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Université de Montréal

The Construction of Transnational Identities in
Latina Coming-of-Age Narratives

Par

Jennifer M. Nelson
Département des études anglaises
Faculté des arts et des sciences

Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du grade de
Mâtre ès arts (M.A.)
en études anglaises

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Ce mémoire intitulé:

The Construction of Transnational Identities
in Latina Coming-of-Age Narratives

présenté par:

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Résumé de synthèse

Les changements, très complexes qui ont eu lieu à l'échelle globale ont amené des transformations importantes dans la position de la culture. La diminution de l'importance accordée à la culture Nationale a des implications significatives pour l'identité, la représentation littéraire et l'analyse textuelle. Dans ce mémoire, j'analyse des récits qui portent sur le passage vers l'âge adulte des Latinas (femmes hispaniques aux États-Unis). Ces textes mettent l'accent sur l'identité et la culture comme constructions. Ils mettent en scène également la formation d'identités émergentes et alternatives. Les récits qui examinent les processus de formation identitaire nous offrent d'importants moyens d'autoreprésentation dans un contexte national. Ce qui est encore plus important c'est le fait que les récits nous offrent un espace de convergence où diverses voix peuvent être intégrées et exprimées.

Tout en me concentrant sur les oeuvres publiées de Julio Alvarez, Cristina Garcia, Judith Ortiz Cofer et Esmerelda Santiago, j'aborde la maturation comme une tentative pour faire face à la formation problématique d'une identité qui se situe entre et à l'ultérieur de groupes établis. La description de la construction identitaire dans des circonstances typiques du monde contemporain rend manifeste la nature déficiente des conceptions conventionnelles de la culture nationale, de l'ethnicité et du genre sexuel. Elle met aussi en évidence les projets idéologiques que la théorie et l'institution littéraire imposent aux positions marginalisées.

Chacun des récits analysés dans le mémoire illustre une version du « rêve américain » (« American Dream »), mais certains aspects de la forme standard

traditionnelle sont délibérément changés, soit pour rendre compte de situations différentes soit pour problématiser le modèle originel. En même temps, ces textes sont facilement ajoutés à un corpus canonique modifié. Ils nous offrent seulement assez de différences pour stimuler la discussion, pour représenter les marges de façon minimale et pour renouveler l'institution littéraire sans transgresser complètement ou remplacer des approches conventionnelles. Je me sers de divers travaux théoriques provenant des études littéraires et culturelles pour me concentrer sur la représentation des identités ethniques, sexuelles et nationales comme sites de confrontation et résistance à l'assimilation culturelle. La plupart des travaux théoriques dans le domaine des études transnationales n'incluent pas le genre sexuel dans leur analyse de la formation culturelle et identitaire. Dans leur omission des problématiques reliées au genre sexuel, les études transnationales culturelles ont exclu un aspect crucial de l'identité. Par son inclusion du genre sexuel, ce mémoire offre une perspective alternative des textes jadis définis comme ethniques, nationaux ou appartenant à la littérature féminine.

Abstract

The highly complex changes occurring on a global scale have led to wide-ranging transformations in the position of culture. The shift away from nation-based culture has significant implications for identity, literary representations, and textual analysis. In this thesis, I analyze Latina coming-of-age narratives. The texts reveal the constructed nature of identity and culture. They also depict the formation of emerging and alternate identities. Narratives tracing the process of identity formation offer an important means for self-representation within a national context. More importantly, narratives offer a space of convergence where multiple voices can be incorporated and expressed.

Focusing upon the recently published works of Julia Alvarez, Cristina Garcia, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Esmeralda Santiago, I approach coming of age as an attempt to negotiate the problematic nature of forming identity between and within established groups. The depiction of identity construction under contemporary circumstances points to the inadequacy of conventional conceptions of national culture, ethnicity, and gender. It also foregrounds the ideological agendas theory and the literary institution impose upon marginalized positions.

Each of these narratives depicts a form of the 'American Dream', aspects of the standard traditional version are changed deliberately, either to accommodate different realities or to challenge the original model. At the same time, these texts are readily added to a modified canon. They offer just enough difference to provoke discussion, minimally represent the margins, and rejuvenate the literary institution without going so far as

to revolutionize or displace mainstream approaches. Relying upon theoretical work in literary and cultural studies, I focus on the representation of ethnic, gender, and national identity as a site of confrontation and resistance to cultural assimilation. The majority of theoretical work in transnational studies neglects to incorporate gender into the analysis of culture and identity formation. In failing to account for gender issues, transnational cultural studies has excluded a crucial aspect of identity. Through the inclusion of gender, this analysis offers an alternative perspective of texts previously defined as ethnic, national, and women's literature.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Latina Writing, Women's Literature, Caribbean Literature.

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Introduction: Transnational Cultural Studies and Latina Subjectivity

As territorial boundaries are broken and redefined, the role of the nation-state as a central site of power and identification is disintegrating. Power is increasingly dissociated from the state through the strengthening of global economics, and the expanding role of local and supranational political institutions. One of the many consequences of this is a disruption of the link between culture and nation. The nation, combined with other agents, remains active in the process of formulating and defining culture, but the role of cultural products within the nation-state has been drastically reconfigured. Expansion in the circulation of people and ideas outside traditional boundaries and pathways intensifies the need for innovative responses to changed circumstances. Similarly, the demand for alternative approaches to cultural production continuously affects both the kinds of literary texts produced, and the ways in which they are transmitted, contextualized, and valued.

The shift away from nation-based culture has significant implications for identity formation, literary representations, and textual analysis. There is growing need to account for experiences of hybridity, deterritorialization, and diaspora that rise out of the legacy of cultural contact and colonial imperialism. Wide-ranging developments in communications technology and altered migration patterns cause boundaries to disintegrate while opening new spaces for the construction of culture and identity. These shifts also provoke transitions in how culture and identity are constituted as traditional conceptions are faced with infusions, encounters, and confrontations from entirely new or previously unrecognized experience.

Transnational cultural studies is an attempt to address both the changes in global realities and the associated variations in cultural production that arise out of current forms of interaction: “The term ‘transnational’ is used to signal the fluidity with which ideas, objects, capital, and people now move across borders and boundaries” (Basch et al. 27). Much of the theoretical work on transnationalism comes out of anthropological inquiries into globalization. In particular, Arjun Appadurai’s examination of global cultural flows explores many of the essential concerns transnationalism raises for culture and cultural studies. In their recent book *Nations Unbound*, Basch, Shiller, and Blanc approach transnationalism through an examination of migrants’ social relations as they live within, between, and among several nations simultaneously. Transnational considerations are surfacing in literary studies, though only recently are they applied to texts directly. In his book *National Culture and the Global System*, Frederick Buell makes some reference to transnationalism in his analysis of globalization and literary theory. These projects are the beginnings of an investigation into the changing relationship between nation, culture, and literature in a transnational setting.

Relying upon theoretical work in transnational cultural studies, the emphasis of this thesis is a study of recently published literary texts that make central the representation of transnational subjectivity. This analysis focuses on selected U.S. Latina coming-of-age narratives because they place at the forefront issues of identity, gender, and ethnicity in a transnational context. The enormous range of associations people maintain with particular nations generates numerous variations in transnational experience. While some characteristics are intrinsic to

specific transnationalities, the objective of this analysis is to offer insights into aspects that are common across national and cultural combinations.

This project takes an approach that is compatible with, but to some extent separate from, that taken by current transnational theory. In drawing upon literary texts that make transnationality central, the exploration into subject formation, identity and representation intersects with work already done on the broader considerations of nation and culture. In this way, the examples addressed here can contribute to the ongoing study of transnationalism, while also offering a useful application and inquiry into current theory.

I have focused upon the U.S. because it is the site of an expansive intermingling of diasporas. Frederick Buell describes this in the following way:

The resurgence of immigration since the 1965 liberalization of immigration law provided an important new force for change in notions of cultural identity in the United States . . . (It brought a decentering Third World influx into colonial and neocolonial cores, and it was part of a larger movement toward the globalization of many areas of economic, social, and cultural life, a process that includes the deterritorialization of culture and the globalization of "dwelling." (196)

This process of globalization is easily identified in the urban areas of the United States which reveal immediately the intermingling of people, cultures, and economic flows. In particular, New York City has wide-ranging global connections making it a site of identification for a variety of cultures and diasporas.¹

¹ Constant flows of people, ideas, and cultural products allow for the reconfiguration of cultural identity to a greater extent than previously possible: "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one

As Spanish-speakers, immigrants of Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican origin are defined ethnically in the U.S. as Hispanic or Latina. At the same time, they mark a uniquely disruptive position because of the dynamics of political and economic relations. The existence of a strong cultural community of Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans in the United States creates certain complex diasporic patterns of citizenship, national and cultural identity. The representation of these complicated networks of association foregrounds the elaborate conditions Buell's sense of "decentering" brings to subject formation.

The national affiliations represented in the literary texts studied here are limited to Caribbean-American Latinas because there is little written about their representation, in spite of the fact that they pose a unique and complex intersection of postcolonial nationalities and U.S. ethnicity. Latina subjectivity can be understood as distinct from U.S. culture or as a part of it. In terms of political representation, positioning identities as assimilationist or resistant is fundamentally dependent upon culture and is crucial to furthering broader agendas. This becomes a central issue in the construction of any transnational subjectivity. In mediating the images imposed by the U.S. with an affiliation with their original home, the subjects narrated in these texts present the forces acting to define Latinas, alongside an assertion of self-definition.

Latina narratives offer a useful case for review for several reasons. "Latina(o)" identity transcends simple ethnic definitions because it incorporates numerous traditions and races.² Therefore, Chicanas can

another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (Said xxvi).

² There is some debate as to whether or not Latinos should be considered a single, cohesive group. This is discussed at some length in Ilan Stavans' introduction to a recent anthology of Latino writing (*New World: Young Latino Writers*, 1997).

self-identify as Latinas without losing any aspect of themselves; just as a Cuban-American can consider herself Latina without any conflict or compromise with what constitutes Chicana identity. This space for identification reflects the re-orientation of what constitutes an ethnic, national, or cultural group. The range of inclusion is unified in part by a common language, although even this is problematic; Spanish-usage by Latinas in reality and in representation occurs along a wide spectrum of possibilities and purposes.³ The texts that I have chosen to analyze are all originally written in English but at least two (*Dreaming in Cuban* and *When I was Puerto Rican*) were subsequently published in Spanish translations.

Latina gender identity involves ties to women across ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. It also includes content distinctive to Latinas (i.e., intersections of race and gender that are strictly Latina). Narratives and representations of women explore the issues of culture and ethnic construction as well as variations in gender roles. In "A Mosaic of Latino Literature in the United States," Roberta Fernández states the following:

(T)he content of Latino literature is closely identified with a discourse of contestation and self-definition. In addition, women writers also challenge the patriarchal traditions of their own culture and, thereby, create an even more complex literature of multiple dimensions. Crossing boundaries has become the dominant metaphor for both the content and the style of contemporary Latino literature, with its emphasis of individual and group identity. (xxv)

³ Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the dynamics of Spanish-usage among U.S. Latinas in her essay "Linguistic Terrorism" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 1987). In this she describes the discomfort and inadequacy many Chicanas feel in speaking Spanish with Latinas raised in Spanish. She argues that the negative regard for Spanish in the U.S. is creating and fostering a sense of shame. This is further complicated by the disrupted education and environmental exposure to Spanish which affects the ability of many Latinas to speak "correct" Spanish.

Latina writing creates and presents an ethnic identity, a woman's voice, and something specific to the dynamics of both: the space it marks and claims, and the boundary-lines it occupies, constructs, and disrupts. This focus on gender gives added insight into the resonating effects migration and culture contact have on identity formation.

What defines Latina identity is, in part, a boundary of difference relative to "mainstream white American culture" (though this is also far more diverse than such a simplistic label indicates). The boundaries of Latina identity rely upon traditional identities and a permissive disregard for certain transgressions of their boundaries. Latina identity is composed of traditional identities (based on ethnicity, nationality, etc.) but also transcends these categories in particular ways to construct an expansive but still coherent identity. This conforms to the position Edward Said proposes in *Culture and Imperialism* :

(T)here has been a gathering awareness nearly everywhere of the lines between cultures, the divisions and differences that not only allow us to discriminate one culture from another, but also enable us to see the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation.
(Said 15)

Inclusive of numerous national origins, hybrid identities, and immigrant experience, Latinas mark a new identity formation that bridges traditional constructions with transnational realities. Latina identity points to the space between cultures referred to by Said, while simultaneously constructing a group that absorbs and reconfigures aspects of pre-existing cultures. This serves to underscore the diversity and changing nature of individual cultures, and the importance of culture in delineating and defining new identities.

The idea of “immigrant” is problematic for numerous reasons pertinent to this area of study. In particular, I will focus on the use of the ethnic immigrant in U.S. culture both as a means of separation and of self-assertion. In terms of literature, this contributes to the representative images attached to the ethnic immigrant, and to the underlying ideological positions which shape and influence literary analysis. This cycle of mutual formulation and re-enforcement is central to identity formation and to power relations. An effort is made throughout this thesis to register the crucial role literary representation has in political initiatives. However, the focus of this study is cultural representation; any attention given to ideology will be held strictly to its relevance and application to literary studies.

The four aspects of the relationship between transnational subjectivity and issues of representation that I will address are: ethnicity, nation, gender, and literary institution. The constitution of identity is crucial to the ways in which we think about ourselves and others; it also significantly affects the ongoing shifts in power relations. The role of ethnic identity is increasingly important in the self-assertion of groups within the United States. It is also a source for constructing social and economic hierarchies on the basis of race and language. The texts studied here depict the effects and tensions of living within a linguistic minority that is not accommodated for by mainstream U.S. society.

Gender identity is affected by the interaction between cultures that occurs in transnational migration. These texts mark the conflicting demands Latinas must negotiate between the relatively strict upbringing their parents give and the growing influence of U.S. culture. The issues surrounding gender roles, respect for patriarchal power, and the

formation of sexual identity are all central to the coming-of-age narratives and point to the ways that gender is subject to re-definition through transnational contact. Challenges in asserting ethnic and gender identity as Latinas also raises considerations of assimilation and resistance that underscore the significance of differential power relations and the potentially destructive nature of cultural contact.

As a rapidly growing ethnic minority, Latina identity is useful in a critical analysis of the construction of national identity in the United States. In discussing the significance of national context on the formation of ethnic identities, it is equally important to recognize the impact of Latinas on the construction of "America." With current shifts in global dynamics, ethnic immigrants increasingly maintain contact with their "home countries"; this has significant implications for the United States as it makes efforts to both include and perpetually exclude ethnic minorities. As Grewal and Kaplan note in their book *Scattered Hegemonies*, there is a tendency within Western theoretical discourse to separate ethnic minorities while maintaining a simple (and simplistic) view of their own position:

(W)hat seems to get theorized in the West as "hybridity" remains enmeshed in the gaze of the West; Westerners see themselves alone as the ones that sort, differentiate, travel among, and become attached or attracted to the communities constituted by diasporas of human beings and the trade of commodities. . . (Grewal and Kaplan 7)

I will view the United States as object of analysis. This serves to recognize that just as having the U.S. as a cultural context for identity formation

changes the experience of Latinas, the presence of multiply located subjects alters the shape of national identity.

Finally, I will critically assess the role these coming-of-age narratives play in terms of representation in the literary institution. As Ortega and Sternbach note: "(F)ailure to acknowledge Latina(o) presence and cultural production reaffirms the concept that U.S. culture, and hence its literature, is only white and middle-class" (5). The U.S. literary institution, while including a few select "minority texts," frequently accepts those texts that can be easily domesticated. However, through reading practices and theoretical perspectives that emphasize an empowerment of these representations and an allowance for diverse and heterogeneous images, "minority" literatures can change the literary institution and work to reconfigure our notions of what constitutes "American" literature.

All texts selected for this analysis, regardless of genre, fall under the category of coming-of-age narratives. By definition, a bildungsroman is "a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity" (Baldick 24). While these texts could be categorized as bildungsroman, "coming-of-age" allows for a degree of differentiation from the tradition affiliated with the term "bildungsroman." The coming-of-age narrative deliberately manipulates and defies traditional boundaries of genre.

I have chosen to direct my study to transnational subjectivity as observed in a series of fictional and autobiographical texts. What becomes of particular interest in these texts is that the coming of age traced in the narrative mirrors the formation of subjectivity on a wider scale, while also

problematizing it. Specifically, the formations of ethnic, national, and gender identity offer revealing insights into how transnationality is negotiated, constructed, and represented. In analyzing identity, it is possible to mark the emergence of transnational subjectivity more clearly, because establishing an autonomous sense of self is central to the narrative. Interactions between characters mark a convergence of assimilation and resistance. This is generally resolved through the construction of an alternate identity that selectively incorporates aspects of its component cultural and national origins without being entirely determined by any of these sources. In this way, traditional national and cultural identification become resources from which a transnational subject constructs identity.

In structuring these narratives as adult reflections on childhood, they depict reflections on childhood innocence and the initiation into adulthood. The contrast of child and adult allows for a clear sense of authority that shows both the ways in which girls are socialized, and how power relations are disrupted by changed circumstances. This point of transition also offers an opportunity to present the first direct contact with problems of gender, race, and culture. It captures an element of shock and tragedy; this forcible break from innocence allows a heightened awareness of loss. The characters can be read sympathetically while critical attention can be given directly to contextual forces that act upon the child's coming of age.

Transnationalism holds serious implications for power relations between dominant and minority positions, and for our theoretical understandings of national culture, ethnicity, gender, and marginality. Latina coming-of-age narratives reflect the role of cultural production in

subject formation in a way that recognizes the constructed nature of identity while still pointing to the importance and power of those constructions. They offer insights into the formation of transnational subjectivity and, consequently, a broader understanding of the changing position of culture. Transnational subjects and the identities they circulate are defined by ongoing historical processes; their construction in the collective imagination and their representation through cultural production is the site of ideological struggles and an engagement with current shifting circumstances. This emerging identity reveals that narratives provide a space for assembling otherwise disconnected elements for an individual who sources her identity in multiple locations.

Chapter One: Constructions of Ethnicity

An examination of transnationalism in relation to ethnic and gender identity first requires some consideration of issues confronting identity formation. Identity acts as an outward expression of subjectivity and as an internal recognition of difference. As María Victoria Polanco argues in her essay "Cultural Identity and Communication,"

Identity must be considered in relation to other people like us, but above all to others who are different to ourselves. Identity is a matter of recognition and representation, social relations and differences. It is a cultural sign, so it can be reformed and constructed. And it is plural, since it is our social and cultural identities that tell which symbolic universes we belong to.

(118)

Identity serves as a means of categorizing people and establishing an associated series of defining behaviors, features, and cultural practices. This functions as a unifying force that promotes a recognition of commonality. At the same time, it involves self-definition through oppositional relationships, and produces a degree of limitation that comes from any set definition.

Peter Caws defines identity as "a *reflexive* relation, a relation of myself to myself, but it can be a mediated relation: I relate myself through my interaction with others *and with the world* " (378). Identity is constructed through interchanges between two primary sources: self-image and external interpretation. Subjects actively participate in self-representation but are affected by forces from outside, particularly by prevailing perceptions of difference (race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, language, etc.). The balance of power between these external and internal

elements, and the ways in which they contribute to representation, are crucial factors in the formation of identities, and in determining their relative positions of power. Motivated in part by ideological concerns, the creation and circulation of representations reveals an underlying order between center and marginalized positions.

In his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969) Frederik Barth describes ethnic groups as organized interactions through which people identify themselves, define and transfer common culture, and form recognizable boundaries in relation to others (10-12). While Barth's work gives ethnicity and culture a degree of substance and cohesion beyond what existing circumstances allow, his view of ethnic groups as defined by boundaries is useful. The following points concerning social boundaries provide a framework for further considerations of ethnicity:

If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion. Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories; and the different ways in which they are maintained, not only by a once-and-for-all recruitment but by continual expression and validation, need to be analysed. (15)

This approach to ethnicity is notably more flexible than most definitions because it permits a fluidity both in terms of affiliation, and in what constitutes a particular group. This allows for change and development rather than a static and rigidly bounded group.⁵

⁵ The construction of identity is dependent upon relationships of similarity and difference: "Like other kinds of identities, ethnic identity is not a fixed nature or an autonomous, unified, self-generating quality. It is a self-awareness based on differentiation and contextualization" (Xu 275). It is crucial to recognize that transnational experience complicates both the process of differentiation and the practical possibilities for simple contextualization.

It is important to recognize that ethnicity may include easily identifiable outward expressions such as food, music, style of dress, or linguistic markers (ranging from slang or particular speech patterns to a separate language). However, these surface features are not the entire definition of an ethnic identity, nor does possessing them certify ethnic affiliation; the strength of ethnicity is determined by the degree to which people associate themselves with it. Openness to adaptation, and the use of boundaries as the basic foundation for describing groups, are key elements in understanding the possibilities ethnicity offers as a concept, and the ways in which the process of transnationalism tests the limits of ethnicity.⁶

Most theoretical discussion recognizes the role ethnicity plays in advancing group interests. In his book *Urban Ethnicity*, Abner Cohen argues:

In many cases members who are third or more generation immigrants . . . have lost their original language and many of their indigenous customs. But they have continuously re-created their distinctiveness in different ways, not because of conservatism, but because these ethnic groups are in fact interest groupings whose members share some common economic and political interest and who, therefore, stand in the continuous competition for power with other groupings.

(xv)

The consequences of transnationalism varies across generations. The narratives studied here present the relationships exiled and migrant

⁶ It is useful to recognize that many aspects of identity are formed through a differentiation from a given context. As Polanco notes in her article: "Ethnic identity is not merely the synthesis of factors that distinguish us from others within the social group. Above all it is something that comes from outside, a relationship to confrontation that allows one to identify and to assert oneself continuously" (118). Because transnational migration entails changing context, it affects identity and ethnicity in profound and fundamental ways. Without a solid and lasting frame of reference, identities rigidly attached to a particular location are disrupted through interactions with more fluid, multiply located identities.

parents have with their children, first-generation immigrants. All of the narratives trace the coming of age of individual women and, in the process, depict the women observed around them. Older women, who have established themselves entirely within one national and cultural context must find ways to maintain sufficient contact with what they know, or settle themselves in the United States. By contrast, the children who migrate are relatively unattached. While they know their home, it becomes a distant memory as they locate themselves (by choice or by force) into U.S. society. Their stories reveal the diversity of positions across a single generation while also recognizing the unifying forces that endure in spite of changed expectations and cultural reference points. Latinas assert a heterogeneous identity that accommodates plurality and still serves as a unified representation.

In reading these coming-of-age narratives, I have focused upon constructions of ethnicity and the ways in which group boundaries are formed and disrupted. The relationship between ethnicity, transnational migration, and Latina identity is central to these texts. In her two collections of autobiographical stories and essays, Judith Ortiz Cofer traces the formation of her own identity in Puerto Rico and the United States. Central to both *Silent Dancing* (1990) and *The Latin Deli* (1993) is the role of ethnic and national identity in various contexts and the meaning individuals give to them in each location. Cofer emphasizes her mother's response to moving periodically between Puerto Rico and the U.S., relative to her own experiences of these events as a child. Her observations depict a clearly defined difference in their negotiation of these migrations. Similarly, in her autobiography *When I Was Puerto Rican* (1993), Esmeralda Santiago traces her family's move from rural Puerto Rico to a

permanent life in New York City. Her story reveals the complex demands migration places upon identity formation, and the impact multiple, often contradictory, cultural forces have on self-definition.

The coming-of-age narratives of both Julia Alvarez and Cristina Garcia fictionalize the stories of families moving from the Caribbean to New York during the same time frame as Cofer and Santiago. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) is a series of interwoven stories told from the alternating perspectives of four sisters and narrated by one of them, Yolanda (Yo). Growing up in New York, the girls must contend with life in exile from the Dominican Republic and attempt to balance the tensions between American life and the demands of their parents' culture. In *¡Yo!* (1997) the characters of the first novel narrate themselves, revising some of the events told previously and recalling additional stories. Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) is a novel that crosses over between Cuba and New York. Drawing upon the women of a single family, separated by generation and geographical distance, this text explores a range of responses to the Cuban Revolution, the experiences of exile (both inside and outside of Cuba), and its subsequent influence upon the formation of identity.

The stories often draw upon school settings to depict the effects of U.S. education, as well as the position of ethnic minorities among students. All of the narratives analyzed here speak of large, segregated classes in public schools; they represent an education system which only neglectfully includes minorities and that re-enforces the racially and ethnically-based social hierarchy in place in the community. The process of education is used as a means of defining the two systems of socialization that contextualize transnational coming of age.

In crossing the boundary from home to school each day, Judith Ortiz Cofer's experience demands a recognition of ethnicity in a way that her mother's does not. Cofer must confront and negotiate the systems at work in the U.S., while her mother can effectively isolate herself within the Puerto Rican community. In "The Myth of the Latin Woman," Cofer discusses the differences that define the coming-of-age process as culturally and ethnically specific:

Though I know that most adolescents feel out of step much of the time, I also know that for the Puerto Rican girls of my generation that sense was intensified. The way our teachers and classmates looked at us that day in school was just a taste of the culture clash that awaited us in the real world . . .
(*Latin Deli* 150)

In Cofer's collections social order is repeatedly described as based upon ethnicity.⁷ The politics of race in the U.S. meant that whether Latinas chose (or had the opportunity) to retain a sense of ethnic identity, it would be imposed from the outside. Cofer describes the strict academic screening and visit to her home that was required before allowing her to attend a predominantly white catholic school ("The Looking-Glass Shame," *Silent Dancing* 125).

Cofer describes a classroom situation which foregrounds the conflicts of cultural contact and social hierarchy. The scene is of Cofer's first day of third grade in the United States having just returned from Puerto Rico:

§

⁷ "I came there from Puerto Rico, thinking myself a pretty girl, and found that the hierarchy for popularity was as follows: pretty white girl, pretty Jewish girl, pretty Puerto Rican girl, pretty black girl" ("The Story of My Body," *Latin Deli* 143).

Once again I was the child in the cloud of silence, the one who had to be spoken to in sign language as if she were a deaf-mute. Some of the children even raised their voices when they spoke to me, as if I had trouble hearing. Since it was a large troublesome class composed mainly of black and Puerto Rican children, with a few working-class Italian children interspersed, the teacher paid little attention to me. I re-learned the language quickly by the immersion method.

(65-66)

Re-orienting herself to the U.S. and re-gaining her English language abilities are not facilitated by the classroom environment. In the context of the classroom and in her community, Cofer's experience of the education system is described as primarily a process of socialization through which she is defined as an ethnic immigrant. This intersects with the shifting politics and meanings of race and ethnicity in accordance with location: "I was born a white girl in Puerto Rico but became a brown girl when I came to live in the United States" (*Latin Deli* 135). Underlying the system of public education in the United States was a process of separating communities based upon race.

In "Angels on the Ceiling," Esmeralda Santiago describes her early experiences dealing with the social hierarchy and its intersections with race and language:

The Brooklyn Puerto Ricans spoke English, and often no Spanish at all. To them, Puerto Rico was the place where their grandparents lived, a place they visited on school and summer vacations, a place which they complained was backward and mosquito-ridden. Those of us for whom Puerto Rico was still a recent memory were also split into two groups: the ones who longed for the island and the ones who wanted to forget it as soon as possible.

(*When I Was Puerto Rican* 230)

This narrative defines a social structure similar to that described by Cofer; it also recognizes the divisions and classifications within ethnic communities, thereby undermining the homogenizing effect ethnic definitions can have. The question of similarity and difference between individuals depends entirely upon perspective. On one hand, students with a Puerto Rican background have their “home” in common. However, this is quickly complicated by the range of positions and affiliations individuals take in terms of ethnicity and nationality.

Cofer also recounts her awareness that a racial and ethnic hierarchy was being negotiated by her family. In “One More Lesson,” Cofer’s father acquires an apartment for the family outside of “the ‘vertical barrio’ the tenement Puerto Ricans called *El Building*” (63). To do this her father must convince the Jewish landlord that his family is suitable:

Apparently, my father had convinced him and his brother . . . that we were not the usual Puerto Rican family. My father’s fair skin, his ultra-correct English, and his Navy uniform were a good argument. Later it occurred to me that my father had been displaying me as a model child when he took me to the store with him. (63)

The narrative continues by making note that her mother was not present for this, and that her “Latin beauty” would have complicated the appearance of “respectability”. In acquiring this apartment, the goal of proving their “worthiness” is achieved. However, Cofer notes that the impact of separating from the ethnic hierarchy has lasting consequences:

(O)ur new home was truly in exile . . . Mother lapsed into silence herself, suffering from *La Tristeza*, the sadness that only place induces and only place cures. But Father relished silence, and we were taught that silence was something to be cultivated and practiced. (64)

The sense of exile and displacement reveals the different responses each family member has to living in the U.S.: Cofer's mother lives physically in the U.S. but is attached only to what reminds her of Puerto Rico, Cofer's father works to set his family apart from the Puerto Rican community, and Judith must negotiate both positions while also interacting actively with "mainstream America".

It is important to note that Cofer's mother maintains the sense of a Puerto Rican home within the private space of their home. It is also significant that Cofer's father rejects the community of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. in his efforts to separate his family from the stereotypes attached to their ethnic group, and not from Puerto Rican culture.⁸ Ethnic identification becomes more complicated in Judith's position because she does not have the option of holding on to Puerto Rican life; her experience of it is consistently disrupted by moves to the U.S. and her distance from it makes immediate identification outside her grasp. Public school demands that she confront the tensions of ethnicity while also contending with the usual strains of coming of age. She is also not permitted (or inclined) to reject the Puerto Rican ethnic community established around her, even as her father is determined that her family separate from it .

The experience of Latina immigrants is further affected by language; Latinas are visible and "vocal" minorities, switching between Spanish

⁸ "We were going to prove how respectable we were by being the opposite of what our ethnic group was known to be - we should be quiet and inconspicuous" (64).

and English in addition to negotiating race, class, national and ethnic shifts. The often conflicting cultural demands that come from moving across boundaries are complicated and defined by language. Cofer's story "Primary Lessons" shows the effect a single period of living in the U.S. has on a child's impressions, fears, and development:

Only I knew what I meant by saying in Spanish that I did not speak Spanish. I had spent my early childhood in the U.S. where I lived in a bubble created by my Puerto Rican parents in a home where two cultures and languages became one. I learned to listen to the English from the television with one ear while I heard my mother and father speaking in Spanish in the other. I thought I was an ordinary American kid - and that everyone's parents spoke a secret second language at home. *(Silent Dancing 52)*

Cofer's sense that a bi-igual household is "ordinary" in America foregrounds an important point about ethnicity in the United States. The reality of maintaining two languages in a family is increasingly common in American families. However, this is contrasted by the active efforts towards a limited assimilation of ethnic immigrants encouraging an acknowledgment of the diversity in American culture only to the extent that it does not threaten the dominant position of white, mainstream, English-speaking America. Cofer cannot convey to her parents that she is caught between two cultures. At the same time, she is prevented from entirely identifying herself with an "ordinary" American experience because the social and educational systems at work in the United States only offer a limited acceptance of her reality.

In many cases, and in all of the narrative representations discussed here, the experience of growing up in the U.S. means a clear division by language - Spanish defines home, family, and private interactions while

English stands for public, external, official, and classroom. The process of assimilation means the loss of Spanish for many Latinas as the pressure of a predominantly English-speaking environment (and the position of authority English holds in defining economic opportunities) privileges the use of English at the expense of Spanish.

Esmeralda Santiago describes her enrollment in a New York public school in which she avoids being held back a year by convincing an administrator to allow her a semester trial period to prove she can learn “inglish” (226). This encounter highlights generational differences when Santiago’s mother is displaced in the discussion of her daughter’s academic level because her English is not sufficient to deal with the school official. Santiago’s request not to repeat the seventh grade is justified by her straight A’s in Puerto Rico, but her behavior is shocking both to the administrator and her mother:

In Puerto Rico if I’d been that pushy, I would have been called *mal educada* by the Mr. Grant equivalent and sent home with a note to my mother. But here it was my teacher who was getting a note, I got what I wanted, and my mother was sent home. (227)

However, the class Esmeralda is placed in to prove herself is “where the administration sent kids with all sorts of problems none of which, from what I could see, had anything to do with their ability to learn but more with their willingness to do so” (228). There is only a limited escape from the racial and linguistically based social hierarchy of school (and of the U.S. generally). However, Santiago’s persistence does get her further than silence would have.

In all of the texts, the ability to communicate in English becomes a means for disrupting traditional patterns of authority between adults and children, and between men and women. Still, the power of language skills requires a confrontation with the assimilation of values that English transmits. Few have the option of removing themselves from this process because survival requires children to acquire English, and to negotiate the precarious position of adults who have not been educated in English.

More complicated are the transnational experiences that these languages must convey through their meanings. Cofer describes this in the following way:

(W)e led a dual existence: speaking Spanish at home with her, acting out our parts in her traditional play, while also daily pretending assimilation in the classroom, where in the early sixties, there was no such thing as bilingual education. But, to be fair, we were not the only Puerto Rican children leading a double life, and I have always been grateful to have kept my Spanish. My trouble with my Mother comes when she and I try to define and translate key words for both of us, words such as "woman" and "mother". (*Silent Dancing* 152)

Even in the same language, the understanding of fundamental experiences becomes difficult to communicate. This is in part because the meaning and content of these words is defined differently. Words become inadequate to convey the changes which occur naturally within cultures over time. This is further complicated by the complete shift of reference points that migration brings. These breakdowns speak to the wide range of experience individuals of similar background (and even the same family) contend with. The movement between contexts becomes a point of departure that directs people with a common past into quite different perspectives and identities.

Santiago recounts the negotiation she must make between her private life and the pressures of a changed context. Unlike Cofer's mother who, while physically in the U.S., was mentally in Puerto Rico, Santiago's mother chose to move her family to New York and is actively involved in creating a life there. The struggle for economic self-sufficiency is central to all of Santiago's stories set in the U.S. and her mother is consistently portrayed as working hard in unskilled jobs. In "You Don't Want To Know," Santiago describes her trip to the welfare office with her mother after she is laid off. The significance of language and ethnicity is emphasized in the following:

I was always afraid that if I said something wrong, if I mispronounced a word or used the wrong tense, the social workers would say no, and we might be evicted from our apartment, or the electricity would be shut off, or we'd freeze to death because Mami couldn't pay for heating fuel. (250)

The strain and anxiety of ensuring that her family would survive becomes dependent upon Esmeralda's ability to speak English and her demonstration that they are "worthy" of assistance.

To further complicate the situation, Esmeralda is obligated to translate for other women at the welfare office, most of whom are in a position similar to her mother's. However, she is also faced with ethical decisions which implicitly demand she choose her loyalties:

Women with accents that weren't Puerto Rican claimed they were so that they could reap the benefits of American citizenship. A woman I was translating for once said, "These *gringos* don't know the difference anyway. To them we're all *spiks*." I didn't know what to do . . . But I worried that if people from other countries passed as Puerto Ricans in order to cheat the government, it reflected badly on us. (250-251)

While Santiago's mother is engaged in the social and economic systems, the demands placed upon her are different from those which her daughter must face. In crossing between the cultural and social boundaries of Puerto Rico and New York, Santiago's narrative defines the places where those boundaries produce a friction in her development; one that will not allow her to retreat to a single culture, or to compromise the two easily. Her awareness and experience of living as an ethnic immigrant constantly requires a mediation of the allegiances, responsibilities, and the expectations of two competing influences.

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents foregrounds language in the title and throughout the text. Accents mark the Latina immigrant, and the sense of loss is one that is both sought and resisted. Language, to a certain extent, defines their degree of assimilation. As teenagers in the U.S., the girls work to rid themselves of their accents and to fit in with their surrounding environment. However, smoothing an accent is a loss: a loss of origins, of culture, and a part of themselves. Even after acquiring English, the girls are at times unable to understand the context they find themselves in, or to convey their sense of a situation in either language. In the story "Trespass," Carla recounts her first year in the United States. She is tormented by boys who mock her accent (152) and is then victimized sexually by a man on her way home from school (156). When the police arrive to take her statement she struggles to find words to explain what has happened:

They had come to this country before she had reached puberty in Spanish, so a lot of key words she would have been picking up in the last year, she had missed. Now, she was learning English in a catholic classroom, where no nun had ever mentioned the words she was needing. (163)

Where pronunciation comes to stand for the degree to which girls have absorbed U.S. influences, the absence of words points to the gaps in knowledge the girls experience through their shifting between cultures. It also shows that the girls come to learn language through experiences, and reflects the difference between the ability to speak a language, and the ability to fully grasp and use the meanings it carries.

In Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*, the character of Pilar is defined as an ethnic minority in the U.S. and an outsider in Cuba. While familiar with both Spanish and English, her identity cannot be fully expressed in either language. The novel also points to the failure of language to capture events and the breakdown of communication between generations. This is contrasted by Pilar's ability to spiritually connect with her grandmother: "She closes her eyes and speaks to her granddaughter, imagines her words as slivers of light piercing the murky night" (7).

In her article "Displacements and Autobiography in Cuban American Fiction," Isabel Alvarez-Borland raises the relationship of Pilar and linguistic expression in the following way:

The tales contained in Pilar's diary seem to fall into two categories: those in which language loss is directly related to the exile experience, and those in which loss of voice transcends exile and becomes a metaphor for existential alienation. . . Thematically, Pilar's anxiety about losing the language of her culture is manifested through her obsession with painting and in her ruminations about visual texts.

(Alvarez-Borland 46)

Dreaming in Cuban represents the need for alternative forms of thought and expression. Pilar dreams in Cuban, indicating something larger than language: a dream that encompasses her experience and sense of place. At the close of the novel she has gone to Cuba:

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 . . . (235)

She also turns to artistic statements as a way of recording, recognizing, and speaking her position. Her painting for the bakery (138-144), the portrait of Celia (232-233), and her music, all mark spaces where simple dependence on language is insufficient; they also point to locations where ethnic borders are broken. Pilar's expressions are not confined to "Cuban" or "American" classifications. Instead, they show the cultural hybridity that comes out of transnationality and reflect the fact that neither Cuba nor the U.S. can be accurately defined as homogeneous. She uses art and music as mediums to express herself:

I play Lou and Iggy Pop and this new band the Ramones whenever I paint. I love their energy, their violence, their incredible grinding guitars. It's like an artistic form of assault. I try to translate what I hear into colors and volumes and lines that confront people, that say, 'Hey, we're here too and what we think matters!' or more often just 'Fuck you!' (135)

The use of the word "translate" in this context is not surprising. Pilar's influences range from the Velvet Underground to Celia Cruz, reflecting that the position she carves for herself is by her choice both transnational and transgressive. The diverse experiences and perspectives across and within generations point to a wide range of possibilities within an ethnic group but also stretch the meaning of ethnicity further as transnational experiences overtake and complicate any direct national and cultural affiliations.

Each narrative speaks to the search for understanding, the development of identity, and the shifting sources of self-definition. Furthermore, these texts directly address the ways in which girls of a particular generation are different from their mothers; a fundamental factor in this is their experience of transnationality throughout identity formation. Ethnicity breaks down as a defining force over generations as the tension between different realities divide groups. An adult exile is vastly different from a child who, in transforming her identity through coming of age, searches to define herself as separate (from the States, the Island, and from her parents). What speaks through all of these narratives is the conflict and opportunity that transnational migration poses to identity formation. Ethnic identity is but one site of definition that is challenged by shifts in location and the diverse, often fractured demands made by contact with multiple cultural spaces.

Chapter Two: National Identity

The diversification of societies has changed the lives of individuals and communities, and poses problems for any attempt to isolate a nation-based identity. The formation and representation of identity are made increasingly complex as subject experience moves across and outside of established national boundaries, and as these borders themselves disintegrate and are reconfigured. Within the United States, the process of globalization and the related increase in transnational "dwelling" have affected identity in a range of significant ways. The impact of this on national boundaries and on the construction of U.S. national identity is profound.

The existence of subjects in the spaces between established national and cultural boundaries act as bridges, defining a new flow of contact and interaction, shaping a new order of relations. In "Patriotism and Its Future," Appadurai describes a kind of dual-identity founded in "the seductiveness of plural belonging, of becoming American while staying somehow diasporic, of an expansive attachment to an unbounded fantasy space" (170). He argues further that such positioning cannot be formulated without external interferences that influence the process of self-identification, limiting the sense of boundless (or entirely self-determined) possibilities.

Transnational identity challenges the boundaries that create separate ethnic groups within a unified national identity. It breaks down both ethnic and national boundaries in accounting for deterritorialization, cultural hybridity, and the multiple and diverse experiences that are commonly eliminated in representations of national and ethnic identity.

In his discussion of contemporary England, Stuart Hall contends, "The notion of a national formation, of a national economy, which could be represented through a national cultural identity, is under considerable pressure" (22). Similarly, U.S. culture is responding to changes in global circumstance that act as a motivating force in the proliferation of ethnic, gender, and alternate identities.

One effect of the changes brought by global forces is an effort to re-establish and strengthen national identity. In the United States this takes the form of increased debate over immigration policy, and attempts to define who is included within the boundary of American identity.⁹ However, this effort is challenged by the declining coherence of identities affected by transnational factors, and by the increased politicization of ethnic and gender identities which compete for influence with the less precise nation-based identity.

Eliana Rivero refers to "double identity" (192) as the site of emergence for a coherent subject formed entirely at the margins of separate nations and cultures. This transnational identity stands at the margins of two (or more) centers; the position marks the convergence of margins within a single identity. From this, the subject is simultaneously a part of both cultures while also separate from them. In their introduction to *Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*, the editors also address double identity:

⁹ Though a detailed analysis of U.S. policies and attitudes towards multiculturalism is outside the scope of this thesis, Arjun Appadurai and Mike Featherstone both discuss nation states, the increasing diversity due to globalization, and the response of multiculturalism in detail.

In many ways, the new immigrants are much more in sync with the varied patterns of cultural hybridization in American culture today than those who landed around the turn of the century. Instead of embracing ethnic denial and forgetting, most of them struggle quite openly to maintain a "double citizenship" or a kind of "double consciousness" through contact with homelands, home cultures, and families overseas. (Singh et al 1994, 7)

The idea that transnational subjects can maintain an identification with their "home" country is increasingly realized as communications and travel enable lasting connections. That Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan raise the possibility of "double citizenship" stresses a significant national-political element that is central to current constructions of American identity. Loyalty and affiliation with a second nation are often seen as diminishing the allegiance an individual can have to either nation.

A coherent, homogeneous American identity is further confronted by the range of experiences that must be acknowledged. As Appadurai explains :

For every nation-state that has exported significant numbers of its populations to the United States as refugees, tourists, or students, there is now a delocalized *transnation*, which retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity. No existing conception of Americanness can contain this variety of transnations. (Appadurai 172)

In negotiating these transnations, the United States must also cope with the legacy of racist and sexist exclusion that is associated with American identity. In qualifying affiliation with America, national identity has increasingly burdened itself with hyphenated separations which isolate groups meant to identify as a single entity. Categorizing immigrants as

Cuban-American for instance, serves to reinforce identifications with a second nation. In an analysis of transnational migration and the United States, the authors of *Nations Unbound* describe the effects of this:

Whatever the class background or nation-state of origin of migrants of color who enter the United States, they come as subordinated people . . . no matter what their citizenship or place of birth, U.S. racial constructions continue to see them as outside of the “real America” . . . The more they come to know America, the more they take up as their own agenda the building of deterritorialized national identities. (234)

U.S. Latina identity incorporates ethnicity, and to some extent nationality, but stretches them into permitting plurality. This enables Latinas to identify concurrently with the varied and multiple locations where they define themselves: ethnic minority and immigrant, resident and citizen, island and the U.S., included and excluded.

If it is possible to define a coherent American identity, it is most certainly one which can not dispute the changing face of its population (regardless of citizenship).¹⁰ The tendency to presume homogeneity in nation-based culture is complicated by the range of characterizations offered in the narratives set both on the Island and in the United States. At the same time, the reality of assimilation does reflect a boundary between two separately-defined groups. While accepting that the United States is a point of reference and a location for settlement for numerous ethnic groups, there remains an effort to simultaneously include and separate.

⁶10 This is in part because of the obvious changes in demographics: “By the twenty-first century our whole concept of “America” will be dramatically altered most significantly by a growing Latino population whose strong cultural ties, economic disenfranchisement, racial visibility, and geographical proximity to Latin America discourages any facile assimilation into Anglo-American society” (Moraga 214).

This process (and resistance to it) is largely dependent upon the constructions and representations of identity, of which the narratives studied here are examples.

Previously, immigration struggles could be simply regarded as an issue of assimilation; individuals either accepted a “new culture” or resisted it. However, this is far too simplistic an understanding of the dynamics of the situation. Assimilation is not exclusively about the immigrant internalizing national culture; it also changes the national culture that determines the criteria of assimilation.¹¹ The immigrant who makes every effort to fulfill these requirements is frequently still regarded as foreign. A rejection of assimilation raises difficulties because it prohibits the immigrant full acceptance into the society, while distance from the country of origin still makes it difficult to maintain an active role within that national culture. The immigrant is confronted by a new environment without complete acceptance and must negotiate the impact this has on identity.

While many changes attributed to assimilation may be the result of other factors (modernization, internal changes, etc.), there is a certain authority given to the idea of the assimilation process. This depicts the immigrant as a malleable subject who can successfully become American or as a rigid uncompromising “other”. While the interactions between the Island and the U.S. are far more complicated than the binary oppositions

11 In her introduction to *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe addresses the formation of U.S. national identity: “It is through the terrain of national culture that the individual subject is politically formed as the American citizen . . . It is through culture that the subject becomes, acts, and speaks itself as “American.” It is likewise in culture that individuals and collectivities struggle and remember and, in that difficult remembering, imagine and practice both subject and community differently”(2-3). In defining particular cultural images and expressions as “American” it is possible to actively include and exclude individuals.

assimilation requires, there remains a reality of complex exchanges that privilege particular influences and standards. This process is not simple assimilation: the replacement of one homogeneous cultural and national identity for another. Rather, the conditions of engagement affect everyone involved but limit the influence of some, while strengthening that of others.

Judith Ortiz Cofer and Esmeralda Santiago describe the differences between 'Island' and "American" lifestyles. The stories and memories of living in the U.S. each contrast a mother's sense of exile with her daughter's coming of age between and within two already diverse cultures. Cofer's mother has expectations for her daughter that remain shaped by Puerto Rico, and even within the context of the U.S. she resists American cultural influences. This constructs two very different identities emerging out of the same migration. The alternating time spent in Puerto Rico (determined by where her father's navy position sends him) means that there is constant re-affiliation with both locations. This enables Cofer's mother to maintain contact with Puerto Rico without assimilating into American life. Cofer's mother has established her sense of self on the island where she is married, has her extended family, and returns with her children.

In contrast, Cofer is coming of age during these migrations and grounds herself in both locations. This is complicated by the fact that she is not entirely free to construct her identity fully in either space. The continuous movement to the U.S. disrupts and isolates her from Puerto Rico. However, her position as an ethnic minority in the U.S., combined with her mother's efforts to keep a Puerto Rican home, distances her from "mainstream America." Cofer describes her experience growing up in the

U.S. as one of crossing boundaries: "I lived in the carefully constructed facsimile of a Puerto Rican home my mother had created. Every day I crossed the border of two countries . . ." (*Silent Dancing* 125).

In her arguments with her mother, Cofer and the girls of the other narratives frequently claim citizenship as a source of self-definition and positioning:

"We are in the United States. I am an American citizen. I speak English better than Spanish and I am as old as you were when you got married!" The arguments would end with her in tears and the heavy blanket of angry silence falling over both of us. . . I felt like an exile in the foreign country of my parents' house. (*Latin Deli* 20)

In fighting from this location, Cofer situates herself in the U.S. as a place of opposition to the Puerto Rican cultural standards her parents attempt to hold her to. This sense of exile speaks to the differences in the experience of transnationalism across generations. It also reflects the complicated nature of nation and citizenship, given that Puerto Rico's political status makes its people U.S. citizens without necessarily making them (culturally) "Americans".

Esmeralda Santiago's circumstances are somewhat different in that her family moves to New York without her father, depending upon her mother's subsistence wages and an extended family to support eleven children. In "You Don't Want to Know," Santiago reflects upon the underlying reasons for their move to New York and search for social mobility:

Sometimes I lay in bed, in the unheated rooms full of beds and clothes and the rustle of sleeping bodies, terrified that what lay around the corner was no better than what we'd left behind, that being in Brooklyn was not a new life but a continuation of the old one. That everything had changed, but nothing had changed, that whatever Mami had been looking for when she brought us to Brooklyn was not there, just as it wasn't in Puerto Rico. *(When I Was Puerto Rican 247)*

Santiago's fears of having gained nothing from her family's migration underscore the fact that their move to New York, while not an issue of exile, is motivated by economic pressures. Given the precarious nature of their financial situation, this also calls into question the limitations U.S. social systems place upon ethnic immigrants in their search for a "new life". The privileging of English over Spanish is a significant factor in keeping immigrant Latinas out of systems of power. In contrasting her position in New York with earlier stories of her childhood in Puerto Rico, Santiago's narrative also raises the issue of the political and economic relationships within the United States. Santiago's education in Puerto Rico includes English as part of a colonizing enterprise. However, these skills only permit her limited advantages in New York. She is able to manage the U.S. education system and the welfare office, but the opportunities available to her family offer only the most minimal possibility of ever entirely escaping poverty.

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents and *¡Yo!* speak to the experience of exile, assimilation, and also raises the issue of citizenship. In making the Garcia family officially American by passport, this text expands the inclusiveness of what "American" means:

For three-going-on-four years Mami and Papi were on green cards, and the four of us shifted from foot to foot, waiting to go home. Then Papi went down for a trial visit, and a revolution broke out, a minor one, but still. He came back to New York reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, and saying, "I am given up, Mami! It is no hope for the Island. I will become un dominican-york." So, Papi raised his right hand and swore to defend the Constitution of the United States, and we were here to stay. ("A Regular Revolution" 107)

Where their parents retain a strong sense of Dominican culture, the girls become increasingly connected to the U.S. In Alvarez's story, there is a detailed description of the girls' responses to officially living in permanent exile from the Dominican Republic:

You can believe we sisters wailed and paled, whining to go home. We didn't feel we had the best the United States had to offer. . . Cooped up in those little suburban houses, the rules were as strict as for Island girls, but there was no island to make up the difference. (107)

After a brief period in public school and a series of troubling confrontations with the dangers of New York, the girls are sent off to a private, expensive boarding school. It is in this environment, away from the watchful eye of their parents and the cultural demands they place upon their daughters, that the girls turn to the relatively independent lifestyle of "American" girls:

We began to develop a taste for the American teenage good life, and soon, Island was old hat, man. Island was the hair-and-nails crowd, chaperons and icky boys with all their macho strutting . . . By the end of a couple of years away from home, we had *more* than adjusted. (108-9)

In one sense, the girls are doing what is asked of them; they are taking advantage of their surroundings and learning to cope with living in a

different cultural and national setting. Just as their father takes on American citizenship, his daughters become increasingly 'Americanized':

And of course, as soon as we had, Mami and Papi got all worried they were going to lose their four girls to America . . . The next decision was obvious: we four girls would be sent summers to the Island so we wouldn't lose touch with *la familia*. The hidden agenda was marriage to homeland boys, since everyone knew that once a girl married an American, those grandbabies came out jabbering in English and thinking of the Island as a place to go get a suntan. (109)

Being sent to the Island is an event that inspires mixed emotions for the girls; it is simultaneously home and banishment. This constant switching of patterns for development leads the girls to associate almost randomly with different values and sensibilities that often come into conflict.

Cuban-Americans hold a unique position among the national origins addressed here. While exile for the Garcia family includes frequent summer holidays to the Island, exile for Cubans is a less liberal experience. The construction of identity in *Dreaming in Cuban* shows that the separation between Cubans at home and Cubans in exile is marked not only by geographic distance but through ideological responses to the revolution. The experience of transnational migration from Cuba to the U.S. is, in some respects, unique because of the extreme political relationship between nations.

Pilar has no real memory of Cuba and her conception of it has been influenced heavily through her mother's staunch anti-communism--which Pilar stubbornly combats. She is strongly linked to the United States where she experiences most of her identity-formation. Still, she is not completely or solely a mainstream 'American.' Her association with Cuba is distant and as an outsider: "Pilar looked so clumsy last night dancing

with Ivanito. The band was playing a cha-cha-cha and Pilar moved jerkily, off the beat, sloppy and distracted. She dances like an American" (224). However, it is Cuba that Pilar returns to and it is Cuba that she considers her origin if not her home.

Throughout the novel the history of the Cuban Revolution, and the relationship between Cuba and the United States, resonate through the narrative and the characterizations. In the recollection of various historical moments, the tension between ideologies and subjects is revealed. This history is juxtaposed against the coming of age of the youngest generation. The character of Celia remains in Cuba supporting the revolution and guarding its coast against invasion. Her daughters take opposing positions: Lourdes leaves Cuba to live in New York as an active anti-communist, Felicia struggles to survive in Cuba. Their children, represent the third generation and mark the range of directions and possibilities that come from choices to migrate or stay on the island. At the close of *Dreaming In Cuban* Pilar must choose between Cuba and the U.S. in a way not seen in the other narratives:

I'm afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know it's where I belong - not instead of here, but more than here.
(236)

Pilar is a product of the generations before her but through her coming of age and exposure to both Cuba and the U.S., forms an identity that encompasses and transcends both. She becomes the connection that forms out of the revolutionary history, and re-joins the people separated by exile and ideology. *Dreaming in Cuban* shows the progression of the subject from

homeland through exile and finally beyond these boundaries to a transnational identity.

Underlying the texts is an importance of memory. As an artist she records her impressions. When painting Celia she asks, "So tell me how you want to be remembered"(232). Celia remembers the relationship with Spain. Felicia retains the practices of the santera. Lourdes struggles to forget through self-exile. With Pilar these histories converge and influence her. While unable to remember Cuba herself, she communicates with her grandmother across the distance (7). As a defiant daughter, Pilar rebels against her mother and all that she stands for, leading her to maintain an interest in Cuba in spite of the time and distance. Pilar is the subject formed entirely outside the homeland but not independent of it. She identifies at once with elements of Cuba and America, she subscribes fully to neither, and is inextricably linked to both. Most importantly, at no point do these concepts of Cuba or America entirely define her.

It is through the use of her imagination that Pilar is most easily able to return to Cuba and to express what it means for her as a home. This is very similar to the experience Cuban-American Coco Fusco has described:

(A)s a child among foreigners, I grew accustomed to living with the presence of an imaginary country in my home; it spoke to me in another language, in stories, rhymes, and prayers; it smelled and tasted different from the world beyond the front door. Still, unlike other immigrants who could return and replenish their repertoire of cultural references, we could not. For many exiles, the real Cuba had died with the Revolution and would live on only in their minds. (Fusco 4)

The correlation between the ability to return home and the ability to create a home remains unclear. The cause for displacement, be it exile or

migration, seems only to affect the degree of direct contact Latinas have with their Island culture. It does not, however, determine the extent or ways in which they choose to assert and identify with it within the United States.

As previously discussed, the assertion of ethnicity is, in part, a response to the intensified interactions of cultures. The movement and migration of people across borders has meant an entire generation of children coming of age in a transnational context. It is possible to migrate to a new location but maintain strong ties to one's original nationality. Similarly, it is possible to cultivate a new, but largely separate, community in the United States. Ultimately though, the displacement from homeland has an impact both on the immigrant and on the culture where she dwells.

Chapter Three Constructions of Gender

One of the key problems with current studies of transnationalism is an absence of gender considerations. This omits any reference to the significant role of feminism in opening up theoretical discussion of marginalized subjectivities. It also encourages the tendency to speak generally about transnationalism without recognizing variations in experience. The merging of subject formation with transnational migration is a site for the reconstruction and reconfiguration of gender roles. Additionally, it breaks down many of the simple binary oppositions used in constructing identity and defining identity politics.

The interaction between diverse interpretations of gender leads to a familiarization with alternate possibilities. However, the dynamics of differential power mean that women must assert their own sense of self while also confronting imposed images produced to limit them. External definitions of ethnic women act as pressures to solidify a restricted identity determined by dominant ideology. Ortega and Sternbach consider this in terms of Latina subjectivity:

(F)or a subject who is not part of the dominant ideology, construction of the self is a far more complex negotiation. In constructing herself as a subject, a Latina must dismantle the representation of stereotypes of her Self constructed, framed and projected by the dominant ideology. (14)

Resistance to traditional patriarchal patterns, and to the dynamics of racist and sexist forces in the U.S. is actively undertaken by many narratives of Latina identity formation. In presenting a variety of possibilities, these texts offer diverse roles and images of women. They

also present characters and situations that conform to stereotypical ideas of Latinas, making these the location of subversion and re-ordering. Particularly through the mother-figures, the narratives are able to retain many of the elements Island culture offers women, while using the space opened by transnational migration as an opportunity to re-distribute power and disrupt dominant images associated with Latinas.

It is useful to consider theoretical positions that intersect with transnational studies and speak to the ways women situate themselves (and are situated) within U.S. culture. In her essay "Haciendo caras, una entrada," Gloria Anzaldúa addresses the dynamics of identity for Chicanas and Mexicanas. She emphasizes the face as physical and expressive, a space that both confronts society and is shaped by it:

"Face" is the surface of the body that is the most noticeably inscribed by social structures, marked with instructions on how to be *mujer*, *macho*, working class, Chicana. As mestizas -- biologically and/or culturally mixed -- we have different surfaces for each aspect of our identity, each inscribed by a particular subculture. We are "written" all over, or should I say, carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience. (xv)

Anzaldúa describes the many masks required for survival in U.S. society, damaging the faces they hide and protect. In removing the masks imposed by a racist culture, she calls for an exposure of the functions of these masks, and a remaking of the faces they have hidden: "uncovering the inter-faces, the very spaces and places where our multiple-surfaced, colored, racially* gendered bodies intersect and interconnect" (xvi). The position Anzaldúa and others take in the collection *Making Face, Making Soul* accounts for the emergence of this identity from a range of locations and through complicated combinations. A focus on gender in this context



offers insight into the positions of women-of-color, while also confronting the racism of feminist theories that avoid race, and the sexism of cultural theories that ignore gender.

In her earlier work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa describes the realities of living as a Chicana in the United States. Her description of the new mestiza can be loosely applied to the experience of any Latina:

She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode -- nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (79-80)

Anzaldúa argues that the subject that is formed in this space is a product of multiple and often conflicting influences which are negotiated and unified. The new mestiza encompasses aspects of identity that account for both the process and the product of its formation:

This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing act of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness - a mestiza consciousness - and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion. (80)

The new mestiza speaks to the experience of the borderlands which, while similar in some respects to transnational subjectivity, is fixed historically to a geographic location in a way that other Latinas are not. In spite of this difference, the dynamics of containing competing cultural influences in a single existence are usefully laid out in Anzaldúa's work.

Latina narratives present an awareness of the tensions created for women generally, and for women of ethnic minorities specifically.

Throughout all of the texts, there is a juxtaposition of three definable female images: the “Island girl,” the “American girl,” and the girl exposed to both forms through transnational experience. Gender identity is shaped by the established and dominant representations, while these are challenged by movement between them. In addition, these transnational subjects actively confront patriarchal power:

Whether Latina writers express themselves in English, Spanish, or interlingual, they live in a society defined by male paradigms; for this reason, Latina literature frequently confronts sexual inequality in both Anglo and Latino cultures.

(Horno-Delgado et al. 15)

In resisting Anglo and Latino power structures and their corresponding cultural images of women, these texts assert a position that does not rely upon simple causal relations; the intermingling of cultural expectations incorporates complexities that pressure analysis to move beyond simple binaries (us/them, Island/U.S., immigrant/national) as boundaries are shifted and splintered.

In the coming-of-age narratives analyzed here, gender identity is incorporated in three primary ways: a matrilineal narrative centered on the perspectives of women across generational divisions, a focus on the process of female socialization, and representations that engage issues of sexual development and awareness. Throughout their treatment of these topics, the narratives construct and contrast a variety of images of women; they also speak to the means women use to interact with one another and the silences that have yet to be overcome. In this way, Latinas maintain a unity without restricting the variety of possibilities that come out of their

diverse transnational experiences. Contact between differing cultural definitions of women communicates both the range of ways “woman” is configured, and provides a site of intervention into cultural representations of women that are restrictive.

In the narratives, gender is a cultural battleground where competing social standards challenge and complicate the process of maturing. At the same time, gender takes a powerful position in disturbing and breaking down the cohesion of established cultural traditions. The narratives emphasize events that are otherwise hidden or ignored: these range from everyday arguments over permission to date, to experiences of incest and rape. In depicting these moments, Latina narratives show the spaces where cultures clash and create tension, but also speak to the realities and issues common to female coming of age in society regardless of culture, nation, or ethnic background.

Julia Alvarez uses family relationships as the foundation for constructions and comparisons of gender identities. Central to *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* is the narrative of Yolanda who returns to the Dominican Republic for a visit during which she reflects upon the tensions of two conflicting locations, neither completely “home.” Throughout “Antojos,” there is a heightened awareness of the family structure, positions of class, nation, culture, and generation: the descriptions of nursemaids and servants, comparisons of Yolanda to her cousins, the hierarchy of authority among the older aunts. The scene is entirely private, domestic, and female. There is a sense of separation between Yolanda and her surroundings; she is at once a family member and a guest; her presence is a source of celebration and disruption. Yolanda is defined, half-jokingly, as “Miss America” (4). She is offered a

cake in the shape of the island that she must cut and distribute to the children: "Let this be my home, Yolanda wishes"(11). The subtle conflicts she has with accepting the lifestyle of her family mark a natural questioning of cultural tradition (her cousins also offer opinions that differ from the generation before them). However, for Yolanda this is further complicated by the fact that she is not entirely at home.

"Antojos" begins with Yolanda's arrival at her relatives' home and her sense that she is already an outsider even among her family, that they will judge her appearance and her character:

Yolanda sees herself as they will, shabby in a black cotton skirt and jersey top, sandals on her feet, her wild black hair held back with a hairband. Like a missionary, her cousins will say, like one of those Peace Corps girls who have let themselves go so as to do dubious good in the world. (4)

And her interpretation is not entirely incorrect, as the first greeting from her cousin shows:

"You look terrible," Lucinda says. "Too thin, and the hair needs a cut. Nothing personal." She is the cousin who has never minced her words. In her designer pantsuit and frosted, blown-out hair, Lucinda looks like a Dominican magazine model, a look that always made Yolanda think of call girls.
(*"Antojos"* 5)

In this interaction, the narrative characterizes women through echoes of the stereotypes each has of the other's culture. In their judgments of themselves and each other, the women present contrasting roles of women and critically assess the standards that define them. The fact that Yolanda and Lucinda are close relatives speaks to the vast differences migration to

the U.S. can create. What is particularly significant in this exchange is that while the negative perceptions of each other are not harmless, each woman maintains her sense of self. There is an acceptance of difference, and a respect for themselves that means neither will change for the sake of the other. In allowing standards to co-exist (if with some tension), the narrative permits a wide range of images of women to circulate, interact, influence one another, but ultimately refrains from favoring any one possibility.

The stories in *Yo!* are interrelated with each other and also refer to the stories and characters of Alvarez's first novel, expanding the series of contrasts beyond just the four sisters. In "Poetry" as told by "the cousin," Lucinda gives an alternate perspective on the setting described previously through Yolanda's eyes. In "Poetry" Lucinda reveals that her impressions of Yolanda are in fact very personal. Yolanda's position as somewhat external to her Dominican family is presented as a source of displacement and turmoil in 'Antojos.' However, any sympathetic reception of this is disrupted entirely by Lucinda's account of herself and her relationship with Yolanda, which underscores the privileges being outside has permitted Yolanda. Lucinda's narrative begins in a direct engagement with Yolanda's position:

Don't think I don't know what the García girls used to say about us island cousins. That we were Latin American Barbie dolls, that all we cared about was our hair and nails, that we had size-three souls. I don't deny I looked around me once I was trapped here for the rest of my life . . . And still, I spread my arms wide and gave myself to this island, which is more than the García girls ever did for their so-called homeland.
("Poetry" 36)

The story proceeds to tell of how Lucinda is removed from boarding school in the States when her family learns of her relationship with an American boy. It is through Yolanda's journals (read by her mother) that Lucinda's parents discover what their daughter has been exposed to: "They knew that it was all invention, but still, just the fact that such stuff could be in their niece's head meant the States was no place to send their daughter" ("Poetry" 51).

The intersections within and between these stories form a coming-of-age narrative that includes and extends beyond simple identity formation. In tracing the experiences of girls growing up, with conflicting demands made upon them by cultural context and traditions, Alvarez's stories speak to the complicated costs and benefits of living in migration. The stories frequently refer to the position of the Garcia girls within the U.S. where they negotiate their position as ethnic minorities living in exile. Ethnicity is a factor on the Island as well (as seen in the diverse positions depicted in the island settings). Ethnic identity is affected by context; crossing national borders is only one level where it is subject to alteration. The interaction between Lucinda and Yolanda's narratives reveals that experiences and perspectives on gender identity vary widely and are determined by the intersection of multiple factors (context, race, class, age, etc.). The rules each girl must live with, and the judgments they impose upon each other are defined by culture but are also altered by context. This reveals that while the two women may be considered part of the same ethnic group, and are close relatives, no single category accurately accounts for their broadly different perspectives on what being a woman means.

One effect of migration is the intermingling of cultural influences. Transnational experience exposes people to new possibilities; Latinas receive influences from Island culture and from the United States. Similarly, immigrant daughters inherit the history, expectations, and examples presented to them. However, as with other aspects of identity, gender roles change. The mothers of these narratives try to train their daughters (it is suggested much in the same way they themselves were taught). Judith Ortiz Cofer describes this in the following way:

Mamá gave herself and others little time for leisure. Only small children were exempt from duties. They were the only ones allowed to waste time - everyone else had to be busy while in her presence. This work ethic applied specially to me, since in her eyes I was a *quinceañera*, a fifteen year old trainee for the demands of womanhood and marriage.

(*Silent Dancing* 141)

There is a sense in this that mothers prepare their daughters as if they will return to the Island and to their culture. The instruction they are given is the only one mothers have to offer, but it fails to account for the changes in their daughters, the possibility that they will never return permanently to the Island, and the fact that their lessons are blurred and without the necessary references that the girls miss in their absence from the Island:

Even as I dealt with the trauma of leaving childhood, I saw that "cultural schizophrenia" was undoing many others around me at different stages of their lives. Society gives clues and provides rituals for the adolescent but withholds support. . . At home my mother constantly reminded me that I was now a "señorita" and needed to behave accordingly; but she never explained exactly what that entailed.

(*Silent Dancing* 124-25)

Their exposure is at once more expansive than their parents, given that they have two cultural reference points, but is also frequently impoverished by a disrupted connection to these realities. Cofer's stories, set in Puerto Rico and in the U.S., indicate that she must constantly think through actions that would have been second nature to her had she been raised exclusively in one environment. She speaks to the fact that Puerto Rican culture naturally encourages young girls to dress in a way seen as excessively mature in the United States. However, this practice takes place in a context where girls are chaperoned and strictly separated from young men. Taken out of context, and placed in U.S. society where dating is encouraged, there is a conflict between appearance and location that leaves girls uncertain how to behave and vulnerable to external criticism.

These girls contend with the struggle for independence within multiple standards and with conflicting demands. In many instances mothers become mediators between a daughter's assertiveness and her father's demands for obedience to his (and his culture's) rules. However, the role of mothers is filled with contradictory messages as well:

On the one hand, there is a celebration of, or tribute to, the mother, while on the other, a confrontation of two cultures and two generations frequently takes place on the mother-daughter terrain. In contrast to the mother's messages about the need to learn English and to be educated in the system, there exist her own misgivings about the assimilation process and subsequent loss of cultural values.

(Ortega & Sternbach 12)

Mothers come to stand for a more singularly influenced subjectivity (although even this is simplistic as the mothers of these narratives clearly undergo their own transformations through the transnational experience). By contrast, their daughters become the new, multiple-voiced subjects

who must forge their identities among many locations. For example, much is made of being *casi señorita*, and mothers look to both protect their daughters and to instruct them in morality. This also becomes complicated in the intermingling of cultural codes:

She acted as if I was going to go crazy or explode or something if she didn't watch me and nag me all the time about being a señorita now. She kept talking about virtue, morality, and other subjects that did not interest me in the least.' (*Latin Deli* 10)

The narratives are constructed in such a way as to depict the moments when mothers are the only ones to understand their daughters' developing sense of self, as well as the times when these new voices are incomprehensible, untranslatable, or entirely contradictory to their mothers' expectations.

Cofer makes reference repeatedly to her father's control over household decisions, and over the restrictions she must abide by as a teenager:

(I)t was the year when I was being denied everything by my father: no dating like other sixteen-year-olds (I was a decent Puerto Rican señorita, not a wild American teenager); no driver's license . . . no end-of-the-year weekend trip with my junior class . . . *No, no, no*, with a short Spanish "o." Final: no lingering vowels in my father's pronouncements. (*Latin Deli* 16)

This emphasizes the contrasting influences Cofer and all of the girls in these narratives must negotiate. Additionally, the focus on language in this instance underscores the cultural codes which are enforced and signals to Cofer that, while she may be uncertain which influences to accept, her father has a firm and authoritative stance on the issue.

As a naval officer, Cofer's father is often absent for long periods of time. Therefore, her mother has a space for her own influence. She negotiates her daughter's conflicts with her father (and through him with patriarchal authority and cultural demands that are incomprehensible to her): "I would scream out my protests that we were not living in some backward country where women were slaves" (*Latin Deli* 20). Throughout all of these narratives, daughters of immigrants continuously remind their parents that they are living in the U.S. and that things are different. In many cases this leads to further restrictions as parents fear they will "lose their daughters to America."

As part of any coming-of-age experience, the girls depicted in these narratives must confront traditions and determine whether to accept or reject them. This is not unlike the challenges and tensions they face regarding cultural assimilation and ethnic identification. In the process of forming their own individual identities, each girl presents a level of independence and assertiveness that is expressed differently from their mothers'.

Esmeralda Santiago recounts her relationship with her mother as generally one of commonality: as the eldest child, and a girl, Esmeralda is a key figure in raising her ten younger siblings. Her mother relies upon her, especially after she can no longer depend on Esmeralda's father who remained in Puerto Rico. Her stories present a respect of her mother and a challenging of the authority she represents:

It was on these tense walks home from school that I decided I had to get out of Brooklyn. Mami had chosen this as our home, and just like every other time we'd moved, I'd had to go along with her because I was a child and had no choice. But I wasn't willing to go along with her on this one.

(When I Was Puerto Rican 260)

When she returns home, Esmeralda instigates an argument with her mother that quickly deteriorates to the following dialogue:

“Ay, Negi, stop exaggerating!”
 “I hate my life!” I yelled.
 “Then do something about it,” she yelled back. (261)

This is in sharp contrast to the typical Island upbringing Esmeralda would have likely received had she remained in Puerto Rico where, during her early childhood, she was encouraged to *always* show respect. Her mother’s response also supports a level of assertiveness and self-reliance that is unusual for “typical” Puerto Rican girls. Children have less choice in determining how closely they will keep contact with aspects of their original culture than their parents. However, they do increasingly take an active role in defining how they will live and by what standards, usually through confrontations with their mothers.

In texts that replace the patriarchal head of the household with a woman, conflicts are taken up directly between mother and daughter. Latina writing reflects these transformations both in the content and structure of their narratives. As Ortega and Sternbach note:

In Latina writing, the entire extended family of women . . . makes up a cast of characters. When we speak of a family of women, we also imply a restructuring of the traditional patriarchal family. Since many of these women are from immigrant or exile families - a condition that often causes the split of a traditional nuclear family - the writers have often displaced a central patriarchal figure, replacing it with a woman-headed and woman-populated household. (12)

The primary site of opposition, then, is less in direct engagement with patriarchy and more so through the mother-daughter relationships that

are privileged and foregrounded in the narrative. For example, in *Dreaming In Cuban*, Pilar identifies with Cuba through her confrontations with her mother, her communications with her grandmother, and her own experience of it. Throughout the narrative, men are displaced either through physically leaving (Gustavo, Javier, Ivanito) or, as in the case of Pilar's father, through infidelities that distance him from his family. The novel focuses entirely on the relationships between women which, though conflictual in many fundamental ways, reveal a growing ability to respect one another's differences.

In the history of this family, the narrative recounts several instances of violence specifically against women (both as part of a larger revolutionary moment, and at the level of individuals). These events are counter-balanced by a self-sufficiency that persists across generations. Pilar's narrative includes a reflection on herself in comparison with her boyfriend:

I think he's more of a traditionalist. He has a tough time being rude, even to people who deserve it. Not me. If I don't like someone, I show it. It's the one thing I have in common with my mother. (135)

In spite of the fact that they are unable to directly reach each other, Pilar is clearly influenced by her mother. The assertiveness she shows contradicts the stereotype of Latinas as deferential to male authority; this rejection of passive obedience is re-enforced through the impression that it is a progressively intensifying family trait.

Certain aspects of patriarchal power remain intact in the narratives. For example, in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* Yolanda recounts her mother's response to the frequent question: Do you have any sons?

Her reply: "'No,' the mother said, apologetically. 'Just the four girls'"(41). Their father puts up the appearance of being pleased and contented with four girls, but there is uncertainty as to whether this is his genuine feeling and an indication that his approval comes from having the authority over and exclusive affections of five women (52).

One of the most profound sources of tension and conflicting cultural demands is sexual development. Ortega and Sternbach argue that:

Regardless of a Latina writer's choice of heterosexual or lesbian relationships, more often than not a cultural conflict is epitomized in relationship to sexuality, especially for second-generation Latinas who came to maturity during the so-called sexual revolution. The act of choosing and practicing her sexuality, and then writing about it, is often perceived as either an assimilation of the Anglo-gringo way of life or a loss of Latina values and culture. (15)

In Julia Alvarez's novels the reorientation and subversion of patriarchal authority is relatively overt, as is the battle over sexual maturity. While there is a tacit understanding that their father is to be respected and treated as the authority on all subjects, his power is challenged both from the external changes of migration and from the resulting internal shifts within his family. Alvarez's story "The Kiss" foregrounds the challenge to patriarchal authority as it recounts Soffa's confrontations with her father and her subsequent fall into disfavor. The story revolves around the family's celebration of their father's birthday:

Even after they'd been married and had their own families and often⁶ couldn't make it for other occasions, the four daughters always came home for their father's birthday. They would gather together without husbands, would-be husbands, or bring-home work. For this too was part of the tradition: the daughters came home alone. (24)

Sofía is hoping for a reconciliation with her father after a long-standing conflict over her morality (or lack thereof). Her father's discovery that his daughter was sexually involved prior to marriage enraged him. Sofía responds with complete resistance to his authority, leaves home, and subsequently marries her lover. The narrative presents these events with an indication that Sofía's father is angered that she has broken the moral codes, but is truly surprised by her open defiance of his authority. His response is to shut her out. In hosting the birthday celebrations and presenting her father with his first grandson, she hopes to end the hostilities. By the close of the party, however, the conflict is further inflamed as Sofía again is frustrated by her father's rejection and asserts her sexuality in front of him out of defiance (39). The story presents the displacement of patriarchal power and the turmoil that comes out of the resulting damaged relationships. Sofía's threat to her father's control does serve to break down his authority, but in the process harms them both.

Throughout the stories of the four girls, Alvarez's *How The Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* reveals the difficulties and opportunities multiple cultural contexts offer. Each narrative emphasizes the shifting gender standards the girls confront, and their attempts to grasp the meaning of both the demands placed upon them and their own desires for themselves. Language and close relationships are a key intersection where miscommunication and conflicting pressures further transform the ways that girls understand themselves.

Alvarez takes this up directly in the story "Joe" which describes Yolanda's relationship with her husband and her subsequent hospitalization. The story focuses on things that are lost in translation

between two people who can not understand one another's words or their meanings. Finding it increasingly difficult to express herself or define what she means, Yo leaves her husband and begins quoting others in an effort to cope:

She ranted, her mother said to her father. Her father coughed, upset. She quoted famous lines of poetry and the opening sentences of the classics. How could anyone remember so much? her mother asked her sullen father. She was carried away with the sound of her voice, her mother diagnosed. She quoted Frost; she misquoted Stevens; she paraphrased Rilke's description of love. (79)

Later Yo tries to explain why her marriage failed: "We just didn't speak the same language" (81). Yo's troubled balance between expression and relationships is further described through "The Rudy Elmenhurst Story" which recalls her college relationships and foregrounds the problems that continue to complicate her sense of self. Yolanda's experience in an English Literature class stresses the differences she sees between being "Americanized" and being "American": "I felt profoundly out of place" (89). The story describes Yolanda's academic acquisition of language and knowledge through poetry and creative writing. This is contrasted with her daily encounters with language in her relationship with Rudy and the surfacing of her sexuality: "I didn't trust this guy. I didn't know how to read him. I had nothing in my vocabulary of human behavior to explain him" (92).

As Yo immerses herself further into the tradition of love poetry, she is also searching to define love for herself and depends on language to orient herself and as the means of seduction: "But the guy had no sense of connotation in bed. His vocabulary turned me off" (96). Yo's relationship

with Rudy reflects a common moment in sexual development, however Yo's distance from the cultural context she is in make the events complicated in unusual ways. The pressures she faces to define herself in words and actions are tangled with her understanding of language and meaning, as well as the conflicting pressures of two moral codes. In both stories, language as a faltering and uncertain means of expression is juxtaposed with a dependence upon literary traditions and "authoritative" or privileged knowledge as a means of negotiating miscommunication.

One recurring topic in many Latina coming-of-age narratives is the experience of some form of violence or abuse during sexual development. The vigilance mothers show in protecting their daughters and training them in a strict Catholic morality, is contrasted and to some extent subverted by the experiences their daughters face unprepared. This is foregrounded in Alvarez's story "Trespass" and in the sexual assaults both Lourdes and Pilar experience in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Esmeralda Santiago recounts the sexual advances of a relative living with her family:

Chico lay on the couch, watching television with the kids, but every once in a while I noticed his eyes fixed on me. I turned my back, face burning, goose bumps rising. Tata called him to the kitchen. His bones creaked when he got up. As he passed behind me, he slipped his hand under my raised arms and pinched my left nipple. (248)

Santiago expresses a sense of shame but keeps silent, while the rest of the household remains unsuspecting. On his return to the couch, Chico throws a dollar at Esmeralda which she uses the next day to buy her first sundae. The contrast of childhood desires for ice cream juxtaposed with the damaging and humiliating experience that permits her to buy the

sundae serves to intensify the incident. Similarly, the undertone of child prostitution and incest are things that her mother's instructions about being a *señorita* never addressed. In including this in her autobiography, Santiago speaks out and against this experience in a way she was not able to as a child. The power of this account is in her taking control through the narrative and expressing these events. On a larger scale, such testimonies make the often hidden experience of abuse public.

While the narratives reveal the ways in which mothers attempt to guide and monitor their daughters' maturity, they also speak to the things that are not communicated between them, whether deliberately or out of an inability to convey them. In *Dreaming In Cuban*, Lourdes translates emotions into food:

When Pilar doesn't return home by nine o'clock, Lourdes calls the police station and begins defrosting a two-and-a-half-pound stash of pecan sticky buns. At ten o'clock, she telephones the fire department and preheats the oven. By midnight, she's alerted three hospitals and six radio stations and finished the last of the sticky buns. (23)

Lourdes progressively gains weight and eats compulsively until she stops eating entirely and begins to starve herself:

Lourdes did not plan to stop eating. It just happened, like the time she gained 118 pounds in the days her father was dying. This time, though, Lourdes longs for a profound emptiness, to be clean and hollow as a flute. (169)

The sections of the narrative that focus on Lourdes recall the miscarriage of her second child and her experience of rape and physical assault by a soldier. Her means of surviving is to leave Cuba without looking back; in

New York she opens a bakery and focuses her energy on creating countless, perfect pastries (18). Her husband's infidelity, though unspoken, is known to her. Similarly, Lourdes knows the painful distance between herself and Pilar which manifests itself through political and ideological conflicts but reflects the underlying and deeper break between them. Lourdes consults the spirit of her father about Pilar:

"Papi, I don't know what to do anymore." Lourdes begins to cry. "No matter what I do, Pilar hates me."
 "Pilar doesn't hate you, *hija*. She just hasn't learned to love you yet." (74)

This dialogue reflects a similarity with Pilar's connection with her grandmother (Celia) because she cannot communicate directly with her mother. Pilar's experiences reveal other significant intersections and oppositions. She finds her lover with another woman and responds by buying herself a stand-up bass and "thumping and thumping, until I feel my life begin" (180). After being assaulted at knife point in the park, Pilar struggles to find a means of healing and escaping. In her own way, she turns to food: "I buy apples and bananas in the cafeteria and eat them furtively in my room" (202). She also leaves her surroundings in order to cope: "On the ninth day of my baths, I call my mother and tell her we're going to Cuba" (203). Neither Pilar nor Lourdes tells of their experiences or directly asks for help, but each is brought along on the journey needed to survive their respective traumas. Both experience a series of events that they respond to in ways which appear at the surface to be opposite, but are surprisingly similar and interconnected.

In Alvarez's "The Four Girls," the inability to cope with the demands placed upon her causes Sandra to develop anorexia after leaving

home for graduate school. The story of Sandra's illness is one that everyone in the family knows but does not speak about: "The mother does not tell a favorite story about Sandra anymore. She says she would like to forget the past. . ." (50). In telling of Sandra's breakdown, the discussion at the private hospital ('Mount Hope') between the doctor and Sandra's parents shows the entirely different understanding each has of Sandra's 'small breakdown'. Her mother believes the problem comes out of Sandra's sense of her appearance: "Sandi got the fine looks, blue eyes, peaches and cream skin, everything going for her!" (52). The doctor looks for reasons in the family dynamics and asks about sibling rivalry. Sandra's father stares distantly out the window, saying and thinking very little (53). By her mother's account, Sandra began a "crazy diet"(51), then left for school and withdrew from her family (53). As her illness progresses, she replaces food with an unceasing and compulsive consumption of knowledge, reading lists of books and claiming she must hurry because, "soon she wouldn't be human" (54). Interwoven with the eating disorder is the conviction that evolution will reverse directions making her "a monkey," no longer human.

Sandra herself appears to be moving in two directions at once within herself; refusing food but craving "the great works of man," she is torn between pressuring herself to constantly know more while simultaneously trying to exist less. Throughout this discussion, which Sandra is not present for, there are indications that her illness is in part shaped by something she is missing, that she is unprepared by her upbringing to negotiate the demands placed upon her. Her retreat into books and her progressive starvation are a search for the elusive answers she needs to survive.

After Sandra's unspoken story is told, the narrative returns to the four sisters years later sharing a rare occasion when they are all together as adults. In the course of conversation the girls argue, and Carla comments on Sandra's "love for hospitals". Sandra responds: "I just want to forget the past, you know?" (60). This reflects her mother's position towards what occurred, and Sandra's dissociation from her own experience. It is unclear whether she has resolved the conflict entirely or merely detached herself from it enough to continue living.

Each of these narratives traces the ways in which girls confront their coming of age in a cultural environment that is not entirely their own. The narratives challenge patriarchal power; they displace male characters, substituting them with female leadership and control. The traditions these mothers represent are influential in their daughters' lives, but are challenged by the change of location and context the girls must face as they mature. It is important to note that while parents may view the U.S. as a threat that could sway their daughters from their 'true' cultural heritage, the girls' understanding of this 'true' culture is disrupted by transnational migration. The perspective these girls offer in the narratives is that of the multiple-voiced, transnational, female subject. They reveal the ways in which Latinas learn to merge and appropriate the values that suit them, and the ways in which they are unprepared to cope or communicate their experience. The reorientation of gender roles is presented as empowering in some respects, but costly and isolating as well.

Chapter Four: Latina Literary Representation and the Institution.

In mediating the tensions caused in the formation of a new identity and negotiating traditional ones, literary imagination and representation take a central role. In numerous recently published texts, including those considered here, storytelling is an integral part of creating identities and collective associations. Ortega and Sternbach argue that this is a positive and powerful activity:

(A)s she affirms her Self, the Latina writer engages in a dialectical and dynamic process, transforming those aggressions directed at her into her own strength . . . She accomplishes this integrity by the act of writing itself. This process constitutes an affirmation, and then definition, of that inter-cultural self and serves as her way of returning to the community those stories they have collectively and historically shared with her, recreating them now into new imaginary worlds. (Ortega & Sternbach 17)

The imagination is fundamental to forming and expressing identities, be they ethnic, national, or gender. In the context of transnationalism this takes on a further dimension. Without a definitive pre-existing location from which to speak, subjects mediate the conflicting demands of multiple identities through creative expression.

There is a significance given to creative expression within all of the narratives. In the texts analyzed, this comes in many forms: letters, diaries, stories (oral and written), music, and painting. It is through these internal texts that the subjects portrayed are able to mediate conflicting demands, join influences in an innovative way, and challenge the limits of boundaries, categories, languages, and identities. In manipulating and disrupting boundaries, while drawing upon the multiple sources and

references at their disposal, Latinas can represent their position and use narratives to locate and assert themselves. Writing (and the discussion of writing in the narratives) functions as a recuperative process, enabling a recovery of history and memory, and permitting a creative re-interpretation that allows the past to be conveyed into the present.

In the texts creativity is always initiated, practiced and taught by women, who use it as a means of defining themselves, and as an opportunity to interact with one another. In her collections, Judith Ortiz Cofer recalls the stories her grandmother told her as a child:

They talked about life on the island, and life in Los Nueva Yores, their way of referring to the U.S., from New York City to California: the other place, not home, all the same. They told real-life stories, though as I later learned, always embellishing them with a little or a lot of dramatic detail, and they told cuentos, the morality or cautionary tales told by the women in our family for generations: stories that became a part of my subconscious as I grew up in two worlds, the tropical island and the cold city, and which would later surface in my dreams and in my poetry.

(Silent Dancing 14-15)

Cofer proceeds to retell some of these stories in her own version. Her collections are composed of stories, essays, and poems that interrelate with each other. The texts build upon one another and re-enforce each other; they present an awareness of the many sources her memories and fictions draw upon and a recognition of the role they play in representing a unique position.

In *Silent Dancing* Cofer describes her position as audience to these stories and the lessons they convey:

I may have been eleven or twelve years old: at that difficult age when a girl is no longer a child who can be ordered to leave the room if the women wanted freedom to take their talk into forbidden zones, or really old enough to be considered a part of their conclave. I could only sit quietly, pretending to be in another world, while absorbing it all in a sort of unspoken agreement of my status as silent auditor. (15)

The stories are used to remember and to create memories. As Cofer records and publishes her recollections, she has changed from “silent auditor” to the role of storyteller her grandmother once held. In making stories and creativity a family practice, the narrative is established as a tradition in and of itself. The stories are then independently offered while also circulating in the context of other literary traditions.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* the stories trace the movement across time and place using various forms of expression. Each character faces her own period of transition and identity formation, whether at the moment of the revolution or at the disappearance of a lover. Celia's letters, while never sent, are a record of the changes and history that are the foundation for each subsequent generation. Lourdes bakes pastries both as her means of functioning within capitalist America and as a manifestation of her self-destructiveness; the split she has in her identity is expressed through her extreme relation with food. Pilar is centered around audio and visual expression; she draws from the past and present but makes it her own. In her article on Cuban-American autobiography Alvarez-Borland notes the significance of Pilar's position:

Pilar leaves the reader with the conviction that the double consciousness of being both narrator of and participant in her own story has enabled her to find that part of her own identity she knew was missing. Listening to the stories of others binds García into a relationship with a community of tellers.

(Alvarez- Borland 46)

As her family's story-teller, Pilar is able to carry her matrilineal past into her own identity. She is also actively involved in translating her history into a modern context. It is through representation and creativity that Pilar becomes self-aware and capable of defining her position in the U.S. and in Cuba.

A consciousness of creativity is also present in Esmeralda Santiago's autobiography. In gaining acceptance to the School of Performing Arts, she must confront her own fears of failure and judgment (260-266). It is also her means of attaining social mobility:

I had dreamed of this moment for several weeks. More than anything, I wanted to impress the panel with my talent so that I would be accepted into Performing Arts and leave Brooklyn every day. And, I hoped, one day I would never go back. (263)

The scene foregrounds Santiago's position as a Latina. She must practice her monologue for weeks, not to perfect it for the audition, but in order to pronounce it "correctly." In her fear at facing the teachers she recites in the following manner: "Ju bee lonh 2 a type dats berry cómo in dis kuntree, Meeses Felps" (264). The surfacing of her strong accent in spite of the efforts to contain it causes the judges to dismiss her briefly (fighting their urge to laugh). They then call her back to pantomime the decoration of a Christmas tree:

My family had never had a Christmas tree, but I remembered how once I had helped Papi wind colored lights around the eggplant bush that divided our land from Doña Ana's. (265)

In drawing upon her memories of Puerto Rico, Esmeralda is able to negotiate the demands placed upon her and actively express herself. However, she leaves the audition certain she has failed not only herself, but her teachers, her mother and her entire family. In the epilogue it is revealed that Santiago is successful: "A decade after my graduation from Performing Arts, I visited the school. I was by then living in Boston, a scholarship student at Harvard University" (269).

Alvarez's novels each conclude with a focus on story-telling and the writer's self-awareness of her position. Yolanda reveals herself as a writer creating stories out of bad dreams and surfacing memories. This becomes the starting point of *Yo!* in which Yolanda is confronted by the characters she created as they take over their stories and narrate their own memories.

Of particular significance are the stories Yolanda's mother relates. She tells of how the family came to be in exile because of stories. In "The Mother - nonfiction" Yolanda's mother recounts the story of how their family became exiled. In an effort to manage four young girls, she tells her daughters there is a bear in her closet that would come after them if they did not behave. Using her mink coat to simulate a bear, she gives a convincing performance and her children believe the story. However, Yolanda becomes bold and curious. She searches her mother's closet and finds not only her mother's alleged bear, but beneath the coat discovers the weapons her father was holding in their home as part of his association with the CIA. Her father's position as a man of a wealthy family is made vulnerable by his participation in activities to overthrow the dictatorship.

Yolanda incorporates her father's guns into one of her imaginings, and not soon after the secret police arrive at their home looking for her father (whether this is as a result of her story-telling remains unknown). The family is quickly rushed to the safety of New York by the CIA and remains in exile.

The power of stories is one that Yolanda's mother respects because she recognizes the damaging effects it can have. She continues to tell "true" stories (one for each girl as seen in *Garcia Girls*) but never without a sense of caution. She tells stories only orally so that they will disappear without a physical trace; this allows her to keep memories alive with less risk. Contrasting this with Yolanda's position foregrounds a creative connection between mother and daughter, and also recognizes the different forms it takes. Yolanda creates fiction based upon her experience; she commits her words to paper and has them published. Her mother is distressed by the impact of having her family's life revealed, but she expresses greater concern that Yolanda is not careful or fearful of the after effects. These texts together speak to the power of writing as a means of creating and coping with change. The stories are what initiate and direct the changes in the Garcia family's experience, but they are also what serves to account for their experience of exile, keeping parts of the life they had to leave behind in the Dominican Republic, and enabling them to define themselves in the United States.

In her article "From Immigrants to Ethnics," Eliana Rivero traces the progression of Latina literature and the corresponding changes in their experience of migration. She argues that the writings of Cuban women reflect the circumstances under which they came to the United States, with earlier immigrants considering themselves in exile. These writers gave

little consideration or attention to the U.S. experience in their writings.

Later writers, particularly those with less actual experience of Cuba, express a much different perception of their identity. These writers often show a recognition of both cultures and the identity they have formed within and outside them.¹² Rivero concludes her essay with the following:

(T)he most distinguishable feature that separates older immigrant generations of Cuban women from their younger compatriots in the U.S., beyond their choice of language, is the problem of their cultural/political identity and affiliations.
(198)

These writers, poets (most notably the Nuyorican performance poets of recent years), and video artists, are increasingly using Spanish and English languages and cultural references in their work. This demands a definition of American literature that locates and incorporates bilingual and interlingual texts.

With increasing frequency writers are using English as their language of expression and relate to writers in similar positions within the United States. Nicholasa Mohr, a writer of Puerto Rican origins, says the following of minority writing:

¹² Similarly, Juan Flores discusses the stages of emigrant Puerto Rican literature. The writings of the second half of the twentieth century mark the "Nuyorican" stage which he claims is defined by the following: "The most obvious mark of this new literature emanating from the community is the language - the switch from Spanish to English and bilingual writing. This language transfer should not be mistaken for assimilation in a wide cultural sense; as the content of the literature indicates, using English is a sign of being here, not necessarily of liking it here or of belonging" (216-217).

The rhythms of our American language are ever-changing, representing the many cultures that exist in the nation. Those whose works speak to and about the peoples of color, and the other marginal communities that continue to struggle for equality in the U.S., are the writers I identify with. (116)

The Spanish Caribbean/Latina/American literatures represented here allow a movement between languages that has only recently begun to flourish. Latina texts provide important and interesting links to a variety of other literary traditions and social formations. In reading these narratives for representations of ethnic, gender, and national identity, it is important to recognize the disruptions they account for and initiate. In terms of American literary history, the position of immigrant literature is changing as immigrants are both singled out as separate, and absorbed into mainstream structures.

In an interview Cristina Garcia speaks to the position of Latina writers: "I also think we're not so much on the periphery. I think what's happening in what was once considered mainstream 'America' is changing, and I think American literature is reflecting that" (Vorda 66). The proliferation of works from minority positions serves to equalize and de-centralize the once dominant canon. Latinas, as well as other ethnic and female minorities, are now at the forefront of a literary movement that includes attention from major publishing houses, recognition in university and high school curriculum, and mainstream success that has placed a growing handful of these authors in central positions.

Jose David Saldivar argues that the hybrid artist "is open to two worlds and is formed within his local and global Borderlands. The hybrid thus becomes through the lived-in simultaneity of the Americas the

ground for political analysis and social change"(152). Whether or not transnational identity is an effective agent for change of material realities is uncertain. Literature relegated to a marginal position offers a space for expressions of identity outside the mainstream while concurrently demanding attention and recognition from members of the community and those outside it. With the rise in circulation of a range of ethnic and women's fiction, clearly the texts of marginalized communities are gaining recognition and readership. This has led to a redefinition of what constitutes mainstream literature. Increased recognition of marginalized literature disrupts the boundaries and alters the relationship between the center and the periphery. This is not to say that ethnic literature has been mainstreamed or even fully accepted. What is clear is that the balance of contemporary literature is changing as are our ways of theorizing and criticizing it.

Under the pressures of changing realities and theoretical attention, a corresponding revision of the canon is underway. In his discussion of Chicano Literature and the canon, Juan Bruce-Novoa argues:

The literary canon and its academic-commercial support are faced with a dilemma. It is no longer a matter of absorbing "foreign" expressions within a national literature but of heeding an insistent, multivoiced call for the restructuring of the canon . . . (199)

While a change in the canon is not a complete resolution to differential power relations, it does offer the beginnings of a recognition *within* the literary institution of texts, traditions, and writers previously excluded. The current focus on marginalized subjectivities is neither certain to

continue, nor will it necessarily ensure altered power relations. As the editors of a recently published collection of Latina fiction note:

(T)he international acclaim achieved by writers like Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, and Julia Alvarez does not mean that Latina writers in general have reached a level of acceptance on par with that of their mainstream U.S. peers. Latina literature is still regarded by most editors at the major publishing houses of this country as commercially risky at best, an attitude which effectively relegates all but a few "stars" to the obscurity of the small presses and literary magazines. (Milligan et al 2)

The success of Latina narratives is tempered by the larger process and context that they function within. Theorizing texts can significantly alter perceptions of the subject positions they narrate. Furthermore, the choice of texts for publication and discussion is a fundamental point in determining what images are acknowledged and what representations are open for consideration.

The construction of ethnicity and gender has received a great deal of academic attention in recent years. The establishment of ethnic and women's studies departments, the publication of journals focused on specific marginalized groups, and the incorporation of some of these studies into the mainstream curriculum, have all served to institutionalize what was previously marginalized. The consequences of this reorientation are debatable. While the inclusion of the periphery is, on the surface, a potentially empowering move, the positioning of ethnic and women's studies as nonessential within academic programs renders their acceptance less powerful. In addition, ethnic studies is generally equated exclusively with minority studies and receives an analysis distinct from

that given to dominant, mainstream (seemingly non-ethnic) groups. As Ortega and Sternbach argue:

Conventional readings of "minority" literature in the U.S. have traditionally tended to emphasize each ethnic group's search for identity. Such readings imply that the critic either doubts or questions the existence of a national or ethnic identity in said literature and, therefore, in its writers . . . If there is a "search" in this writing, we contend that it must be defined as a search for the expression or articulation of that identity, but not for her identity itself. (3)

Through essentialist readings of minority texts, the validity of mainstream literature is implicitly re-enforced without scrutiny. Many of the attempts to theorize literature with regard to ethnicity and gender are highly essentialist. As Guillory explains in *Cultural Capital*, the projects that conflate representations of experience with political representation generally are overly simplistic in their engagement of texts. There are some important considerations to be gained from recognizing identity and difference. Theoretical positions are under serious scrutiny because: "(C)ritical operations of contemporary literary discourse have had the effect of objectifying diverse ethnic cultural texts as minority discourse in ways that collapse particular modes of articulating resistance within singular theoretical frameworks"(Liu 17). It is therefore a question of balancing political interest and respect for difference, with a rigorous analysis that acknowledges more than identity and representational concerns.

One of the primary concerns in literary theory and minority literature is ideology. Arguably, the institution is directed by the position of the dominant: "(T)he narrative of a dominant social group's ideological universalization of its particular interests and historical situation, an

ideology which we can be sure will be asserted along a variety of fronts, especially in the context of 'values'"(Guillory 275). Theorizing transnational identity with full consideration of an emerging subject calls into question the legitimacy of the dominant ideology that has privileged itself through the marginalization of the "other." However, ethnic criticism that recognizes only identity differences is insufficient in that it ignores similarity and continues to analyze relative to the center.

Identities do serve as a significant factor in determining the flow and positioning of power but their instability and openness to external manipulation makes them unreliable:

Because identifications change and shift, they can be worked on by political and economic forces outside of us and they can be articulated in different ways. There is absolutely no political guarantee already inscribed in an identity.

(Hall 57-58)

As literary representations, it is important to recognize that texts are not clear reflections of a particular reality; even autobiographical texts make clear that memoirs are a *creative* account of memories. At the same time, these texts do circulate as representative of a categorized ethnic and gender position. This proves useful to understanding the role of culture as actively involved in defining power relations; these literary representations are not the sole source of political consolidation but can provide effective means to furthering political change.

The challenge raised by feminism and minority theory contests and resists the dominant position. In questioning the legitimacy of dominant historical narrative, hierarchical economic and social patterns, and the ideological underpinnings of theoretical discourse that support the center

at the expense of the margins, disempowered groups effectively engage and confront current realities. At the same time, these arguments have contributed to a larger interrogation of any constructions that rely upon a unified subject. In his post-structuralist reading of ethnicity, Radhakrishnan describes this contradictory position in the following way:

The constituency of 'the ethnic' occupies quite literally a 'pre-post'-erous space where it has to actualize, enfranchise and empower its own 'identity' and coextensively engage in the deconstruction of the very logic of 'identity' and its binary and exclusionary politics. (50)

This process denies the long-standing existence of subjectivity and independent approaches to knowledge already functioning outside of Western models. It also demands that those defined as marginal represent themselves within the Western framework, while that structure undercuts any efforts to negotiate existing power dynamics.

In "Canon, Institutionalization, and Identity: Contradictions for Asian American Studies," Lisa Lowe reveals the contradictory demands placed on minority literatures. Texts are meant at once to conform to Western standards that permit institutionalization, while also standing apart as the ethnic, immigrant, undefineable and utterly different from the Western. (42) These contradictory expectations serve to further misreadings of ethnic texts in a search exclusively for assimilation or for difference. Efforts to capture and define narratives of irresolution as either assimilated or 'other' rejects the depth of struggle and impossibility of resolution that requires an inconclusive narrative.

Lowe's analysis provides a useful insight applicable to readings of marginalized texts and particularly the transnational: "(I)f the novel is

read as either a narrative of immigrant assimilation or even as a narrative of successful self-definition. . . both characterizations privilege a telos of development that closes off the most interesting conflicts and indeterminacies of the text”(45). Although these narratives may accurately enough begin as immigrant literature, and may be deliberately labeled “minor” and separated as “ethnic,” by their closing it becomes clear that immigrant and ethnic are only aspects of what they uncover.

JanMohamed and Lloyd advocate a position that reduces the essentialism and universalizing nature of previous approaches, and call for the following:

(A) theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture. This definition is based on the principle that minority groups, despite all the diversity and specificity of their cultures, share the common experience of domination and exclusion by the majority. The common experience does not induce any kind of homogenization, but it does provide the grounds for a certain thinking in solidarity across the boundaries of different identities - which, as often as not, are imposed rather than autonomously constructed. (ix)

This project calls for a redressing of the agenda within theoretical discourse, emphasizing a complete analysis of marginalization without privileging the center/periphery approach. This project raises issues of the formation and substance of this subject while critically evaluating the standards of the dominant. This provides a space for effective politically motivated criticism that does not neglect a productive and rigorous analysis of literature.

An issue of particular concern for the recognition of emergent and marginalized subjectivities is the changing understanding of what

constitutes a subject and a questioning of the legitimacy of a unitary subject. Of the many considerations this debate has raised, the point of interest to this analysis is the question of how to respect deliberate efforts of 'strategic essentialism' while simultaneously allowing for the shifting reference points caused by transnationalism. In removing the foundation of a single established location, it is uncertain whether or not any unified subject can concurrently encircle multiple identities.

In her article "Autobiographic Subjects and Diasporic Locations," Inderpal Grewal invokes a "new subject" that is both political and heterogeneous. Her point proves to be much needed in studies of gender and in transnational cultural studies, where critiques of power relations often tend to collapse into an altered, but still flawed, binary opposition that involves little analysis of subjectivity outside a simple (and inadequate) comparative perspective. If we accept the construction Anzaldúa proposes, the Latina subject manages to remain multiple *and* function politically while fully undertaking or accepting oppositional relations.

What becomes difficult is establishing this Latina subjectivity within theoretical discourse. There is a need to balance respect for the specific circumstances and position of emergent subjects without privileging these points to the exclusion of diversity, or developing the sense of exoticism that plague studies of "the other." According to Grewal and Kaplan: "(T)he dominant Western attitude toward hybridity is that it is always elsewhere or it is infiltrating an identity or location that is assumed to be, to always have been, pure and unchanging" (8). There is a critical importance involved in accounting for marginality without succumbing to the common pitfall of *exclusively* seeing marginality.

In her essay "The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism," Norma Alarcón critically addresses dominant feminist theory and the position it takes with regard to race and subjectivity. Her conclusions are as follows:

(C)urrent political practices in the United States make it almost impossible to go beyond an oppositional theory of the subject, which is the prevailing feminist strategy and that of others; however, it is not theory that will help us grasp the subjectivity of women of color . . . each woman of color cited here, even in her positing of a "plurality of self," is already privileged enough to reach the moment of cognition of a situation for herself. This should suggest that to privilege the subject, even if multiple-voiced is not enough. (366)

The issue then becomes not a question of a *unified* subject or a *multiple-voiced* subject, but the use and manipulation of the subject in any theoretical discussion. Alarcón's argument is persuasive and she injects a useful skepticism of the "new subject" and of its value in theoretical discourse. The "new subject" has gained attention in part because it can be easily situated in the growing areas of cultural studies and identity politics; however, this factor limits the extent to which emergent subjectivities can oppose dominant power relations. Alarcón is quite likely correct in stating that emerging subjects are insufficient to support political initiatives, and do not provide an adequate locating of the intersections of race and gender within theory. At the same time, I am reluctant to dismiss multiple voiced subjects because, for all of the flaws inherent to a reliance on subjects, there are some innovative uses for emergent subjects within theoretical discourse. As Grewal argues:

This subject provides a constant critique of nationalist and even insurgent agendas, of power relations that structure global economic flows, and will never be complete. For such a

nonessential subject, difference would not be an obstacle to political praxis, since differences usually are taken to mean essentialist differences that are insurmountable for the formations of coalitions or for solidarity with various struggles. (Grewal 234)

Part of what will permit emergent subjects, including those formed out of transnationalism, a more oppositional and active engagement in theoretical discourse is an analysis of representations with emphasis on the multiple voices these texts present.

A creative accounting for the coming-of-age experience in a transnational context becomes a means for negotiating tensions as well as an intervention into the dominant systems of power. In presenting and asserting their own images, there is an opportunity for marginalized positions to disrupt the mechanisms that work to define them externally. It is important, however, to recognize that not all representations that speak from marginalized positions are actively attempting to re-order power relations. Inderpal Grewal emphasizes this and the importance of theoretical perspectives in determining the role of texts:

(F)or those termed minorities, it is not the resolution of identity that is necessary for political action, but oppositional mobilization and coalitional, transnational, feminists practices. For, after all, many immigrants or diasporic subjects, even those multiply located or with multiple voices, are not automatically oppositional; it is the consciousness of the linkages between the specific and multiple hegemonies under which these minorities live that makes them so.

(Grewal 251)

Even the most oppositional of texts requires a reading engaged in the critique of differential power relations in order to make an impact. Any analysis of Latina coming-of-age narratives must then speak to ways in

which texts affirm and define new positions through confrontation with established traditions and privileged forms.

These Latina coming-of-age narratives are success stories. They present the trauma and recovery of girls struggling to define themselves. They speak to the opportunities, privileges, and achievements the girls accomplish with the support of (and in spite of) the family dynamics and socio-economic circumstances they come from. In all of these narratives, there is a vision of the "American Dream" and its fulfillment.

While the texts included here do offer unique challenges to literary traditions and cultural representations, it is uncertain whether or not the images and narratives prove to function in an effectively disruptive way. These texts depend upon the "American Dream" as a reference and are often overpowered by it. Self-identification is defined within and through established power structure and the texts are easily used to reaffirm dominant ideology. This leaves oppositional efforts vulnerable to subversion and domestication. Through the manipulation of cultural products and the role of the literary institution, the success story of Latina narratives becomes one that is less about empowerment, and more about the United States as a "land of opportunity".

Conclusion

What is new is that this is a world in which both points of departure and points of arrival are in cultural flux, and thus the search for steady points of reference, as critical life choices are made, can be very difficult. It is in this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship and other identity markers) can become slippery, as the search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication. (Appadurai 44)

As culture and nation are confronted with recent shifts in migration and communication, an interrelated transformation is occurring in the construction of identity. Much of what marks identity today is dependent upon a range of defined, but constantly reconfigured, boundaries. In some respects, homelands can continue to be home even for those who have migrated to the U.S., but the singularity (and even the integrity) of what constitutes and defines that "home" is increasingly under threat by sheer numbers and proximity of "others."

Complications caused by transitions in culture are in some respects more threatening to those who hold minority positions. This raises issues of power and empowerment that can be viewed as both liberating and a source of concern. Stuart Hall's position is cautious:

The emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, new communities, hitherto excluded from the major forms of cultural representation, unable to locate themselves except as de-centered or subaltern, have acquired through struggle, sometimes in very marginalized ways, the means to speak for themselves for the first time. And the discourses of power in our society, the discourses of the dominant regimes, have been certainly threatened by this de-centered empowerment of the marginal and the local.

(Hall 34)

Current changes dissolve the traditional foundations for achieving full standing, and without the advantage of a recognized subjectivity, marginalized subjects must create new means of establishing themselves. At the same time, the means for maintaining the dominance of privileged positions is collapsing, as are simple patterns of hegemony. The recognition that identity is itself a constructed representation has provoked a greater self-consciousness in self-definition. In turn, this awareness demands a more careful analysis of the complex relationship between representations and lived realities, as well as a certain kind of vigilance to maintain definitions or reconfigure them to account for fluctuations.

Even seemingly stable identities are undergoing enormous changes prompted both from within, and through increasingly complicated interactions with other possibilities. The diversification of societies has changed the lives of individuals and communities, and poses problems for any attempt to isolate a nation-based identity. The formation and representation of identity are made increasingly complex as subject experience moves across and outside of established national boundaries and as these borders themselves disintegrate and are reconfigured. Efforts to formulate a sense of self and a group unification that is more than temporary is one of the main purposes in the active assertion of identity.

It remains uncertain whether alternate identities emerging today indicate an overall revision of the function of identity, or simply reflect the rise of new dominant actors within the same system of power relations. While positions privileged in the political economy may have some command over their own self-determination, confrontations with authority alter power relations. The struggle for position is not yet resolved

and, as the process of globalization continues to affect culture and nation, the role of identity and the significance of location will be further affected. Mike Featherstone describes the outcome of these shifts in the following way: "(T)here is a return to local cultures, and the emphasis should be placed upon local cultures in the plural, the fact that they can be placed alongside each other without hierarchical distinction" (179). The circulation of culture and formation of identity now function in a way that diminishes the possibility for any single group to privilege itself.

The partial displacement of the center permits a discussion that goes beyond identity. It is increasingly possible to speak of gender, ethnicity and marginality in a way that is less reliant upon relations with the dominant or center. There is simply a recognition of a complete subject and the beginnings of an analysis of it that speaks to more than identity. Narratives constructed to encapsulate the space between cultures, while related to the cultures they draw from, are not entirely a part of them. Relative to more nationally based texts, these transcend the cultures that form them to a degree and in a way that calls into question the coherence of culture.

"American" culture is characterized as much by emerging and established diversity as it is by any notion of tradition or consistency. This is increasingly being recognized within theoretical discourse. The understanding of identities which form outside traditional boundaries is a step towards a fuller analysis of the transnational subject, and serves the more political interest of deconstructing the flaws of the dominant approaches. It is increasingly apparent that categories once taken for granted are far more fluid and problematic than previously conceived. This means that a reorientation of theory is only a part of the larger

transition toward recognizing the position of literature and literary theory in a post-national world.

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