. (STATEN, 2003, p. 74).

In Castro's absence, women assumed much of the leadership of the July 26 Movement. Those women formed contacts with other women's groups opposed to Fulgencio Batista, such as the Association of United Cuban Women and the Women's Martí Civic Front, and distributed Castro's "History Will Absolve Me" speech in a pamphlet form. Batista finally agreed to hold election and resign from presidency on August 24, 1954, so that he could campaign to be officially president. The election was a sham from the very beginning and Batista was elected on November 1st without any opposition. Vice-President Richard Nixon visited Cuba and gave Batista the American government support. On May 15, 1955, Castro and his followers were set free. (STATEN, 2003, p. 74-75).

On December 2nd, 1956, Castro and his followers landed at Playa Las Coloradas and a battle against Batista's troops took place. Although this was one of the most disastrous clandestine landings in Cuba's history, it was eventually celebrated as an epic one and a small museum and a replica of the boat *The Granma*, used in the landing, stand at Playa Las Coloradas. (GOTT, 2005, p. 154).

Established at the Sierra Maestra, utilizing guerrilla tactics, and receiving the support of local peasants, Castro and his comrades, including Ernesto "Che" Guevara, were able to demoralize Batista's troops. On January 1, 1959, Batista and his closest supporters fled to the Dominican Republic. (STATEN, 2003, p. 79-80). Throughout Batista's influence and government, the United States demonstrated that their only concern was American interests, showing Cuban people that they were not to be taken into consideration in the political and economic affairs that affected Cuba. According to Staten, "Batista's *golpe* of 1952 and the U.S. recognition of, indifference to and then support for Batista's repression served to increase the growing divide between Cuba and the United States." (STATEN, 2003, p. 85).

On January 8th, 1959, Fidel Castro arrived in Havana and spoke to a huge audience, claiming for revolutionary unity. At the end of his speech - "an event recalled by all who witnessed it" - two white doves went to rest on his shoulders, "an unexpected but optimistic symbol to mark the start of a new era in Cuban history". (GOTT, 2005, p. 167). According to Gott, to *Santería* believers, doves are symbols of Obatalá, the Son of God, a god who "rules the mind, the thoughts and the dreams of everyone. The doves perched on Castro's shoulder were perceived by believers as a sign that he had been chosen by the *Santería* gods to guide and protect people." (GOTT, 2005, p. 346).

In *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground*, Julia E. Sweig states that one of the elements that contributed to the rebels' success was the Cuban diaspora to the United States. In the 1950s, prominent Cubans lived, worked, and studied in

the United States, in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Miami. Many of the Cuban exiles actively raised money for the rebels, “sent back money, tried to ship weapons there, and angled for a role in a post-Batista political settlement.” Sweig affirms that “Toward the end of the insurgency when the moderate, nonviolent opposition had essentially collapsed, many prominent Cuban political and civic leaders regarded Fidel Castro and his revolutionary movement as their return ticket to national politics.” (SWEIG, 2002, p. 185). According to Sweig, the Cuban elite, who left Cuba due to Batista’s government, expected to return to the island when Fidel seized power. Since the early nineteenth century, however, Cubans had moved to the United States searching for political stability and economic opportunity. The wars of independence (1868-78, 1895-98) and the political and economic scenarios contributed to Cuban emigration. However, the largest number of Cubans (approximately three-quarters of a million) emigrated after January 1959, when Fidel Castro overthrew Batista’s government. Even though it may not exist a consensus about the quantity of waves of Cuban immigrations, this dissertation will adopt María Cristina García’s discussion over the issue. According to García, after the Revolution most of the Cubans who left the island went to the United States in three distinct waves of immigrations: immediately after the Revolution, from 1959 to 1962; during the “freedom flights”, from 1965 to 1973; and during the “Mariel boatlift” of 1980. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 1).

The first Cubans to be affected and to leave the country were those of the middle and upper classes. The new Cuban émigrés perceived themselves as exiles, not immigrants. They hoped to return to Cuba once Fidel Castro’s government was replaced. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 1). María Cristina García adds that “The U.S. government drafted new immigration laws to accommodate them and devised the Cuban Refugee Program, the most comprehensive refugee assistance program in American immigration history, to welcome them.” (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 2). The Cubans who belonged to the first wave of immigration would be known as “the golden exiles”. Sonia Torres states that the United States gave a priority status to this specific group of immigrants, because 82% of the so-called golden exiles in the 50’s and 60’s were white; the majority was composed of qualified professionals or skilled laborers that were familiar with the American culture and spoke English; as they were from middle and upper classes, they would not become a burden to the American economy; and all of the golden exiles were anti-Castro and their immigration would serve as American propaganda and an increase to the economic problems in Cuba. (TORRES, 2001, p. 126). Those people belonged to the dominant economic-political class in Cuba and the American government stimulated their incorporation to the American society.

The Cuban golden exile group was composed of many great landowners whose properties had been confiscated by the new government. In May 1959, the land reform was announced at a ceremony in the Sierra Maestra. Landowners were permitted to keep 1,000 acres of their property and larger areas were liable to expropriation. Much of the expropriated land was to be divided into small individual plots of 67 acres and larger ranches and plantations were to be run as agricultural cooperatives. (GOTT, 2005, p. 170). Gott adds that the land reform "caused particular preoccupation in the United States, for one clause stated clearly that land in the future could be owned only by Cubans. The law struck at foreign landowners, of whom the majority were American." (GOTT, 2005, p. 171).

On August 6th, 1960, Fidel announced the nationalization of all major American properties in Cuba, including 36 American-owned sugar mills and their plantations, all the American oil refineries, the electric power and telephone utilities. In September, all American banks were confiscated, including the branches of National City Bank of New York, Chase Manhattan Bank and the Bank of Boston. Over the following three months, the nationalization of American institutions in Cuba was extended to railways, port facilities, hotels and cinemas. On September 2nd, 1960, in a sentence that foreshadowed the nuclear crisis, Castro claimed that revolutionary Cuba had then military support from outside the continent. Castro added that Cuba accepted with gratitude the help of rockets from the Soviet Union should its territory be invaded by military forces of the United States. The United States did not like Castro's message and, in November, launched its most powerful economic weapon: an embargo on US exports to Cuba. The US was forbidden to export anything to Cuba, except for food and medicine. (GOTT, 2005, p. 184-185). According to Gott, the US embargo created "considerable hardship and major dislocation as the Cubans readjusted the country's entire economic structure." (GOTT, 2005, p. 185).

Besides aiming at spreading anti-Castro propaganda, the United States intended to overthrow Castro's government. In fact, President Eisenhower ordered the CIA to prepare Cuban refugees to accomplish a coup. María Cristina García states that "On March 17-19, 1960, President Eisenhower authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to organize, train, and equip Cuban refugees to overthrow Fidel Castro." (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 30).

On April 16th, 1961, Fidel Castro proclaimed the socialist character of the Cuban revolution. The Bay of Pigs invasion began on the following day. (PÉREZ JR., 1999, p. 503). García states that the CIA recruited almost fifteen hundred exiles to participate in the invasion force, later known as Brigade 2506, on April 19, 1961. This tentative invasion occurred at the Bay of Pigs and Girón Beach. The word "fiasco" has been used to describe the events. A

series of tactical mistakes took place and these included the fact that the underground counterrevolutionary groups in Cuba, which the Brigade counted on, were not warned of the invasion. In addition to this, President Kennedy, who had approved the CIA plans as well, just hours before the invasion, canceled the utilization of American air force for the landing group without notifying the Brigade soldiers, who were left vulnerable to the Cuban military. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 31). Thus, many Cuban exiles saw President Kennedy's action as omission and betrayal. Staten points out that, after the Bay of Pigs event, "The United States with a slim majority suspended Cuba from the OAS [Organization of American States] in early 1962 and began pressuring its allies to end all trade and commerce with the island." (STATEN, 1996, p. 98).

The failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion encouraged the Soviet Union to tighten its relationship with Cuba. According to Staten, although the Cuban government had not asked for, the Soviet Union started to install medium-range nuclear missiles in Cuba in October 1962. (STATEN, 2003, p. 99). After the discovery of the missiles by the United States, the American government surrounded the island with a naval blockade. Cubans hoped for an American attack, since they expected that, if the United States used nuclear weapons against Cuba, the Soviets would use the nuclear weapons against the United States. Thus, many Cubans became disappointed when the agreement was settled between the United States and the Soviet Union: "The agreement […] to remove the missiles […] stunned and humiliated the Cubans. The reality is that Castro and the Cubans were pawns during the missile crisis. […] Castro heard about the agreement to end the crisis on the radio." (STATEN, 2003, p. 99-100). As Staten adds, Cubans who supported Castro felt betrayed by the Soviets. (STATEN, 2003, p. 100). On the other hand, Cuban exiles in the United States expected the conflict to overthrow Castro and became disappointed as well: "Cuban exiles, like the rest of the world, anxiously prepared for the possibility of a war. Many were hopeful that this confrontation might provide the necessary impetus for U.S. military involvement in Cuba and the overthrow of the Castro government." (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 35).

On September 28, 1965, Castro announced that all Cubans with relatives in the United States who wished to leave the country would be allowed to do so, with certain exceptions. For example, individuals whose professional and technical skills were vital to economic production and young men of military age (15-26) would not be permitted to leave. Castro's permission aimed at exposing the United States for using Cuban exiles as propaganda against his government. This second wave of immigration (1965-1973) carried more than 297,000 refugees to the United States and differed from the first wave. In this second exodus, the

Cuban government protected its own interests by selecting the emigrant pool. During the first wave, 31 percent of the Cubans who left for the United States were professionals or managers, while the second wave was composed by 57 percent of blue-collar, service, or agricultural workers as well as by women, the elderly, and a substantial percentage of Cuba's Chinese and Jewish populations. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 41-43).

As part of his political strategy and influenced by the Carter administration and by his proposal to dialogue, in the late 1970s, Castro released more than 2,000 political prisoners and authorized Cuban emigrés to return to the island in order to visit their relatives and to witness the accomplishments of the revolution as well. Nevertheless, the effect was not the one expected by the Cuban government. By being in contact with the latest American developments, the Cubans born into the communist regime became aware of a culture that did not fit the patterns they were taught, producing some curiosity and desire to experience that life as well. Thus, when the opportunity arrived in 1980, thousands of Cubans took it. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 51-54).

On April 4, 1980, the Peruvian Embassy crisis occurred. By March 1980, several Cubans were able to smuggle themselves to Latin American embassies. On March 28, six Cubans entered the Peruvian embassy by crashing a stolen bus into its gates. Even though they were unarmed, the Cuban guards shot at the bus and one of the guards was killed in the crossfire. The Peruvian ambassador refused to turn the gate-crushers to Cuban authorities. On April 4, Castro ordered the removal of Cuban guards around the embassy and sent steamrollers to destroy the embassy gates and barricades. Later that afternoon, Castro announced that the Cuban government would not "risk the lives of its soldiers to protect 'criminals'". As the news spread over Havana, around 10,800 men, women, and children rushed to the Peruvian embassy in the hope of leaving Cuba,. The crisis lasted days and the emigration plan was negotiated by Peru and Cuba with the assistance of several countries. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 55-57).

Castro agreed to allow the asylum-seekers to leave Cuba. After four days of airlift, Castro suspended the flights to Costa Rica, claiming that the United States and Peru were utilizing the Costa Rican connections to send for their demagogic purposes. By this time, 7,500 Cubans had emigrated, but Castro wanted to get rid of the other asylum-seekers and thousands of dissidents as well. On April 20, the Cuban government announced that anyone who wished to leave Cuba would be allowed. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 58-60). Some 125,000 Cubans embarked on small ships at the port of Mariel from between April and October 1980, exodus known as the Mariel boatlift. (GOTT, 2005, p. 266-267). Gott adds that the *marielitos*'

"reception in Florida was not welcoming [...]. Many of the Mariel generation of migrants were mulatto or black, and came from the poorer segment of Cuban society." (GOTT, 2004, p. 268). Even the exile community did not welcome these immigrants because it feared that the *marielitos* would damage their golden reputation. According to María Cristina García, "Unlike the early refugees, the *marielitos* encountered hostility and discrimination wherever they settled. Neither their homeland nor the host country wanted them." (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 46). García adds that the term *marielito* was coined by the emigré community in order to distinguish themselves from the new immigrants and quickly became a pejorative term in the community. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 73).

2.3. A brief view of Cuba after the collapse of Communism

One may have expected that the political scenario of Cuba could be modified by the collapse of Communism in the early 1990s and the closer relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. According to Gott, the real Cuban crisis started in 1990 "when the oil supplies that the Soviet Union was contractually obliged to deliver failed to arrive. Cuba's domestic economy was seriously disrupted. The regular flow of Soviet tankers bringing cheap oil had been the Revolution's economic lifetime since the 1960s." (GOTT, 2005, p. 286-287). The relationship between the Soviet Union and Cuba was significantly altered. Gott adds:

> Gorbachev himself was under pressure from the United States to cease Soviet support for Castro. Cuba had become an expensive irritant. Soon the other Comecon countries would follow where Gorbachev led. They too demanded dollars. Although the Soviet leadership maintained a friendly but realistic stance towards Cuba, other Russians did not disguise their contempt for their former ally. *Glasnost*, meaning a freer press in the Communist world, unleashed torrents of criticism against Cuba. Semi-independent Soviet magazines, like *Moscow News*, became so hostile that they were banned in Havana. (GOTT, 2005, p. 287).

The American pressure over the Soviet leader had its effects on Cuba. The crisis that reached Cuba contributed to the legalization of the US dollar, authorized by Decree-Law 140 in August, 1993. The US dollar was first introduced in Cuba during the American occupation after 1898, replacing the Spanish coinage and being used until 1915, when the introduction of peso occurred. (GOTT, 2005, p. 291). Gott adds that "The return of the dollar was a serious blow to revolutionary pride." (GOTT, 2005, p. 291).

The complex and tense relationship between the United States and Cuba lasted for decades after the Revolution took place. In March 1996, for example, President Bill Clinton signed the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, also known as the Helms-Burton Act, which allows American citizens to sue foreign corporations whose trade or investments profit from any properties that were expropriated by the Castro government after 1959. The Helms-Burton Act allows the American government to penalize foreign companies that conduct business in Cuba and establishes that no government with Castro or his brother Raúl Castro would be acceptable to the United States. (STATEN, 2003, p. 134).

The signing of this Act occurred after political and diplomatic turbulences took place. Former President Clinton worked with Cuban officials to promote safe and legal immigration to the United States. The U.S. government agreed to allow at least 20,000 legal Cuban immigrants per year. Mr. Clinton promoted more people-to-people contacts between the United States and Cuba by allowing private organizations to develop relationships with Cuban organizations. The Helms-Burton Act would be voted in Congress in 1996, but it did not have the President's support yet: "Fearing an adverse reaction from U.S. allies in Europe and Canada, Clinton threatened a veto, but on February 24 of that year Cuban planes shot down two U.S. civilian aircraft belonging to the anti-Castro Miami-based group Brothers to the Rescue in international waters." (STATEN, 2003, p. 134). Staten adds, "In reaction to this event, the U.S. Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Helms-Burton Act in March." (STATEN, 2003, p. 134).

The current scenario of American and Cuban relationship is not free of the tension and complexity that has characterized it over the years. On January 22nd, 2009, President Barack H. Obama signed executive orders directing the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to close its network of secret prisons and ordering the closing of the US military base of Guantánamo Bay within a year. The orders required a review of the 245 detainees still held at the naval base to determine if they should be transferred, released or prosecuted. However, the orders have left unresolved complex questions surrounding the closing of the Guantánamo detention center, such as whether, where and how many of the detainees are to be prosecuted. (MAZZETTI; GLABERSON, 2009).

President Obama's orders include suspending legal proceedings at Guantánamo Bay for 120 days. Nonetheless, these orders have already proved difficult to be enforced, as a military judge at the Guantánamo detention center denied the government's request to delay the case of a detainee accused of planning the 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Yemen, which killed 17 US service members and injured 50 others. Army Col. James Pohl, the chief military

judge, said that he found the government's arguments "unpersuasive" and that the case will go ahead because "the public interest in a speedy trial will be harmed by the delay in the arraignment". (FINN, 2009).

The Guantánamo Bay issue is a complex situation between Cuba and the United States. On January 29th, 2009, former Cuban President Fidel Castro demanded that President Obama return the US naval base at Guantánamo to Cuba, without conditions. President Obama has already declared that he wants to move toward normalization of the US-Cuba relations but would not eliminate the 46-year-old US trade embargo against Cuba without political reforms. (FRANK, 2009).

Needless to say, the history of Cuba has interesting examples that display the intertwining between the United States and Cuba. Nonetheless, the aim of this dissertation does not encompass a detailed analysis of Cuban background. Considering this, the present chapter intends only to provide a brief discussion of Cuban history in order to display the close relationship between the Cuban and North American societies that began centuries ago and that forged the current connections. Being aware of the intertwinement between both histories may be crucial to understand the complexity of works by Cuban-American writers. In addition to this, it should be observed how history may be portrayed in fiction. According to Isabel Alvarez Borland, "Seeing history from the perspective of fiction can be a valuable experience because it allows the reader a deeper knowledge and insight into that history." (BORLAND, 1998, p. 4). Both novels analyzed in this dissertation contribute to this relevant experience, providing an important opportunity of being aware of the possible perspectives that involve the intertwinement of history and fiction.

3 HYBRIDITY AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE DIASPORIC SUBJECT IN *DREAMING IN CUBAN*

> We don't seem to leave the country
> You and I, always with an open map
> Searching the borders and open coasts
> Yearning for lost shores
>
> Achy Obejas, "The Boat"

This chapter aims at investigating exile and the hybrid subject in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and to analyze how those issues interfere in family relationships. Even if the members of a family are separated, those relationships may be crucial to the formation of identity. García's novel deals with a Cuban family that experiences exile, leading some of its members to become hybrid subjects. Not all of them leave their homeland, but even the members who remain at their mother country are affected by the separateness of their family.

Politics and family relationships are connected in this novel. It is interesting to observe that Cubans, either in the United States or on the island, are affected by the politics towards Cuba as well as the political scenario in the United States is affected by Cuban-American community. The Cuban-American community is so important to the American society that even American politicians acknowledge its relevance. As Clifford L. Staten declares:

> During presidential elections in the United States, both the Democratic and Republican candidates pay homage to the Cuban American community in Florida. They reiterate their support for the embargo against the island while taking note of Florida's important electoral college votes. (STATES, 2003, p. 1).

However, as already pointed out, actions like those do not imply that the Latin American community is accepted, without any prejudice, in the United States. Even though the relevance of this community may be taken into consideration by American politics and economy, people with Latin American origins constantly suffer prejudice in the dominant culture, which is frequently Hispanophobic, as Sonia Torres states in *Nosotros in USA: Literatura, Etnografia e Geografias de Resistência* (TORRES, 2001, p. 9). Not only people with Latin American origins have inner struggles in order to be capable of encountering their own identity in a culture that may be hostile to them, but also they may have to face the dispute between the governments that lead the country they were born and the country they live in, which is the case of the Cuban-American community.

Although the American embargo towards Cuba displays the tension between the two countries, both governments are undeniably connected. Clifford L. Staten adds that "President Bill Clinton once characterized U.S. relations with Cuba as a 'terrible family feud.' For better and for worse, Cuba and the United States have developed these intimate family ties since the middle of the nineteenth century." (STATEN, 2003, p. 3). The intertwinement of the two countries has reflected on their peoples as well.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Pilar, who was born in Cuba and left for the United States when she was two years old, searches for her identity and, in this pursuit, travels to Cuba. Pilar has been living in New York all her life, but it does not feel like home to her. Although she is not sure whether Cuba is her home, she wants to go back to Cuba in order to find about her roots. (GARCÍA, 1992, p. 58).[3] One may observe that her Cuban background is not solidified in her, since she declares that every day Cuba fades a little more inside her (p. 138).

Pilar is attempting to find herself, since her parents' taking her to the United States interfered in the development of her identity. She is so desperately eager to go back to Cuba in search for her identity that she travels by herself to Miami when she is just thirteen years old. Pilar finds herself divided in two cultures. Hybridity is present in Pilar. She does not embrace the American culture, but, at the same time, she does not feel completely Cuban. Her desire to feel complete and her need for belonging encourage her to go back physically to her roots.

It should be mentioned that, at the beginning of the novel, right after the Contents, there is a genealogical tree of the Del Pinos family. This picture is an interesting illustration of the origins of the Del Pinos' members. From the start, the reader may be aware of the important role played by family relationships and one's roots in the novel. Pilar, for example, travels to her native soil in order to find herself.

The decisive moment to Pilar's return to Cuba occurs after she performs a *santería* ritual. While in New York, Pilar enters a *botánica* in which its owner recognizes her as a daughter of *Changó*. Without Pilar's request, he prescribes some baths with herbs and tells her that, on the last day of the baths, she would know what to do. After taking them, Pilar tells her mother that they are going to travel to Cuba. In a certain way, it is ironical that, in a cosmopolitan city as New York, Pilar is going to find her way back to her roots through Cuban religious rituals and, once in Cuba, she finds out she belongs more to New York than to Cuba.

[3] Subsequent quotations from this novel refer to the same edition and will appear by page number in the text.

It should be pointed out that, on the day she enters a *botánica*, it seems Pilar feels uncomfortable or, maybe, anguished: “I feel something’s dried up inside me, something a strong wind could blow out of me for good.” (p. 198). Perhaps, Pilar’s fragmented identity may have led her to the *botánica*: “I enter a *botánica* on upper Park Avenue. I’ve passed the place before but I’ve never gone inside. Today, it seems, there’s nowhere else for me to go”. (p. 199). Her sentiment of not belonging may have driven her towards the *botaníca*. After the ritual, she figures out what she has to do in her attempt to feel complete.

The complexity of living in two worlds, two cultures, is present in García’s novel. Hybridity and fragmentation of the subject may be seen in García’s *Dreaming in Cuban.* As an epitome of a hybrid subject, during her staying in Cuba, Pilar states that she knows she belongs to New York – not instead of Cuba, but more than Cuba. (p. 236). By stating this, Pilar acknowledges the presence of American culture in the construction of her identity. It is ironical that she is capable of recognizing its importance only when she is back to her mother country.

Katherine B. Payant states that the “search for identity and ‘belongingness’ is common to all adolescents, but in a child like Pilar, it is complicated by a hyphenated existence.” (PAYANT, 2001). Pilar represents the “1.5” generation. Cuban sociologist Rubén Rumbaut has labeled the generation born abroad but made in the United States the “1.5” or “one-and-a-half” generation. According to Rumbaut, “members of the ‘1.5’ generation form a distinctive cohort in that in many ways they are marginal to both the old and the new worlds, and are fully part of neither of them.” (Rubén Rumbaut apud PÉREZ-FÍRMAT, 1996, p. 4).

It is interesting to observe that the trip to Cuba operates differently for both Pilar and her mother Lourdes. As María Cristina García states, “For Lourdes, the trip is an opportunity for a political statement: she spends her time in Cuba criticizing the revolution and mocking her compatriots. She dreams of assassinating Fidel Castro. For Pilar, the trip is a journey of self-exploration, an opportunity to fill in missing pieces.” (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 186). Actually, it seems that, probably, had this trip not occurred, Pilar would be forever longing to go back to Cuba and denying the relevance of American culture in her character. Isabel Alvarez Borland states that:

> In *Dreaming in Cuban*, it is precisely the pull between two places that motivates Pilar’s actions. The questions posed by the ethnic version of the Cuban-American condition are directed to the issue of heritage and to reconstructing an identity that very much belongs in the United Sates but that needs Cuba in order to be complete. Pilar needs Cuba as a context to assume her life because she needs to complete puzzle of her heritage. By going back and collecting the tales of the women in her family, Pillar will gain the knowledge that she needs about her origins. (BORLAND, 1998, p. 146).

By going to Cuba and obtaining the knowledge about her origins, Pilar is able to understand the complexity of her own identity. Once Pilar realizes that she belongs more to New York, she, in other words, realizes that she cannot live in Cuba instead of New York. Pilar's trip to Cuba also enables her to enlarge her view on the conditions of life of the dwellers of the island. Her idealized view on her homeland seems shaken. "The ocean is warmer than what comes out of her [Celia's] pipes, but I'm getting used to cold showers. The food is another story, though, greasy as hell. […] I have to admit it's much tougher here than I expected, but at least everyone seems to have the bare necessities". (p. 234). Even though Pilar thinks that people in Cuba have the bare necessities, she acknowledges that adapting herself there is harder than she has thought. Pilar becomes aware of some of the conditions of living in Cuba.

Pilar's awareness may have contributed to her decision to lie to Celia, her grandmother, in the Peruvian Embassy episode. Lourdes tries to send her nephew Ivanito, Felicia's son, to the United States by taking him to the Peruvian Embassy, and Celia hastens there so that she could get Ivanito back. When Celia asks Pilar if she had seen Ivanito in the Embassy, Pilar lies to her grandmother, telling her she had not. Pilar adds that someone had told her a plane had left for Lima that morning and that Ivanito must have been on it (p. 242). In "Back to the Future: Mothers, Languages, and Homes in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*", Rocío G. Davis states that:

> At the beginning of the novel, she [Pilar] rejects her mother's patriotic American values […] sympathizing with the Cuban cause embodied in the figure of her grandmother. At the end, after witnessing life in Cuba for herself […], she [Pilar] appears to become independent of her previous ideas. She lies to her grandmother about Ivanito's departure, implicitly assenting to his defection. (DAVIS, 2000, p. 3).

Even though one may say that Davis speaks from his own personal ideological position, Pilar's lie to her grandmother, intentionally or not, contributes to Lourdes's attempt to send Ivanito to the United States. In the interview to Professor Scott Shibuya Brown, Cristina García states that Ivanito "didn't belong in Cuba any more than Pilar's mother did. It would have been criminal to force him to stay. Pilar understood intuitively that this was how it had to be." (García apud BROWN, 1992, p. 253). Besides the issues in everyday life on the island, Pilar also becomes aware that she could not express herself fully through her art in Cuba: "I ask Abuela if I can paint whatever I want in Cuba and she says yes, as long as I don't

attack the state." (p. 235). Celia's answer implies that actually, in Cuba, a person cannot paint whatever he/she wants to.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that exile affects families whose members have left their homeland not only in terms of those who are displaced but also of those who have remained at the mother country. Celia is the one who has to learn to deal with her granddaughter's absence. If Lourdes's attempt to take Ivanito is successful, once again, Celia will have to deal with the departure of another grandchild. In "From This Side of the Fish Tank", Teresa de Jesús Fernández states:

> Exile is usually understood as being uprooted; viewed this way, only those who leave suffer, those who voluntarily or involuntarily give up their native soil. It is the condition of all who emigrate, who live apart from their own nations; but this is an incomplete definition. It does not take into account the other side of the phenomenon, that of the Other, the internal exile, who is left with the estrangement, the sense of loss; it is the Other who is left to deal with absence. (FERNÁNDEZ, 2003, p. 77).

Celia's awareness of her loss may be a reading of her entering the ocean at the end of the novel. The fact that she dropped her inseparable pearls, a gift from her former Spanish lover, may be an indication of some kind of epiphany. Cristina García states that she feels that Celia has come to some kind of personal reckoning when she releases her drop-pearl earrings to the sea. (García apud BROWN, 1992, p. 254).

Interestingly, Pilar's and her mother's trip to Cuba also operates as a means of portraying the distance between Lourdes and her origins. The void that exists in Lourdes's identity may be perceived when the inhabitants of the island do not understand her Spanish. During her staying in Cuba, Lourdes strolls in the streets with Pilar. Lourdes complains about the city and the dwellers:

> "Look at those old American cars. They're held together with rubber bands and paper clips and *still* work better than the new Russian ones. *Oye!*" she calls out to the bystanders. "You could have Cadillacs with leather interiors! Air conditioning! Automatic windows! You wouldn't have to move your arms in the heat!" Then she turns to me, her face indignant. "Look how they laugh, Pilar! Like idiots! They can't understand a word I'm saying! Their heads are filled with too much *compañero* this and *compañero* that! They're brainwashed, that's what they are!" I pull my mother from the growing crowd. The language she speaks is lost to them. It's another idiom entirely." (p. 221. Italics in the original.).

It is interesting to observe that Lourdes's connection with the Spanish language has been damaged. When she addresses her compatriots, Lourdes does not manage to establish communication with them. Her language seems to be already contaminated by the language of the mainstream culture. The possible loss of her roots originated by living in a new society may be noticed in the language loss Lourdes suffered. Isabel Alvarez Borland states that "For

the women living in the United States, the loss incurred by exile is clearly expressed through the metaphor of language loss." (BORLAND, 1998, p. 139). Lourdes has embraced the new language, the language of the dominant culture. Her Cuban origins seem contaminated by the new environment, which may be portrayed in her incapacity of communicating with the dwellers of the island.

Borland adds that Lourdes "speaks in Spanish but seems unable to communicate in that language, as becomes evident during her visit to Cuba." (BORLAND, 1998, p. 139). Although Lourdes speaks in her mother tongue, her compatriots cannot understand her. The language loss she suffers displays the void in her identity, maybe, due to her desire to erase her origins: "She [Lourdes] wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnivals floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her." (p. 73). Lourdes declines to acknowledge the existence of any Cuban part inside her, although she is composed of both cultures. Living at the crossroads of two cultures contributes to Lourdes's fragmentation.

While the problems in the connection between Lourdes and her mother tongue may be felt during her staying in Cuba, Pilar, on the other hand, becomes more connected to Spanish. During her trip to Cuba, Pilar starts to dream in Spanish. Interestingly, it is necessary her physical presence at her homeland so that she can dream in her mother tongue: "I've started dreaming in Spanish, which has never happened before. I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There's a magic here working its way through my veins." (p. 235).

In the very title of the novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, it may be noticed not only the allusion to the dreams but also to Cuba itself, since Cuban is not a language. When placed as such, the word Cuban is presented as a form of expression, not only a nationality. The utilization of the term in this way may be seen as an illustration of the importance of the Cuban heritage for Pilar and, to a certain extent, the importance of one's heritage for the subjects that live at the crossroads of cultures and languages. Cuban-American writers, for example, may feel the necessity of learning the language of the dominant culture in order to be inserted in the new society. At the same time, they may experience the need to maintain their mother tongue so that they may feel connected to their homeland. As María Cristina García states:

> The language in which one writers, dreams, and communicates is naturally a concern for Cuban American writers seeking to define their cultural and artistic identity. From the moment they arrived in the United States they have been pressured to learn one language and

> retain another. To maintain connection to both cultures, both societies, they had to be truly bilingual. Spanish provides a link to the past, but English represents the future and an opportunity for a reinvention of self. [...] Bilingualism represents adaptation. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 187).

Eilish Gaffey states that "Perhaps the most significant aspect relating to the status of English is the emphasis placed on its functional qualities in offering potential access to information, prestige and economic prosperity." (GAFFEY, 2005, p. 13). In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Lourdes utilizes the English language as a way of taking advantage over her employees in the United States. Lourdes hires Russian and Pakistani immigrants who do not speak English to work at her bakery in New York so that she can offer them lower salaries. Paradoxically, she screams at them because they do not understand what she says. Besides this, Lourdes rifles through their coats and shopping bags when they are working in order to see if they are stealing from her, behaving the same way many employers from the dominant societies act towards immigrants. Lourdes sees her employees through the same stereotyped view that is addressed to Cuban immigrants and reproduces the treatment given by North-American employers. Discussing education in the Philippines, Benedict Anderson states:

> […] in Spanish times educational facilities were extremely limited, and the only "national" language available was Spanish, to which, however, no more than 5 per cent of the indigenous population had access. Secular, twentieth century American imperialism was a different sort of beast. Immensely confident of Anglo-Saxon world hegemony and the place of English as the language of capitalism and modernity, the colonial regime effortlessly extruded Spanish and so expanded an English-language school system that by 1940 the Philippines had the highest literacy rate in Southeast Asia. (ANDERSON, 1988, p.7).

According to Pilar, Lourdes believes she is helping her immigrant employees: "She believes she's doing them a favor by giving them a job and breaking them in to American life. Hell, if she's the welcome wagon, they'd better hitch a ride with someone else." (p. 32). In these commentaries, we may observe another example of how Lourdes uses language in order to achieve her goals and of how, once again, she reproduces the language and behavior of the oppressors.

Dwelling at the borderlands of cultures contributes to the subjects' fragmentation, something that may be noticed in the way they negotiate with the language of their motherland and the language of their new environment. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the connection with their homeland may be established by means of the Spanish language. Even though Lourdes cannot be understood by her compatriots in Cuba, she is able to connect herself with her roots, even unwillingly, when she curses in Spanish. Despite Lourdes's

efforts to extinguish her ties to her Cuban background, she fails to maintain herself away from her mother tongue. Like Pilar, Lourdes is a hybrid subject.

Even the fact that Lourdes moved from Miami may be seen as part of her effort to erase Cuban influence on her. After leaving Cuba, Lourdes and Pilar met Rufino, Lourdes's husband, and his family in Miami. Although Lourdes could not stand his family, it seems that one of the reasons for Lourdes to move from Miami was her necessity of being away from a place that could remind her of Cuba. Living in Miami could be seen as a way to be connected with the island, not only because of the climate but also because of the geographical proximity to Cuba. María Cristina García states that:

> Those who traveled to the United States regarded Florida as the most appealing place to spend their exile. […] For homesick, snow-fearing Cubans, Florida's climate and topography were also important considerations; and as an added incentive, the plane ride from Havana to Miami was quick (fifty-five minutes) and inexpensive (approximately twenty-five dollars), making a return easy when conditions in Cuba changed. (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 15-16).

Lourdes, however, does not want to have any part of her connected to Cuba. Lourdes refuses to live in any city that may provide her with a bond to unite her to her homeland. Miami would be a place too close to Cuba for Lourdes to consider living there. When Pilar runs away to Miami in her attempt to reach Cuba, she is able to look at the clouds in the sky and to think that it would rain in Cuba: "The clouds speed through the darkening skies, probably headed for Cuba. It'll rain there, too, in another hour or so." (p. 63). The clouds may be seen as a way of connecting the two places. The connection and the proximity observed by Pilar would not be welcome by her mother.

A return to Cuba, which many Cubans in exile would dream about, was not part of Lourdes's wishes. She did not consider living in a city where the climate may be similar to Cuba. Her motive to choose New York for her family's place of living was based on how cold the city could be. Actually, when they drove away from Miami, she only knew that she wanted to go to a place where it was cold:

> "I want to go where it's cold," Lourdes told her husband. They began to drive. "Colder," she said as they passed the low salt marshes of Georgia […]. "Colder," she said through the withered fields of a Carolina winter. "Colder," she said again in Washington, D.C. […]. "This is cold enough," she finally said when they reached New York." (p. 69).

Motivated by the possibility of being farther away from Cuba, Lourdes has led her husband and daughter to cold New York. Accomplishing the opposite that many Cuban exiles did when they went to the United States, Lourdes preferred a place whose climate could offer

her enough snow to cover her memories of her homeland. It is possible that Lourdes's rape by Cuban soldiers encourages her eagerness to erase Cuba from her life. Before her departure from Cuba, soldiers went to her property in order to confiscate it. Lourdes defied them and they beat her and raped her. Her moving from Miami may be an attempt to forget those horrible images. Lourdes tries to push away the situations that would possibly make her remember Cuba and her past.

In another example of Lourdes's attempt to erase her roots, one may point out her commitment to American society. She endeavors to be a member of the dominant culture, as it may be seen through her joining the local auxiliary police in New York. According to Pilar, Lourdes does this "out of some misplaced sense of civic duty." (p. 136). By patrolling the streets of New York, Lourdes may have felt that she was contributing to the development of that city and, to a certain extent, of American society. It should be mentioned that Lourdes is a golden exile, which may have contributed to her assimilation of the American culture. The adaptation of golden exiles into American society had the support of the host country, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Clifford L. Staten affirms that "Nearly 250,000 Cubans had fled the island between 1959 and October 1962. Almost all were members of the upper and middles classes […]." (STATEN, 2003, p. 100). Staten adds that "the early immigrants were received with open arms" by the American government. (STATEN, 2003, p. 116). The golden exiles were welcome by the U.S. government, since those immigrants were not from the lower classes in their homeland and they were not seen as burdens by the American society.

Being welcome by the host country may have contributed to Lourdes's assimilation of the new culture. Another interesting example of Lourdes's assimilation of American culture may be found in the name of her bakery: Yankee Doodle Bakery. The name of her business does not refer to Cuban or Latin American culture but to an American icon. A relevant episode that portrays Lourdes's commitment to American society occurs when she asks Pilar to make a painting in honor of the American Independence Day in her second bakery: "'I want a big painting like the Mexicans do, but pro-American,' she specifies." (p. 138). Lourdes's intention to be part of American society leads her to value American tradition and history. Lourdes's pro-American behavior is exemplified in her attempt to transform her bakery into a place in which American society may be celebrated, be it by the name of the bakery, be it by a pro-American painting. Pilar agrees to paint; however, she does so in her own way. Actually, Pilar deconstructs an American symbol, the Statue of Liberty:

> I do a perfect replication of her [the Statue of Liberty] a bit left of center canvas, changing only two details: first, I make Liberty's torch float slightly beyond her grasp, and second, I paint her right hand reaching over to cover her left breast, as if she's reciting the National Anthem or some other slogan. […] at the base of the statue I put my favorite punk rallying cry: I'M A MESS. And then carefully, very carefully, I paint a safety pin through Liberty's nose. (p. 141).

As Pilar herself states, through her paintings, she intends to find a unique language, to obliterate the clichés (p. 139). By painting this important American symbol in her own terms, Pilar seems to be challenging the American society in its core. In "A Wounded Discourse: The Poetics of Disease in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*", April A. Shemak states that "Pilar challenges the U.S. social order" and that "her rendering of a 'punked out' Statue of Liberty is particularly evocative as it deconstructs the icon of a welcoming 'motherland'." (SHEMAK, 2006, p. 18). Pilar's subversion includes the sayings at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Her version of the Statue displays a punk rallying cry instead of Emma Lazarus's poem, "The New Colossus", whose title is an allusion to the Colossus of Rhodes. As it may be observed in the poem below, the first eight lines of the verse may be seen as a description of the Statue and, in the last six lines, Liberty itself speaks:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lighting, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep ancients lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched reuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The first appearance of the Statue was at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876 and the sculptor, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, conceived the Statue "as a gift from the French people to their republican brothers and sisters across the Atlantic". The sculpture was not underwritten by the French state but by private subscription and lottery. (SKERRY, 2006, p. 44-46). It should be pointed out that the Statue of Liberty became a symbol of welcome to immigrants, even though, it was not designed for this purpose. According to Peter Skerry, in 1883, the Statue was almost completed and the pedestal only half finished. An art auction to raise funds was launched and one of the items was the manuscript of Lazarus's poem. Emma Lazarus was a secular, assimilated Jew. Skerry adds that "in the early 1880s, as Jews fleeing

pogroms in Russia began to arrive in New York", Lazarus "began the reinterpretation of the Statue of Liberty into a symbol not merely of welcome to immigrants but, more specifically, of refuge to those fleeing persecution and oppression." (SKERRY, 2006, p. 46). However, the Statue was designed to be a symbol of liberty, not a symbol to welcome immigrants. Skerry adds:

> More to the point, Liberty was depicted as a woman whose austere, classical demeanor was meant to suggest the universality of America's founding ideals. These were underscored by the tablets of law that she cradles in one arm and the torch she holds high with the other. And with her back to New York, Liberty strides oceanward, sending her light out into the world. Thus, at its origins the Statue of Liberty had nothing to do with immigration. It was intended as a beacon of hope to those struggling for liberty in their own lands, not as a welcome light for those seeking liberty here. (SKERRY, 2006, p. 45).

In 1903, Emma Lazarus's poem, "The New Colossus", was engraved on a bronze tablet and it was placed on an out-of-the-way interior wall of the pedestal, remaining in the obscurity. Through most of the 1930s, the Statue of Liberty remained a symbol of French-American friendship and liberty as an abstract idea. Throughout this period, immigrants were arriving in New York Harbor and they passed by the Statue of Liberty on their way to nearby Ellis Island. (SKERRY, 2006, p. 46).

The view of the Statue of Liberty has always had a significant emotional impact on immigrants and it contributed to "the symbolic transformation begun by Lazarus's still-unknown poem" (SKERRY, 2006, p. 46); however, it was an unofficial interpretation. Skerry adds that, thanks to a Slovenian-American journalist, Louis Adamic, the immigrants' responses to the statue became part of national consciousness. In the late 1930s, Adamic's articles and lectures about immigrants quoted "The New Colossus" and, in 1945, the bronze tablet of 1903 was moved to Liberty's main entrance. (SKERRY, 2006, p. 46). According to Skerry, the event that most decisively placed Lazarus's poem into the attention of the American public was the Second World War and Jewish refugees in Nazi-dominated Europe: "[...] this time the association of the Statue of Liberty with refugees and victims of oppression generally stuck." (SKERRY, 2006, p. 46). Interestingly, the symbolism around the Statue of Liberty and immigrants has also reached Cuban exiles. Skerry states: "In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed a historic immigration reform law in a ceremony at the base of the statue, and he cited Lazarus's poem, using the occasion to announce a new program to aid refugees from Castro's Cuba." (SKERRY, 2006, p. 46). The image of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol to welcome all immigrants is clearly a social construct. Interestingly, the conflicts

that immigrants may have to endure in order to survive in the United States have proved this image to be different from daily life.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Pilar deconstructs the Statue of Liberty. Besides obliterating the clichés, Pilar uses her art to transmit the language it produces. According to Pilar, painting is its own language. “Translations just confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English.” (p. 59). Utilizing her paintings, Pilar is able to avoid translations, which, in her opinion, could damage communication.

During the Statue of Liberty episode, it may be noticed a relevant moment in Pilar and Lourdes’s relationship. The customers of the bakery fiercely disliked Pilar’s painting and one of them yells “Gaaahbage!”. A man charges her Statue of Liberty “with a pocketknife, repeating his words like a war cry.” (p. 144). Pilar’s painting is bitterly rejected by the customers. Lourdes is the one who defends her daughter’s painting:

> Before anyone can react, Mom swings her new handbag and clubs the guy cold inches from the painting. Then, as if in slow motion, she tumbles forward, a trashing avalanche of patriotism and motherhood, crushing three spectators and a table of apple tartlets. And I, I love my mother very much at that moment. (p. 144).

The fact that Lourdes defended Pilar’s painting and, to a certain extent, Pilar herself, provides an important connection in their mother-daughter relationship. Lourdes’s attitude is capable of uniting them, since, as Pilar herself states, she loved her mother at that moment. It is interesting to observe that the complexity that exists in Lourdes and Pilar’s relationship may also be noticed in Lourdes’s relationship with her mother Celia.

Lourdes’s decision to leave Cuba for the United States aggravated the tension between Lourdes and her mother. Celia did not want her to take away her granddaughter. The moment in which Lourdes told her mother that they were leaving is marked not only by Pilar’s clutching Celia but also by Celia calling Lourdes a traitor. At this scene, Pilar clings to Celia, demonstrating her early connections with her grandmother. Besides, Celia turns this moment, which involves family issues, into a political one:

> I [Pilar] was sitting in my grandmother’s lap, playing with her drop pearl earrings, when my mother told her we were leaving the country. Abuela Celia called her a traitor to the revolution. Mom tried to pull me away but I clung to Abuela and screamed at the top of my lungs. My grandfather came running and said, “Celia, let the girl go. She belongs with Lourdes.” That was the last time I saw her. (p. 26).

Richard Gott affirms that “The defeat of the exile invasion [at the Bay of Pigs, April 1961] had an impact not just on Cuba but on the whole Latin America. […] Cuba was now

irrevocably independent and all those who sought an alternative future were henceforth regarded as traitors." (GOTT, 2005, p. 190).. It is interesting to notice how intertwined political and personal matters are. Celia called her daughter a traitor because she decided to move to the United States after her husband's family had their property confiscated by the Cuban government. Nonetheless, though Celia accused her daughter of treason, it seems that this episode was just a small element in their complex relationship. The distance between Lourdes and her mother was already evident before the revolution. However, the political affairs seem to transfer their relationship into a more complicated level.

Actually, politics overshadowed the void that already existed before the revolution. An example of this void occurred when Lourdes was just a baby. When Celia and Jorge got married, he left his wife with his mother and his sister, knowing that it could be a traumatic experience to her. Jorge's mother and sister abused Celia, contributing to her breakdown. Before Celia's husband Jorge took her to an asylum, Celia rejected her own daughter: "In the final dialogue with her husband, […] Celia talked about how the baby [Lourdes] had no shadow, how the earth in its hunger had consumed it. She held their child by one leg, handed her to Jorge, and said, 'I will not remember her name'." (p. 42-43). In fact, Celia's problems with her own daughter Lourdes had started before any political agenda would interfere. The Del Pinos had already been crushed by issues that would lead them to be apart even when they were geographically close.

Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that a dysfunctional relationship between mother and daughter could be seen between Celia and her mother as well. Celia's mother had rejected her when Celia was just a child. Celia's father maintained two families, each of them with nine children. The members of the families knew about each other, but they never acknowledged the existence of the other one. After getting divorced, her parents dispersed their children among relatives throughout Cuba. Celia's mother put her on a train so that she could live with her aunt Alicia. Celia's mother left her alone: "On the long train ride from the countryside, Celia lost her mother's face, the lies that had complicated her mouth. The life Celia was leaving seems no longer significant." (p. 92). At the age of four, Celia was abandoned by her own mother. As already mentioned, the maternal rejection Celia suffered as a child will be felt by her daughter Lourdes as well. As Rocío G. Davis claims, "The awareness of her mother's rejection of her clouds Lourdes's infancy." (DAVIS, 2000, p. 4). Complicated mother-daughter relationships are present in the Del Pinos family. Maternal rejection was experienced by Celia and her daughter Lourdes. Besides, Lourdes's daughter has a turbulent relationship with her, which has led Pilar to declare that "The family is hostile

to the individual." (p. 134). The distance observed in mother-daughter relationships in the Del Pino family extends over four generations.

An important example of Pilar's problematic relationship with her mother that should be stressed is Pilar's opinion about Lourdes's versions of events. Pilar states that her mother reshapes the events so that they may be according to her views of the world. Pilar declares that Lourdes actually believes that her version of history is the true one, as it may be observed in the following fragment:

> This is a constant struggle around my mother, who systematically rewrites history to suit her views of the world. This reshaping of events happens in a dozen ways every day, contesting reality. It's not a matter of premeditated deception. Mom truly believes that her version of events is correct, down to details that I know, for a fact, are wrong. […] It's not just our personal history that gets mangled. Mom filters other people's lives through her distorting lens. (p. 176).

Linda Hutcheon states that "Facts are events to which we have given meaning. Different historical perspectives therefore derive different facts from the same events." (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 54). Experiences, intents, and points of view, for instance, interfere on the narration of events, even of history. Depending on the narrator's intention and background, history may be narrated in different ways. Another example that illustrates that history is a construction is mentioned by Pilar. She says that her father told her stories about Cuba after Columbus arrived there and that the Spaniards wiped out more Indians with smallpox than with muskets. And she asks: "Why don't we read about this in history books?" (p. 28). She also comments on other events and asks: "Why don't I know anything about them? Who chooses what we should know or what's important?" (p. 28). French philosopher Jacques Le Goff states that the collective memory is not only a conquest, but also an instrument and an object of power. (LE GOFF, 2008, p. 470). By selecting what is to be recorded, societies construct their memories and histories. In this sense, a male perspective is massively present. In "Women and the Revolution in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*", Andrea O'Reilly Herrera states:

> Recent feminist criticism has increasingly attended to the notion that in literature and life women, both inside and outside, the Caribbean have traditionally been excluded from the main currents of economic and political life. Virtually denied entrance to the public domain – the space, almost exclusively reserved for males, where History is made – women have essentially been rendered ahistorical. (HERRERA, 1997, p. 70).

Dreaming in Cuban provides a relevant opportunity of inscribing female voices into the scenario that has ignored them. In an interview entitled "…And There is Only My

Imagination Where our History Should Be", García states that she wanted "to very specifically examine how women have responded and adapted to what happened to their families after 1959." (García apud LÓPEZ, 2003, p. 106). García adds that "Traditional history, the way it has been written, interpreted and recorded, obviates women and the evolution of home, family and society, and basically becomes a recording of battles and wars and dubious accomplishments of men." (García apud LÓPEZ, 2003, p. 107).

Another interesting issue to be mentioned is how the Spanish language operates in Pilar. She and her boyfriend speak in Spanish when they make love, because, according to her, English seems an impossible language for intimacy (p. 180). It is interesting to observe how Pilar has to appeal to her mother tongue in order to share intimacy with her boyfriend. Her mother, on the other hand, demonstrates she feels comfortable with the new language: "Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention." (p. 73). Lourdes curses in Spanish, demonstrating an undeniable connection with her Cuban roots: "I [Pilar] envy my mother her Spanish curses sometimes. They make my English collapse in a heap." (p. 59). It may be noticed that Lourdes appeals to her mother tongue when she wants to express her inner thoughts. Even though Pilar states that she envies her mother for her connections with Cuba, Pilar also demonstrates a close relationship with the Spanish language as it may be seen when she makes love with her boyfriend.

Besides her cursing in Spanish, another example of Lourdes's connection to her motherland is her dance with Ivanito, her nephew, in Cuba. The customers at the restaurant where Lourdes danced even applauded her. Her Cuban roots were inside her, whether or not she was aware of it: "Her [Lourdes's] body remembered what her mind had forgotten. Suddenly, she wanted to show her daughter the artistry of *true* dancing. Lourdes exaggerated her steps, flawless and lilting, teasing the rhythm seductively." (p. 224. Italics in the original.). It seems that Lourdes intends to tease her daughter by showing her the Cuban rhythm. While Lourdes feels comfortable dancing a Latin American dance, Pilar dances as if the Cuban rhythm were not part of her: "Pilar looked so clumsy last night dancing with Ivanito. The band was playing a cha-cha-chá, and Pilar moved jerkily, off the beat, sloppy and distracted. She dances like an American." (p. 224). As a hybrid subject, Pilar is divided between two cultures, which is exemplified in the way she performs a Cuban dance. Interestingly, despite embracing the American culture, Lourdes is the one who dances like a Cuban.

Pilar, born in Cuba and living in New York, desires to go to her homeland. James Clifford, in "Diasporas", states that "Diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the

experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place." (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 255). These issues may be observed in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Pilar, as already mentioned, lives in New York while longs to go back to Cuba. Pilar acknowledges, though, that the distance between Miami and Cuba is larger than it seems: "Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all." (p. 219). Wishing for so long to go back to Cuba, at the age of thirteen, when Pilar sees her father Rufino Puente with a woman that seems to be his lover, Pilar decides to travel to Miami so that she could return to Cuba:

> That's it. My mind's made up. I'm going back to Cuba. I'm fed up with everything around here. I take all my money out of the bank, $120, money I earned slaving away at my mother's bakery, and buy a one-way bus ticket to Miami. I figure if I can just get there, I'll be able to make my way to Cuba [...]. (p. 25).

Seeing her father with another woman is the last straw for Pilar. Although she has stated that she desires to go to Cuba and wonders how her life would have been if she had remained on the island, the view of her father with another woman accelerated Pilar's tentative departure. Besides, longing to go back to Cuba, Pilar claims that her memories of the episodes that happened on the island while she was a little child are very vivid in her mind. She declares that she remembers the day in which Lourdes told Celia that they were leaving Cuba and that Celia called Lourdes a traitor. "I was only two years old when I left Cuba but I remember everything that's happened to me since I was a baby, even word-for-word conversations." (p. 26). Interestingly, Pilar claims that she remembers specific details that would be very difficult, maybe even impossible, to be recorded by infants; however, at the same time, she declares that Cuba fades a little more inside her:

> Most days Cuba is kind of dead to me. But every once in a while a wave of longing will hit me and it's all I can do not to hijack a plane to Havana or something. I resent the hell out of politicians and the generals who force events on us that structure our lives, that dictate the memories we'll have when we're old. Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there's only my imagination where our history should be. (p. 137-138).

Another issue to be taken into consideration is Pilar's discovery of her own sexuality and Lourdes's way of dealing with it. Pilar does not have privacy, since Lourdes looks for her daughter's diary and reads it. Besides, while Lourdes has sex with Rufino until he begs her to stop, she does not want to let Pilar explore her own sexuality. Lourdes even considers her responsibility to know her daughter's inner thoughts (p. 26). In her process of discovering her

own sexuality, Pilar has private moments in the bathroom. When Lourdes finds it out because she has read Pilar's diary, Lourdes wants to control Pilar as much as possible:

> I like to lie on my back and let the shower rain down on me full force. If I move my hips to just the right position, it feels great, like little explosions on a string. Now, whenever I'm in the bathroom, my mother knocks on the door like President Nixon's here and needs to use the john. Meanwhile, I hear her jumping my father night after night until he begs her to leave him alone. You never would have guessed it by looking at her. (p. 26-27).

When Lourdes found out about Pilar and her bath, she beat her in the face, pulled her hair out in big clumps, called her a *desgraciada* and ground her knuckles into Pilar's temples (p. 27). At the same time, Lourdes has sex with her husband so intensively that Rufino asks her to leave him alone. It is ironical that Lourdes explores her sexuality, but denies it to her own daughter.

In spite of Lourdes's conservative attitudes towards her daughter, it is important to acknowledge her defying the patterns that women were expected to follow in Cuba: "Cuban women of a certain age and a certain class consider working outside the home to be beneath them. But Lourdes never believed that." (p. 130). In Cuba, after getting married to Rufino Puente, she decided to work in the family's ranch:

> While it was true that she [Lourdes] had grown accustomed to the privileges that came with marrying into the Puente family, Lourdes never accepted the life designated for its women. […] Lourdes knew she could never be this kind of woman. After her honeymoon, she got right to work on the Puente ranch. (p. 130).

Lourdes made some changes in the Puente ranch. When her mother-in-law discovered it, she got furious and restored the villa to its former state: "Lourdes, who defiantly rebuilt the aviary and restocked it with birds, never spoke to her mother-in-law again". (p. 130). Even in Cuba, Lourdes dares to break the rules imposed by patriarchal societies. Besides this, her business in the United States was able to succeed in a competitive market, which is the New Yorker. She is even capable of opening a second bakery. Being a successful businesswoman, Lourdes does not embrace the role of victim. Lourdes does not intend to accomplish the roles established for women in Cuban society.

It is interesting to observe that Lourdes's mother, Celia, in her own way, had defying attitudes as well. Celia had a relationship with Gustavo, a married Spanish man, before her marriage. She wrote letters to him for more than twenty years. Despite never mailing them, Celia was able to externalize some of her inner thoughts through those letters, allowing the reader to know some of them as well. When Pilar was born, eleven days after the revolution,

Celia decided not to write to him anymore. When Pilar goes to Cuba, Celia gives her granddaughter those letters. In Pilar's attempt to recuperate the stories of her family, Celia's letters to her Spanish lover contribute to her granddaughter's journey. As Professor Leila A. Harris states, those letters offer not only an account of Celia's private life but also of the history of Cuba through a personal perspective. (HARRIS, 2008, p. 59).

Celia's letters provide the terrain for recollecting the memories of her family. Professor Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos claims that, in general terms, one may say that when we remember previous experiences, we have the impression that we reconstruct our past according to motivations strictly personal. However, this belief – that our memories are strictly personal – was contested in the first decades of the last century. Sociologist Maurice Hallbawachs and psychologist Frederic Charles Barlett established, in the first decades of the 20th century, the theoretical bases that allow us to reject the rigid separation between memory and society and to define memory as a social construction. According to Sepúlveda dos Santos, the contribution of these theorists is to display that memory constitutes a social process, in which individuals are not seen as isolated human beings, but interacting with each other, throughout their lives and from determined social structures. (SANTOS, 2003, p. 33). Celia's memories are intertwined with the history of Cuba.

Another issue that should be mentioned when discussing Celia's letters is her breaking the rules imposed on women in a sexist society. Celia was not a virgin anymore when she married Jorge and her previous relationship enabled her to experience her sentiments towards her Spaniard lover fully. Celia's letters to Gustavo are fraught with passion, with words that externalize her deep love to him. On the other hand, her letters to her husband are completely the opposite. During his stay in New York, Jorge wrote "her [Celia] letters every day, when he still had the strength, long letters in an old-fashioned script with flourishes and curlicues. […] They were romantic letters, too." (p. 33). Jorge called Celia his "dove in the desert". Celia wrote back to him every once in a while, but her letters were full of facts, nothing more. They made Jorge sad. His sadness could be connected with the fact that her letters lacked love, the kind of love that Celia addressed to Gustavo. One may observe that Celia is sensitive enough to verbalize in her letters her sentiments to her Spaniard love. It may be implied that Celia simply does not have the same feelings towards her husband. It should be mentioned the fact that Celia feels that she is waiting for something to happen in her life:

> Celia stands alone in the rain in her leather pumps and jade housedress waiting for her twin granddaughters to return from their camping trip to the Isle of Pines. It seems to her that she has spent her entire life waiting for others, for something or other to happen. Waiting for her

> lover to return from Spain. Waiting for the summer rains to end. Waiting for her husband to leave on his business trips so she could play Debussy on the piano. The waiting began in 1934, the spring before she married Jorge del Pino, when she was still Celia Almeida. She was selling American photographic equipment at El Encanto, Havana's most prestigious department store, when Gustavo Sierra de Armas strode up to her display case and asked to see Kodak's smallest camera. He was a married Spanish lawyer from Granada […]. (p. 35).

When Gustavo left Celia to return to Spain, Celia felt miserable. She got sick and was examined by doctors. She wanted to die. Celia wrote her first letter to Gustavo because Jorge insisted that she did so: "'Write to that fool,' Jorge insisted, 'If he doesn't answer, you will marry me'". (p. 37). Jorge was fourteen years older than Celia. Her first letter to Gustavo is dated November 11, 1934, in which she tells him that she would be always his (p. 37). Gustavo had bought Celia her drop pearl earrings, which she always wears. "Four twenty-five years, Celia wrote her Spanish lover a letter on the eleventh day of each month, then stored it in a satin-covered chest beneath her bed. Celia has removed her drop pearl earring only nine times, to clean them. No one ever remembers her without them." (p. 38). Celia's relationship with Gustavo had defied the sexist Cuban culture. Jorge attempts to punish her for that. Isabel Alvarez Borland states that:

> Both Celia and Felicia are products of male-dominated Cuban society. García establishes a definite connection in this text between the oppressed situation of women and Cuban *machismo*: Celia's husband tries to punish her for having had a lover before she met him; Felicia's husband abandons her as soon as they are married. Their poverty, their unhappy childhood, and their lonely existence are indirectly tied to events that have rendered them powerless. (BORLAND, 1998, p. 140).

Another interesting issue that should be observed is how magic realism operates in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Utilizing this postmodern narrative strategy, García deconstructs what is supposed to be real. In "Magicking the Real: Paradoxes of Postmodern Writing", Lori Chamberlain states that "Although there is no clear consensus among critics about the precise boundaries of magic realism, it refers broadly to that fiction propelled by the tension between realistic elements and fabulous, magical, or fantastic elements." (CHAMBERLAIN, 1986, p. 7).

The vivid conversations between Lourdes and her deceased father as well as the dialogues between Pilar in the USA and her grandmother in Cuba are some examples of how magic realism is utilized in the characters' processes of pursuing their identities. According to Maggie Ann Bowers, magic(al) realist writing "has become associated with the modernist techniques of the disruption of linear narrative time and the questioning of the notion of history." (BOWERS, 2005, p. 9). Bowers adds:

> One of the unique features of magical realism is its reliance upon the reader to follow the example of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level. It relies upon the full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction during the reading experience, no matter how different this perspective may be to the reader's non-reading opinions and judgments. Magical realism has become a popular narrative mode because it offers to the writer wishing to write against totalitarian regimes a means to attack the definitions and assumptions which support such systems (e.g. colonialism) by attacking the stability of the definitions upon which these systems rely. (BOWERS, 2005, p. 4).

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the conversations between Pilar and her grandmother, for instance, enable them to maintain a connection that was lost in their relationship when Lourdes took her daughter to the United States after the Revolution. In this way, a consequence of political events, that is, their separateness, is destabilized by means of magic realism.

Another interesting example of the use of magic realism in the novel is related to Jorge and Lourdes. Jorge, who died while in New York, tells his daughter Lourdes, after his death, that he knows about her being raped by a Cuban soldier, a fact that she never told anyone. Besides this, Jorge tells her why he left Celia with his mother and his sister after they got married. He claims that he wanted to punish Celia because of the Spaniard man. He confesses that he wanted to kill her, to break her. When he went back home, it was done. Jorge asks Lourdes to go to Cuba and tell Celia everything and that he is sorry (p. 197).

Magic realism plays an important role in the narrative. It enables the writer to deconstruct reality. It should be highlighted that relevant issues are discussed by a deceased person. After Jorge's death, the reader may become aware of Jorge's real intention concerning Celia's piano. Chamberlain also states that "In searching for the alliance between the real and the imaginary, the dead and the living, reality and pleasure, magic realistic writers are investigating both realms." (CHAMBERLAIN, 1986, p. 17). In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the connection between the dead and the living ones contributes to the perception of reality.

Jorge declares that he bought Celia a piano so that she could have her hands busy. In the asylum where Jorge sent Celia, she became friends with Felicia Gutiérrez, a woman who had killed her husband by setting fire on him and did not regret she did so. That friendship made Jorge afraid and he decided to buy her a piano: "I wanted to see her hands move. I was afraid they'd lie in her lap, threatening me." (p. 196). Rather than concerned about Celia's alleged bad health condition, Jorge was preoccupied with his own life and the supposed threat to his life that Celia would have accomplished. It is interesting to mention that Jorge's relationship with Lourdes is so strong that, even beyond death, they are able to maintain it, destabilizing the concepts of time. According to Angel Flores, in magical realism, "Time

exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality." (Angel Flores apud RÍOS, 2002).

The relationship between Jorge and his other daughter Felicia, on the other hand, is very distant, even when they lived in the same house. When Felicia goes to Celia's house to tell her that Jorge is dead, Celia said she already knew, as Jorge went there to say good-bye. Felicia gets angry because Jorge did not say good-bye to her: "'You mean he was in the neighborhood and didn't even stop by?' […] 'But he's been in New York four years! The least he could have done was say good-bye to me and the children!'" (p. 9). The last time she saw her father, Jorge smashed a chair on her first husband's back. Felicia did not become devastated because her father died, but she got angry because he did not say good-bye to her. Even his appearance to Celia after his death does not intrigue Felicia. She felt rejected by her own father, which led her friend Herminia Salgado to insist that Felicia should have a *santería* session so that she could make peace with him (p. 12). Besides not having a close relationship with her father, Felicia experienced complex relationships with men. As Shemak states, Felicia had "troubled relationships throughout her life" and "she inherits the traits of her namesake, Celia's roommate in the asylum, who killed her husband by lighting him on fire." (SHEMAK, 2006, p. 9).

Hugo Villaverde, Felicia's first husband, is the father of her twin daughters, Luz and Milagro, and of her son Ivanito. His father was a descendant of slaves. Maybe that is the reason why Jorge did not accept his daughter's relationship with Hugo, an Afro-Cuban descendant, the same way Felicia's parents did not approve of Felicia's friendship with Herminia. Named after Celia's friend in the asylum, Felicia Gutiérrez, Jorge's daughter decided to kill her husband by setting fire on him as did her mother's friend. She was mistreated by Hugo, who even transmitted syphilis to her. When she was pregnant with Ivanito, she set fire on Hugo. He did not die, though, but he got really hurt.

Luz and Milagro have never forgiven Felicia and this episode has contributed to the lack of communication between mother and daughters. The void in the family relationship leads the twin sisters to develop their own language, preventing their other relatives from understanding them: "Celia knows that Luz and Milagro are always alone with one another, speaking in symbols only they understand." (p. 38).

Dreaming in Cuban is a polyphonic novel, term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in order to describe Dostoievski's novels. (DIEDRICK, 1993, p. 609). James Diedrick states that as a speaker is not free to express his/her "linguistic intention unobstructed but must always mediate that intention in relation to other speakers, so the novelist, according to Bakhtin, must

grant characters their own intentions, mediate their voices without subsuming them within a single authorial voice." (DIEDRICK, 1993, p. 609). *Dreaming in Cuban* presents a third-person narrator and more than one first-person narrator. Thus, other voices may be heard and this strategy plays a relevant role in the narrative. Harris adds that "the polyphonic and non-linear narrative of the novel emphasizes the geographical, political and emotional fragmentation of a family".[4] (HARRIS, 2008, p. 56. My translation.). As Borland states, "García's skillful use of point of view provides the reader with a variety of perspectives from members of the various generations and migratory waves and produces a panorama of Cuban history that transcends the story of 1959." (BORLAND, 1998, p. 137). Through Luz Villaverde, for instance, it is possible to learn her point of view about the fact of her mother's setting fire to her father Hugo. Luz states: "Luckily, Milagro and I have each other. We're a double helix, tight and impervious. That's why Mamá can't penetrate us." (p. 120). Even their brother Ivanito acknowledges this: "Pilar has tried to talk to the twins, but they answer her in monosyllables. Their world is a tight sealed box. Luz and Milagro are afraid of letting anyone inside. […] I know as long as they have each other they'll survive. But what about me?" (p. 229).

Luz allows the reader to realize the lack of communication in the relationship between the twins and Felicia. Luz mentions, for example, that her mother declares that Milagro is her little jewel and that Luz is the light in the night that guides their dreams. Despite her mother's sayings, Luz is not connected to her: "This was just like her. Pretty words. Meaningless words that didn't nourish us, that didn't comfort us, that kept us prisoners in her alphabet world. My sister and I call our mother 'not-Mamá'." (p. 121). Felicia does not manage to provide her daughters with the language they want. On the other hand, their father Hugo does. Some time after being burnt, Hugo went back and met their daughters: "In his sagging eyes we found the language we'd been searching for, a language more eloquent than the cheap bead necklaces of words my mother offered." (p. 124).

Some time after Felicia's relationship with Hugo ended, she meets Ernesto Brito and falls in love with him: "For three days they rocked in each other's arms, voracious and inseparable, speaking few words, but knowing all they needed to know." (p. 150). Ernesto Brito died tragically in a fire at a seaside hotel. He had been a restaurant inspector, renowned for his refusal to take bribes. Felicia thought that he was killed because he was honest. After writing a letter of protest to El Líder, demanding a full investigation, and not receiving any

[4] The original text is: "A narrativa polifônica e não-linear do romance enfatiza a fragmentação geográfica, política e emocional de uma família."

answer, she considered that El Líder is the one to blame (p. 150). At that time, Felicia was working as a hairdresser in a beauty shop. Felicia thinks Graciela Moreira, a customer, is a spy, also responsible for Ernesto's death, and attacks her: "That is the last thing Felicia remembers for many months." (p. 151).

The novel presents a complex order of events. As Davis claims, "The author frequently juxtaposes present and past tense, blurring and confounding the two time frames: rather than presenting a chronological account, she invites the reader to reconstruct the sequence of events […]." (DAVIS, 2000, p. 3). The scene right after the episode with Graciela Moreira describes Felicia waking up at a place that she does not recognize. It is learned that some months have passed and Felicia does not know where she is or even who she is. She is living in this place with Otto Cruz, her third husband, and when he is making love to her, Ivanito's face appears in a vision on the ceiling. Otto Cruz is determined to leave Cuba for Miami. Felicia kills Otto by pushing him from a roller coaster, giving a closure to the gloomy fate around her name. It is interesting to observe that the same event concerning Otto's death is mentioned by the third person narrator as well as by Herminia Salgado.

As already mentioned, the novel is polyphonic, presenting a relevant opportunity to have other voices heard. It is important to point out that, for example, through Herminia Salgado's voice, it is possible to learn about the Afro-Cubans' conditions on the island and their pursuit for identity and liberty in Cuba. Although her voice is heard just in a few pages and, as she herself declares, she is supposed to tell the reader about Felicia del Pino's life, she is able to point out some of the problems the people with African origins had to face. She is able to externalize some of the prejudice Afro-Cubans have suffered concerning their skin color, *santería* and the fact that many of them were hunted during the Little War of 1912 in Cuba.

Herminia says that during that War her grandfather and his uncles "were hunted day and night like animals, and finally hung by their genitals from the lampposts in Guáimaro" (p. 185). She adds: "The war that killed my grandfather and great-uncles and thousands of other blacks is only a footnote in our history books. Why, then, should I trust anything I read? I trust only what I see, what I know with my heart, nothing more." (p. 185). It is interesting to observe that Herminia raises the same discussion upon the history books that Pilar raised. Besides, it should be stressed that, even though Herminia is expected to tell Felicia's story, she succeeds in offering an image of the Afro-Cubans' situation. By means of describing the tortures and pain suffered by them, she is capable of displaying how that period in Cuba marked them. Richard Gott states that "The massacre of 1912 remained etched in the memory

of Cuban blacks for decades. They almost never took part in politics again, devoting themselves to music and retreating into their own African religions […].” (GOTT, 2005, p. 125). Religions with African origins contributed to African-Cubans to feel connected to their homeland and *santería* is an important instrument for this attachment.

Africans were captured in their homelands and sent to places where they were not respected and not even treated as human beings, not being allowed the preservation of their culture. *Santería* is a religion that provided them with the possibility of being close to their African origins. In “Calling on the Spirit: The Performativity of Black Women’s Faith in the Baptist Church Spiritual Traditions and Its Radical Possibilities for Resistance”, Telia U. Anderson states that:

> Although the exigencies of the slave trade and three centuries of captivity did not permit the cultural preservation of captured Africans and instead brought about the total and complete destruction of an overwhelming number of their cultural resources, ‘one of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave’s culture was her religion’. The openness and adaptability of African faiths to syncretism made them the healthy provenance of charismatic forms of worship, which are still found in the United States and in the African diaspora. (ANDERSON, 2001, p. 116).

Santería is very important to the preservation of African culture and to the construction of Cuban culture as well. Besides, through Herminia’s own words, the reader becomes aware that Felicia’s parents were afraid of Herminia’s father, a *babalawo*, a high priest of *santería,* and that the people in Santa Teresa del Mar told evil lies about him. It is important to observe how people with African origins had to struggle in order to construct their own identity. It seems that it did not matter the place where African people were taken to, they had to fight for their recognition. Besides, it is relevant to highlight that Felicia and Herminia’s friendship made possible Felicia’s contact with *santería,* which eventually led her to become a *santera*. Herminia says that Felicia defended her from the other kids who called Herminia a *bruja*. According to her, Felicia did not see color. Even though her parents forbade her to visit Herminia, Felicia did it anyway.

Morever, *santería* affects not only Felicia but also Pilar. By means of her contact with this religion, Pilar feels more attached to Cuba and announces to her mother that they are going to Cuba. In “The ‘Boom’ in U. S. Latina/o Fiction: Performing Magical Realism in *The Love Queen of the Amazon* and *So Far From God*”, Karen Christian states that, in “*Dreaming in Cuban*, *santería* also functions as ethnic performance by enabling the U. S. Cuban protagonist to reestablish a connection to her ancestral culture.” (CHRISTIAN, 1997, p. 126). One day, when Pilar enters a *botánica* on upper Park Avenue, the owner recognized her as a

daughter of Changó and gives her herbs to bath with. Christian adds that "In effect, Pilar's performance of the ritual highlights her ethic difference – *santería* is practiced outside the margins of Anglo-American culture – as it rekindles her desire to seek out her Cuban roots." (CHRISTIAN, 1997, p. 127).

Another issue that should be taken into consideration is also pointed out through Herminia's words. She mentions that men are still in charge in Cuba. Herminia declares that, before the revolution, during elections period, politicians would tell people that they were all the same. However, everyday life was different: "The whiter you were, the better off you were." (p. 185). According to her, under the revolution, there is more respect. Nevertheless, although she is a supervisor in a battery factory, she realizes that one thing has remained the same, that is, male power over women:

> I've been at the battery factory almost twenty years now, since right after the revolution, and I supervise forty-two women. It's not much, maybe, but it's better than mopping floors or taking care of another woman's children instead of my own. One thing hasn't changed: the men are still in charge. Fixing that is going to take a lot longer than twenty years (p. 185).

Herminia acknowledges that changing this sexist situation is going to take many more years to be accomplished. Women have suffered layers of oppression and gender differences should be taken into account when analyzing colonialism. Besides, among the differences in the colonized societies, there are also the differences concerning gender. If gender differences are ignored, this may result in an inaccurate picture of women's situation. After all, women are oppressed not only as colonized subjects but also as women, leading to what is called a double colonization. In spite of being already exploited by the colonizers, women suffered discrimination performed by members from their own community. Ashcroft et al state that:

> More recently, feminism has been concerned that categories like gender may sometimes be ignored within the larger formation of the colonial, and that post-colonial theory has tended to elide gender differences in constructing a single category of the colonized. These critics argue that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men, and the 'double colonization' that resulted when women were subject both to general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women needs to be taken into account in any analysis of colonial oppression. (ASHCROFT et al, 2002, p. 103).

Postcolonial studies should take gender differences into consideration so that a more precise account may be developed. It should be highlighted that, through Herminia's words, the reader may not only learn more about Felicia's life but also become aware of the oppression people with African origins have to face in Cuba. Besides this, her words are

powerful instruments to make people conscious of the issues concerning the double oppression suffered by women in Cuba.

The female members of the Del Pino family have undergone through their own journeys in order to pursue their identity. Besides dealing with issues concerning their own family, they have to negotiate with different cultures. As this chapter attempted to discuss, the construction of identity may be intensively permeated by family relationships as well as by politics. Even though a family may be physically separated due to political issues, its members may be apart from each other even before the physical distance has occurred. Needless to say, the geographic distance might highlight the separateness among members of a family. However, at the same time, it may overshadow the depth of unresolved problems among those members. The Del Pinos suffered the consequences of a political revolution in their homeland, which eventually resulted in their geographical separateness. Nevertheless, they had already faced family troubles, which were actually responsible for maintaining them apart from each other.

As already mentioned, if a person with specific origins is inserted in a different culture, it may contribute to the formation of his/her character. Living in two cultures may interfere in how this subject is going to perceive himself/herself as well as the environment and the people around him/her. The hybrid subject may negotiate with different cultures in order to achieve his/her own identity. As previously pointed out, this negotiation may even include religious practices, for example, which may be the case of the Afro-Cubans and *santería*. A fragmented subject emerges from the boundaries of those cultures, belonging not to a specific culture instead of the other, but rather belonging to both of them.

Pilar Puente, for instance, may be seen as a representation of the hybridity discussed by Homi Bhabha. Belonging more to New York than Cuba, not instead of Cuba, defines Pilar. The contact that she had with the two cultures contributed to the construction of her identity. Pilar had to go to Cuba in order to understand and, to a certain extent, accept that the American culture is part of her as well as the Cuban one. Analyzing hybrid subjects may be seen as an important opportunity to discuss ex-centric characters. *Dreaming in Cuban* fosters this discussion by displaying compelling portraits of subjects who live in two cultures.

4 AN ANALYSIS OF *MEMORY MAMBO*: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, SEXUALITY AND POLITICS AT THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURES

To survive the Borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*
be a crossroads.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera:* The New Mestiza

The present chapter aims at investigating the construction of the diasporic subject in Achy Obejas's *Memory Mambo*, analyzing how hybridity and politics may interfere in family relationships. The effects of belonging to a different culture may influence both the relationships of its members and the relationship between them and their new environment. Analyzing *Memory Mambo* is an opportunity to understand the construction of the hybrid subject, the effects of dealing with different cultures, and the influence of political issues upon family relationships.

In *Memory Mambo,* Juani Casas is a twenty-four-year-old lesbian woman, who was born in Cuba and left for the USA when she was six years old. Juani's memory of her country is patchy, fragmented and, much of it, provided by her relatives. At some points, Juani does not know for sure if the memories are hers or have been constructed by the stories she has been told. Even though Juani left Cuba when she was a little child, eventually, she considers going back to Cuba. As she herself admits, she intends to return to her motherland due to her necessity to belong or even to escape. (OBEJAS, 1996, p. 235).[5] As already mentioned when discussing *Dreaming in Cuban*, Clifford claims that diaspora cultures involve the experiences of living in one place and remembering/desiring another place. (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 255). Besides living in a new environment while desiring their motherland, diasporic subjects may also make constant attempts to become part of the new society.

Throughout the novel, the reader is offered a picture of the lives of Cuban-American people and of their attempts to be part of a different society with a different culture. In *Memory Mambo,* the characters' daily behavior, their festivities, their religious beliefs disclose their homeland traditions in many occasions. At the same time, these characters attempt to incorporate the new culture into their daily lives, carrying out this process in relation to both individual subjectivity and national identity levels. This way, both the individual and the national spheres are strong elements in Obejas's novel.

[5] Subsequent quotations from this novel refer to the same edition and will appear by page number in the text.

A portrait of hybridism originated by living in different cultures may be seen in Obejas's novel. The fact that Juani's relatives live in a different society has even interfered in the composition of their family. Due to exile, Juani's family is composed of members of blood and members of exile. Juani states that there is a difference between two types of cousins. According to her, blood cousins that live in Cuba expect the ones who left for the United States to help them to enter the American society: "They assume they can call on us, just because we crawled out of the DNA pool […]. They figure they can get us to send them food and medicine, to file their papers to get them out of Cuba, even to support them once they're here." (p. 13). Blood cousins believe that, because of the family genealogy, help by their relatives should be guaranteed. Through Juani's words, the reader notices that this assumption is not be welcome by the ones who have managed to inhabit the United States.

On the other hand, the connections among cousins in exile may be, to a certain extent, crucial to the process of living in a different culture. According to Juani, cousins of exile have an affinity: "[We have] a way of speaking that's neither Cuban nor American, neither genetic or processed. […] We communicate, I suspect, like deaf people – not so much compensating for the lost sense, but creating a new syntax from the pieces of our displaced lives." (p. 13). Dwelling in a new environment may lead people to forge a new family, creating bonds that only other people that share the same experience may understand. It seems that cousins of exile are connected due to some necessity of being inscribed in a community: "They're the cousins we never had, something far more vital than just substitutes for the ones left in Cuba. We know them because they're only the other Cubans in our American neighborhood, or the only Cubans in our apartment buildings […]." (p. 13). As they are inserted in a society that may be hostile to them, fragmented subjects may feel the need for belonging and creating family relationships even if these relationships are based on their native origins. By doing so, they may have an opportunity to feel complete. In fact, the composition of their family in exile would give them a sense of who they were. Liz Balmased states: "I was Cuban because I was different from the *americanito* kids in elementary school. They never seemed to have parties at their houses or any cousins. I had a ton of cousins because I was Cuban." (BALMASED, 2003, p. 20). The fact that the members of Cuban community in exile have several cousins contributes to the formation of their identity.

By living at the crossroads of cultures, individuals may have to cope with the traditions that are held in their homeland while they are inscribed in a new society that may not follow the same values. These issues may generate conflicts that may be transferred to how the subjects deal with their own families: "Most Cuban women don't move out of their

family's home unless they get married or go off to school. The idea of the two of us [Juani and her sister Nena] sharing an apartment while single and living in the same city as our parents was pure American thinking." (p. 158). The fact that Juani's family lives in a new society with different traditions has contaminated the way they handle their own homeland customs.

Besides, hybrid subjects may perform the values and traditions of the host country as an attempt to adapt themselves to the new environment. In *Memory Mambo*, one may notice that Cubans try to accomplish American customs, for example, when Juani's family had people over after Tío Pepe's funeral. Juani's relatives live at the crossroads of cultures and they attempt to assimilate the new culture while maintaining their own heritage. When Tío Pepe dies, Juani's family adopts the American funeral tradition although they do not actually know for sure how it should be carried out:

> Although Cubans don't normally have people over after funerals, Father Sean had explained to our family that this was an American tradition that made some sense. At first it sounded much like a party to us. Cubans prefer to hold an all-night prayer vigil and bury the body immediately. Mami was concerned that Tía Celia [Tío Pepe's wife] would think the kind of gathering Father Sean suggested might be offensive to Tío Pepe's memory. But Father Sean said, "It's a healing thing. It's not a celebration, but a reassurance." I thought it was a good idea, as did Patricia [Juani's cousin, Tía Zenaida's daughter], who'd actually been to a few American funerals, so we decided to try it. (p. 92).

Juani's relatives attempt to be part of a different society with different culture and language. In their pursuit of accomplishing the new customs, they follow this American religious and social ritual, trying to incorporate the new culture in their lives. Nevertheless, they were not completely aware of all the details of having people over after someone's funeral. In addition, this moment of mourning portrays the way Juani's relatives dwell in the borderlands of cultures. The food that the relatives took to that event displayed their connections to Latino traditions, while they were trying to perform American customs:

> People from all over the neighborhood brought plates of black beans and rice, guacamole, *yucca con mojo*, freshly baked breads, baskets of fruits, flan and *tres leches*, and about a dozen other kinds of dessert. I realized most of us were Latino, awkwardly trying to perform an American custom, and didn't really have much sense of what to do. […] "Do we play music?" asked my father anxiously. "Mozart or something like that, soft?" "No, no music," said Ira, Patricia's husband. […] "I mean, I think no music…" (p. 92-93).

It is interesting to notice how Cuban food is present in Juani's relatives' attempt to maintain connections with their homeland while performing American traditions. Their pursuit to preserve their Cuban origins may be intertwined with the memories that food provides. Besides offering a chance for dealing with the fact of living in different cultures, Tío

Pepe's death is also an important opportunity to witness Tía Celia's subversion of traditions. Tío Pepe was an alcoholic and had affairs with many women throughout his marriage to Tía Celia. She not only had to cope with cultural oppression due to dwelling in a different society but she also had to deal with the oppression women are victims of.

As already discussed in Chapter 3, women have suffered different forms of oppression. Female individuals may be oppressed as colonized subjects because of the oppression carried out by the dominant culture. In addition to this, women may suffer subjugation due to gender, and other issues, leading to what is called a double or multiple colonization. Besides being exploited by the dominant culture, women may suffer discrimination performed by members of their own community.

Moreover, living at the crossroads of cultures is affected by gender issues as well. Clifford states that "Diasporic experiences are always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diasporas and diaspora cultures to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacements in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences." (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 258). Female diasporic experiences display certain specificities that are not shared by male ones. Besides dealing with the fact of living in different cultures, women have to tackle issues related to female subjugation.

It is important to highlight that many women may perpetuate the sexist treatment they receive from their husbands or partners. In *Memory Mambo*, Tía Celia did not do anything to change her situation. According to Juani, Tía Celia "managed to never notice how often Tío Pepe cheated on her, or the frequency of his binges or, sometimes, even that he'd disappeared". (p. 45). When he went back home, Tía Celia did not mention anything related to his being away.

It should be pointed out that Tía Celia's mother had the same kind of attitude concerning her husband's behavior: "Amazingly, the all-time denial queen in Caridad's family isn't her mother, but her maternal grandmother, Nivia." (p. 46). Even when her husband died in the arms of one of his mistresses and Nivia had to recognize his body - "naked and waxy, something of ecstasy about his face, and his formidable member stiff and pale on his thigh" (p. 46), she did not acknowledge that the body was his. Maybe because, if she did, she would have to admit that her husband was unfaithful to her. In her denial attitude, Nivia told a lie that escalated and involved other members of the family. It is interesting to observe that, even after her husband's passing away, Nivia maintained her submissive behavior. On the other hand, after her husband's death, Tía Celia, Nivia's daughter, adopted a more confident attitude, especially due to the presence of her granddaughter Rosa:

> When Pauli [Tía Celia's daughter] came back to town after Tío Pepe died, she stayed with Tía Celia. Then everything changed. Tía Celia, who had seemed so lost those few days between Tío Pepe's death and the funeral, suddenly came back to life. Mami and I commented on how worried we'd been – Tía Celia had a blank look about her without Tío Pepe, as if she could miss a step and fall down the stairs or forget to eat. But as soon as the burial was over, as soon as the funeral stickers were peeled off the car windows on the way back from the cemetery, Tía Celia emerged from her haze. She was not her old self – not the humiliated wife with infinite patience and blind loyalty – but a whole new person. At the reception after the funeral, we were all awed by her, tossing her hair and rolling her new granddaughter on her lap. (p. 92).

Besides relinquishing her submissive behavior, Tía Celia also modifies her attitudes towards her daughter Pauli. Before Tío Pepe's death, Tía Celia was indifferent towards her daughter: "When Tía Celia got home from work, she'd find Tío Pepe in whatever position Pauli had left him. [...] But for all the attention Tía Celia gave Tío Pepe, she'd be nearly as indifferent to Pauli as her daughter had been to her father." (p. 64). After his passing away, Tía Celia began to consider Pauli as a motive of pride: Pauli's "crazy independence, her sexuality and vigor, all these became medals of honor. To hear Tía Celia, Pauli was a kind of new woman, a pioneer who did not need men or approval. And she was the first to defend Pauli's right to silence about the identity of Rosa's father." (p. 94). Tía Celia's renewal became evident: "Although no one would admit it, Tío Pepe's passing seemed to free Tía Celia." (p. 94). Her submissive behavior vanishes and, in this process, she does not accept Caridad's obedient attitudes towards her husband.

Caridad, Tía Celia's other daughter, is frequently abused by her husband Jimmy and Tía Celia does not agree with Caridad's lack of independence. According to Tía Celia, "'She [Caridad] is living Jimmy's life, being his slave. He is really Jimmy Frankenstein, just like Pauli says.'" (p. 96). Although Caridad complains about Jimmy, she does everything he wants her to. Jimmy would win any argument with Caridad by slapping her, or even just threatening to. Pauli deemed Jimmy as Dr. Victor Frankenstein:

> For Pauli, he [Jimmy] was simply Jimmy Frankenstein […], but her reference was not to the hapless monster, whom she regarded as an innocent, but to the scientist, the evil Victor who pieced together cadavers and animated them in his own earthly way. As far as Pauli was concerned, Jimmy had found a way to kill Caridad and then bring her back in his own distorted image, compliant and anesthetized. (p. 59).

An interesting example of Jimmy's attempt to modify his wife in his own terms may be noticed when Caridad receives some money as heritance due to her father's death. Caridad wants to buy a car with the money while Jimmy says that they have bills to pay. Though Jimmy may be correct in his assertion, he does not even consider Caridad's point of view. She

claims that the purchase of the car would make her feel better about her father's death. However, Jimmy does not discuss the matter with her; he just imposes his decision. Caridad affirms that "He can't just tell me what to do like that […]." (p. 16). Nonetheless, Juani acknowledges that they both know he can, and he does. (p. 16). In fact, Jimmy controls Caridad even when it comes to family matters. He has already forbidden Caridad to go out with Juani, because, according to him, people would think that his wife was lesbian as well.

Jimmy has even tried to ban Juani completely from Caridad's life by prohibiting Caridad to meet Juani. However, Puncho, Juani's brother, considerably bigger than him, intervened. As a result, Caridad was allowed to spend time with Juani, but they would not spend too much time together, just the two of them. It is interesting to notice Jimmy's homophobic attitude while he plays a "game of power" over Juani, sexually harassing her. Sonia Torres states that, for reasons Juani cannot explain, she does not tell Caridad what it is going on, despite Patricia's insistence on Juani's reporting everything. (TORRES, 2001, p. 154).

Perhaps, the fact that Jimmy, in a way, is family may restrain Juani's responses to his attitudes. After all, as it will be corroborated during Juani's physical fight with her former girlfriend Gina, she is capable of responding aggressively to actions that she is against. Juani reacts fiercely when Gina breaks up with her. On the other hand, Juani does not do anything in order to stop Jimmy's disturbing behavior, even though she is not comfortable with it. The way Juani deals with Jimmy is a complex situation. According to Torres:

> That unexplainable complicity between Juani and Jimmy will end at the only truly dramatic incident of *Memory Mambo*, which is the discovery, by the entire family, that Jimmy sexually abuses little Rosa, daughter of "cousin" Pauli. This episode will change the course of the story completely, functioning as a kind of epiphany of the protagonist, who, questioning her complicity with Jimmy, decides to change her course, quit her job at the family's laundromat and go to Cuba, where she expects to learn the truth about her family's mutilated past and about herself.[6] (TORRES, 2001, p. 154. My translation.).

Concerning this episode, it is interesting to observe Juani's actions during the event. Incapable of telling what occurred and escaping from Jimmy, who wanted to beat her because she did not help him, Juani runs away from the house, a very different behavior from the one towards Gina when they broke up. Besides, one may notice a portrait of how memory functions. Patricia states that Pauli and Ali, Rosa's parents, witnessed the whole scene;

[6] The original text is: "Essa cumplicidade inexplicável de Juani com Jimmy irá desaguar no único incidente verdadeiramente dramático de *Memory Mambo*, que é a descoberta, por toda a família, de que Jimmy abusa sexualmente da pequena Rosa, filha de 'prima' Pauli. Esse episódio mudará inteiramente o rumo da história, funcionando como uma espécie de epifania da protagonista, que, questionando sua cumplicidade com Jimmy, decide mudar de rumo, abandonar seu trabalho na lavanderia da família e ir para Cuba, onde espera conhecer a verdade sobre o passado truncado da família, e sobre si mesma."

however, they asked Juani what really happened. As Patricia puts it, probably they sought confirmation. (p. 236). According to French philosopher Maurice Hallbwachs, our memories remain collective and we remember through others, even though those memories involve events in which only we have been present and objects which only we have seen. (HALBWACHS, 2008, p. 30). Halbwachs adds that individual memory is not entirely isolated and closed. In order to evoke his/her own past, a person generally needs the memories of others and the points of reference, determined by society, that exist outside him/her. (HALBWACHS, 2008, p. 72). Besides observing how memory may act, Rosa's abuse episode may exemplify Caridad's submissive behavior.

Even after this episode, Caridad stands by her husband. The sexist Cuban-American community the family is inserted in may contribute to Jimmy's behavior towards Caridad and to her submissiveness. Ethnicity is part of someone's self and its importance should be considered. Inhabiting communities that are different from one's original community may be crucial to the construction of one's identity. Regarding being affected by dealing with different communities, it is important to analyze the issues that involve living in different cultures. Even when the situations have to do with family relationships, hybridity should be taken into account. Pauli, Tío Pepe's daughter, does not accept her father's behavior. When she was twelve years old, for instance, she created a situation so that one of Tío Pepe's mistresses would believe that he suffered from herpes. By doing so, the relationship ended and this forced her father to be more discrete.

As a teenager, Pauli managed to interfere in her father's affairs while her mother always had a submissive attitude. Tía Celia behaved as a woman is expected to do in a sexist society. Pauli, on the contrary, displays a defying attitude. Her behavior, though, is not admired from a Cuban perspective: "In American terms, Pauli refused to enable her father. In Cuban terms, she was ingrate." (p. 63). Two different points of view informed by two different cultures.

Dwelling at the crossroads of cultures affects the way members of a family deal with each other and the new environment as well as the new environment perceives those people. In Obejas's novel, Jimmy, for example, is a *marielito* who left for the U.S. by himself. As already discussed in Chapter 2, the *marielitos* were not welcome by the American society. Gott adds that the *marielitos*' "reception in Florida was not welcoming [...]. Many of the Mariel generation of migrants were mulatto or black, and came from the poorer segment of Cuban society." (GOTT, 2004, p. 268). Jimmy is from Cuban poor class. He was housed by

an American family in Indiana. Years later, his real sister moved to the USA and he started to live with her. However, Jimmy could not manage to live with a member of his own family:

> They [the American family in Indiana] were kind to him but different from everything he'd ever known, and though Jimmy never felt that he was a part of their family, he got so Americanized without even realizing it that when his real sister showed up from Cuba years later and he came to live with her, he didn't know her, he didn't know how to be with her. He'd say "excuse me" all the time, preferred Folgers and eggs to Bustelo and toast for breakfast, and couldn't dance to save his life. "See, he [Jimmy] doesn't belong in either world, Cuban or American," Caridad said […]. (p. 44).

Jimmy's Americanization affects his relationship with his sister. Jimmy may be seen as a fragmented subject, who has to learn how to cope with different worlds, though not belonging to either of them. It is interesting to observe how the issue of fragmentation reaches down to the level of food. Jimmy, for instance, prefers Folgers, a major coffee brand in the United States, and eggs, as part of a typical American breakfast. At the same time, Jimmy declines to have Bustelo, which is a trademark of coffee that appeals to natives of Cuba.

Even Jimmy's name, by itself, displays assimilation of American culture since it is not a name that appeals to those of Cuban heritage. It seems that he is composed of fragments of both cultures. In "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?", Lawrence Grossberg states that "The figure of *fragmentation* emphasizes the multiplicity of identities and positions within any apparent identity. […] Identities are always contradictory, made up of partial fragments." (GROSSBERG, 1997, p. 91. Italics in the original.). Jimmy is an example of a hybrid subject, fragmentated by both cultures.

Concerning identity, another issue that should be taken into account in this investigation of *Memory Mambo* is sexual identity. When the novel begins, Juani's relationship with her girlfriend Gina has already ended. Their relationship and Juani's sexual orientation are significant elements in Juani's self. Being lesbian is obviously part of her identity and influences not only the way she behaves but also the way her family behaves towards her. Though Juani does not experience any sort of anguish for being lesbian, her family does not deal with her sexual identity openly. Juani's father, for example, knows that she is homosexual, but he avoids any conversation that could involve Juani's sexuality:

> If anyone at a family gathering or party starts in on when I'm going to find the right man and get married, I can always count on my father to rescue me with a quick comment about women's liberation, or there being no man alive good enough for his daughter. His motivation isn't to spare me discomfort but to save himself. Because he's afraid I won't lie, it's vital to him that I not be provoked into the truth. In my family, this is always the most important thing. (p. 80).

Probably, Juani's father would be embarrassed if she assumed her homosexuality in front of other members of the family. Since he knows that Juani will not lie, he seeks to justify the fact that his daughter does not have any boyfriend. Juani's father does not want her to verbalize her sexual orientation in order to avoid any situation or commentary that could be unpleasant to him.

Juani's parents deal with her homosexuality in different ways. Nevertheless, both of them are uncomfortable with their daughter's sexual identity. It is not easy for Xiomara, Juani's mother, to accept her daughter's sexual orientation. Xiomara's Catholic background seems to have contributed to her difficulty in dealing with Juani's homosexuality:

> Her [Xiomara's] basic reaction is Catholic: she is mystified but defers, both to her vague knowledge of the church's condemnation, and to the fact of my existence. I think in her heart of hearts she wonders, if this is supposed to be morally disfiguring, why do I seem so clear and reliable? My mother meets my friends and lovers and cannot hide her confusion: She wants to dislike them but can't. […] Embarrassment is part of our tension, and of our ever increasing silences. (p. 79).

Xiomara is not able to understand why someone so reliable as Juani can be condemned according to Catholic rules. Eventually Juani's sexual orientation leads to a void in her relationship with her own mother, exemplified by embarrassment and increasing silences. Sonia Torres states that Xiomara is aware of Juani's homosexuality and, although they only talk through half-words, Gina, Juani's former girlfriend, is accepted as Juani's friend, though she endeavors to hide their real relationship in front of the other members of the community. (TORRES, 2001, p. 154). Juani is lesbian in a community whose origins are in a homophobic society. Sonia Torres adds that "The intersection between the support to the social improvements of the revolution and the repudiation to Cuban homophobic politics has been particularly difficult to negotiate, especially for Cubans that are, at the same time, homosexual."[7] (TORRES, 2001, p. 158. My translation.). Cuban society is so homophobic that Juani's cousin Titi, who lives in Cuba, desperately wants to go to the United States.

Through her cousin Tomás Joaquín, Juani learns that Titi has had relationships: "It's not that Titi hasn't had lovers, because between the lines of Tomás Joaquín's stories – in which Titi's 'best friend' changes from time to time – I know […] that she's been loved and has loved, powerfully and jealously." (p. 75-76). When Juani's family talks about her cousin, they affirm that Titi wants to be free, but they are not able to say the reason why she desires to

[7] The original text is: "A interseção entre o apoio aos avanços sociais da revolução e o repúdio à política homofóbica de Cuba tem sido particularmente difícil de negociar, especialmente para cubanos que são, ao mesmo tempo, homossexuais".

be free. On the other hand, Juani is the one capable of understanding her cousin's attitudes. For her, Titi's reasons are not related to political issues. In fact, her motivation to leave Cuba has to do to with her necessity to be openly herself. According to Juani, Titi needs to be loved in daylight and, in the United States, she may be free to express her own sexuality: "What no one will say […] is that Titi's addiction to the notion of escape, her desire to come to the U.S., has nothing whatsoever to do with any of that patriotic crap, but with a whole other, perhaps, even crazier idea – that once here, she might be free to be queer." (p. 76).

Even though Juani and Titi are miles apart and separated by political reasons, Juani feels connected to her cousin. Juani is capable of understanding Titi's necessity of being loved openly. In spite of the fact that she lives in a free country, Juani experiences some of the issues of someone being closeted. All of Juani's girlfriends have been closeted, always concerned with other people's opinions. The novel begins with Juani dealing with the breaking up with her girlfriend Gina, the one she claims she loved the most and still does. Gina could not manage to come out:

> Even though I'm here, in what is supposed to be the land of the free, I share this desire with my cousin Titi. Every lover I've ever had has been closeted, has always instantly looked over her shoulder when we've kissed on a street corner or train station platform. This was especially, and most painfully, true of Gina. (p. 76).

In their romantic relationship, Gina was not capable to demonstrate intimacy in public, not even by means of a quick kiss on Juani's mouth. Gina's refusal to assume her homosexuality has reached significant levels, as she does not even provide a word to classify her relationship with Juani. It is ironical that Juani and Titi share the same kind of problems, though due to different reasons, when related to express intimacy openly in their relationships:

> It wasn't as if she [Gina] pretended to be heterosexual. […] Whenever she introduced me to anybody, she had no word for me, not *friend* or *lover*, just *Juani*. She'd greet me with a kiss, but always on the cheek, and squeeze my hand, then always let go. I tried hard to understand and respect her boundaries, but they were so different from mine – and to make things worse, Gina refused to talk about any of this. (p. 76-77. Italics in the original.).

It should be mentioned that Gina is an *independista*, struggling for Puerto Rican sovereignty, and she even works in political campaigns. Besides, her politically correct attitudes also involve music, food, clubs, and clothes. Due to Gina's politics, for instance, they did not listen to old salsa and malesung boleros, "because they encouraged women to romanticize instead of working on real relationships" (p. 116); they did not eat California

grapes or lettuce because of the boycotts; they only went to lesbian bars with mixed races clienteles or to salsa nights; and they "only wore clothes made with natural fibers – although, whatever their fabric content, absolutely no clothes from Asia which could have been made with child labor." (p. 117). However, Gina could not manage to come out, which clearly disturbed Juani: "'It's nobody's business,' she'd [Gina] say. 'Why should my life be an open book to complete strangers?' 'Yeah, but why deny your life in the process?' I'd [Juani] ask […]." (p. 77). By denying it, Gina's behavior may be seen as a way of depreciating the issue of sexuality.

To a certain extent, Gina attempts to separate sexual identity from politics, which seems impossible. Adrienne Rich, in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", considers "heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women". (RICH, 1993, p. 227). Rich declares that she has chosen the terms "lesbian existence" and "lesbian continuum" rather than lesbianism, due to its "clinical and limiting ring". Rich adds that lesbian existence is also "a form of naysaying to patriarchy, an act of resistance." (RICH, 1993, p. 239). Gina could have used her connections with political issues in order to give voice to oppressed same-sex oriented people that have been silent by patriarchal societies. Yet, she declined to assume her homosexuality. Sonia Torres states that although Gina is "fanatical for everything that is politically correct, she is not able to assume her homosexuality in public."[8] (TORRES, 2001, p. 157. My translation.). Though Gina is engaged in political causes, ironically, she could not manage to come out.

The fact that Gina could not manage to come out interferes in her relationship with Juani. As Bianca Cody Murphy states, in "Difference and Diversity: Gay and Lesbian Couples", "Stage differences in coming out affect the relationship of same-sex couples. Each of the partners may make what feels like a personal decision about coming out, but the consequences of such a decision affect the couple" (MURPHY, 1997, p. 349). In Obejas's novel, Gina's decision of declining to come out has affected Juani as well.

Taking into consideration Gina's own words and behavior, it seems that she displays internalized homophobia. Her refusal to assume her sexual identity in public may indicate that she cannot cope with her own sexual orientation. Besides, she may have been utilizing her political struggle for Puerto Rico as a way to overshadow the importance of coming out:

[8] The original text is: "[...] apesar de ser fanática por tudo que é politicamente correto, ela [Gina] não conseguir assumir publicamente sua homossexualidade."

> "Look, I'm not interested in being a *lesbian*, in separating politically from my people," she'd [Gina] say to me [Juani], her face hard and dark. "What are you talking about? Issues of *sexual identity*? While Puerto Rico is a colony? While Puerto Rican apologists are trying to ram statehood down our throats with legislative tricks and sleights of hand? You think I'm going to sit around and discuss *sexual identity*? Nah, Juani, you can do that – you can have that navel-gazing discussion." (p. 77. Italics in the original.).

As Gina so ardently claims that the political cause regarding Puerto Rico is more important than issues of sexual identity, it seems she attempts to minimize issues of her own sexuality so that she can utilize this as an excuse for not coming out. By refusing to assume her homosexuality, Gina, intentionally or not, might have diminished the relevance of being able to express one's sexual identity, a right that Juani's cousin Titi has eagerly been looking forward to and has been denied in her motherland.

On the other hand, it should also be considered that Gina may be preoccupied with the consequences of coming out in a community whose origins are in a homophobic society. Maybe Gina was afraid that, once she had come out in public, she would be labeled once again, since her Puerto Rican origins are already motives for suffering prejudice. However, this time, she would be labeled by her own community. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa claims that:

> Most of us [lesbians of color] unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect [homosexuality] of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 42).

Gina was attempting to fight for Puerto Rico, but she could not be sure that if her community would accomplish the same for her. It is possible that Gina has declined to assume her homosexuality freely in order to avoid being rejected by the ones she has been trying to get free. Gloria Anzaldúa adds that "For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality." (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 41). Perhaps Gina was not ready to accomplish this rebellion openly and to put herself in a position in which she might be abandoned by her own compatriots.

Moreover, it should be highlighted the relevance of Juani's relationship with Gina concerning her own connection with Cuba. Juani becomes aware of her distant relation with her motherland through her relationship with Gina, who maintains a much closer relationship with her Puerto Rican origins: "And I realized […] that […] I [Juani] was jealous that she [Gina] and her friends knew so much about my country, and I knew so little, really, not just about Cuba, but about Puerto Rico and everywhere else." (p. 133). Gina's friends also ask

Juani if she were a “good” or a “bad” Cuban. Sonia Torres states that from this confrontation Juani realizes that, in fact, she does not know her Latin-American roots. (TORRES, 2001, p. 156). In fact, political issues are significantly present in Juani and Gina’s relationship. As Isabel Alvarez Borland states:

> Juani’s Latino friends (mostly Puerto Ricans) have already decided that the Cubans in the United States are “worms” since they left a regime that in her friends’ eyes was more equitable to minorities than the current U.S. society. Moreover, Juani’s Cuban background is one of the reasons that her love relationship with Gina eventually comes to an end – Gina is the object of racial “Puerto Rican jokes” among Juani’s family; Juani, in turn, is the center of “Cuban exile jokes” among Gina’s friends. Both women feel unfairly treated, yet neither does anything to remedy the situation. (BORLAND, 1998, p. 119).

Political issues and sexuality are intertwined in *Memory Mambo*. Both Juani’s and Gina’s backgrounds perform important roles in their relationship. One of Gina’s friends, for instance, shows her prejudice calling Juani a *gusana*, which literally means “worm”, a pejorative term used to refer to Cuban exiles, a reference to “the shape of the duffel bags used by the first wave of [Cuban] refugees, who left by planes or ferries”. (p. 242).

It is relevant to point out that Cuban and Puerto Rican communities demonstrate prejudice towards each other. Even though these communities are in a new environment that may be hostile to both of them, they demonstrate ingrained prejudice in their discourses and actions. Political issues clearly affected Juani and Gina’s relationship. The way each of them is treated by the community of the other one was a significant problem for them, since neither defended the other from those disrespectful behaviors. In fact, when Gina broke up with Juani, one of the reasons she gave to do that was the treatment she received from Juani’s family:

> What Gina said was that she was tired of coming over to my family’s house and having to put up with my relatives, especially the men, making Puerto Rican jokes all the time, acting like Cubans were god’s gift to the world. […] She said we were racists and classists and that we only made fun of Puerto Ricans because most of them were darker and poorer than us. (p. 122).

Gina and Juani’s relationship was deeply affected by their different national and cultural affiliations. Besides having to face problems that any couple would have to deal with, Gina and Juani had also to cope with racial and political issues that were beyond their reach. Bianca Cody Murphy states:

> Ethnic and racial minority gay men and lesbian women live in three communities: the gay and lesbian community, the racial/ethnic community, and the dominant mainstream society. Although each community offers some support, each has its own expectations and demands, which often conflict. The tension of living in these three communities, in all of which one feels marginalized, adds to identities difficulties, which can be particularly troublesome if there are racial and cultural differences between the partners. (MURPHY, 1997, p. 353).

Same-sex oriented people may be exposed to tenser situations if they also belong to ethnic and racial minorities. The fact that they are part of three minority groups increases the probability of their suffering discriminatory treatments, even by their own peers. Isabel Alvarez Borland affirms that *Memory Mambo* "provokes the reader […] into thinking that the issue of sexual identity is fraught with complexity, and that it cannot be understood without first taking into account other factors of identity such as ethnicity and culture […]." (BORLAND, 1998, p. 120). Inhabiting different communities may be crucial to the construction of one's identity. Discourses that deal with issues of sexual identity should take into consideration not only gender and sexual orientation but also other specificities of the communities in which the subjects are inscribed.

Besides dealing with these family matters, Juani intends to know her family's history. She searches for memories of their past. To a certain extent, she searches for her own identity. She wants to know what really happened, although this proves not to be possible. Juani even considers going to Cuba, a journey she believes could provide her with the answers she wants. According to María de los Angeles Torres, "Exile as a forced physical separation severs contact with the familiar points of reference that contribute to the creation and sustenance of memory." (TORRES, 2003, p. 11). The fact that Juani is away from her motherland fosters her necessity of constructing the net of her memories. Even the title of the novel reminds the reader of the possibilities of memories that may be sewn together.

Mambo is a typical Cuban dance and its utilization in the title may lead to an encounter with Cuban roots and, at the same time, to a cultural rescue that may be provided by means of memory. Besides, the fluidity of the mambo dance may be found in the identities forged at the crossroads of cultures. Mambo may also imply adaptation of cultures. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat states:

> Born in Cuba but made in the USA, the mambo is itself a one-and-a-halfer. I do not mean that the mambo was invented by a one-and-a-halfer – no one individual "invented" the mambo – but that its hybrid, hyphenated musical form allies it with other 1.5 creations. Like Cuban-American culture, the mambo is a music of acceptance, not resistance. (PÉREZ-FIRMAT, 1996, p. 12).

Multiple possibilities of arrangements may be accomplished in mambo dance. Similarly, various configurations may be arranged in one's identity, even in one's memory. Sonia Torres states that Juani is obsessed with memory, especially with its contamination, with the dreams that merge, in exile, in a true "mambo" (TORRES, 2001, p. 150). In Juani's pursuit to connect the stories of her family, she realizes that it not a simple accomplishment. It is interesting to notice that not even her family's journey towards the United States is clear in Juani's mind:

> My family and I came from Cuba to the U.S. by boat when I was six years old, in 1978. These are the facts: It was a twenty-eight-foot boat; there were fourteen of us; the trip lasted two days; we were picked up by the Coast Guard just a few miles from Key West, around *Cayo Sal*, a deserted island that refugees often confuse for the southern-most tip of the U.S. but which really belongs to the Bahamas. […] So, if these are the facts, why do I remember so much more? (p. 9-10).

Juani's memory is fragmented and, in a way, contaminated by the stories that her relatives have told her. In order to learn the facts that occurred, one should be aware that the intentions of the narrator should be taken into consideration as well. In an interview to Professor Ilan Stavans, when asked whether the attempt to survive the present by inventing or embellishing the past is a natural response to exile and whether exile is the transformation of memory into a homeland, Achy Obejas claims that, in a way, they are. Obejas adds:

> It also has to do with the need to find a reason for one's own misery – after all, one needs to justify being away, broken, separated from the source. Why here and not there? And why here you're one of many, whereas there you're unique, special, personalized. The biblical Jews had God to explain their condition, but for Cubans, it's more personal. It is common to hear Cuban exiles say "We gave everything up" and "We left our lives behind." While the biblical Jews were moving toward paradise, Cuban exiles often feel that they moved away from it. And so exiles imbue life in the diaspora and on the island with a great deal of meaning – mostly a certain nostalgic predisposition. (Obejas apud STAVANS, 2002, p. 374).

In their attempt to survive in the new environment, subjects who experience exile may construct their past with a distorted view of events, fitting the facts in their own perspectives. As pointed out in Chapter 3, Linda Hutcheon states that different historical perspectives result different facts from the same events. (HUTCHEON, 2003, p. 54). The narrator's intention or background determines the narration of events.

In *Memory Mambo*, Juani's father has his own versions of their escape from Cuba to the United States. According to the listeners of his stories, his version of the events would be different. Besides, he alleges that he invented the duct tape and there was some conspiracy that managed to steal his invention. Even when Juani tells the duct tape story, she does not know for sure what is her memory and what she heard in his stories: "I remember all this, but

I don't know if I remember it for real or because I heard the story a million times. My brother Pucho doesn't remember anything, […]. Nena says it's all true, although her memories aren't quite the same as mine […]." (p. 25). It is interesting to observe that even some of the memories they have may not have happened at all. Patricia, Juani's cousin, is the one who is going to deconstruct some of the stories that are allegedly true in their family: "Patricia says it's just a fantasy created in exile, a group hallucination based on my father's constant retelling of the story." (p.25). Patricia seems not contaminated by this collective hallucination. The construction of Juani's family's memory is forged in the stories its members create.

Professor Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos states that to write about memory is to write, on one hand, about the relation between individual and society and, on the other side, about the relation among the past, present and future. According to Santos, not few theorists tell us what we remember at the present is always different from what happened in the past. Santos adds that it is important to discuss the notion that the representation of the past, which appears before our eyes as identical to the original, bringing the illusion that the past is being reproduced literally and covering the difference, may be utilized and manipulated in order to serve the interests of various groups. There are not only illusions in the reconstructions of the past, but collective memories may be understood as collective imaginary and, as such, based on a historic condition. (SANTOS, 2003, p. 186).

According to Sonia Torres, Patricia is presented as a counterpoint to the complicity of the other members of the family, pointing out, throughout the novel, the innumerous interwoven fictions in the family history. (TORRES, 2001, p. 153). The complicity that Juani's family shares has led them to delusional beliefs since they, in a way, corroborate those stories by not contesting them. Actually, some of them were capable of asking her father some questions about the duct tape story, even though they were incredulous, so that he could feel comfortable with it. Gina, Juani's former girlfriend, for example, did not challenge Juani's father, though it took her a great deal of willpower: "I think it's fair to say that, of all our friends, it was Gina […] who had the hardest time with the duct tape story. Mami, Nena and I knew it took an incredible amount of willpower for her to sit through it and not challenge my father, to just bite her lip and say nothing." (p. 25).

The issues that involve living in different cultures are complex. Even when the situations have to do with family relationships, hybridity should be taken into account. As already mentioned, Pauli's attitudes towards her father and his affairs were not welcome by her family. The contact with the American culture contaminated Pauli's behavior towards her own family, and this is often seen as negative. However, when convenient, the family may

take advantage of the contamination provided by the contact with a different culture. When Juani's family decides to fire her cousin Pauli from the Laundromat, the way Nena, Juani's sister, deals with their business is a characteristic that, to a certain extent, helps the family. According to Juani, Nena is "a real good capitalist". (p. 21). This feature of Nena's personality, as it works to the advantage of the family, is seen as a significant instrument for their business success.

Tío Pepe and Juani's father took the decision of firing Pauli because it would be necessary to have another person to chaperon her and there would not be benefit for having her as an employee. Pauli's boyfriends visited her during her shift, causing disturbance. However, the two of them were not capable of firing her because she was family: "That caused quite a sensation. Cubans don't fire family, but we fired Pauli. It was Nena, of course, who did it: Even though they made the decision, neither Tío Pepe nor my father could bring themselves to face Pauli, the family's most difficult child." (p.39). Nena's American way of doing business was helpful since Tío Pepe and Juani's father could not manage to fire Pauli due to the Cuban tradition of not firing members of the family.

When analyzing how politics may interfere in personal matters, it is interesting to observe how the opposite may be represented in Obejas's novel. Xiomara, Juani's mother, utilizes the revolution as a motive for leaving Cuba, as the last straw for a situation that she could no longer deal with: "Frankly, we left Cuba, not because the *milicianos* were after my father for stealing boats, but because of my mother. Not that the revolution had much to do with her reasoning, either. For my mother, the revolution was just the last straw." (p. 31). Juani's mother is a "*café con leche mulata*", who displays internalized prejudice. It is not coincidence that her husband Alberto, Juani's father, is green-eyed and very light-skinned. In Xiomara's attempt to "cleanse" her family genealogy of their black ancestry, she decides to leave Cuba so that her children would not be romantically involved with any person that could have roots that were not of Anglo-Saxon descent:

> Years later, after she'd landed Alberto José Casas y Molina and we were born, her immediate goal became to get us out of Cuba, out of Latin America, out of any country where we might couple with anybody even a shade darker than us: We had to get to the United States which was close by and chock full of frog-eyed people such as Joe Namath and President Ford. Each time Mami remembers the moment when Raúl, Fidel and his supporters waved and laughed at the multi-colored masses lining the streets of Havana on that historic New Year's Day, she's reborn as counterrevolutionary. (p. 35).

Xiomara used political matters to resolve her personal issues. Her racism has led her towards the United States. When the revolution triumphed, she realized that the power in

Cuba could be in the hands of people with black heritage: "[…] nothing stunned my mother more than the fact that that crazy Raúl and his black friends were riding on tanks with Fidel […]. In that instant, my mother – who'd been struggling to pass her entire life – could see that the order of things had just been altered." (p. 35).

Xiomara has spent her life attempting to pass as a white person. After the revolution, she could not cope with the possibility of having black people in Cuban government. Xiomara's attitude represents the discontentment that was felt by many from the white Cuban elite. Richard Gott states that Castro's putting an end to whites-only facilities was not welcome:

> [A]ll whites-only facilities in Cuba were subsequently opened to everyone or closed down. Many whites were unhappy about these developments, or, at best, cynical. Teresa Casuso, an erstwhile friend of Castro who later went into exile, described in a memoir how "employing the Negroes as a tactical weapon" became "an important part of Fidel's overall strategy in Cuba, where he sought to represent himself as the friend and the protector of the oppressed – that is, the Negro and the peasant". The old elite could not forgive Castro, she wrote, for launching "these repressed, long-suffering groups into a crusade of spite and hate". Casuso's words were those of a disgruntled white exile, yet the early years of the Revolution were in no way characterised by black triumph. (GOTT, 2004, p. 174).

The possibility of modifications in the *status quo* of Cuba was more than Xiomara could bear. The only solution she could envisage was the escape from Cuba. Xiomara may take situations that have nothing to do with racism and transform them into a moment of demonstrating her racial prejudice. For instance, when Caridad and Jimmy got married, a musician was hired to play at the wedding ceremony. As the musician had Cuban and Puerto Rican heritage, Xiomara did not approve his hiring due to his ancestry: "'Now every picture of the wedding is going to have a Negro in it', she said, rolling her eyes, as if Mario were actually black instead of *mulato*, or the only black person invited – and as if any of that mattered to anybody but her." (p. 69). Even a professional with Cuban and Puerto Rican origins at the ceremony party was a problem to Juani's mother to deal with.

It is ironical that Xiomara has attempted to "cleanse" her family genealogy by marrying a white man and moving to the United States and, eventually, her children's skin is darker than that of her niece Patricia's and her nephew Manolito's, whose father is an African descendant: "To my mother's chagrin, Patricia and Manolito, the children of her sister Zenaida and the brown-skinned Raúl, are both pale and Anglo-like, with blue veins visible just under rice-paper skin." (p. 35). Even though Tía Zenaida married a man with brown skin, her children did not display their African ancestry.

Another situation that should be considered ironical is the fact that Nena, Juani's sister, falls in love with a black man. Despite Xiomara's effort to prevent her children to be romantically involved with people with dark skin, her daughter moves in with a man that is not only black but also half-Jewish and whose mother is a lesbian black Puerto Rican. Though Xiomara has taken her family overseas in order to avoid this kind of relationship, her objective is not accomplished.

According to Juani, her mother would do anything to deny her real lineage (p. 32). Even though Xiomara's skin color is a real proof of her African heritage, she wants to pass as a white woman. In her denial concerning her own origins, Xiomara accepts her husband's alleged ancestry, in spite of its impossibility to be true. Besides Alberto's light skin, one of the reasons she became interested in him is his supposed lineage: "As we've always been told, we're direct descendants of Bartolomé de Las Casas, better known in Cuban lore as 'The Apostle to the Indies.' Las Casas got this name because of his alleged work protecting the island's indigenous population from the Spaniards' bloodlust." (p. 32). Even though Bartolomé de Las Casas was a priest and supposedly a celibate, Juani's parents have embraced this story fiercely.

Patricia, Juani's cousin, is the one in the family that deconstructs this version of their past. She even affirms that the whole tale is a lie. Bartolomé de Las Casas was a historical character and Patricia claims that "one of the ways Las Casas 'protected' the Indians was by making the first suggestion to the Spanish governor that Africans might be better suited to work in the tropics than the Indians" (p. 34). In fact, Patricia believes that it was how slavery started in Cuba. Interestingly, Patricia's statement portrays an event that is believed to be true. Stuart Hall states: "One paradoxical outcome of Las Casas' campaign was he got Indian slavery outlawed, but was persuaded to accept the alternative of replacing Indians with African slaves, as so the door opened to the horrendous era of New World African slavery." (HALL, 2005a, p. 217).

Patricia also tells Xiomara and Alberto that, if they were descendants of Bartolomé Las Casas, possibly they were descendants of an illegitimate child conceived with some Indian woman he probably raped. Xiomara, however, does not accept that because it would mean that, despite her efforts, they are not as white as she has claimed.

It should be pointed out that Xiomara's attempts to hide her lineage could be noticed even when her children were infants: "When we were little, my mother was always after us: '*Caminen siempre por la sombra*' [...]. She was terrified that too much sun would somehow reveal our real heritage, whether Indian or black." (p. 34). Xiomara, to a certain extent, also

attempted to contaminate her children with racism since she expected them to behave in a way that would not reinforce their African or Indian roots.

It should be mentioned that not only Xiomara displays internalized prejudice. Her sister Tía Zenaida demonstrates racism as well. Although Tía Zenaida married a brown-skinned man and her mother Olga was an African descendant, Tía Zenaida shows that she has prejudice towards black people. When she worked as a cleaner at hotels, she did everything she could not to associate herself with the other cleaning women, who were mostly American born women of African ancestry:

> At the hotels where she scrubbed bathrooms and changed soiled linen, she did everything possible to separate herself from the other cleaning women, most of them African-American. She ate lunch by herself, refusing to sit at a table with them for fear that she'd she perceived as black herself, and wouldn't accept rides from her co-workers and their husbands, even if they lived in the same little block in Brooklyn, because she didn't want to be seen getting out of a car with black people. (p. 103).

Although Tía Zenaida occupied the same professional position her co-workers did, she avoided any kind of contact with them. It seems that she refused to admit the fact that they shared the same African roots. Like her sister, she has attempted to pass as a white woman and, in her pursuit, she did not want any connection with black people. In general terms, Juani's family displays a great deal of prejudice. Tía Zenaida along with her sister Xiomara cannot cope with their African origins.

As this chapter attempts to point out, living in different cultures may interfere in how this subject is going to perceive himself/herself, as well as the environment and the people around him/her. *Memory Mambo* fosters the discussion over the issues of hybridity, prejudice and gender, displaying an interesting portrait of those who do not belong to the homogeneous monolith. Analyzing diasporic subjects is a valuable opportunity to discuss marginalized characters.

In *Memory Mambo*, Juani and her family dwell at the crossroads of cultures which, in a way, forces them to live in constant awareness of their hybridity. They live in the United States and try to incorporate the new culture's customs to their own traditions. Living in two cultures defines them.

5 CONCLUSION

> This is why I will always remain on the margins,
> a stranger among the stones,
> even beneath the friendly sun of this summer's day,
> just as I will remain forever a foreigner,
> even when I return to the city of my childhood
> I carry this marginality, immune to all turning back,
> too *habanera* to be *newyorkina*,
> too *newyorkina* to be
> - even to become again –
> anything else.
>
> Lourdes Casal, "For Ana Veldford"

The verses of the epigraph above, by Lourdes Casal, seem to summarize the issue of inhabiting the borderlands of cultures. While too American to be Cuban and too Cuban to be American, individuals who dwell in both societies, in the end, belong to neither of them. Those subjects have to learn how to live on the margins and how to negotiate with both cultures, while they pursue their own identity.

In this dissertation, I sought to investigate exile, hybridism and the construction of the female diasporic subject in the light of feminist perspectives. Political actions that are accomplished by governments may affect each individual directly, reshaping their own lives. María de los Angeles Torres, for example, states that Cubans' lives were forever altered by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 (TORRES, 2003, p. 1).

The chapter dedicated to the history of Cuba intended to point out, in a brief way, the historical and political intertwining between the United States and Cuba. The consequences of historical events and political deeds have implications on people's daily lives, including the physical moving away from their mother country. In the Cuban case, for example, many people left their country due to political and/or economic reasons. A peculiar situation defines the exile experience that may be observed in the Cuban-American community as this research attempted to display: geographically so close to their motherland and, at the same time, so far away from it.

The novels discussed in this research portray groups of people that felt forced to leave their homeland. Even though these novels do not constitute strict examples of autobiographical narratives, they do provide important and very personal accounts of the diasporic experience. They also provide a valuable opportunity for us to reflect on women's

roles in their attempts to maintain alive the connections between diasporic people and their homeland. María de los Angeles Torres states:

> Cuba became one of the few countries in the world in which citizens had to ask for permission to return to visit as well as to travel abroad. Although travel in modernity can be construed in many ways, in this case it became a means to defy the official order. Women, in particular, were the ones to travel to maintain contact with their relatives. Each journey, in its own way, challenged the foundations of the boundaries, which defined who we are. (TORRES, 2003, p. 4).

The connections that were formed under those circumstances contributed to the construction of the identities of the subjects that were forged throughout this process. Torres states that the visits to Cuba that were permitted by the government provided Cubans with an opportunity to establish or renew ties with their homeland (TORRES, 2003, p. 6). Cuban women have played an important role in this attempt to preserve their homeland's roots and traditions. Torres, for example, adds that her mother kept their Cuban heritage alive, insisted that she and her siblings take Spanish lessons, practicing at the kitchen table, writing letters to her mother's aunts in Cuba. When her family left Cuba, Torres's parents were allowed only one piece of luggage. Her mother chose to fill her suitcase with photographs. (TORRES, 2003, p. 30).

The novels analyzed in this dissertation portray the necessity of coming to terms with a past that may be significantly present in the lives of individuals who experience exile. Torres states that, during her staying in her home country, she came to understand that she did not lose her Cuban past, because it was with her regardless of where she resided physically. (TORRES, 2003, p. 56). Torres adds:

> It was my past, rooted in over five generations of relatives buried on that beautiful island in the Caribbean. I also came to accept that I could not change my past, it was as it was. The heritage, the memories, the fate. I did not have to forfeit my link to the past to become one with my present. I merely had to find a peaceful place where I could enjoy my memories. And where my ghosts could once again dance el *guaguancó*. (TORRES, 2003, p. 56).

The work developed in this dissertation sought to portray subjects who are marked by entangled cultures. Having roots in one country and living in another one defines those subjects and construct their identity. Those individuals may have to cope with their past while attempting to deal with the present. María Cristina García states that "In trying to define their relationship to both Cuba and the United States, most Cuban American authors have come to accepts their hybridity, while others have concluded that they don't fit anywhere." (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 191). The novels analyzed in this research provide the contemporary

literary landscape with an important opportunity to discuss issues related to exile, hybridity and identity. As García claims, “In the process, they [those Cuban American writers] have not only articulated the concerns of their generation but enriched the literature of their adopted country.” (GARCÍA, 1996, p. 191).

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