

Copyright  
by  
Danny Méndez  
2008

**The Dissertation Committee for Danny Méndez Certifies that this is the approved  
version of the following dissertation:**

**In Zones of Contact (combat): Dominican Narratives of Migration and  
Displacements in the United States and Puerto Rico**

**Committee:**

---

Jossianna Arroyo-Martínez, Supervisor

---

Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba

---

Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel

---

César A. Salgado

---

Nicolas Shumway

---

**In Zones of Contact (combat): Dominican Narratives of Migration and  
Displacements in the United States and Puerto Rico**

**by**

**Danny Méndez, B.A., M.A**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May, 2008**

## **Dedication**

*A tía Rita, que desde otros espacios me incita a seguir caminando. Sigamos deshaciendo misterios...*

## Acknowledgements

The pieces that compose this academic (and spiritual) path were laid way beyond my time, by people whose every breath has served as my inspiration. For this reason, the process of writing and developing this dissertation has been a complex and personal journey. I wish to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to the following people for inspiring me, for challenging me, and for demystifying this experience even when I thought I was losing faith.

I am very thankful to Jossianna Arroyo-Martínez, my advisor, friend and strongest supporter. Teaching by example, Jossianna's intelligence, elegance, respect and honesty has guided me at all times. Her ability to see beyond my doubts and insecurities, at crucial times, has been a constant source of motivation. *Gracias también por dejarme ser parte de todo lo lindo y positivo que siempre te rodea. La luz que te sigue ahora también está conmigo, gracias.*

Also, I am grateful to my committee members for their research, critical insights and suggestions. I wish to thank Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel for paving a very important path for Caribbean studies. Her readings and suggestions have been invaluable (*¡gracias!*). I want to thank Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba for his constant support and faith in my project. I also wish to thank Nicolas Shumway and César A. Salgado for their incisive comments and encouragement. Any errors that remain in this work are entirely attributed to my negligence.

I am greatly indebted to John W. Kronik (Q.E.P.D) and Myrna García-Calderon for providing me with the foundational guidance and literary background that has led to this day. *Gracias por inculcarme el respeto a la literatura.*

This project was prompted by two very important people in my life: Pedro Florentino Méndez and Altagracia Gómez de Méndez, my parents. *Gracias por dejarme seguir mis sueños y darme toda la libertad para ser quien soy. Gracias por enseñarme lo que significa la fortaleza. ¡Los amo!*

My sincerest thanks to my family for loving me and inspiring me to always continue the struggle. *Gracias a:* Graciela Gómez (*mi abuela*), Jenny (*mi hermana*), Pedro (*mi hermano*), Yoaury (*mi cuñada*), Tiffany Marie, Brandon Daniel, Remy (*mis sobrinos*), and tía Elsa . I wish to also thank tío Julio, *quien sé que desde el cielo está sonriéndome.*

I want to thank the “Michigan crew.” I began this academic journey in Ann Arbor and I am truly honored to have you all in my life, thank you: Paul A. Burns, Shawn Christian, Mariam Colón-Pizarro, Zaire Dinzey-Flores, Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, Mónica Sosa, and Radi Rangelova.

My displacement to Austin was not easy, but I was lucky enough to have the welcoming embraces of these wonderful people: Michael L. Segura, Rebeca Castellanos, Médar Serrata, Alejandra Zambrano, Jorge Nuñez, Karla González, Rocío Del Aguila, Christian Cousins, Lorna Torrado, Manuel Gerardo Avilés, Bárbara Abadía-Rexach, Celeste Henery, Peggy Brunache, Jemima Pierre, Jennifer Wilks, Enríque González-Conty, Juan Carlos López. *Gracias por ofrecerme todo el amor, el tiempo, y las palabras necesarias para entender que aunque largo el camino siempre termina.*

**In Zones of Contact (combat): Dominican Narratives of Migration and  
Displacements in the United States and Puerto Rico**

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Danny Méndez, PhD.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

Supervisor: Jossianna Arroyo-Martínez

The assassination of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in 1961 marked the beginning of many rebirths for the Dominican Republic. Confronted with the growing pains of an emerging democratic national consciousness, the island was also faced with an unprecedented circumstance: a massive exodus that displaced thousands of Dominicans to the United States and Puerto Rico. My dissertation focuses on contemporary narrative representations of Dominican migrations to the United States and Puerto Rico.

In chapter 1, “A Product of Exiles, Travels and Displacements: The Constructions of an Ethnic and Racial Consciousness in the United States in Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s

*Memoir*,” I propose my own working definition of a Dominican transnational subjectivity at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as I see it surfacing in Henríquez Ureña’s memoir.

In chapter two, “With Floating (Intranational) Borders: Displaced Dominicans in Puerto Rican Narratives,” I explore the narrative representation of Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico and the challenges they bring about to the Puerto Rican national discourse constituted in the late 1930s. This chapter analyzes José Luis González’s La luna no era de queso: memorias de infancia (1988), Ana Lydia Vega’s “El día de los hechos” from her short story collection Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio (1982) and Magali García Ramis’s “Cuatro retratos urbanos” from the short story collection Las noches del riel de oro (1995).

In chapter three, “Of Absent (nomadic) Fathers and Boys in Construction: Dominican Diasporic Subjectivities in Junot Díaz’s Drown,” I analyze the short story collection titled Drown (1993) by Junot Díaz. My reading of Díaz’s work interprets his characters as gravitating towards communities in which they become active components of multi-racial and multi-ethnic communities fostered by global migrations.

In the last chapter, “Crooked City Women: A Reading of Race, Ethnicity and Migration in Narratives of Late 20th and 21st Century Dominican Women writers,” I focus on Loida Martiza Pérez’s novel Geographies of Home (1999) and Josefina Báez’s performance piece Dominicanish (2000) to illustrate how their work challenges patriarchal forms of expression that are rooted in the homeland and then disseminated in U.S. diasporic Dominican communities.



## Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	ix
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Asserting a Transnational Consciousness.....	13
<b>Chapter One: A Product of Exiles, Travels, and Displacements: The Constructions     an Ethnic and Racial Consciousness in the United States in Pedro Henríquez     Ureña's <i>Memoir</i></b> .....	26
A Memoir of Home(s) .....	29
The National Home: Raising Pedro Henríquez Ureña.....	45
Pedro en la ciudad: A Dominican Memory in Transit.....	58
The Confluences of <i>raza y cultura</i> .....	76
<b>Chapter Two: With Floating (Intranational) Borders: Displaced Dominicans in     Puerto Rican Narratives</b> .....	84
The Paradoxes of a <i>dominicanidad viajera</i> .....	89
Dislocated National Tensions .....	96
As an Exile in my Dominican Mother's Womb.....	105
The Perennial Walk of the Foreigner.....	126
<b>Chapter Three: Of Absent (nomadic) Fathers and Boys in Construction: Dominican     Diasporic Subjectivities in Junot Díaz's <u>Drown</u></b> .....	135
Of Mother Tongues and Nomadic Encounters .....	138
My Body, My Story (vomit) .....	145
The How-To of Telling and Not Telling.....	154
Drowning el pato: Homosexuality, Masculinity and Movement.....	161
Photographing (her)Story: Motherhood and Abandonment .....	168

**Chapter Four: Crooked City Women: A Reading of Race, Ethnicity and Migration in Narratives of Late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dominican Women Writers ...175**  
Of Minor Literatures .....180  
Forging a Multilayered Dominican(york) Laughter .....183  
The Psychological and Emotional Junctures of Home .....201

**CONCLUSIONS .....221**

**REFERENCES.....229**

**VITA.....235**

## INTRODUCTION

En cuanto a mí, no tengo nada nuevo que aprenderle a Nueva York. Desde luego, podría aprender mucho en bibliotecas, conferencias, teatros, etc. lo que no es precisamente neoyorquino; y lo que, trabajando allí, aprovecharía muy poco. Ya le dije a Max: todavía fuera a Europa, por conocer sacrificaría algo; pero ¡Nueva York! Volver a aquel trabajo duro de diez horas y a los pequeños golpes de antipatía contra quienes, como yo, llevan en su tipo físico la declaración de pertenecer a pueblos y raza extraños e ‘inferiores’...

-Carta de Pedro Henríquez Ureña a Alfonso Reyes de el 3 de febrero del 1908

### **There's no guarantee**

Now I'm another person

Mouth twisted

Gui ri gui ri on dreams

Gui ri gui ri business

Even laughing

### **Laughing in Dominicanish**

There's no guarantee

Ni aquí ni allá...

God bless the child travelin' light

Here I am chewing English

And spitting Spanish.

-Josefina Báez, Dominicanish (47-49).

Separated by almost a century, Pedro Henríquez Ureña's and Josefina Baez's literary depictions of immigration and Dominican identities in the United States seem to be polar opposites, displaying two wildly different social and literary sensibilities. Each of them give voice to two very different migratory processes: Henríquez Ureña, writing a decade after the U.S. massively intervened in the Caribbean during the Cuban-Spanish American war, reflected attitudes corresponding to the period well before the formation

of Dominican diasporic identity communities – a time when the Dominican enclave in New York may have seemed ‘invisible’ - whereas Baez’s literary assumptions are rooted in a 21<sup>st</sup> century transnational stance which is the result of the problematic negotiation of Dominican identities connected to the great post-Trujillo Dominican migration which, by the force of sheer numbers if nothing else, made the Dominican community a very visible part of contemporary New York. Their literary sensibilities and production correspond to the early manifestations and consequent consolidation of a US empire, as defined by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri:

The passage to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty. In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *detrterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm with its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities... (12)

Their writings concurrently depict their predicaments, as a reflection of their time, within this borderless empire they have migrated to.

In the lines I quoted from his letter to Alfonso Reyes in México, Henríquez Ureña sums up his experience of New York in terms of the cultural disillusionment and of social hardships that befell him as a mulatto man at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that Henríquez Ureña confronts the issue of race and immigration in personal letters and not on the memoir he writes describing his first visit to New York city (1901-04), is a detail that critics have not studied yet. For Josefina Báez, a 21<sup>st</sup> century afro-Dominican woman, the New York urban space is a transitional site that is defined by, among other things, transnational migratory processes. While these two confront their particular

difficulties as Dominicans in New York city during different historical junctures, their narratives reflect a similar concern: how to conciliate an ethnic, racial, class and national identity in the United States that simultaneously draws on traits of cultural and racial multiplicity in the Dominican Republic while contending with the multi-ethnic and multi-racial communities that they encounter in their new local contexts. Although all Hispanic Caribbean immigrants to the United States experience similar identity processes, I am interested in tracing a difference in Dominican modes of incorporation into the United States through the authors I analyze on this dissertation. As Alejandro Portes and Ramón Grosfoguel have presented on their article “Caribbean Diaporas: Migration and Ethnic Communities” (1994), modes of incorporation refer to: “...the process of insertion of an immigration group at different levels of the host society. These levels encompass government policies, mainstream attitudes towards new comers, and the size and characteristics of the preexisting ethnic community” 62). As such, Dominican immigrations to the United States do not follow the same patterns of immigration nor reception as those of Cubans and Puerto Ricans, and this in itself has an effect on the ways Dominicans negotiate their identities in their diasporic communities. Portes and Grosfoguel point towards one of the key differences in Dominican immigrations to the United States: “Dominicans immigration has not been singled out for restriction by US authorities, but neither has it been favored with special programs” (64). As they create a niche for themselves in their communities, Dominicans are also producing cultural expressions that reflect their particular social, ethnic, racial and economic difficulties as immigrants in the United States; where their presence has not been as readily documented nor fostered.

The cultural production of Dominicans in transnational settings, such as those encountered and produced in New York city, New Jersey and Puerto Rico, cannot be understood without acknowledging the place of creolization as a marker of national, cultural and social development in the Dominican Republic, and indeed in the Hispanic Caribbean as a whole. As noted by Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnès Sourieau on their book Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity (1998): “Caribbean creolization offers a glimpse into a phenomenon that is fundamental to the New World experience” (1). Dominican immigrants in the United States, as it also occurs with other Caribbean groups, have already been part of a society that has been fundamentally shaped by the coexistence of multiple cultures (African, European and natives). As Portes and Grosfoguel point out:

To an extent seldom seen in other regions of the world, Caribbean societies are themselves the product of external migration. The native population of the islands was effectively annihilated in a short time due to a combination of European diseases and the brutal labor regime forced on it by the early colonizers. Thereafter, the area was populated by European settlers plus slaves and indentured servants brought from Africa and Asia to work the land. (50)

For this reason I note that the historic experience of hybridity of cultures, language, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality forged in the crucible of creolized societies (such as those in the Hispanic Caribbean) produces a legacy effect on the identities and communities crafted in the new host enclaves. The emotional crisis that accompanies the changes embodied in language, gender relations, class, and racial and ethnic consciousness brought about by the crossing of cultural and national borders in the context of the

United States and Puerto Rico are all mediated by the dynamics of a creolized Dominican culture. Dominican identities and the communities in the diaspora are prefigured by identity processes begun in the Dominican Republic. Hybridization is *not* a property of migration to the United States, but a longstanding Hispanic Caribbean cultural pattern to which members of the diaspora gravitate and (re)create in their respective diaspora communities.

As Daisy Cocco De Filippis elaborates on her book, Desde la diáspora: selección bilingüe de ensayos (2003), Dominican and Dominican-American writers have been writing about their immigration experiences in the United States from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if not before. Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir illustrates this early period both in its omissions as well as its descriptions. As a memoir, it peculiarly foreshortens social and political personal experiences one expects to find in a biographical account. It is only by giving weight to those gaps that we begin to sense some of the challenges Henríquez Ureña faced as an elite intellectual encountering a space that understood him solely through the lens of color. In other words, immigrants like Henríquez Ureña, who were raised in intellectual, elite settings, dealt with the racist slurs commonly directed at racial and ethnic others in the United States through a strategy of distance. On the other hand, Dominican narratives written in the 1990s respond to a different order of problems pertinent to the visibility of the Dominican community in the United States. Instead of the distancing procedures used by Henríquez Ureña, most authors writing from within the Dominican diaspora of the last two decades deal on some level with the voluntary or involuntary immigration (for political and/or economic reasons) from the Dominican Republic and, of necessity, with the diasporic perspective

on racial, class, ethnic, gender and sexuality constructions as these structure their lifestyles in the Dominican enclaves in the U.S.

There has recently been a welcome surge in the number of scholarly treatments of Dominican narratives written in the United States, but this attention has been notable for taking into account a very selective literary canon of writers, which has severely limited the representation of the Dominican experience. For me, a number of questions are posed, for instance by Janira Bonilla's commentary on Dominican literary production in the United States, and especially when she notes the following:

With the exception of the work of [Julia] Álvarez and [Junot] Díaz, historically Dominican literature has received marginal attention in the United States because most of the literary production by diasporic Dominicans is in Spanish and therefore has had little access to the mainstream markets. However, during the last ten years, with the introduction of Álvarez and Díaz, the growth of the Dominican community within the United States, and increased scholarship on Dominican studies, Dominican literature has begun to emerge from the margins. (201)

While it is true that our critical attention towards Dominican literature has increased over the last few years, it is also important to revisit those "margins" Bonilla notes. In order to understand the different representations of a Dominican identity in the United States, it is essential to study the literary production already in existence at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The proliferation of numerous Dominican and Dominican-American writers in the last decade such as Julia Álvarez, Junot Díaz, Nelly Rosario, Angie Cruz, Loida Maritza Pérez and Josefina Báez, writing about their experiences in the United States has



justly received a great deal of critical attention from scholars<sup>1</sup> who have found these texts to assume a paradigmatic importance in making sense of the historical event of Dominican migration. However, two caveats have to be lodged against this budding scholarly tradition. One is that the reception of these authors by scholars interested in analyzing the formation of Dominican diasporic communities in the United States starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s has also occluded the presence of prior Dominican migrations which generated their own narratives<sup>2</sup> (Cocco De Filippis 35-36). The second is that Dominican migrations to the United States have received a greater degree of critical attention than that of Dominicans migrating to the island of Puerto Rico and the ensuing effects of these displacements in Puerto Rican literary manifestations. This project intends to elaborate on both these issues. Lengthening the historical horizon of Dominican immigrant literature and taking into account the multiplicity of sites at which it has been produced will show how heterogenous it has been, how multiply it has been represented, and how much it defies confinement to just one framework or pattern.

In order to elaborate my objectives in the subsequent chapters, I first need to contextualize and define key theoretical concepts and their particular application to Dominican migrations and their representations in literature. In 1961, the Dominican

---

<sup>1</sup> See Lucía M. Suárez's, The Tears of Hispaniola: Haitian and Dominican Diaspora Memory. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006) and see also Silvio Torres-Saillant's, El retorno de las yolas : ensayos sobre diáspora, democracia y dominicanidad. (Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> In their anthology, Literatura dominicana en los Estados Unidos: presencia temprana, 1900-1950 (2001, ) Daisy Cocco de Filippis and Franklyn Gutierrez have gathered some of the most significant works written by Dominicans in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Some of these Dominican writers are: Fabio Fiallo Cabral, Manuel Florentino Cestero, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Jesusa Alfau Galván de Solalinde, Gustavo Bergés Bordas, Angel Rafael Lamarche, Virginia de Peña de Bordas and Andrés Francisco Requena.

Republic had to cope with more than a mere change in the political scene with the assassination of its dictator Rafael L. Trujillo. The end of Trujillo's thirty year long regime left the island economically and politically unstable, causing a great exodus that displaced thousands of Dominicans to the United States and Puerto Rico (Sagás and Molina 12). Immigration during the Trujillo era was virtually impossible as the following lines indicate:

Migration-and even occasional travel-were jealously curtailed by the Trujillo dictatorship. Travel provided the opportunity for disaffected individuals to join the political exile community, and it was feared that travel would expose Dominicans to 'dangerous' democratic ideas. Thus overseas, travel was strictly restricted and the travelers' activities monitored by the regime. As a result, very few Dominicans migrated abroad during the Trujillo era. (12)

With the assassination of Trujillo and the U.S. invasion in 1965, the prospect of escaping the debilitated economic infrastructure of the island became one of the main reasons of immigration for thousands of Dominican citizens. For this reason, contemporary Dominican patterns of migration are difficult to classify according to a clear disjunction between the economic and the political, since they have been dependent upon the particular blend of the political and economic situation which has differed greatly from one generation to another.

Entering the culturally and ethnically dynamic contact zones of their new host societies, those first wave Dominican immigrants had to negotiate their own niches amidst other ethnic groups. I take the term *contact zones* from Mary Louise Pratt to describe the parameters of the encounters of different cultures and ethnicities in social

spaces that repeat the hegemony of uneven relations of domination and subordination in the social whole, extrapolating this concept to the texts I analyze in this dissertation (Pratt 1992, 4). In the texts I examine, the element of *contact* illustrates the multiple identity negotiations enacted by Dominicans, which go beyond a mere reproduction of a Dominican identity acquired in the place of origin. I concur with Pratt's elaboration of contact, when she proposes that:

A "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and "travelers," not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (7)

My objective is to illustrate and analyze simultaneous instances of cultural creation and reproduction in these diasporic/migratory communities. The convergence of differences in these communities occur, I believe, in what Homi Bhabha describes as an "in-between space." As Bhabha indicates in his book, The Location of Culture (1994):

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions-or race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation-that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-

between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity. (1)

My readings will accordingly challenge homogeneous conceptions of language, race, national identities and sexualities, taking them instead to be in a constant state of mutability as a result of the cultural contacts occurring in their respective spaces-in-between.

The massive Dominican migrations began after the 1965 United States occupation of the island when large numbers of Dominicans left seeking better living conditions, destined mainly for New York City, Florida, Boston and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The large numbers of Dominicans leaving the island in the 1960s has led to some discussion of whether these migrations are properly classified as either a diaspora or as a transmigration, the latter of which implies the preservation of home ties. Silvio Torres-Saillant identifies a Dominican diaspora in his book, El retorno de las yolas: Ensayos sobre diáspora, democracia y dominicanidad (1999) by asserting that: “Existe diáspora dominicana debido al gran éxodo que ha marcado a nuestro pueblo. La última emigración masiva que registra la historia dominicana irrumpió a principios de los sesenta y se distingue de las anteriores en que, contrario a aquellas, esta engendró a una comunidad diaspórica” (31). He goes on to trace the different uses the term Diaspora has undergone in the past few years in both literary studies and migration studies when he indicates that: “[el uso del termino diáspora]...se extiende a todos los grupos contemporáneos que muestren, en una tierra adoptiva, los recursos materiales, la estructura sociopolítica y los incentivos discursivos para representarse a sí mismos como diáspora” (31). On the other hand, Peggy Levitt disagrees with Torres-Saillant’s

assertion, claiming ‘diaspora’ refers to specific conditions: “Some scholars also use the term ‘diaspora’ to describe generalized relationships between migrants from a particular country throughout the world. I reserve this term for a specific kind of transnational tie involving expulsion or involuntary exile, based on a remembrance of a lost or imagined homeland that is still to be established (Levitt 928). But as we have learned from previous studies on Puerto Rican<sup>3</sup> and Dominican<sup>4</sup> migration patterns, the forces of expulsion can be economic and not solely political, and the voluntarism of Levitt’s definition does not conceptualize the deep and total reach of economic penury and the level of control of the victims of economic injustice. In this project, I apply the term diaspora to the cultural impact of Dominican migrations during the 1960s and the repercussions that these geographical dispersions have had on Dominican narratives written in the United States and in Puerto Rico. In doing so, I address the many ways in which Dominican national identities have been continuously reconstructed, in tandem with the lived realities of transnational migrant subjects (Duany 2002, 36).

I am also reading a nomadic subjectivity that defines the ethnic and racial cultural contacts, emotional camouflages and sexual performances that affect the characters analyzed on this project. This nomadic subjectivity is in continuous interaction with its surroundings, and leads to particular performative politics of becoming. As Rosi Braidotti notes on her book Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory (1994): “Nomadic shifts designate...a creative sort of

---

<sup>3</sup> See Jorge Duany’s. The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). See also Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel’s Caribe two ways: cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico. (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2003).

becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction and experience and knowledge...” (6) These politics of becoming and nomadology are not far from Deleuze and Guattari’s framework of multiplicity and the nomad, which I also extrapolate to my own readings of Dominican identities, and their continuously becoming migrant/diasporic subjectivities.

On their critique of Freudism, Deleuze and Guattari reject the unilateral approach they perceive on Freud’s psychoanalysis and focus more intently on a framework of multiplicity as a basis of subjectivity. This notion of multiplicity is key in our understanding of diaspora/migration experiences as always unfinished and always in process for the subjects that experience it, especially if they are constantly adapting to their new surroundings.<sup>5</sup> In other words, we have more than mere representations of the same thing, instead we have the different subject positionings of material, emotional, physical and spiritual elements that may have a direct relationship with the place of origin, in this case the Dominican Republic, but also with the new spaces encountered in the diaspora (Deleuze and Guattari 32). Deleuze and Guattari explain the use of their framework as:

---

<sup>4</sup> See Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernandez’s, The Dominican Americans. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> See Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” *African Studies Review*, no. 43(Spring 2000); See also Brent Hayes Edwards, Cheryl Johnson-Odim, Agustín Laó-Montes, Michael O. West, Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Commentary and Response,” *African Studies Review*, no. 43 (Spring 2000). The authors of these studies analyze the theoretical framework of diaspora as understood within African diaspora and African-American studies. They illustrate recent concerns with globalization and transnationalism pointing towards the importance of recognizing multiplicities within these processes. Viewing migration as always in construction and never finished, these authors point towards the necessity of affirming a multiplicity of differences when defining diaspora and migration discourses.

Multiplicity was created precisely in order to escape the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one, to escape dialectics, to succeed in conceiving the multiple in the pure state, to cease treating it as a numerical fragment of a lost Unity or Totality or as the organic element of a Unity or Totality yet to come, and instead distinguish between different types of multiplicity. (32)

While I do not think that the authors analyzed on this project intend to present a decentralization of the state and the effects of the nomad on this decentralization, I do believe their projects point towards an un-nostalgic narrative depiction of migration in which its constituents actively affect their spaces of cultural multiplicity. We can flesh this idea out a bit more, and define multiplicity as the physical state-space of circulation and social interactions experienced by the Dominican characters explored. This new space is defined within a greater framework of global migrations and diasporas as represented by their New Jersey, New York, and Puerto Rican enclaves. These changing spaces result in the constant redefinition of such concepts as race, sexuality, gender and class, and are often times in a state of oppositional definitions when related to the other subjects cohabitating in these communities. Furthermore, some of the characters presented are faced with the difficulty of transcending and redefining their positions in the Dominican Republic, as poor rural Dominicans to that of a minority group read in particular racial and ethnic ways in the United States.

### **Asserting a Transnational Consciousness**

Intervening in the important discussions on transnationalism and transmigration occurring in the 1990s, Dominican migration scholars such as Jorge Duany, Ernesto

Sagás, Ramona Hernandez and Silvio Torres-Saillant pointed out the double aspect of this framework, applying as it does to the sociopolitical, cultural and economic impact of the Dominican diaspora in the United States and in the island itself. These scholars build on the foundational work of Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton and their definition of transnationalism as: "...the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (2) Transnationalism, as opposed to early, assimilationist or melting pot models, defines the ways in which immigrants arrive to their new local spaces already carrying with them a sense of class, gender, race and ethnicity derived from experience, and projected on the contours of their ethnic communities. In this regard Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton note that immigrants in a transnational field can: "...use their social relationships and their varying and multiple identities generated from their simultaneous positioning in several social locations both to accommodate to and to resist the difficult circumstances and the dominant ideologies their encounter in their transnational fields" (4-5).

Unsurprisingly, the question of identity within a transitional setting materializes itself as a trope in the works I analyze on this project. In each of the chapters that follow, Dominican identities are structured amidst transnational cultural settings reflecting contemporary migration patterns from the Dominican Republic to the United States. The sites of residence described on the works of Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Ana Lydia Vega, Magali García Ramis, José Luis Gozález, Junot Díaz, Josefina Báez and Loida Maritza Pérez are transnational in the sense that they depict how Dominicans move in different spaces to create fluid identities that could be both rooted in the Dominican Republic and in their local communities in the United States and Puerto Rico (Schiller, Basch and



Blanc-Szanton 11). Each writer in his or her own way depicts aspects of the transformations Dominican migrations have undergone in “local spaces in cities such as New York and San Juan, Puerto Rico where they have relocated in large numbers” (Duany 2002, 34). I have found Jorge Duany’s anthropological study Quisqueya on the Hudson: The Transnational Identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights (1994) very helpful as an intellectual model for my own analysis, as Duany was perhaps the first to extensively examine Dominican communities in the New York city. Duany’s ethnographic study of a Dominican neighborhood in Washington Heights yielded the finding that, through their everyday cultural practices, Dominican immigrants in New York city were both maintaining and reconstructing their identities, an activity the substance of which consciously differentiated them from other of New York’s Latino ethnic groups. In this study Duany noted that: “Due to the proximity of the island, the ability to travel back and forth with ease and the connections to family and friends on the island, Dominicans can defy the melting pot assimilation patterns of earlier Europeans immigrants...” (Duany 1994, 44).

Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández’s work, The Dominican-Americans (1998) goes a step further in describing this transnational community. Taking a cultural turn, Torres-Saillant and Hernández perceive transnationalism in terms of a “cultural state of mind that permits [Dominicans] to remain actively linked to life in the native land while becoming acclimated to the values and norms of the receiving society” (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1998, 156). Transnationalism also brings with it some challenges to the Dominican community, especially when Dominicans are faced with the reality of a different racial classification system.

Immigration to the United States heightens the attention of the immigrants towards a racial and ethnic consciousness, that, on the Dominican Republic, has over the centuries generated a varied vocabulary which overwhelms the limited racial labels (which tend towards the manichean opposition black vs. white) available to them in the United States. As Duany elucidates: “On the one hand, transnational migration can erode hegemonic discourses on race and ethnicity in both sending and receiving countries. On the other hand, the racialization of Dominicans in the United States-as well Haitians in the Dominican Republic or Dominicans in Puerto Rico-can harden fundamentalist concepts of cultural difference” (Duany 2002, 45). While the Caribbean model of racial classification allows Dominicans in the island to maneuver their assumed racial identities in such a way as to negate or directly ward off any associations with a black race, in the United States they are forced to contend with a limited number of racial labels leading them to assume a “third racial category” such as Latino, Hispanic, Spanish or Spanish American (Duany 2002, 46). This brings us to a question central to the Dominican immigrant’s experience of race: does immigration significantly alter Dominican self-perceptions of race or are they simply adopting, as a form of cultural bricolage, a non-white racialized label that is still for the most part considered to be non-black.

This question is most recently addressed in Ginetta E. B. Candelario’s sociological study, Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops (2007). Candelario departs from the notion that the Dominican Republic’s national construction was built under a system of rules that continue to have an impact on the ways Dominicans-in the island and outside of it-negotiate their identities. One of the

most damaging and simplistically defined precepts in this system is the negation of black ancestry in the Dominican Republic. Candelario proposes that it is not simply the desire of whiteness that structures identity discourses and displays in the island, but instead an ideal norm of what it means to be *dominicano*. This process in the island has been historically mediated under the disjunctive of asserting both a Hispanicity (deriving from Europe) and an assumed indigenous identity, eliding the African or black culture associated with Haiti. Candelario traces how Dominicans have assumed their Hispanic roots and indigenous identities in preference to their black legacy as a way of affirming their autonomy in the context of Spanish colonialism, Haitian unification efforts and U.S. imperialist forces. In the context of Dominican communities in the United States she stresses that:

Because Dominicans are a transnational community, one that has historically existed in dynamic dialectic between the United States and Haiti, Dominican identities must be understood in relation to that triangular dialectic. That is, while I agree that identities are internally cohesive, paying close attention to the complexity of identity discourses and displays forces me to argue that Dominican identities are also embodied, displayed, enacted, and perceived according to their context. (8)

In order to evaluate the legacy of that history in current Dominican identity discourses Candelario explores the sites in which national historiography is codified into myth, especially in the national museum exhibits, popular culture, literatures and even beauty parlors, insofar as the later reproduce the myths of the Dominican appearance – hair, skin color, nails, etc.

As Candelario's work shows, ideals of beauty in the Dominican Republic are directly linked to hair, because unlike skin color, facial features and ancestry in the island it can be structured and confined to the demands of self-identification with a non-black identity. I am perhaps most interested in Candelario's perceptive commentary on creolization and identity discourses Dominicans are involved in within their transnational communities. In this sense Candelario cautions that:

Dominican identity in the United States must be understood as simultaneously ethnic and racial, or "ethno-racial." By ethno-racial I mean that Dominicans are negotiating their status as racialized minorities operating in the context of histories and structured beyond their control, but they do so with a degree of agency and self-determination. They bring to the local context, in other words, their own histories and understanding of their identities and they display them accordingly. The degree to which they are successful in securing others' acceptance of their self-perceptions depends on their receiving context and the relative salience of gender, class, citizenship, and place in their lives. (10)

The roots of transnational culture go back, as we will see in my analysis of Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir, to before the Dominican immigrant community in the United States was a visible enclave, leading to the heightened presence of Dominican communities at the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where I locate Josefina Báez's performance/poem. My work is then also concerned with analyzing the difficulties of acknowledging the intricacies of cultural, racial, and ethnic multiplicities that have historically defined the Dominican Republic, and then visualize how these factor into the diaspora in the United

States and Puerto Rico. My approach to these traditions, uses a theoretical concept I call *emotional creolization*.

*Emotional creolization* bears on the immigrant subject's everyday task of consolidating past notions of gender, sexuality and race acquired in the Dominican Republic along with adjusting to the pressures of assimilating into other cultural processes. We can then say that this process simultaneously unhinges and weaves new forms of *dominicanidad* in the context of the United States. An *emotional creolization process* is the byproduct of mechanisms of identity constructions that draw from the legacy of racial and ethnic cultures defining the Caribbean region as a whole, while it also draws upon the mixture of ethnic groups present in the United States and their own trajectories of myth and identity. Within an *emotional creolization* we still have all the tensions and diffractions of language and cultural production that define the term of creolization itself, but this time manifested at an emotional and psychological level, and the site of exposure is the United States rather than the Caribbean or Latin American region. These become sites of sensibility.

As sites of sensibility the spaces of immigration influence the becoming processes of these migratory subjects. Filiations with the Dominican nation are reworked from the vantage point of the diaspora. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate that: "...becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance" (238). If an alliance with the new host society is to be conceded, then one must also take into account the place of affect within this negotiation. Affect as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, could be: "A fearsome involution

calling us toward unheard-of becomings. These are not regressions, although fragments of regression, sequences of regressions may enter in” (240). The uncanny *feeling* that they are immersed in a process of self-redefinition in their new societies once again reminds us that they derive from national spaces defined by the mixture of cultures. Affect in this regard is: “...not a personal feeling of, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel...” (238). Immigration faces these characters with cultural and social systems different from theirs, and in doing so challenges their preconceived notions of national identities.

Creolization and its place in the production of Caribbean cultures arose first as a critical theme in the aesthetic sphere, among Caribbean artists, and from there it was taken up by historians and sociologists. In the case of the Dominican Republic creolization processes began to take form in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the transplant of African peoples into the island as a result of the extinction of the indigenous population. The active mixing of African cultures with indigenous and European cultures led to the framework of creolization theorized by Edouard Glissant. On Poetics of Relation (1996) Glissant reflects on the different ethnic and racial encounters taking place in the crowded Caribbean space, claiming that these encounters have yielded something more than *mestizaje*: “...creolization is métissage without limits, the elements of which are manifold, its outcomes unpredictable. Creolization diffracts (changes direction) whereas some forms of métissage may concentrate more... Thus, creolization carries itself the adventure of multilingualism along with the extraordinary explosion of cultures” (46-47). Glissant elaborates his framework of creolization with the backdrop of the French

Caribbean but his views can be extrapolated to Caribbean as whole, and to its diaspora.

The Caribbean, as Glissant notes in his essay Discours antillais (1989), is a:

...site of history characterized by ruptures that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade. Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment, as it were, as it happened with those people who have frequently produced a totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance European people, but came together in the context of shock, contradiction, painful negation, and explosive forces. (62)

In the case of the Dominican Republic, the African diaspora, has produced uncanny effects on a conscious and unconscious level, a massive denial and repression of historic fact; Glissant's creolization process has gone forward, in the island, through staged contradictions, especially for those that claim a European and an indigenous past as the determinants of Dominican national subjectivity. In the collective memory of the Dominican Republic, contributions of Africans at all levels of the national project have been silenced or rendered a secondary if not foreign status in relation to what is considered to be *dominicano* (Candelario 2007, 254).

In my definition of an *emotional creolization* I draw from Glissant's mechanisms of cultural production and preservation that marked the transplantation of African peoples to the Caribbean. I am particularly interested in fleshing out the components of reversion and diversion as I see them occurring in the Dominican diasporic communities described by Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Ana Lydia Vega, Magali García Ramis, José Luis González, Junot Díaz, Josefina Báez and Loida Maritza Pérez. What makes my concept of an *emotional creolization* different from what Glissant originally proposes is that I situate it

within Dominican narratives of migration in the United States where a motif continually emerges in which, 'home grown' notions of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender are tested against a cruder racial and gender codes produced by other histories (U.S. history). By situating *emotional creolization* in a different territory I can discuss how immigration to the United States can at times exacerbate issues initially experienced in the Dominican Republic.

Mechanisms of reversion and diversion initially defined by Glissant on Discours antillais, correspond to the actions African peoples assumed in the Caribbean in order to both preserve their African culture but also adapting it to their new surroundings. As Glissant explains: "The first impulse of a transplanted population which is not sure of maintaining the old order of values in the transplanted locale is that of reversion. Reversion is the obsession with a single origin... To revert is to consecrate permanence, to negate contact" (16). But once an active interaction with the new surroundings becomes inevitable, as Glissant notes, *diversion* emerges occurs concurrently with reversion. Diversion, then, allows for the coexistence of a repressed past (traumatic or not) of experiences rooted in the place of origin and the unquestioned acceptance of the new social and cultural order operating in the new host society: "Diversion is not a systematic refusal to *see*. No, it is not a kind of self-inflicted blindness nor a conscious strategy of flight in the face of reality. Rather, we would say that it is formed, like a habit, from an interweaving of negative forces that go unchallenged..." (20). What is particularly illuminating in these mechanisms of reversion and diversion is that repressed emotions and realities are once again set into motion when faced with the necessity of



acculturation into a new host society. As we shall see, in the grand sweep of the Dominican diaspora narrative, these two functions become extremely salient.

In chapter 1, “A Product of Exiles, Travels and Displacements: The Constructions of an Ethnic and Racial Consciousness in the United States in Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s *Memoir*,” I propose my working definition of a Dominican transnational subjectivity at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as I see it surfacing in Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s memoir. In this chapter I focus on the first travel experience of Henríquez Ureña to the United States. The aim of this chapter is also to investigate the cultural implications of what it means to be Dominican at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for an intellectual mulatto man such as Henríquez Ureña in New York city. I review his memoir’s account of this journey, the poetry he writes while in New York city, and his correspondence of the time with his friend the Mexican intellectual, Alfonso Reyes. Some of the questions that are at the center of my study relate to the different mechanisms of ethnic and racial negotiations prefigured in Henríquez Ureña’s depiction of culture in New York city, a depiction that is already double – public in the memoirs and poetry, private in descriptions in his letters written around the same time. An emotional creolization process is noted on Henríquez Ureña’s problematic claims of a creole identity and culture that fails to acknowledge the presence of African cultures in the Dominican Republic. This in itself roots his claims for an universal culture within a Dominican identity that is primarily defined by its Hispanic legacy. Henríquez Ureña’s class, racial and ethnic self-perceptions are then, as expected, affected by the society he encounters in New York city at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In chapter two, “With Floating (Intranational) Borders: Displaced Dominicans in Puerto Rican Narratives,” I explore the narrative representation of Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico and the challenges they bring to the Puerto Rican national discourse from the late 1930s. Here, issues of race, ethnicity, citizenship and nationality are seen to be constructed and embodied separately in both the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, but then become further complicated as the Dominican enclave in Puerto Rico sets up a diaspora/immigration dialogue. On this chapter I analyze José Luis González’s La luna no era de queso: memorias de infancia (1988), Ana Lydia Vega’s “El día de los hechos” from her short story collection Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio (1982) and Magali García Ramis’s “Cuatro retratos urbanos” from the short story collection Las noches del Riel de Oro (1995). My focus in this chapter is intent on reading, defining and elaborating the characters presented on these narratives as foreigners constantly negotiating their identity, their very presence, in contrast with the reality of Puerto Rico. The representation of Dominican immigrants in Puerto Rican narratives, undergo an ambivalent exposure depicting an emotional creolization process that touches upon the sometimes conflicting racial and ethnic markers defining the national and the cultural fields of both Caribbean spaces.

In chapter three, “Of Absent (nomadic) Fathers and Boys in Construction: Dominican Diasporic Subjectivities in Junot Díaz’s Drown,” I analyze the short story collection titled Drown (1993) by the Dominican born and New Jersey raised author Junot Díaz. Díaz’s work in Drown, has received a great deal of recent critical attention towards the immigrant Dominican communities of New York City and New Jersey. My reading of Díaz’s work situates his characters as gravitating towards communities in

which they become active components of multi-racial and multi-ethnic communities fostered by global migrations. On this chapter I also briefly contrast Junot Díaz's literary production to that of Julia Álvarez.

In the last chapter, "Crooked City Women: A Reading of Race, Ethnicity and Migration in Narratives of Late 20th and 21st Century Dominican Women writers" I focus on Loida Martiza Pérez's novel Geographies of Home (1999) and Josefina Baez's performance piece Dominicanish (2000) to illustrate how their work has challenged the geographic coordinates of Dominican national spaces, while also challenging patriarchal forms of expression rooted in the homeland and then disseminated in US diasporic Dominican communities. Here the urban space takes the form of a "crooked city," or a twisted city harboring the multiple cultural and social encounters and evasions amongst Dominican immigrants in the United States. The resulting contacts and tensions represented in these works elaborate on the constantly evolving notions of *dominicanidad* that are triggered in a "crooked city", and that I perceive as being more acutely exposed through the female characters Báez and Pérez portray.

These last two chapters complicate our understanding of transnational identities in the urban expanses of New York and New Jersey by particularly emphasizing how race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender have been preconditioned to be in a state of stress in these communities, prior to immigration from the Dominican Republic.

## Chapter One

### **A product of Exiles, Travels and Displacements: The Constructions of an Ethnic and Racial Consciousness in the United States in Pedro Henríquez Ureña's *Memoir***

Dominican historian and essayist Pedro Henríquez Ureña, when living in the United States, resided in New York, Washington DC and Minnesota, as well as in other Latin American countries. These different residences corresponded to important stages in his life and, more pertinently, provided him with the material out of which he wrought the literary, cultural, political and overall societal observations of the United States and its relationship to Latin America in essays, letters and memoirs.

The memoir written in 1909 while in México (but published entirely in 1989) may well be claimed as the first written account by a Dominican intellectual in the United States. Not only does Henríquez Ureña use the occasion to express his views of North American society and its relationship to his own Dominican *patria*, but his experience had a decisive influence on the notion of a Pan-Latin American identity he later elaborated in his 1925 essay, “La utopía de América”. The rudiments of Henríquez Ureña’s humanistic views of “el hombre universal,” which is the social construction at the center of “La utopia de América,” appears first in his 1909 memoir. This universal man appeals as an ideal to Henríquez Ureña’s nomadic character as presented throughout his memoir, an authorial presence that accompanies his entire personal and professional life. As Henríquez Ureña tells us in his essay, “el hombre universal” is a product of

many journeys and displacements, by which he is made into the universal persona situated in the utopic landscape of a Latin America that has also been built up, over the centuries, by journeys and displacements. Although Henríquez Ureña's ideal has a universal vocation, his experience of diverse cultures never dislodges the autochthonous culture that is his birthright:

¿Y cómo se concilia esta utopía, destinada a favorecer la definitiva aparición del hombre universal, con el nacionalismo antes predicado, nacionalismo de jícaras y poemas, es verdad, pero nacionalismo al fin?...sabr  gustar de todo, apreciar todos los matices, pero ser  de su tierra; su tierra, y no la ajena, le dar  el gusto intenso de los sabores nativos, y esa ser  su mejor preparaci n para gustar de todo lo que tenga sabor genuino, car cter propio. (7-8)

But as is the way with utopia and lofty ideals of universality, human problems immediately arise when trying to put them into practice. I believe Pedro Henríquez Ureña began to experience them during his first travels to the United States.

In this chapter, I focus on Henríquez Ureña's first encounter with the United States, which he unfolds with varying degrees of specificity in this memoir, in the poetry he wrote while in New York City, and also in the letters he exchanged with his friend Alfonso Reyes. Furthermore, I argue that the 24 year old Pedro's memoir projects lived experiences of migration, class and ethnicity which shaped him even prior to becoming a traveler to the United States. Henríquez Ureña's memoir presents the case of an elite Dominican intellectual's national consciousness put to the test of early 20<sup>th</sup> century New York City. The description of his arrival to New York city is first filtered through the literary framework provided by Jos  Enrique Rod 's essay, Ariel (1900), and then

modified by his own city wanderings. Henríquez Ureña's self-image as a poet, a cultured traveler, a member of the Dominican elite, is catalyzed by the unexpected social and economic realities he underwent as a working class immigrant.

Alfredo Roggiano was the first to publish fragments of the memoir in 1961 in Pedro Henríquez Ureña en los Estados Unidos.<sup>6</sup> After acquiring permission from Pedro Henríquez Ureña's widow, Isabel Lombardo Toledano de Henríquez Ureña, to reproduce a selection of this memoir, Roggiano filled out the context by including supplementary material from his most important writings which document his three visits to the United States.

I am using the edition of Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir that was published in 1989 in Argentina, and I am consulting, in addition, a subsequent 2000 edition published in México that includes other material released previously by Roggiano, such as another *Diario* (recounting Henríquez Ureña's displacement from Cuba to México between the years 1909-1911) and his *Notas de viaje a Cuba* (describing his journey back to Cuba from México in 1911).

The first three parts of the memoir intersect accounts of Henríquez Ureña's childhood in Santo Domingo with descriptions of his first stay in the United States. The fourth and last part deals with his stay in Mexico from 1906 to 1909. On August 5, 1909 of that year he began the *Diario* included in the 2000 edition. I will be focusing entirely on the parts in the memoir related to the United States, an aspect of his life that has thus far received little critical attention.

---

<sup>6</sup>Alfredo Roggiano. Pedro Henríquez Ureña en los Estados Unidos. Editorial Cultural: México, 1961.

Growing up during the dictatorship of Ulises Heureaux,<sup>7</sup> Henríquez Ureña witnessed the severe problems this brought to his family; including multiple exiles to Haiti and Cuba. The culminating blow was the death of Pedro's mother, which brought about the disintegration of the home and family (his father remarried shortly after). At that moment in Pedro's father's life, it was necessary to attain a greater distance from the Dominican Republic due to his political affiliations. Perhaps Henríquez Ureña wrote his memoir at such an early age in order to organize these traumatic experiences, creating a home out of a longing for home. The act of writing his memoir (or evoking memories of that past) is an act of self-affirmation as a Dominican, a member of the Dominican community, preceding any further displacements away from the Dominican Republic.

### **A Memoir of Home(s)**

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, or even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back...we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.

-Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands  
(10)

The experience of immigration depicted in Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir does not immediately offer us the nostalgic hindsight gaze of the abandoned *patria* alluded to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ulises Heureaux, commonly known in the Dominican Republic as Lilís, governed the island from 1887-1899. There is very little information available about his family, even so it is well known that he was born in Puerto Plata in 1845 to immigrant parents. His father is rumored to have been a Haitian immigrant and his mother immigrated to the Dominican Republic from one of the Minor Antilles (I was unable to find the specific island she was born in. Heureaux's rule was marked by bankruptcy and the brutal suppression of his opponents. He was assassinated in 1899, leaving the island with a great debt and open to foreign invasions.

by Rushdie in the lines above. If anything, in his memoir Henríquez Ureña expresses a joy and excitement characteristic of a traveler on the verge of a new departure: “¡Nunca hubiera pensado entonces que pasaría tanto tiempo fuera de mi país! Iba contento, lo cual causó extrañeza en quienes me conocían con mis exagerados afectos patrios; pero pensaba que mi ausencia duraría cuatro o cinco años, y que durante ella tendría ocasión de visitar el país” (64). Henríquez Ureña arrived in New York in 1901. It was not until 1908 that he saw the Dominican Republic again, having in the meantime made extensive visits to both Cuba and México. In 1901, Henríquez Ureña was just 16. Even though his family had been exiled from the Dominican Republic during his childhood, he had never spend so much consecutive time away from home – and this, during the crucial years of his youth.

In order to conciliate exile and self-identity, Rushdie conceived a narrative space of understanding between the India he left behind (or lost with travel) and the “imaginary Indias” of his own construction. Henríquez Ureña’s memoir elaborates the inverse process. His memoir does not, at least directly, present the case of a subject who is seeking to bridge the gap between the Dominican nation abandoned and the new host society encountered.

Henríquez Ureña’s memoir illustrates many *other* things than the mere representation of a Dominican (ethnic) background. In the title of this chapter I have alluded to the coexistence of exile and displacement in Henríquez Ureña’s writing consciousness, but coexistence does not imply identity. I have found it useful to adopt a concept of writing and memory construction that is akin to Azade Seyhan’s proposal (1996) that: “The labors of memory transcribed in language reclaim the lost experience



of another time and place. The discourse of dislocation and relocation often mirrors the reconfigured consciousness of postmodern culture itself” (175). Although I view Henríquez Ureña’s memoir as a depiction of travel experiences of modernity, I am also interpreting his memoir as a historically prefiguring attempt at recapturing the Dominican nation he had gradually displaced himself from (for different reasons). The memoir itself is the literal site of exposure of a life that had been marked by dislocations and relocations.

Henríquez Ureña’s 1909 memoir was not his first attempt to write an autobiography, since he had been keeping a diary which he later destroyed. In this act of destruction and consequent continuation of self-writing there seems to be a clear focus on self figuration along with a perceptible textual strategy, and nowhere is this most clearly depicted than when he proclaims:

Ya alguna vez emprendí un diario, cuando tenía quince años, 1899, y lo continué hasta 1902; pero lo destruí porque en él apenas apunté otra cosa que impresiones literarias y *hechos de vida externa*. Pero ahora quiero componer (sí, *componer*) una relación detallada de mi vida con los puntos que han ido quedando en mi memoria, especialmente en *cosas literarias*. (28, My emphasis)

Making us aware of the existence of a previously destroyed diary makes one wonder what is missing from *this* memoir, what were the exact observations of “hechos de vida externa” that seemed so unimportant to Henríquez Ureña that they merited destruction? Furthermore, what is the purpose of this young man’s memoir?

Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s allusion to a destroyed text within the one we have helps us see that, even this early in his career, a writing consciousness was layered. It is

important to appreciate the tantalizing hint, here, which indicates that this memoir may be a mere counterfeit, an artifice veiling other problematic experiences, a text disguising another text, especially as the memoir is bounded by the act of destroying the diary, which related the day to day events he lived until its destruction. It is necessary to keep the question of the diary in mind because, in his description of New York City, *Henrriquez Ureña* will assume a distance that makes his description seem more like an extensive theatre review of the city space encountered, while rather surprisingly omitting his social and political lived experiences. In a recent work that analyzes the work of *Pedro Henrriquez Ureña*, *Arcadio DÍaz Quiñones* also reflects on these omissions by asserting that:

Esa memoria de la ciudad funciona por sus omisiones tanto como por sus afirmaciones. No hay indicios de que la pluralidad que descubre en Nueva York incluya otros sujetos, que se haya interesado por la cultura afronorteamericana o por figuras contemporáneas como W.E.B du Bois o Arturo Alfonso Schomburg. Llama la atención que no habla del desarrollo del Barrio en East Harlem y las comunidades puertorriqueñas...lo que sí le maravillaba era la vitalidad de la “alta cultura” que ofrecía la ciudad. (201)

Self writing is always a performative act of re-presentation, and as such it proceeds with dual techniques of omission and insertion of the precise events to be highlighted within the fabric we come to know as a memoir or an autobiography. This performative dimension of autobiography is elaborated in *Sylvia Molloy's* foundational work, *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America* (1991), where she writes that autobiography is: “...a retelling, since the life to which it supposedly refers is

already a kind of narrative construct. Life is always, necessarily, a tale: we tell it to ourselves as subjects, through recollection; we hear it told to or we read it when the life is not ours” (5). Molloy discerns a very particular Western subjectivity at work in autobiographical writing in Spanish America, one that can also be seen in Henríquez Ureña’s memoir, especially when he drifts into extensive listings of plays, operas and theatres visited in New York City while consciously leaving out any mention of his racial, ethnic or social difficulties. Since, unsurprisingly, most of the plays and operas listed on Henríquez Ureña’s memoir come from Europe, it seems appropriate to draw some parallels to Molloy’s description of: “...the ‘cultural forms’ and fragments of actual texts that the autobiographer calls upon, when writing, as vehicles for what memory has saved. Spanish American autobiographers often resort to the European archive for textual fragments with which consciously or unconsciously, they forge their images” (5).

The narrative fragmentation in Henríquez Ureña’s memoir can be also symbolically associated with his many displacements. Even the writing of the memoir itself is done in transit. The daunting references and reviews of the New York theater scene found in Henríquez Ureña’s memoir is a protective device, a literary mechanism that allows him the possibility of avoiding any direct mentioning of the probable problematic and traumatic experiences lived at that time in New York.

Recently, Angel G. Loureiro, in The Ethics of Autobiography: Replacing the Subject in Modern Spain (2000), has taken up Molloy’s notion of performativity. While Molloy’s work focuses on the assembling of the textual aspects of autobiography, Loureiro’s work focuses on the cognitive and psychological implications of silences in

the text and the textual strategies operating in the mindset of a subject writing about his life. In this regard Loureiro notes:

The impossibility to attain a discursive saturation of the past can be discerned in the various ways in which autobiography's narrative tissue appears disrupted: fragmentation, narrative hesitations, multiple and potentially conflictive explanations and perspectives, fissures in the teleological design, ruptures that prevent the narrative from attaining a coherent closure, etc. In general those disruptions occur when the autobiographer strives to represent the irruption of chance, crisis, traumas, epiphanies of self-consciousness, an immersion in darkness, an unexpected confrontation with death, an exposure to (self) destruction, a shaken sense of selfhood... (29)

Literature, or "cosas literarias" is the apparent driving force behind Henríquez Ureña's memoir. His literary formation and his maturing critical observations are what he seeks to highlight, and as such he recurs to an accumulation of narrative, cultural and artistic images to aid him in this self-representation. The action of continuing acts of self-writing from diary form into a memoir allows Henríquez Ureña the possibility of escaping the restraints (the daily details, the contingencies, the non-thematized time) that are an invariable concomitant of diary writing. And by restraints I note Henríquez Ureña's own wording of "hechos de vida externa" to illustrate the social reality he did not want to represent in diary form. The resurfacing of these "hechos de vida externa"- and mostly in terms of racial, ethnic and political views of the United States- in letters written around the same time as the memoir are indicative of the textual strategy of omission that Henríquez Ureña will employ in his memoir. Two Pedros grow out of one: the one who

wrote the memoir and had a conscious textual strategy of self-representation in mind, and the one who wrote *beyond* the memoir in letters and essays to expound on realities omitted from the memoir.

Pedro Henríquez Ureña came from a powerful Dominican family which accepted the values common to elite Latin Americans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The privileged position of the Henriquez Ureña family is illustrated by the fact that they played an important role in the formation of the national discourse of the time.

The Dominican Republic's sense of nationhood first began to take form in the minds of a growing middle class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A universal definition of progress, as Teresita Martínez-Vergne has argued, was at the center of the Dominican Republic's ideology, ideally uniting all citizens in the national project (16). The Dominican men of letters and political thinkers were deeply influenced by the ideas of the Puerto Rican intellectual Eugenio María de Hostos (1839-1903), a liberal advocate of progress, education and political freedom. Hostos, who settled in the Dominican Republic in 1875, was a dominant influence on the 1880s generation of Dominican intellectuals. Progress and civilization, notions taken from European sources (or western modernity), had to be adopted to the racial realities of the island itself. Pedro L. San Miguel argues that: “This racist interpretation was common among the social and intellectual elite throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, who believed that the presence of large sectors of inhabitants of indigenous or African origin constituted an impediment to the ‘progress’ of the region’s countries...” (San Miguel 2005, 23-24). Thus, Haiti became the racial other

for the Dominican Republic, a defining counterpart to Dominican civilization, inscribing an anti-Haitian discourse into Dominican national discourses.

At the root of this project of nation building and the construction of a national identity during Henríquez Ureña's childhood (depicted in his memoir), lies the tumultuous, forbidden presence of Haiti and blackness in the social context of the Dominican Republic during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Haiti factors directly into Henríquez Ureña's childhood as, first, the country in which his father sought political refuge against the Heureaux regime, and second as the country he travels to after his mother dies. In keeping with the tone of his memoir, Pedro does not describe his surroundings while he travels in Haiti, but instead enumerates the literary projects he decides to embark on in the shadow of his mother's death. Once again, the omissions found in Henríquez Ureña's memoir serve as obvious digressions from issues that are pertinent not only to his upbringing but also to contemporary controversies about national identity. In other words, it is not surprising that Pedro's stay in Haiti does not provoke a self-reflection on his racial consciousness nor on the implications of being a black or mulatto man within Dominican society. Instead Haiti surfaces in the memoir, conventionally enough, as a less civilized place than the Dominican Republic.

Historically Dominican racial and ethnic identities have developed in counterpoint to Spain, Haiti and the United States (San Miguel 23; Candelario 257). The social racial contacts that existed between Creole elites and the Afro-Hispanic population in the Spanish part of Santo Domingo gave rise to the first traces of a Dominican identity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As Candelario elaborates:

These groups became increasingly self-aware politically, socially, and culturally during the Spanish colonial period. Spanish colonial policy had devastated the economy of Santo Domingo and left impoverished the small creole community in the seventeenth century. The poor material condition of the colony and weak political condition of the Spanish colonial government, taken together with demographic predominance of the African and African-Creole population during the 17<sup>th</sup> century lead to a more socio-racially incorporative system. (257)

The French part of Hispaniola (Saint-Domingue) underwent a complex history of slavery and revolution in which French planters and the French creole elites attempted to impose legally binding categories on blacks and nonwhites, hoping to avoid a Creole identity that would incorporate the black faction of the population. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 30,000 whites and 35,000 mulattos were trying to control a population of nearly half a million slaves in revolt during the period of the Haitian revolution (1791-1804). In the quest for independence, many of the differences that existed between mulattoes and the former slaves were seemingly transcended. In 1804, Haiti became the first Black Republic. Even though some of the same social and racial issues pervaded after the revolution “legally and politically blackness was conferred on all of its citizens, regardless of ancestry” (Candelario 258).

The cultural and social implications of the Haitian revolution affected the eastern part of Hispaniola, which declared independence from Spain in 1821 under José Nuñez de Cáceres. Independence proved ephemeral, as Jean-Pierre Boyer in 1822 succeeded in uniting the whole island of Hispaniola under Haitian rule. This process of unification was not experienced by Dominicans as a wholly violent or completely undesirable

interlude. According to the often cited quote of Nuñez Cáceres himself, quoted in Frank Moya Pons's The Dominican Republic: a National History: "The majority of the Dominican population was mulatto, and many were favorably disposed to the unification with Haiti. To them, the Haitian government promised land, the abolition of taxes, and the liberation of the few remaining slaves" (123). In time as more priority was given to economic and public affairs that directly dealt with Haiti's preexisting conflict with France, dissatisfaction began to surface in Santo Domingo. The discontent on the Spanish side of Hispaniola was phrased in ways that shed light upon latent racist views concerning the Haitian government which had illegitimately taken over the nation. In a sense, Dominican national identity was twice born, once against the colonial power of Spain, and second against the power of Haiti, conceived in racial terms. The second phase of independence took place in 1844 when "...La Trinitaria, a pro-independence group led by Juan Pablo Duarte, overthrew the Haitian Unification Government headed by Boyer, [doing] so under the banner of an integrated Dominican national identity as Hispanic, Catholic, and white. Henceforth, all things Haitian would be ideologically coded as antithetical to all things Dominican, including blackness" (Candelario 259). This anti-Haitian sentiment does not come across directly on Henríquez Ureña's memoir. But his writing does participate in the exaltation of a Native Taíno legacy, a common semiotic mechanism for masking African and Afro-Hispanic influence and pursuing acceptable anti-Haitianist views.

Dominican identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the tenet of a "Hispanic, Catholic, and white" nation, foregrounded identity in an indigenous myth. Since the arrival of the Spanish in Hispaniola during the 15<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the depletion of the indigenous



population so that in approximately 50 years, the Taíno population was eliminated, the myth in the Dominican Republic was directed at systematically obliterating the memory of the arrival of African slaves into the island.<sup>8</sup> Embracing their Hispanic cultural heritage and their indigenous past, allowed Dominican intellectual elites the possibility of integrating the Dominican nation within the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal framework of progress and civilization which dominated the intellectual life of Latin America. The irony is that for an island with more than half of its population being mulatto and black, the indigenous claim was made in the face of the reality of an African or Afro-Hispanic presence (Duany, Torres-Saillant, Martínez-Vergne, Candelario).

Pedro Henríquez Ureña's intellectual formation and consequent production reflect the values and traditions of the Dominican society of his time. In their quest to retain the Hispanic tradition that had been "lost" with the Haitian occupation, Dominican intellectuals, like Henríquez Ureña himself, sought to recuperate it by extolling the cultural history of the Dominican Republic and its relationship with Spain.

Intent in tracing a preponderant place for Spain in the formation of a Dominican intellectual life and culture, Henríquez Ureña's writing depicts a nostalgia for the presumable cultural role Santo Domingo held prior to the Haitian occupation. This is perhaps most potently exposed in Henríquez Ureña's essay "Vida intelectual de Santo Domingo" (1910) where he provides an incomplete historical account of the rise and fall of the cultural legacy of the colonial city. In this account Henríquez Ureña mourns the fall of "el principal centro cultural en América" as a result of the Haitian occupation. But

---

<sup>8</sup> José Alcántara Almánzar. "La cultura dominicana", Los escritores dominicanos y la cultura. República Dominicana : Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, 1990.

the historical account he provides omits one important cultural contribution within the chronicling of intellectual and cultural processes he seeks to trace: the absence of Africans and Afro-Hispanics in the Dominican Republic prior to the Haitian occupation. Right from the beginning of his essay Henríquez Ureña states the privileged cultural and intellectual presence the Dominican colony enjoyed by indicating that: “La colonia de Santo Domingo, la Antigua Hispaniola, convertida durante el siglo XIX en República Dominicana, fue, durante la primera centuria en la conquista, el centro principal de cultura en América. Por allí pasaron, no sólo grandes capitanes, sino también cronistas y poetas...” (124) The trajectory of cultural enrichment and progress set into place in Santo Domingo by the Spanish colonizers is thwarted only by other historical factors that he summarizes as such:

Bien pronto había de pasar el esplendor de la Hispaniola. Desde el mismo siglo XVI, el descubrimiento de las tierras continentales atrajo a los conquistadores, y Santo Domingo se convirtió poco a poco en mero punto de escala. Los repetidos ataques de los adversarios de España, desde fines del siglo XVI; la división de la isla, de cuya porción occidental se apoderó Francia; y, por último, las invasiones de los haitianos, los antiguos esclavos franceses, consumaron la ruina de la colonia, y, a la vez que la redujeron a la miseria, acabaron por destruir la cultura. (124)

The desire for a continued relationship of subordination and cultural dependency with Spain clearly emanates from the lines above. What is daunting to me is Henríquez Ureña’s perception that an African presence erupted into Santo Domingo only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the invasion of the former French slaves from Haiti. In other words, slavery

in Santo Domingo and the cultural contributions of this population do not factor into Henríquez Ureña's chronicling of intellectual and cultural life. The image of Santo Domingo that he represents is that of a nation erected above the ruins of a splendid cultural past that was sustained only by a direct association with Europe. His lament for this past is encapsulated in the following line: "Sólo noticias vagas quedan de la vida intelectual durante los tres siglos del coloniaje..." (124). Serving as a synthesis of his observations on this essay, this line is also an image that surfaces throughout Henríquez Ureña's intellectual work.

Henríquez Ureña "amends" his previous omission of an African cultural presence in Santo Domingo on his monograph, "El español en Santo Domingo" (1940). In reference to this essay Silvio Torres-Saillant indicates that Henríquez Ureña denies: "...that his country had had an African presence prior to 1916, when the United States invaded the Dominican Republic and promoted the flow of workers from Haiti" (Torres-Saillant 2005, 294). What Henríquez Ureña actually claims is a lot worse than just denying an African presence, he recognizes the Africans in Santo Domingo (prior to 1916) as deriving from a different cultural context that was anything but African. This fact made their cultural absorption into the Hispanic culture of Santo Domingo more efficient. Particularly interested in analyzing the Spanish language in Santo Domingo, he considers the place of blacks in the Spanish side of Hispaniola and their possible "perturbing effect" on language by noting that: "Elemento de perturbación para el vocabulario español podrían haber sido los esclavos negros, que entran en la isla desde los comienzos del siglo XVI" (100). Even though he finds the presence of African slaves worth mentioning at this point he is quick to remind us that: "En Santo Domingo

la influencia africana es muy escasa: no hay más africanismos de vocabulario que los que pertenecen al español general” (100). In his quest to revise the historiography of blacks in Santo Domingo he goes onto the most problematic extreme: denying their African ancestry. After alluding that a systematic import of African slaves only occurred until the 17<sup>th</sup> century (and then afterwards the importation disappeared), Henríquez Ureña then proclaims the following:

Y desde el principio, buena parte de los esclavos no venían directamente de África: consta que venían de España, donde habían sido comprados a los portugueses; estaban ya hispanizados. Caso curioso: los primeros esclavos no eran todos negros; se trajeron también esclavos blancos a América. De todos modos, lo que ha caracterizado a la población de origen africano de Santo Domingo es su completa hispanización. (101-102)

This observation poses the question of what exactly is the process of hispanization of blacks in Santo Domingo. The answer is clear, a total erasure of their blackness and cultural contributions as blacks at the expense of the “hispanización” Henríquez Ureña confers on them. It is also very clear that he is forcedly trying to use his writing as a strategy of separation from his own mulatto culture and in doing so, he aligns himself with the hegemonic racist national discourse operating in Santo Domingo in the 1940s. Henríquez Ureña’s racist antihaitian sentiment, is triggered by his fear that Haitian immigrants are corroding the pure Hispanic legacy exemplified by the Spanish language: “Ahora, desde hace veinte años, la fuerte invasión de braceros procedentes de la contigua Haití y de las vecinas colonias francesas e inglesas anuncia la posibilidad de que se tiña de extranjerismo el habla de las clases pobres, pero no con derivaciones de lenguas

africanas, sino de inglés y *creole o patois*” (102). Desperately attempting to erase any semblance of blackness in Santo Domingo prior to the Haitian immigration of 1916, Henríquez Ureña’s textual strategy of separation from anything black reaches its lowest point when he notes that:

Hasta 1916, en Santo Domingo no predominaba la población, ni siquiera la mezclada de blanco y negro, aunque abunda, porque son muy débiles los prejuicios de raza, como en el Brasil. El negro de Santo Domingo raras veces era puro en el siglo XIX: caso semejante al de Puerto Rico. Si fuera se creía muy africanizado el país, y muchas geografías así lo indican, es por la continuidad de Haití, la antigua Saint-Domingue: confusión difícil de disipar. Es significativo que las letras, y la cultura dominicana en general, estuviesen hasta 1880 en manos de criollos de origen europeo o con mezcla de sangre india. (nota 9, 102)

These lines indicate Henríquez Ureña’s necessity of consolidating the vision of an intact Dominican culture of European descent that until then, according to him, had recently been affected by Haitians, and by extension by blacks. Another interesting gesture that he makes in these lines, is the cultural parallels he pretends to make between Puerto Rico, Brazil and Santo Domingo by indicating that black cultures in these regions did not derive from pure African sources; after all in Henríquez Ureña’s mind the African slaves that had arrived were already *hispanized*. For this reason he also disdains the *poesía negrista* surfacing in the Hispanic Caribbean during the 1930s: “Ahora se ha extendido a Santo Domingo la reciente boga de la poesía de temas negros en la Antillas, que florece en Cuba y Puerto Rico...” (nota 9, 102). Citing the names of Luis Palés Matos, Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillen among others, Henríquez Ureña pauses his listing of

poets when he comes across the Dominican poet Manuel del Cabral, who he does not see as a poet that follows the tradition of a *poesía negrista* that truly represented the Dominican Republic for one simple reason: “...los negros de sus poemas son principalmente haitianos o *cocolos* de las islas inglesas, porque los nativos de Santo Domingo tienen costumbres menos pintorescas...” (nota 9, 102).

Recuperation of a Hispanic legacy in Santo Domingo is then another one of Henríquez Ureña’s objectives as an essayist and cultural critic at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As I analyze on the last section of this chapter, the roots of his *americanista* ideology and his vision of a Pan Latin American utopia arise from the sociocultural context that shaped him in the Dominican Republic. His adherence to a notion of universality in terms of culture can be understood, as I argue, as a literal escape mechanism. A mechanism adopted in order to insert himself as a cultured man while shifting the focus away from his physical racial features, and thus strategically self-fashioning himself within the hegemonic tradition of Dominican intellectuals of his time. The *emotional creolization process* for Henríquez Ureña is then rooted on a process of learning and maneuvering his lived experiences of class and nationality in the Dominican Republic, while also facing a social context that focused on issues he had not experienced up to that point.

As we will see in the following section, Henríquez Ureña’s memoir manifests all the racial and class contradictions that founded his perception of Dominicaness. He was thus vulnerable to the very different ethnic and racial codes operating in the United States that he traveled to at a time of heightened racial oppression, and personally confronted a different social, cultural and political reality for which he was unprepared.

### **The National Home: Raising Pedro Henríquez Ureña**

Pedro Henríquez Ureña's family participated in the activities of a group of Dominican thinkers who aimed to create a firm definition of *dominicanidad*, nation and citizenship (identity), thus resolving the cultural, racial, gender and class differences of the time. As Teresita Martínez-Vergne points out in Nation and Citizen in the Dominican Republic, 1880-1916 (2005), these thinkers were able to become involved in the national cause in part because: "...the young men (and a few women) who became the intellectual cream of the Dominican Republic obtained a privileged education, in some cases advanced or professional degrees, which both facilitated their entry into the old-time elite circles that combined wealth, politics, and status and legitimated their voices in such spheres of influences" (4). Such was the case with Henríquez Ureña's father and uncle. Pedro Henríquez Ureña's uncle, Federico Henríquez y Carvajal (1848-1952) was one of Hostos's close followers, and was also an active participant in the political and literary scene at the time. His interest in the Cuban independence movement led him to a close friendship with José Martí. Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal (1859-1935), Pedro's father, came from a wealthy family, and received a prestigious education in Paris, crowned by a degree in medicine. His close association with Hostos resulted in a collaborative effort to create the first public schools in the Dominican Republic. Along with his wife, the poet Salomé Ureña de Henríquez, Francisco created a home that instilled a sense of national pride and of *patria* in their children. But Francisco's public

disapproval of the Dominican dictatorship of Ulisses Heureaux resulted in the family being exiled for various periods of time in Haití and Cuba (Martínez-Vergne 4-5).

At home, Pedro Henríquez Ureña acquired traits from his mother and father. From the latter he is imbued with the early teachings of an *americanista* and *antillanista* ideology. From his mother, he inherits a humanistic and spiritual vision of the Dominican *patria*, as expressed in her poetry. In this fashion, early associations of home, nation and identity are woven into Henríquez Ureña's childhood memory and are further developed through the interactions the family maintains with prominent figures such as José Martí, Eugenio María de Hostos and Ramón E. Betances. Pedro Henríquez Ureña's early encounters at home, which made the multiple cultural and sociopolitical realities faced by the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Cuba respectively into living experiences, situate him precociously in a contact zone of sorts (Pratt 7). As such, Henríquez Ureña's home can be viewed as a site of encounter for the (dis)similar historical trajectories under which the Hispanic Caribbean islands had developed, but it was also a site of dialogue between intellectuals advocating for a *pancaribbean* ideology independent from Spain.

Our first point of entry into the memoir is through Henríquez Ureña's precise description of his family's ethnic background, and starting with his grandparents: "Mi abuelo Noel Henríquez...era hijo de holandés é inglesa...Mi abuela paterna tenía sangre de los últimos indios dominicanos que permanecieron en la población de Boyá" (29). There is no mention in this particular section nor in any other section of this memoir of an African cultural or ethnic influence on his family, even though Pedro Henríquez Ureña was a mulatto man. Instead Henríquez Ureña prefers to dwell on his grandfather's Dutch



and British ancestry, and strategically omits any mention of an African relative. He opts for a mythic connection to an indigenous past when he claims his grandmother's ancestors came from "los últimos indios dominicanos," a claim that is less scientific than wishful. As I have shown, racial constructions in the Hispanic Caribbean are bound to class and ethnicity, which are, further, determinants of a very particular notion of nationality. In the case of the Henríquez Ureña family, affluent intellectuals, it is probable that their racial status was never contested in the Dominican Republic. But as Pedro would find outside of the Dominican Republic, such confrontations in communities with other systems of racial marking were impossible to avoid.

A sense of patriotism and writing was nurtured at home through Salomé Ureña de Henríquez's poetry. Today, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez is not only recognized for her poetic prowess, but also for her efforts to reform the educational system in the Dominican Republic. She was one of the first Dominican women to advocate for Eugenio María de Hostos's positivism, presenting views on education and culture which clashed drastically with those of the Heureaux regime. Just as Hostos aroused opposition from the conservative camp, so too, did Salomé Ureña de Henríquez. Since the Catholic Church monopolized education, it mobilized a powerful faction of the Dominican society to fight in its behalf against schools that promoted a positivist curriculum emphasizing science and reason (Mateo 2001, 24)<sup>9</sup>. Even though they faced this opposition, Hostos with the

---

<sup>9</sup> These disputes were common all over Latin America due in part to the perceived notion that the academic reforms proposed by positivists directly opposed the Catholic church. For more on this issue, see, Daisy Rivero Alvisa and Iliana Rojas Requena, Justo Sierra y la filosofía positivista en México (Editorial de Ciencias Sociales: La Habana, 1987). See also Leopoldo Zea, El positivismo en México (Colección Stadium: México, 1953).

aid of Salome Ureña de Henríquez would open the first school aimed at providing a positivist education to Dominican women in 1881.

Pedro's precarious health as an infant brought him close to his mother and her world of poetry. "Enfermé gravemente el mismo año de mi nacimiento. Era la primera vez que uno de nosotros enfermaba de modo serio; y mi madre, con su naturaleza intensa, se alarmó grandemente. Al sanar yo, escribió su poesía *En horas de angustia*, donde pinta vividamente su alarma, no menos que su gozo final" (30). Though often ill, Pedro was an acute child with a curious mind that was constantly stirred by the words used in the political discussions that so frequently took place at home, such as *patria*, *nación* and *ciudadano*. His precocious critical eye served to solidify early on his relationship with his mother who at all times fostered Pedro Henríquez Ureña's intellectual sensitivity: "A los tres años de edad, oyendo un día cantar el Himno Dominicano, letra de Emilio Prud'homme y música de José Reyes, y en él la palabra patria, pregunté a mi madre su significado; me contestó: 'Ya te lo diré después' y escribió una poesía sencilla, *¿Qué es Patria?*" (30). In her response, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez's contemplative voice ponders on the unique question posed by her young son:

¿Qué es Patria? ¿Sabes acaso  
lo que preguntas, mi amor?  
Todo un mundo se despierta  
en mi espíritu a esta voz...<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> We can perceive this theme of patriotism not only in the poem *¿Qué es patria?* (1887) but also in the majority of Salomé Ureña de Henríquez's poetry and of other Dominican writers of her generation.

These lines, evoking the sentiment of *patria* promoted within the Henríquez Ureña household (and directly transmitted from mother to son), show a way of thinking that inhabited not only the skilled poetry of Salomé Ureña de Henríquez but also Pedro Henríquez Ureña's desire as a child to learn about the history of the Dominican Republic— and already transmuting that history into myth.

Pedro's early critical observations of Dominican society were restricted or filtered by his parents' teachings at home. As advocates of the Hostosian positivist doctrine, Salomé and Francisco Henríquez were in favor of a reform of the educational system. Ironically, while intending to provide their children with a better education than what the Dominican Republic could offer, the Henríquez Ureña family restricted the cultural and ethnic contacts their children could engage in by confining their education to home schooling. Prohibiting play with children outside the home, the parents reproduced class differences in the experiences of their children: "Mis padres no gustaban de la educación que en el país se da a los niños, y no nos dejaban corretear, como los *otros*, por calles y plazas formando amistades de todo *orden*, ni siquiera las fomentaban entre nosotros y los niños que visitaran nuestra casa" (My emphasis 32). Home schooling and isolation from children of different classes undoubtedly limited Pedro Henríquez Ureña's awareness of *other* social realities within Dominican society; and it ultimately tints the first socio-cultural observations he makes when faced with the necessity of continuing his education outside of home.

His intellectual and educational formation was also elaborated in the midst of a vibrant literary scene that tied ideals of the Dominican nation within narrative and

poetical manifestations of the time. It is within these literary circles that Pedro Henríquez Ureña develops his passion for literary and cultural criticism, as he recalls:

Pero lo que vino a decidirme francamente por la literatura fue asistir a una velada solemne que celebró la antigua Sociedad ‘Amigos del País’, en mayo de 1896, al cumplir veinticinco años de fundada: de esta sociedad habían sido fundadores mi padre y varios de sus amigos...en aquella velada dijo un discurso Prud’homme, leyeron trabajos en prosa Leonor Feltz... (39)

Leonor Feltz’s<sup>11</sup> influence on Pedro’s literary and intellectual formation starting in 1897 came at a time when he was emotionally vulnerable, in the wake of his mother’s death. Through the literary social gatherings organized in her home, she introduced him to a new literary and cultural ambience, which must have been quite a contrast to his former restriction to the home circle of parentally approved social contacts. It is through these *tertulias* and through the guidance of Leonor Feltz and her sister Clementina that Pedro was introduced to the writings of several important Latin American and European thinkers theorizing on the cultural and social role of Latin America at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Las Feltz, que por entonces contaban alrededor de treinta años (una más y otras menos), habían sido siempre amigas de la casa; y Leonor, que es hoy la mujer más ilustrada de Santo Domingo, fue siempre la discípula predilecta de mi madre. Bajo su influencia y estímulo, comenzamos una serie de lecturas que abarcaron

---

<sup>11</sup>The Feltz sisters, Clementina and Leonor Feltz, were students of Salomé Ureña Henríquez.

algunos campos diversos: el *Ariel* de José Enrique Rodó...el descubrimiento de [Henrik] Ibsen. (61)

His introduction to the works of Rodó and of other modern writers shaped Henríquez Ureña's views on Latin America and the United States. In fact, during his first visit to New York, one of the surprises was that North American society seemed vastly different than Rodó's description of it.

Leonor Feltz's importance in Henríquez Ureña's life centers on the fact that she provided him with the spiritual guidance needed after his mother's death: "Mi madre había llegado a ser para mí la guía espiritual consultada cada minuto" (43). He consequently finds a friend and a literature guide in Leonor: "...Leonor, con su sagacidad crítica, con su percepción delicada, influyó mucho en la dirección de nuestro gusto...Antes, como a destiempo perdí la dirección espiritual de mi madre...Leonor, que poseía sólida cultura científica y lectura literaria mucha más vasta que la mía, fue quien nos guió en la interpretación de la literatura [moderna]" (63). These words highlight the importance that women had in Henríquez Ureña's intellectual formation: the maternal object plays a fundamental role in Pedro's sense of his intellectual and artistic identity. As Julia Kristeva has suggested – following Melanie Klein - in Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia (1987), the literal loss of the maternal object leads to melancholia. While Kristeva is concerned with establishing melancholia as a fundamental element in feminine sexuality, I believe it bears some resemblance to an emotional pattern in Henríquez Ureña's life. I am alluding to his close relationship with his mother and of the feminized image he portrays of himself as a child. As we see later, this tendency is further developed when he opts to work in literature, to his father's dismay, who

envisioned a “different” career path for his son. While I do not view Henríquez Ureña as a man with a feminine sexuality, I do view the actions he takes to mourn his mother- who he identified with- as a melancholic gesture like that described by Kristeva as an “acting out” process. Kristeva notes that: “Acting out, where a woman is concerned, is more inhibited, less developed, and consequently it can be, when it takes place, more violent. For the loss of the object seems beyond remedy for a woman and its mourning more difficult, if not impossible” (393). In Henríquez Ureña’s case, literature became his way of negotiating loss while at the same carrying on her legacy. We especially see this once he embarks on his first visit to Haiti to reunite with his dad who had gone into exile a few months before: “Al llamarnos a su lado, en realidad, obedecía a otros temores: la situación de la República Dominicana se hacía alarmante; los empréstitos del gobierno y la excesiva emisión de papel moneda habían creado al gobierno de Lilís una situación tirante, habían sumido al país en la miseria; por todas partes se sentía que el malestar del pueblo iba a producir un estallido” (54). In this case Salomé’s death coincides with a heightening of the political tensions and persecutions orchestrated by the Heureaux regime, and consequently aggravates an already difficult moment in the lives of the family (and especially so for Pedro).

This departure from the Dominican Republic was his first painful venture away from the home where he first conceived a patriotic consciousness under the nurturing influence of his mother. Mourning doubly in Haiti – for his mother and his country - Pedro finds solace in taking up the project of documenting his mother’s poetic legacy for posterity: “Comencé entonces una actividad literaria febril, cuyo centro era el recuerdo de mi madre; formé una antología de escritoras dominicanas, con biografías y

juicios...En seguida emprendí una *vida* de mi madre, la cual escribí muy por extenso..emprendí también a coleccionar todos los artículos y poesías escritas a la muerte de mi madre” (48). Shortly, the task of being his mother’s literary executor, which entails dealing with her contribution to the Dominican Republic, widens to include other poetic works. Undoubtedly Pedro’s exile is experienced as a double movement, in which his desire for knowledge of other literatures and cultures is awakened as part of a desire of finding and documenting autochthonous literary works to create a myth of home – of, that is, the Dominican Republic: “Pero mi continuo afán por el recuerdo de mi madre y mi interés por la poesía dominicana me hicieron concebir un proyecto: el de escribir la historia de la poesía dominicana” (47). In this fashion for Pedro Henríquez Ureña, poetry and patriotism come together in the unlikely space of transit, in which the uncanny coincidence of exile and mourning meet in his dead mother’s works.

Even though Henríquez Ureña’s stay in Haiti proved to be a fruitful one for his literary activities, it was not as productive for his studies. In fact, Pedro’s father did not approve of his literary interests, in contrast to his late mother: “...mi padre estaba siempre ocupado y las horas que dedicaba a nosotros las ocupaba en darnos lecciones científicas; y además, veía con disgusto mi retraimiento y mi afición exclusivamente literaria, que me hacía descuidar los estudios de ciencia” (49). These differences between father and son trigger yet one more displacement for Pedro, this time leading him back to Santo Domingo.

Henríquez Ureña returns to Santo Domingo clearly affected by the numerous displacements, physical and spiritual, that have been forced upon him. He comes back with a more mature, and a more critical view of Dominican society, observing, for

instance, the provincialism of his fellow classmates: “Al volver a Santo Domingo...me hallé mal entre aquella multitud, tan distinta ya del primitivo grupo de alumnos capitaleños, con quienes no había sentido disgusto alguno al salir de mi aislamiento...estos provincianos, no sin puntas de semi-barbarie, me traían de mal traer; y llegué a concebir la idea de que la amistad era imposible entre jóvenes” (52). In the theatre reviews he writes in Santo Domingo at this time (1900-01), the same tone can be overheard: Henríquez Ureña unconsciously intends to educate the primitive Dominican youth he describes in these lines.

Pedro found a lively theatre scene when he returned to Santo Domingo, which gave him a taste of a whole different social and cultural scene than the one he had been exposed to his father’s and mother’s the literary circles and journals, foreshadowing, he believed, the kind of culture he would find in the United States: “No fue el año 1900 para mí un año de producción literaria...escribí algunas crónicas teatrales: llegó por entonces a Santo Domingo la compañía dramática de la actriz cubana Luisa Martínez Casado, y nos presentó un extenso repertorio español...” (60). For Pedro this new theater experience was translated into another a way of writing and thinking about culture. Pedro looked around for some place to vent his impressions of the theatre scene developing around him, which is how, as he explains, he first broke into print in the newspapers:

Max y yo pedimos, para ejercitarnos, y sin remuneración, por supuesto, la plaza de cronistas teatrales del diario *La Lucha*, que por ser oficioso no podía negárnosla...yo escribía tres crónicas firmadas Bohechío, siguiendo el gusto por los nombres de nuestros indios...Mis crónicas, con el entusiasmo natural de quien



por primera vez gozaba extensamente de los espectáculos teatrales y del verdadero talento dramático, aunque en medio de malas condiciones escénicas y peores ayudantes artísticos, rebosaban elogios a la Martínez Casado...(60)

Two things are important to highlight on this passage, one is the name Pedro assumes in order to write his critique and the other is the act itself of adopting a different persona to write a theatre review. It seems that the change in persona is tied to his notion that a theatre review was perhaps not an important literary contribution, after all he had already mentioned that “No fue el año 1900 para mí un año de producción literaria.” His adoption of the name Bohechío under which to write his reviews is a significant act of self-fashioning as a way of claiming part of the Dominican indigenous myth: Bohechío was an Indian chief (cacique) in the Jaragua region of the Dominican Republic. This is a small sign of the the type erudite Dominican intellectual he intended to become.

I had the opportunity of consulting these three *crónicas* in one of Henríquez Ureña’s personal albums held in the “Pedro Henríquez Ureña Collection” at El Colegio de México. Written for the Dominican newspaper La Lucha, the *crónicas* were published in July 31, August 17 and August 21 of the year 1900. All the *crónicas* describe the arrival and presentation of the Luisa Martínez Casado<sup>12</sup> theatre company in Santo Domingo. In these *crónicas* we begin to read Henríquez Ureña’s developing critique of the arts, while at the same time demonstrating a profound interest and knowledge of theatres, plays and operas for a 16 year old adolescent.

---

<sup>12</sup> Luisa Martínez Casado (1860- ) was a renowned Cuban actress. She opened her own theater company in her home town of Cienfuegos around 1904. I have been unable to find much information on her work other than what Henríquez Ureña presents on his reviews.

The review of July 31st sets the tone for the other reviews. Henríquez Ureña presents in La Lucha. On that first review he expounds on the dramatic piece titled Virginia (1853) by the Spanish playwright Manuel Tamayo y Baus, who is compared unfavorably to José de Echegaray. “Tamayo i Baus es el primer dramaturgo español de este siglo. No es tan fecundo como Echegaray, pero si es más grande i elevado.” Such an acute judgment of a theatrical world he had just begun to experience in real life will be broadened in New York City, where he will considerably increase his acquaintance with European plays and operas. But without a doubt what interests Henríquez Ureña most in these reviews, just as it will in the ones he writes in New York City, are the actresses and female characters. We perceive this on the accolades he showers on Luisa Martínez Casado: “Luisa Martínez Casado estuvo sublime la noche del sábado. En ‘Virginia’ reveló una faz nueva de su talento artístico.” But while Henríquez Ureña cautions that Martínez Casado does not meet the highest standards of acting, he also recognizes the existence of something beyond acting – stage presence: “Sarah Bernhardt o Eleonora Duse, a quienes recuerda la figura de Luisa, podrán superarla al crear una mujer, pero no al crear una romana.” For Henríquez Ureña, Martínez Casado’s theatrical work when set against that of a French or an Italian actress, results in a less aesthetically pleasing product, but in terms of presence and theatrical craft she seems to win over Bernhardt and Duse. Perhaps this perceived distinction in Martínez Casado’s work is what makes her stand out when she interprets the role of Don Juan Tenorio, on José Zorilla’s play. On the review of August 21<sup>st</sup> Henríquez Ureña notes: “Luisa Martínez Casado, hábilmente vestida de Don Juan, hizo este papel con talento i arte; declamó admirablemente; en los

momentos patéticos la atención estaba toda puesta en ella a tal punto que se podía oír volar una mosca.”

In these reviews of European plays represented by Caribbean actors such as Luisa Martínez Casado, Manolo Casado and Isaac Puga among others, the 16 year old Henríquez Ureña is visibly developing a critical persona with an idiosyncratic set of standards. The reviews reflect his perception that these actors are perhaps better adept at representing plays written by Spanish playwrights rather than those of other European playwrights. It is not surprising then that he would praise Martínez Casado’s rendition of Tamayo’s Virginia (1853), but does not perceive the same interpretative quality when the company presents the tragedy Adriana Lecouvreur (1849) by the French playwrights Eugène Scribe and Ernest Wilfrid Legouvé. Of this work Henríquez Ureña asserts the following in his review of August 17: “Deja una impresión de vacío...se espera ansiosamente el drama nuevo de Tamayo.” It is not clear whether this sense of emptiness derives from the acting or from the play itself. What is clear is that Henríquez Ureña is having fun describing the European theatre world to his compatriots. His orientation is exclusively to Europe, there being no mention of any Dominican plays or actors in Henríquez Ureña’s memoir nor in the reviews written for La Lucha. Under the guise of Bohechío, a cacique, Henríquez Ureña is shaping an identification with the European culture he views in these plays and promoting it to a Dominican audience. Jossianna Arroyo’s notion of a cultural travestism comes to mind, especially if we see Henríquez Ureña’s early writing as a textual strategy by which he intends to insert the culture of the other (in this case European) within the national culture of the Dominican Republic. As Arroyo states:

La integración del cuerpo del otro en el discurso nacional plantea los problemas de representación-racial, sexual y de género- de este cuerpo y las distintas máscaras a las que tiene que recurrir el sujeto de la escritura...El travestismo cultural como estrategia de identificación con el otro, surge de los juegos de poder propios de la representación y es por esto que el cuerpo del otro se figura desde la raza, el género y la sexualidad. (5)

In an island where the cultural contributions of an African diaspora were censored by the general consent of the elite, it is natural that Henríquez Ureña would seek to highlight the cultural importance of these European plays (and, not incidentally, display his own Eurocentric erudition) in the theater chronicles of a national newspaper.

### **Pedro en la ciudad: A Dominican Memory in Transit**

On the threshold of a new century, the new Dominican government, headed by Juan Isidro Jiménez, faced bankruptcy and the turbulence left in the wake of Ulises Heureaux' assassination of in 1899. In a sign that the family fortunes had brightened, Pedro Henríquez Ureña's father was named Isidro Jiménez' Minister of Exterior Affairs. Commissioned with the task of reducing the foreign debt accrued by Heureaux, Francisco Henríquez, along with Pedro and his eldest brother, embarked on a trip to the United States. Although Pedro had, as a teen, already spent time outside of the Dominican Republic in Haiti, this did not prepare him for the experience of visiting the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The abrupt transformation of his economic situation while in the United States was a reaction to the changing political fortunes of his

family in the Dominican Republic, which shifted unexpectedly. Henríquez Ureña went from a privileged visitor to that of the that of a not so privileged immigrant.

Although he did not know it, when the 16 year old Pedro Henríquez Ureña left the Dominican Republic in 1901, he was beginning a long journey, one that would always put a distance between him and his *patria*. Initially, he does not experience the New York City of the turn of the century as a *montage* of Latin American and Caribbean cultural and ethnic encounters (Laó-Montes 2001, 2). In fact, upon entering the New York area on the steam boat that brought them in through Puerto Rico, Henríquez Ureña reaches for those European references in which he has been taking such pride in his theater reviews: “Llegamos, por fin a Nueva York, el 30 de enero...dos impresiones, sin embargo, recibí ese día, que tardé en repetir: la primera, las casas campestres de ciertas poblaciones de la costa, que observábamos antes de entrar en Nueva York: todas ellas me recordaban las moradas campestres que *veía pintadas en los libros de cuentos franceses...*” (65, My emphasis). Literature is this precocious adolescent’s first filter, one that connects him to his dead and revered mother. The consequent discoveries of his new host society will constitute a process of peeling away the literary appearance around this experience, lending his interpretations the air of a gradual process of deconstruction.

It is perhaps Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s second impression of New York that ultimately depicts, at least for me, his initial condition as a tourist traveler rather than as an immigrant: “...la segunda [impresión] el *singular aspecto de Bowery*, por donde pasamos en coche. Durante meses, juzgué engañosamente esas primeras impresiones, pues ni fui al campo ni pase nunca por el Bowery” (65, My emphasis ). It seems quite ironic that the description Henríquez Ureña makes of Bowery and the one made by

Enrique Zuleta Álvarez on the footnote referencing that particular section of the memoir, both rely on a stereotypical vision of the Bowery neighborhood. Neither of them situate Bowery within the Lower East Side district of New York City, historically known as a site of cultural and ethnic encounters amongst immigrants from all over the world. At the time Pedro Henríquez Ureña travels to New York, the Bowery along with the entire Lower East Side was known, among immigrants, as a space of ethnic community building and not solely as a gang ridden neighborhood (Maffi 124). Henríquez Ureña's declaration of Bowery's "singular aspecto" echoes Zuleta Alvarez's somewhat imprecise description when he proclaims Bowery as a: "Barrio de New York que aun hoy se caracteriza por ser el refugio de ebrios y marginales sociales" (65, footnote 126). In his book titled, New York City: An Outsider's Inside View (2004), Mario Maffi, tracing the historical construction of ethnic urban spaces in New York City – and especially the Lower East Side - describes the Bowery neighborhood as follows: "Immigrants from all over the world flocked to the Bowery, a volatile popular neighborhood, which also counted outcasts, tramps and prostitutes...among its inhabitants. Even so, the theatre flourished [there]...This double-edged character of the street remained well into the opening years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century..." (124).

Part of the reason for Pedro's apparent rejection of the bustling Bowery neighborhood, and the stark contrast between the rural New York he viewed before entering the city may lie on his preconceived notions of what he would find once he landed in North America. Henríquez Ureña travels with a with a (pre)text in mind of the North American society. In fact he travels to New York with the vision acquired from José Enrique Rodó's foundational essay Ariel (1900), as we noted above: "...mis

impresiones se atropellaban un poco, y yo las veía todas a través del prejuicio anti-yankee, que el Ariel de Rodó había reforzado en mí, gracias a su presagio literario; no fue sino mucho después, al cabo de un año, cuando comencé a penetrar en la verdadera vida americana, y a estimarla en su valer” (66).<sup>13</sup> In reality, Pedro Henríquez Ureña does not encounter the utilitarian and materialistic society Rodó describes in his essay.<sup>14</sup> The vision of Ariel does not endure the shock of experience, as Pedro proceeds through a multitude of cultural and ethnic encounters in New York City.

Henríquez Ureña was financially equipped, at first, to satisfy his desire for visiting the cultural and artistic zones of the city. In this, he was much more fortunate than the majority of ethnic immigrants coming to New York. The reserved character that characterized Pedro Henríquez Ureña as a boy presents itself in the same way once he arrives to New York, as he expresses: “En Nueva York nos encontramos a varios dominicanos: al expresidente D. Alejandro Woz y Gil...con el fin de que cuanto antes aprendiéramos el inglés en toda forma mi padre nos buscó una casa de huéspedes en el barrio de la Universidad de Columbia” (66). Henríquez Ureña’s reference to an emerging

---

<sup>13</sup> Ariel, published in 1900 reflected some of the common beliefs of the time amongst a select group of Latin American intellectuals pondering on the political and social atmosphere of Latin America after the Spanish-American war. The prevalent notion was that Latin American societies were at risk of falling prey to North American imperial powers, leading Rodó to express the judgments in his essay. Pedro Henríquez Ureña, who had first encountered Rodó’s essay through the tertulias organized by Leonor Feltz, became so engrossed with the ideas proposed in it that he retains its vision of North America as a social reality. But in Henríquez Ureña’s first publication, Ensayos críticos (1905), while he shows his fidelity to *Ariel* by exalting some of the views expressed by Rodó, he also criticized Rodó’s rigid view of North American society by highlighting the cultural values of the United States (which he had experienced first hand at this point).

<sup>14</sup> According to Rodó in his essay, the greatest threat posed by the Northern nation upon Latin America was the utilitarian spirit it offered disguised as civilization. In this equation, Calibán is representative of the utilitarian North American spirit, characterized by its obsession with material gains and specialized skills (utilitarian democracy). In the other hand, Rodó defends the spiritual, more European root he perceives as an inherent feature rooting the Latin American national character. In this fashion Rodó wages a battle in

Dominican community of exiled intellectuals at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is one of the earliest mentions of the presence of Dominicans in the United States, a fact that has received little critical attention, perhaps because he does not talk openly about this group in this memoir.

According to Daisy Cocco De Filippis, the Dominican presence in New York at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was certainly not as abundant as it would be decades later after the assassination of Trujillo (13).<sup>15</sup> In fact, Pedro and his family are representative of that first trickle of Dominican immigrants to the United States, who arrived either as political refugees or political emissaries of the new Dominican government, as was the case of Pedro Henríquez Ureña's father (Cocco De Filippis 2001, 14). In either case, these first immigrants were of a more prosperous class than would be the case with later migrations, which were more economically triggered. For this reason, the New York street wanderings Pedro embarks on will yield a different caliber of social observation than that developed by later Dominican and Caribbean writers, narrating their experience in the United States with a constant reference to the possibility of impoverishment. I am thinking here of Bernardo Vega's memoir, which, even though it recounts immigration experiences to New York in 1916, presents in a clear manner some of the difficulties faced by Puerto Rican immigrants to New York at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bernardo Vega was not a part of the elite class of intellectuals formed in the Hispanic Caribbean, to which the Henríquez Ureña belongs to, which comes across in his

---

defense for Latin America's spiritual values that can only be reached by a selected few, as opposed to the utilitarian democracy denoted by Calibán.

<sup>15</sup> Daisy Cocco De Filippis, *Literatura dominicana en los Estados Unidos: Presencia temprana 1900-1950*. (Santo Domingo: Editora Buho, 2001).



memoir, Memorias de Bernardo Vega (Contribución a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña) (edited by César Andreu) (1977). Vega was a working class Puerto Rican immigrant who recorded his personal life experiences as a witness to the real struggle of these first Caribbean immigrants. Vega, in contrast to Henríquez Ureña, is conscious of the difficulties faced by Caribbean immigrants transitioning from the former Spanish colonial sphere into the North American society. But Pedro Henríquez Ureña's record is, so to speak, from the top down: a member of the Dominican elite, he carries that elite frame of reference with him as he interprets the New York of 1901. It is typical, then, that though he finds a growing Dominican community, he gives it only a brief mention.

Henríquez Ureña is most interested in New York's cultural scene, and to experience that, he does not feel the need to tie himself to any ethnic community or neighborhood. Casting himself as a flâneur, his constant mobility through the city's theatre, museum and musical cultural scene is what merits the most attention in this section of the memoir. Pedro summarizes his first few days in New York as: "En aquellos primeros días me dedicué con ahínco a los teatros..." (67) He compiles a large list of all the plays and operas he attends during those first few days in New York, a number that seem a little boastful. Unlike the New York City of other immigrant accounts of the time, Henríquez Ureña's city is set out as a harmonious zone of cultural contact where foreign visitors have *carte blanche* to intrude and interact freely. Not being able to speak English does not impede his exploration of the city – indeed, this was part of the reason he had traveled to New York city in the first place: "...rara vez iba a los ingleses, pues no podía entender todavía a los actores; pero fui alguna vez a ver el

*Hamlet* con Sothern y Virginia Harned, *El Mercader de Venecia* con Nat Goodwin y Maxine Elliot...” (67).

His contact with the city is solely through the arts at this point, at least if we trust his memoir. Other contacts he might have made in the neighborhood he resided in do not provoke the same extensive description as the theatre and opera houses. In fact, we get only a minimum sense of Pedro’s neighborhood, casually mentioned while describing his nightly routine: “Asistí al Curso de Elementos de Derecho general, en la Universidad de Nueva York...y también, durante las noches, a cursos de Derecho comercial y público en una escuela nocturna del barrio de Harlem, donde vivíamos” (74). The skills he learns at this point aid him years later when his condition falls to that of working immigrant. But in these lines he fails to describe his neighborhood in Harlem. Between 1880 and 1890, Harlem underwent a great demographic transformation as Italian, Jewish and German immigrant groups began to move there from the Lower East Side. At the same time, African Americans were coming to the New York area, often from the Jim Crow south, creating an influx into the Harlem district that gradually turned into a community. This was the scene in Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s Harlem, as revealed not by his memoirs, but by urban historians (Maffi, Lewis). Surely even as a *flâneur* he perceived the great social and cultural changes occurring at street level in his own neighborhood. Surely, too, these trends must have tested his own racial identity (as mulatto man), which was just the kind of thing that white Americans would call into question.

Walter Benjamin has extensively analyzed the *flâneur* type in his essays on the Paris of Baudelaire. Motifs from those essays come to mind when reading Henríquez Ureña’s New York descriptions. Having himself read Baudelaire – being reminded, in

fact, of French stories upon first encountering New York - Henríquez Ureña was familiar enough with the figure that we can question why certain of the motifs collected by Benjamin seem so oddly missing from Henríquez Ureña's account. For instance, the crowd. As Benjamin notes: "Fear, revulsion, and horror were the emotions which the big city crowd aroused in those who first observed it" (174). If there are crowds in the photographs of the Lower East side of the time, and crowds described by other visitors to New York, they have vanished from Pedro Henríquez Ureña's vision. Instead, there is a sense of vacant neighborhoods and theaters, along with minimum active interactions between Pedro and other residents. Might this be an account that masks the racial shocks and insults that we might expect from New York street life – a turn away from an undignified reality? We can assume that the theatrical explorations Pedro embarks on when he arrives to New York are in part triggered by the need to continue an activity that was not all together foreign for him, since he had shared this interest for theatres and operas with his brother Max in Santo Domingo. In this sense the interest for theatres fostered in the place of origin is reproduced in the host society leading, I believe, to a cocooned involvement with New York, one that protects the self against involvement with the city itself.

The mapping out of New York city is materialized in this memoir by way of an accumulation of names of operas, theatres, actors and singers Pedro includes. The development and description of these theatre experiences are left out of the memoir, but instead elaborated in reviews for Dominican newspapers and magazines. The presence of the crowd as a constitutive element of the urban space is symbolically replaced by the controlled spaces of theatres and the multitude of elements that configure its presence and

function in the city experience elaborated by Henríquez Ureña. There are times when Pedro writes out all the shows and the casts of the pieces presented, this is particularly the case for the shows he sees at the Metropolitan: “La temporada del Metropolitan fue corta ese año...” (77). It is also through the discovery of theatres outside his neighborhood that Pedro’s mobility takes him into contact with the low income parts of New York, as when he indicates: “Los teatros baratos (Murray Hill, American, algunos de Brooklyn) solían dar obras clásicas o modernas de importancia, y con frecuencia asistí a sus representaciones; durante tres temporadas cuyos recuerdos se me confunden, vi muchas obras, no siempre mal representadas” (79). In this case the “teatros baratos” are defined by where they are located in New York. In this case, Brooklyn stands out as one of the sites where these type of plays would be staged. The crowd through which Benjamin’s *flâneur* strolls is transmuted in the memoirs to the dandy’s tour of theatres by Henríquez Ureña, and his discriminating gaze echoes Benjamin’s comment about the man of leisure: “How the man of leisure looks upon the crowd is revealed...his attitude toward the crowd is, rather, one of superiority, inspired as it is by his observation post at the window of an apartment building...his opera glasses enable him to pick out individual genre scenes” (173). But Pedro does not solely stand back and gaze, he decides to explore the *other* theatre world presented in ventures to theatres in Brooklyn. If this is a form of slumming, an anthropological expedition, or a response to genuine curiosity is unclear. His encounter with other ethnic New York communities, such as Germans (at the time, the most numerous immigrant community in New York) are also mediated by this saving contact with the theatre: “Concurrimos también, aunque no sabíamos alemán, al Teatro de Irving Place, a ver ciertas obras conocidas...” (80). Thus,

the city experience posted for posterity in Pedro's memoir is wrapped in the curiously selective reality of a theatre world in which he can, in a sense, protect himself from disobliging encounters; while he omits other lived experiences in the city.

The constant vigilance of having to present himself as the cultured intellectual is an invitation to see the narrative as a countering story to cover up any social difficulties that must have befallen him, a mulatto, in the United States in a particularly racially charged period. Whereas Benjamin observes the street as a:

...dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enameled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to the bourgeois in his salon.

The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done (quoted in Glebber 54).

For Henríquez Ureña, the streets can never be that much a part of his intimate life. I note the theatres, instead, serve as a symbolic dwelling space for Pedro. But it is not solely the act of wandering through the theaters that interests Henríquez Ureña, it is also writing and providing a written critique of what he experiences. The moment of vulnerability, of surrender in fantasy is immediately transformed into an act of judgment and intelligence. In order for these experiences to be real, or at least to be controlled, they require a site of permanence that only the act of writing can sustain. Writing, too, is for an audience in a homeland that is getting ever more distant. The continuation of his theater pieces for the Dominican audience makes him a guide, navigating a semi-fabulous city, a persona that Henríquez Ureña assumes in the Dominican literary magazines, Revista Literatoria and

Oiga Directo. While in the memoir we get a list of names of plays and actors encountered in the city, in the crónicas written for Revista Literaria (under the direction of Enriquez Deschamps) and a couple of years later while still in New York for Oiga Directo (under the direction of G. Egea Mier), we get more detailed accounts of plays and operas. Both the Revista Literaria and Oiga Directo devote a section to the New York artistic scene titled “Neoyorquinas: Notas artísticas” and “Crónica neoyorquina” respectively. I have been unable to find any more information regarding these Dominican literary magazines except for the reviews themselves, which Henríquez Ureña kept on the second album of newspaper clippings I found in the Archivo Histórico. It is important to keep in mind that while the memoir was written a couple years after Henríquez Ureña had departed from the United States for the first time, these crónicas were written *in situ*.

These reviews, written for a Dominican audience, are what allow Henríquez Ureña to participate not only in the bustling New York theatre scene, but also on the Dominican literary scene. In the first review published for the Revista Literaria dated July 8, 1901, Henríquez Ureña begins by indicating that: “Aquí en la Metrópoli del Norte á donde me ha conducido la suerte, vuelvo, animado por el entusiasmo de una estupenda función artística, á recordar mis casi muertas aficciones de cronista de teatro y trato de reseñar, como en Quisqueya, mis impresiones”. As we will see, the impressions Henríquez Ureña chronicles for these Dominican journals will ultimately feed back into his memory of his initial views of New York city. But we do have another source in the letters exchanged with Alfonso Reyes years later while in México (roughly around the

same time Henríquez Ureña writes his memoir) against which we can compare his official memories.

In the articles written for the Revista Literaria, New York city surfaces yet again as a beacon of artistic splendor. The presentation of this altogether foreign scene for Dominicans in the island is presented through the eyes of an enlightened young Eurocentric intellectual. His loyalties to Europe's modern culture are manifested even in the pieces that he focuses on: "Sin duda, los acontecimientos teatrales de más importancia que ha visto este invierno Nueva York fueron la temporada de gran ópera y las representaciones dramáticas de Sarah Bernhardt y Coquelin". In this fashion a constellation of European works and actors are extensively adulated as the following lines illustrate:

Durante quince semanas, de diciembre a marzo, cantó en el Metropolitan Opera House la magnífica compañía en que figuraban Jean de Reske, rey de los tenores, Nellie Melba, Lillian Nordica, Milka Ternina, Lucienne Bréal, sopranos que son estrellas de los teatros europeos...y otros tantos artistas notabilísimos que formaban un conjunto numeroso y espléndido, y subieron a la escena obras tan altas como el don Juan de Mozart, "La Africana" y "Los Hugorones" de Meyer Breer, "Fausto" y "Romeo y Julieta" de Gounod, "Aida", "Rigoletto" y "La Traviatta" de Verdi...

The apparent superiority of these actors, singers and their works is highlighted by their setting, New York city, which becomes, in these chronicles, a site of encounter for not only these artists but also for anyone seeking to attain a universal and a seemingly more modern cultural appeal. One cannot help but wonder if these chronicles are also

Henríquez Ureña's way of providing Dominicans with a cultural lesson, and in this way educating those young Dominicans he had described as lacking cultural sensitivity when he notes the following on his memoir: "[una] multitud...de provincianos, no sin puntas de semi-barbarie" (52). But it seems that this cultural experience is only truly attained with traveling to such cities as New York, or as Henríquez Ureña asserts as the "Metrópoli del Norte." The city, in these chronicles, is the symbolic site for these nuanced works of art, this quote illustrates: "Mientras tanto los co-astros franceses...después de haber triunfado en el Teatro del Madison Square Garden-el más artístico que hay en Nueva York-recorrían las grandes ciudades de la gran República."

But in the midst of his euphoric writing, Pedro Henríquez Ureña interrupts himself to indicate a socioeconomic reality that could potentially be lost in translation for the Dominican audience reading his reviews, when he expounds on the cost of his theatre wanderings: "El Metropolitan Opera House rebosaba de gente, y...perdone el lector porque iba ¡Oh influencia del país de dollar! a decir las cifras exorbitantes a que ascendieron, según los diarios, las entradas y las ganancias. Pero no haya miedo de que yo cometa semejante profanación del arte". The economic freedom with which Henríquez Ureña was able to explore the theatres and operas in New York city is evidenced in these words, although he also criticizes capitalism (dollar system). Another element brought to surface with these lines is his consciousness of the cultural capital that has shaped him prior to traveling to the United States and that gives him a different status in North American society. I am alluding to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" to illustrate the forms of knowledge or education that can set a person on a higher status in a society (quoted in Richardson, 241). In Pedro's case, as described throughout this



chapter, he is able to embody this cultural capital because of his elite upbringing in the Dominican Republic, his literary and theatrical knowledge and lastly due to his economic advantage when he first arrives to New York city. This particular theater review is important because it clearly denotes Henríquez Ureña's consciousness of cultural capital, and nowhere else does he depict such a consciousness.

For the first time, in the theatre chronicles Henríquez Ureña writes in 1903<sup>16</sup> for the Dominican journal Oiga Directo, he began to use his own name. These chronicles are similarly dominated by reports of predominantly European plays and operas, the only variable being a decrease in foreign artists in these works: “La temporada dramática de Nueva York se inició con un buen número de piezas notables. Casi todos los dramas importantes se estrenaron á principios de otoño. Pocos artistas extranjeros han aparecido, pero entre éstos se encuentran dos pantomimistas célebres: la española Rosario Guerrero y la danesa Charlotte Wieche.” The consistent presentation of the Metropolitan Opera House as a symbol of artistic grandeur and by extension as a landmark of the city, continues to be one of the key presentations on these reviews: “La apertura de [la temporada del] Metropolitan Opera House da á la aristocracia neoyorquina ocasión de mostrar su lado deslumbrante. El primer gran *rendezvous* de los millonarios, después de la semana de la feria de caballos, es la primera noche de la ópera.” Theatre reviews were not the only type of writing Pedro Henríquez Ureña was committed to do during those first years in New York City, in fact that first stay inspired other forms of writing that were

---

<sup>16</sup> These journal clippings are arranged in order of publication in the second album of clippings I found in the Archivo Histórico. The only date written in that section is right above the first review indicating that it was published on: diciembre 26, 1903. The other reviews are not dated but immediately follow the first one.

more personal such as the poetry he writes which reflected on the effects of his multiple displacements and exiles.

Writing, patriotism and nostalgia join in the space of a supposedly ephemeral visit, especially through the letters, theatre reviews and poems Henríquez Ureña continuously sends to Santo Domingo. Even though he did not manage to foster the same type of relationships with other Dominican residents in New York city, his concern with maintaining ties in the Dominican island is palpable throughout the memoir: “Quedé, pues, un tanto aislado durante algunos meses, si bien veía con frecuencia a algunos dominicanos residentes en Nueva York...escribí algunos versos *otoñales*, modernistas; también escribí la poesía ‘Mariposas negras’, que mis gentes en Santo Domingo encontraron bien hecha” (75). The poetry Henríquez Ureña wrote while in New York City follows two directions. In one sense he adheres to the modernist tendencies of the time when he describes his impressions of autumn in New York on his poems “Flores de otoño” (1901), “Otoñal” (1901) and “Frente a las ‘palisades’ del Hudson” (1903). Other poems such “Íntima” (1903), which he dedicates to his aunt Ramona Ureña, demonstrate a need to recall a vision of *patria* or homeland symbolically represented through his own Dominican home. “Íntima” is reminiscent of the poetic influence Henríquez Ureña’s mother had on him, and it comes as no surprise that it is aunt Ramona (Salome Ureña de Henríquez’s sister) who inspires it, since she is one of the closest familial links he preserves while in the city (through letters and poems).

“Intima” is as much a personal account of Henríquez Ureña’s sense of his nomadic condition, as it is a description of the his mother and aunt’s nurturing, poetic and

patriotic influences upon him. At the center of the poem itself is the image of a fragmented national home held together in the mind of a displaced subjectivity:

Desde el solar nativo,  
-el nido de los pálidos recuerdos-,  
la casa palpitante de memorias  
que viven y se agitan como espectros;  
me llega tu palabra,  
hinchida de magníficos consuelos,  
mensajera piadosa del terruño,  
hasta el extraño techo...(33)

New York city, or “el extraño techo” allows for, I believe, a self-reflection that up to that point Henríquez Ureña had not committed to. In a confessional tone he seemingly discloses his pain to his aunt, but it seems that these confessions are also a road to self discovery for himself:

En la vida, en la lucha,  
¡cuán temprano sentí, lloré cuán presto!  
¡cuánto de penas supe!  
solitario me encuentro,  
sin patria, sin hogar, sin ilusiones,  
-todas volaron con volar ligero- (33)

In “Intima” we have Henríquez Ureña’s first and most direct exposition of the effects of the flights from home and the deaths he faced as an adolescent, before his exile in the United States. He also addresses his condition as an immigrant in New York city,

because by 1903 (when writes this poem) his economic situation had drastically been transformed by a sudden shift in the political situation of the Dominican Republic: “De pronto, un suceso para nosotros inesperado cambió de manera definitiva nuestra suerte. Horacio Vásquez, el vice-presidente de Santo Domingo, se levantó en armas contra el presidente Jiménez...y a principios de mayo, el gobierno había cambiado” (81). The direct ramifications of these political changes for Pedro manifest themselves at an economical level at first, and I would argue that here we see the traveler, playing with the persona of the dandy, change into the working class immigrant. With the necessity of having to find a job, Pedro and Max start working in the commerce industry where they are finally confronted with a social reality unknown to them: “Mientras tanto, buscábamos nosotros trabajo en el comercio de Nueva York...vi entonces de cerca la explotación del obrero; la mayoría eran mujeres y niños; los pocos hombres que habían eran casi todos italianos que acudían a mí para hacerse entender; y el promedio de salarios cuatro dólares por semana” (82). It is important to note that even though Pedro finds a job in New York city, it was an unusual opportunity that did not reflect the type of jobs other immigrants were occupying at this time. Henríquez Ureña’s job in accounting, allowed him more labor mobility and a better salary than those of the workers under his supervision. This is evidenced by Pedro’s ability to continue his wandering through theatre districts with no apparent repercussions on his finances : “En ese tiempo, rara vez me alcanzó el tiempo para la lectura, ni menos para escribir. Pero mi interés por el teatro continuaba, y concurría asiduamente” (83)

This reality also confronts him with a different face of New York: one in which immigrants like himself led a difficult life under the constant threat of their precarious

economic condition. This situation is worsened after he is laid off from this job: “Mientras tanto, desde julio de 1903 yo había quedado sin trabajo en Nueva York; y no logré encontrar otro empleo” (88). But once again the image of the theatre wanderer surfaces on the memoir to diffuse the real emotions he must have felt about his worsening situation. In a pattern that is now familiar, he flies from the realities of working and living as an exile to the domain of the arts as a psychological refuge. Describing his experiences in the theatres and writing them down on his memoir allows him the power of presenting himself in an ordered fashion, even if at a superficial level, and as a man of universal and artistic appeal. The writing down of his theatrical experiences, and the compulsive listing of the vast wealth of plays and operas he attended and the actors he saw are acts of self-presentation in which Henríquez Ureña can remember this time when he became a man as a period in which he accumulated the stock of knowledge that would serve him as a refined and cultivated character. This explains Pedro’s somewhat bizarre attitude towards his economic and health issues, when he asserts: “El invierno llegó crudísimo; y en diciembre...caí en cama con un reumatismo que durante quince días me impidió casi moverme...Por supuesto, que la mala situación pecuniaria y aun física nunca fue para mí impedimento en lo relativo al teatro y los conciertos, que habían llegado a ser para mí un ritual inevitable; y así ese año concurrí a la ópera, al Metropolitan...” (89). These lines reaffirm the image of Pedro as a theatre wanderer, one that surfaces more and more when his social, economical and political circumstances are in upheaval.

When the political situation worsened in the Dominican Republic for the liberal party of Pedro’s family, his father went into exile to Cuba in 1904. At the same time, Pedro leaves New York for Cuba but not without noting for the first time how his

neighborhood had changed in those three years: “El barrio en que vivíamos pululaba de dominicanos desterrados, que ahora se aventuraban hasta Nueva York” (89). A fleeting hint about this emerging Dominican community of immigrants is all that is left to the reader.

Yet, however much the personal was encased in the dandy’s affection for the theater, it still existed, emerging a year prior to Henríquez Ureña’s 1909 memoir in the letters exchanged with his great friend Alfonso Reyes in 1908. Here, away from the prying eyes of any reading public, Henríquez Ureña provides a more critical view of his experience in the United States than that presented in the memoir he writes a year later.

### **The confluences of *raza y cultura*: Another take on Henríquez Ureña’s New York Experience**

The narrative of Henríquez Ureña’s friendship with Alfonso Reyes is part of the story of his wandering. After moving to Cuba in 1904 and residing there for a couple of years, Pedro decided to travel to México in 1906, feeling that Cuba was too narrow a space for his intellectual undertakings. It is at this time he befriends Alfonso Reyes. Their correspondence, published in three volumes in the 1980s,<sup>17</sup> covers 40 years of friendship up until Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s death in 1946. Separated for long periods, these letters were a continuation of their dialogue, representing the intellectual and spiritual connections that united them across a vast sea of political, cultural and social difficulties.

---

<sup>17</sup> Pedro Henríquez Ureña and Alfonso Reyes. Epistolario íntimo, 1906-1946. Santo Domingo: UNPHU, 1981.

It may seem odd that we get a clearer vision of Henríquez Ureña's personality through the letters he exchanges with Reyes than in the memoir in which he supposedly concentrates his experiences. But in his letters, Henríquez Ureña can present a less guarded and more intimate style of writing that escapes the causality inherent in the genre of memoir and autobiography writing. Henríquez Ureña does not give his friend, in these letters, the sense of adulation or the frozen obsession with the arts that becomes the official version of his first experience in the United States. Instead we receive a more open and critical impression of the society and culture, a frankness that was altogether missing from the memoir. Of special attention are two letters he writes in 1908 that expose his state of mind before undertaking the project of relating his memoir.

In the 1908 letter sent to Reyes, Henríquez Ureña responds to Reyes's inquiry regarding a possible visit to New York City, his response could not be more direct and it shows how the New York City experience affected him:

En cuanto a mí, no tengo nada nuevo que aprenderle a Nueva York. Desde luego, podría aprender mucho en bibliotecas, conferencias, teatros, etc. lo que no es precisamente neoyorquino; y lo que, trabajando allí, aprovecharía muy poco. Ya le dije a Max: todavía fuera a Europa, por conocer sacrificaría algo; ¡pero Nueva York! Volver a aquel trabajo duro de diez horas y a los pequeños golpes de antipatía contra quienes, como yo, llevan en su tipo físico la declaración de pertenecer a pueblos y raza extraños e 'inferiores'...(74-75)

This is the first text I have found in which Pedro Henríquez Ureña makes any mention of the racial or ethnic difficulties he encountered in New York city in 1901. It is even more telling that it is during his stay in México- once he has attained a distance from the

United States- that he can articulate to some degree a racial consciousness that had never surfaced as so in his memoir.

These lines are indicative of a whole world of street level experience suppressed in Henríquez Ureña's memoir. His usage of "raza" to denote a phenotypic description of ethnicity seems out of bounds if we are to consider that he is producing these letters amidst the political and cultural scene lived in México in 1906. His arrival to México placed him in the midst of discussions of cultural and racial *mestizaje* that were themes of Mexico's cultural renewal, sponsored in a great part by the Ateneo de la Juventud formed in 1909. Henríquez Ureña along with the members of the Ateneo he joined, sought to revalorize the indigenous element on all levels of Mexican culture and politics by emphasizing a cultural *mestizaje* that they perceived inherent not only in México but in Latin America as a whole.

Race in this context was immersed within *mestizaje* reflections that ultimately situated race as a synonymous counterpart to the varied cultural experiences conforming "Nuestra América." Henríquez Ureña himself advocated for the term "raza" to be replaced with "culture," in order to avoid any perceptions of separation amongst the multiple ethnicities that compose Latin America. These views are particularly addressed on his essays "Patria de la justicia" (1925) and "Raza y cultura hispánicas" (1933). In these essays the concepts of race and culture in the narrative construction of a Latin American national identity receive a treatment reminiscent of José Enrique Rodo's essay, *Ariel* (1900). Similar to Rodo's essay, Henríquez Ureña follows a narrative trope that encourages the movement from barbarism towards cultural civilization through the attainment of a utopia framework that will unite Latin America as a *magna patria*:



Debemos llegar a la unidad de la magna patria; pero si tal propósito fuera su límite en sí mismo, sin implicar mayor riqueza ideal, sería uno de tantos proyectos de acumular poder por el gusto del poder, y nada más. La nueva nación sería una potencia internacional, fuerte y temible, destinada a sembrar nuevos terrores en el seno de la humanidad atribulada. No: si la magna patria ha de unirse, deberá unirse para la justicia, para asentar la organización de la sociedad sobre bases nuevas, que alejen del hombre la continua zozobra del hambre a que lo condena su supuesta libertad... (10-11)

The unity of Latin America as utopia or as a magna patria, is then only achieved with the “inevitable mestizaje racial y cultural.” This desire for a *magna patria* that unites Latin America, in theory, under the tenets of a universal culture has its roots on an even greater aspiration that Jossianna Arroyo describes as: “Uno de los propósitos principales del discurso de la unidad era subvertir la visión de otredad racial y bárbara de Latinoamérica que, desde la conquista, tenían los europeos...” (Arroyo 2003, 13). For this matter the substitution of “race” with “culture” in Henríquez Ureña is not an innocent gesture, since it is also in line with the works of other Latin American intellectuals that had adopted José Martí’s vision of *nuestra América*. Analyzing the intellectual production of the Cuban and Brazilian essayists and ethnographers, Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre, Arroyo indicates that: “Si para Martí, a fines de siglo XIX, utiliza el término ‘razas’ era hablar de ‘culturas’, en el caso de Fernando Ortiz y Gilberto Freyre, en la segunda década del siglo o XX [la cultura] se relativiza separándose del concepto de raza” (Arroyo 2003, 14-15). Following this equation Henríquez Ureña did not concede race an important contribution in his theoretical framework, because as he indicates: “Desde el punto de

vista de la ciencia antropológica, bien lejos está de constituir una raza la multicolor muchedumbre de pueblos que hablan nuestra lengua en el mundo, desde los Pirineos hasta los Andes y desde las Baleares y las Canarias hasta las Antillas y hasta las Filipinas. Junto a las gentes del viejo solar ibérico, donde se superponen culturas milenarias, desde lo más antiguos del Mediterráneo...” (12). In following Henríquez Ureña’s train of thought it would be dangerous not to recognize the importance of race and ethnicity in the various cultures that conform Latin America, because through its all-encompassing sweep the term *mestizaje* erases the significance of the racial and ethnic elements in the constitution of Latin America (Arroyo 2003, 11-19; Stuzman 46). But Henríquez Ureña perceived the focus on race to be an unnecessary tendency that occluded what he viewed as the real important element characterizing Latin America:

...el vocablo *raza*, a pesar de su flagrante inexactitud, ha adquirido para nosotros valor convencional, que las festividades del 12 de octubre ayudan a cargar de contenidos de sentimiento y emoción. El Día de la Raza bien podría llamarse el Día de la Cultura Hispánica, porque eso es lo que en suma representa; pero sería inútil proponer semejante sustitución, porque el vocablo *cultura*, en el significado que hoy tiene dentro del lenguaje técnico de la sociología y de la historia, no despierta en el oyente la resonancia afectiva que la costumbre da al vocablo *raza*.  
(13)

And this it the greatest problem I find in Henríquez Ureña’s formulations of a Latin American nation and culture. His blind faith on the Hispanic world, and its “beneficial” influence on Latin America manifests itself through his distorted views on the projects of discovery and colonization, especially when he asserts the following:

Es que la conquista y la colonización se ven de modo muy diverso: porque la verdad es que España se volcó entera en el Nuevo Mundo, dándole cuanto tenía. No pudo establecer formas libres de gobierno ni organización económica eficaz, porque ella misma las había perdido; pero dictó leyes justas. No estableció la tolerancia religiosa ni la libertad intelectual, que no poseía; pero fundó escuelas...Y sobre todo, su amplio sentido humano la llevó a convivir y a fundirse con las razas vencidas, y formando así estas vastas poblaciones mezcladas... (15)

The presumably passive and benign intrusion of Spain in the New World is perceived by Henríquez Ureña as having yielded the gift of *mestizaje* and the structure for a higher cultural order in Latin America. In this regard Henríquez Ureña goes even further to proclaim that: “No: la más humana de las colonizaciones, y por eso la mejor, ha sido la de España y Portugal: es la única que de modo sincero y leal gana para la civilización europea a los pueblos exóticos” (16). Even though on these essays he celebrates an indigenous and an autochthons culture from Latin America, it is all mediated by European standards. Civilization in the barbaric expanse of Latin America or “los pueblos exóticos” is understood solely under European terms. In his narration and construction of a Latin American identity, Henríquez Ureña follows the path of other intellectuals such as Rodó, Sarmiento, Freyre, Ortiz and Vasconcelos, whose work reflect the anxiety of the Creole elite class who intended to promote the unity and progress of their nations while also intending to authenticate them by grounding them on a distant past, that was almost always European in nature (Arroyo; Anderson 154).

The fact that Henríquez Ureña could acknowledge the experience of social difficulties in the United States that stemmed from his own racial subjectivity,

demonstrates the limits of the racial discourses he adopts in México in order to take part in the cultural and social reformations operating at the time. In order to insert himself in these intellectual and cultural elaborations of *mestizaje* ideologies advocated by the Ateneo de la Juventud, Henríquez Ureña had to dilute his own racial and ethnic constitution. Henríquez Ureña's usage of *raza* in the letter to Reyes to denote the difficulties for people like him that “[contra quienes como yo]...llevan en su tipo físico la declaración de pertenecer a pueblos y raza extraños e ‘inferiores’,” reflects on his own racial and ethnic difficulties in the United States, but more importantly on the early manifestations of a racial and ethnic consciousness on his intellectual formation. The image he presents of himself on the letter to Reyes contrasts drastically to that of the *flâneur* and theatre wanderer he portrays throughout his *memoir*.

The silences and omissions found on Henríquez Ureña's memoir are filled by the emotional creolization process I have been elaborating throughout this chapter. As a Dominican man with a privileged upbringing in the Dominican Republic, his initial racial and ethnic consciousness was already prefigured, before immigration to the United States, on a conflictive nature. As we have seen, his problematic claims of a creole identity and culture fails to acknowledge the presence of African cultures in the Dominican Republic. This in itself roots his claims for an universal culture within a Dominican identity that is primarily defined by its Hispanic legacy. Henríquez Ureña's class, racial and ethnic self-perception are then, as expected, affected by the society he encounters in New York city at the beginning of the twentieth century. The *emotional creolization process* for Henríquez Ureña is then embedded on a process of learning and maneuvering his lived experiences of class and nationality in the Dominican Republic,

while also facing a different social context that focused on issues he had not experienced up to that point, such as race.

## Chapter Two

### With Floating (Intranational) Borders: Displaced Dominicans in Puerto Rican Narratives

En Puerto Rico, Martín resiste las identidades que poco a poco se les cuelan por los poros. Critica a su hermano Pedro porque habla puertorriqueño.

Pedro se pregunta por qué tiene que ser dominicano. Si no lo fuera, aunque nació en Puerto Rico, no tuviera que cargar con el fardo de los prejuicios.

-Miguel Angel Fornerín, La dominicanidad viajera (19)

Not long ago, while on a trip to Puerto Rico, I unexpectedly found Santo Domingo. It waited for me at *Los Pinos Café on la Calle Ponce De León* amidst the inviting tunes of *merengue* and *bachata*. On that early morning as I crossed the threshold into the restaurant, I was instantly in synch with the familiar conversations of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans and of the scent of such Dominican foods and beverages as *mangú*, *morirsoñando*, and *tostones*.

Once inside, surrounded by fellow Dominicans and Puerto Ricans alike, I was momentarily enchanted by the idea of *returning* to “lo dominicano,” but this illusion was shattered in short order when I spoke to the *mesera*. Hoping she would recognize me as a fellow *dominicano* (even if such a construction had come byway of Nueva York) I spoke to her “lo más dominicano posible.” Her friendly reply, peppered with a slight “acento puertorriqueño” prompted me to inquire if she was Dominican. Yes, she said, and then she asked me: “Y usted, ¿es puertorriqueño?” I automatically responded that I was a *dominicanyork*. Her smile, and casual response of: “ah, pero tu eres niuyorquino” thrust me back into reality, my romanticized notion of *dominicanidad* once again put into

perspective. Both her affirmation of “dominicanidad” in Puerto Rico along with my own labeling as a dominicanyork while in Puerto Rico alluded to identity processes in which the signifier “lo dominicano” or la dominicanidad connoted meanings well beyond the Dominican nation. Furthermore her social status in Puerto Rico as a Dominican female immigrant was not easily accessible to me, in my moment of hopeful solidarity, as one can see from numerous studies considering the impact of Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico.<sup>18</sup>

What has been the effect of Dominican migrations within Puerto Rican culture? This question, initially posed by Jorge Duany (1986)<sup>19</sup> continues to make itself felt within the ongoing socio-political discussions dealing with both *dominicanidad* and Puerto Rico. What concepts of nationality, citizenship, and consequently identity travel with these Dominicans? As we have seen in Pedro Henriquez Ureña’s writings while in the United States and while reflecting on that experience in México and Cuba, displacement leads to renegotiations of one’s cultural and social presuppositions and behaviors as they are adapted to the different and often treacherous political, cultural and economical situations encountered in their new spaces.

Dominican migrations to the neighboring island of Puerto Rico bring to surface many of the contradictions and challenges assumed in the project of narrating

---

<sup>18</sup> See, Ramón Grosfoguel and Chloé S. Georas, “Latino Caribbean Diasporas in New York,” (Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York, edited by Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Jorge Duany, “*Los Países: Transnational Migration from the Dominican Republic to the United States*,” (Dominican Migration: Transnational Perspectives, edited by Ernesto Sagás and Sintia E. Molina. Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004) and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, (Caribe Two Ways: cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico. San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Jorge Duany, Los dominicanos en Puerto Rico: migración en la semi-periferia. (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1990).

(constructing) Caribbean national spaces. Furthermore, displacement processes also bring forth another problematic negotiation, what subjects are entitled to become a part of the spaces forged by Hispanic Caribbean national discourses? Several political, cultural and economical problems are addressed or put in the forefront with Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico, especially when addressing their incursion within Puerto Rican national imaginaries. At the same time the presence of these immigrants in Puerto Rico embodies what José Luis González has phrased as a “caribeñidad fraternalmente compartida,”<sup>20</sup> in allusion to the spectrum of racial and ethnic inequalities that have been fraternally shared in the Hispanic Caribbean, with their ramifications for the founding of Caribbean subjectivities.

Puerto Rico becomes a site of encounter and of contact for these Dominican immigrants, seemingly naturally woven into Puerto Rican culture. In reality, their presence speaks of a historical trajectory of Caribbean displacements that has shaped the Hispanic Caribbean as a whole.<sup>21</sup> This existing “cultura de la migración” permeating Hispanic Caribbean subjectivities and its national signifiers has been recently theorized by Yolanda Martínez San-Miguel in her book Caribe Two Ways: cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico (2003). Martínez San-Miguel surveys the formation of a Hispanic Caribbean culture of multiple heterogeneous migrations, and the effects of these displacements within the imaginaries created by national and nationalizing discourses from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. The constant cultural exchanges

---

<sup>20</sup> José Luis González, La luna no era de queso: memorias de infancia. (San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1988).

<sup>21</sup>On this point one can read José Luis González’s El país de cuatro pisos (1982), Antonio Pedreira’s Insularismo (1934), Jorge Mañach’s Teoría de la frontera (1971).



enacted in this network of displacements has led to the use of “caribeñidad”, alternately visualized, imagined and “embodied” by its different users within communities created by these traveling/immigrant/exile subjects. Given this space of semantic play, Martínez San-Miguel has seized on a specific reading that construes “lo caribeño” or Caribbean culture:

...desde la perspectiva de la formación de una serie de límites internos que he denominado ‘fronteras intranacionales’, y con las que intento percibir las maneras en que cada una de estas comunidades representa su interacción cultural con ese trasfondo caribeño que se comparte como resultado de los múltiples desplazamientos. (32)

And thus, in smuggling across the borders a number of cultural elements that aid in their particular constructions of *dominicanidad* o “lo caribeño,” Dominican immigrants to Puerto Rico are not displacing themselves to an entirely foreign space.

Borrowing the concept of “dominicanidad viajera” from the Dominican born and Puerto Rican resident Miguel Angel Fornerín, I propose new questions to accompany Duany and Martínez San-Miguel’s research: have the successive Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico figured into Puerto Rican national consciousness? In other words, how has *dominicanidad* been constructed in Puerto Rican narratives? These questions take us back to the issues of race, ethnicity, citizenship and nationality that have been thematized both in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico; yet compartmentalizing the two cultures misses their mutual interplay.

With the objective of analyzing alternate narrative constructions/depictions of *Dominicanidad* extracted from Puerto Rican narratives, I will be focusing my analysis on

José Luis González's La luna no era de queso: memorias de infancia (1988), Ana Lydia Vega's "El día de los hechos" from her short story collection Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio (1982) and Magali García Ramis's "Cuatro retratos urbanos" from the short story collection Las noches del riel de oro (1995). The ethnic or cultural identities usually denoted by "lo dominicano" or "lo caribeño", will, as we shall see, be rearticulated in these Puerto Rican narratives through the dispersions of a neo-Caribbean Dominican subject who actively reacts and self-represents via associations in the communities (zones) of cultural contact found in Puerto Rico. It is my contention that these writers, each in their own way, complicate and challenge Puerto Rican national spaces and the ideology of homogeneous subjectivities by articulating the Hispanic Caribbean as a space permanently traversed by an immigration processes that undermines any stable identity. For the purpose of this chapter, my analysis is an attempt to read, define and elaborate the characters presented on these narratives as foreigners constantly displaced within the Puerto Rican national space .

Consequently at the root of this study I combat the ever present image of immigrations/displacement/exiles as probable causes of Puerto Rican national anxieties. Instead, my project dispenses with the myths of the unified national self, and allies with those theoretical elaborations which have focused on the postnational/(post)colonial communities as laboratories within which is created an array of fractured social identities. With this consideration in mind, I will try to place my approach in dialogue with a few key texts: Julia Kristeva's Strangers to Ourselves (1989), Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel's Caribe Two Ways: cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico

(2002), and Jorge Duany's The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States (2002).

### **The paradoxes of a *dominicanidad viajera*: narration and foreignness**

Miguel Angel Fornerín has proposed the vision of a “dominicanidad viajera” to represent the identity negotiations that travel with Dominican immigrants and their consequent constructions of stylized living spaces away from the Dominican nation. Like Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Fornerín writes for newspapers, and thus aims at a more diverse audience. His book, La dominicanidad viajera: ensayos sobre diáspora, cultura, sociedad, política y literatura en el Santo Domingo de fin de siglo (2001), is an assemblage of various editorial essays written for the Dominican newspaper, Listín Diario, between 1998 through the year 2000. Fornerín's concept of *dominicanidad viajera* is actualized in many guises in the culture, literature and society of both the Dominican Republic and within Puerto Rico.

Fornerín's work reflects the author's own displacement or “viaje” to Puerto Rico, and comes from a line of Dominican writing that has pondered the cultural nexus between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, mediated by the Dominican migrants to Puerto Rico, resulting in hybrid and negotiated identities. As a result, Puerto Rican literary critics have gone as far as to recognize a dual national identity in Fornerín's intellectual production that ties in to both his place of origin and his adopted terrain, as noted by Giovanni Di Pietro in his prologue of Fornerín's most recent book, Ensayos sobre literatura puertorriqueña y dominicana (2004):

En su identidad dominico-puertorriqueña, Miguel Ángel encuentra la gran ventaja

de disfrutar tanto lo que es de su país de origen como lo que es de su patria adoptiva. Y, en efecto, en fin de cuentas, desde su perspectiva es muy poca la diferencia que existe entre esas dos realidades, pues son dos caras de la misma moneda. (13)

The suggested happy marriage of a Dominican ethnic identity in harmonious integration with Puerto Rico stands in contrast to a more conflicted social reality of difficult racial and ethnic encounters which have continually shaped Dominican and Puerto Rican relations. Ironically, the minor difference between the lived realities of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, as highlighted by Di Pietro, provided the point of departure for Puerto Rican nationalist discourses stemming from the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Martínez-San Miguel elucidates:

Sí...la década del ochenta fue crucial en la configuración de una frontera intranacional que se distanciaba de la presencia cubana en la isla, ya para la década del noventa el dominicano se ha convertido en ese nuevo límite contra el cual se negocian las coordenadas más recientes de la identidad cultural y racial puertorriqueña. (154)

According to the nationalist discourse, Dominicans play the role of “national others” within the national space, allowing for contrary Puerto Rican imaginaries to be formed or narrated. But as Martínez-San Miguel points out, Dominicans are ostracized while Cuban immigrants to Puerto Rico in the 1980s were welcomed: “Las fronteras raciales, étnicas, de clase y género, e incluso las barreras jurídicas, han sido mucho más duras en el caso dominicano que en el cubano, porque los quisqueyanos son vistos como

inmigrantes poco diestros que no benefician cultural ni económicamente al país receptor” (154).

The contemporary literary dimension of Puerto Rican national discourses began to take form in the 1930s with the emergence of a group of prominent intellectuals, writers, and artists. This 1930 generation of intellectuals wrote essays and narratives that sought to define the Puerto Rican nation and its culture. As Jorge Duany has explained, the definition of the Puerto Rican nation that was put to practice by the generation of 1930 was one founded under 5 basic tenets: 1) the Spanish language was the foundation of “lo puertorriqueño,” as opposed to English; 2) the Puerto Rican island was the geographic terrain that held the nation; within the island’s borders, everything was Puerto Rican; 3) a common origin, deriving from the place of birth, defined Puerto Ricans; 4) the collective history of Spanish, indigenous, and African influences created an ethnic character resilient enough to withstand US assimilation; 5) a vast Puerto Rican local culture was readily available to counteract the invasion of US culture sweeping the island (Duany 2002, 21).

Massive Dominican immigration historically began in the mid 1960s, after the assassination of Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, when the transitional government opened the borders, leading to an unprecedented flight of numbers of Dominicans to the United States and Puerto Rico in search of better living conditions.<sup>22</sup> Over the years, a large number of Dominican immigrants migrated illegally to Puerto

---

<sup>22</sup>At the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Puerto Ricans were also migrating to the Dominican Republic. As noted by Marínez-Vergne, Puerto Ricans “arrived in large numbers, because of the land and employment crisis in their own home island” (86)

Rico, risking their lives in *yolas* in hopes of reaching Puerto Rico and ultimately the United States (Duany 1990, 19).

But once in Puerto Rico, these Dominican immigrants were greeted with the persistent accusation that they were stealing jobs from Puerto Ricans. Duany's work has shown that this was not true: Dominican immigrants arriving to Puerto Rico filled low paying jobs that Puerto Ricans were not actively seeking out. More importantly, those early Dominican immigrants had effectively adapted themselves to the Puerto Rican society by way of their interactions with friends, other family members and their neighborhoods (Duany 1990, 25)

However, the image of Dominicans stealing jobs created an easily exploited anti-Dominican sentiment even on the intellectual level, where Dominicans, as foreigners, played the role of the necessary, abject Others to help create the Puerto Rican subject. Jorge Duany elaborates on the many salient aspects of Dominican difference targeted by Puerto Rican nationalists: "The causes of the growing antiDominican [in Puerto Rico] discourse include the immigrants' legal condition (many are undocumented), socioeconomic composition (most are lower class), gender (the majority are women), and, above all racial appearance (most are black or mulatto)" (Duany 2002, 27).

Dominicans migrated to Puerto Rico because the Dominican economy, completely dependent on larger economies, could not generate the wealth to maintain them. Puerto Rico was a richer, but still economically and politically dependent nation. Understood this way, Dominican migration to Puerto Rico has been analyzed as a displacement process situated in the semi periphery in relation to global migration

patterns and theoretical frameworks (Duany 1990, 20). As Duany further explains: “En esencia, proponemos que Puerto Rico ocupa una posición intermedia en la división internacional del trabajo entre los países agrícolas subdesarrollados y los países industriales avanzados” (20). Thinking along these lines we can inscribe our displacement schema within Duany’s Dominican-Puerto Rican ladder migration framework: immigration from an island in the periphery (politically and economically) towards one in the semi-periphery (economically and dealing with its status as a colony of the US), and lastly migrations to a centric space (represented by the US) (Duany 1990, 20). In this configuration, Dominicans migrating to Puerto Rico and supplying specific economical/labor needs encounter a political economy shaped by Puerto Rico’s colonial relation to the United States. The consequent emergence of a distinct Dominican immigrant community in Puerto Rico leads to a Puerto Rican perception of them as, above all, *foreigners* to the nationalist discourse, and a perception within the Dominican community itself of this transformation within the dominant Other’s discourse.

I utilize Julia Kristeva’s definition of the foreigner in her book Strangers to Ourselves (1991) to illustrate what I perceive is the relationship between Dominican immigrants to Puerto Rico and the narrative mechanisms used to represent this migration. According to Kristeva, the signifier “foreigner” has undergone a change in modernity: “with the establishment of nation-states we come to the only modern...definition of foreignness: the foreigner is the one who does not belong to the state in which we are, the one who does not have the same nationality” (Kristeva 1991, 96). But, Kristeva contends, the legal figuration of the foreigner simply conceals the anxieties aroused by its appearance in a seemingly homogeneous cultural atmosphere: “Today the notion of

*foreigner* is indeed endowed with a legal meaning: it refers to a person who is not a citizen of the country in which he resides. ...such a framework... allows one to settle by means of laws prickly passion aroused by the intrusion of the other in the homogeneity of a family or a group” (Kristeva 1991, 41). Reflecting on the colonial status of Puerto Rico, Dominican migration to the island also supposes an incursion that may have possible political and economical implications for them. Puerto Rico’s conflictive colonial relationship with the United States automatically confronts the Dominican immigrant with issues that are somewhat unfamiliar to them, where the United States’ political and economical presence is perceptible but not as visible (or as politically ingrained), as in Puerto Rico.

As a permanent fixture in Puerto Rico’s national development since 1898, the United States has attempted to exercise a hegemonic control over the economic, political and cultural institutions of the island. The political presence of the United States over Puerto Rican matters, has led some critics to evaluate the viability and sovereignty of the island itself. As defined by Juan M. García-Passalacqua, viability derives from: “...the Latin *vita*, ‘viability’ refers to the capability of growth or development, to the capacity to live by oneself” (152). In the constant process of developing and reshaping their economic and political trajectories alongside the United States, Puerto Rico has remained within the gray area of being a territory of the United States, not a state. Puerto Rico’s image in the minds of Dominican immigrants is that of a land of better living opportunities, but it can also represent the bridge towards their ultimate goal of immigration to the hegemonic site of opportunities symbolized by the United States.



A successful migration to Puerto Rico manifests the legal complexities of Dominican citizenship as a unit in the negotiation for US citizenship or legal residency of Puerto Rico. This consequently configures Puerto Rico as a space of economic, social and political opportunities— insofar as it is a portal to the United States- within Dominican immigrant imaginaries. Ultimately, the power relations that characterize interactions between foreigners and nationals or citizens exceed the legal and feed into cultural desires and anxieties, as Kristeva describes:

The group to which the foreigner does not belong has to be a social group structured about a given kind of political power. The foreigner is at once identified as beneficial or harmful to that social group and its power and, on that account, he is to be assimilated or rejected...the foreigner is thought of in terms of political power and legal rights. (96)

For Puerto Ricans, the arrival of Dominicans on Puerto Rican soil not only entails confronting a “foreign” culture that is possibly eroding the elements that define the Puerto Rican nation as such, but also forces a reconsideration and deconstruction of nationalistic discourses. Puerto Rican narrative representations of Dominican immigrants have tended towards two patterns, either presenting the Dominican incursion (with its problems) and interactions with other Puerto Ricans and Caribbeans in their new communities without a determining *telos*, or inscribing the Dominican immigrant community entirely within extreme nationalistic frameworks. In either case these Dominican immigrants embody not only their own displacement processes, but will consequently arouse other concerns that are not directly reflective of their own migrations to Puerto Rico. And thus, as Kristeva reminds us, the foreigner carries a:

...face that is so other [that it] bears the mark of a crossed threshold that irremediably imprints itself as peacefulness or anxiety. Whether perturbed or joyful, the foreigner's appearance signals that he is 'in addition'. The presence of such a border, internal to all that is displayed, awakens our most archaic sense through a burning sensation. (Kristeva 1991, 4)

The very existence of the Dominican immigrant community in Puerto Rico, ultimately calls for discussions of race, ethnicity, gender and their place within Caribbean national imaginaries that would criticize and in many ways transform Puerto Rican national discourses operating since the 1930s.

### **Dislocated National Tensions: Dominican Diasporic Communities in “El día de los hechos”**

The specter of foreignness and conflict as a narrative marker of Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico is initially presented in 1982 in Ana Lydia Vega's<sup>23</sup> story “El día de los hechos” contained in her short story collection Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio (1983). Running as an invisible thread tying all the stories in this collection together, Ana Lydia Vega superposes displacements and immigration processes in the Caribbean (Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico) over a level of preexisting native conflicts (racial, ethnic, political and economical) that travel with the immigrants wherever they migrate.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ana Lydia Vega was born in 1946 in Santurce, Puerto Rico. Her works reflect an interest in developing and contesting the national discourses that have defined Puerto Rican national identities from the 1930s onwards. Vega also has a marked interest in reflecting on the political status of the Puerto Rican island in relation to the imperial powers of North America. Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio (1983) is considered to be one of her most popular works of fiction.

In “El día de los hechos,” Vega captures the double movement of immigrant alienation: first, the rupture and displacement of Dominican immigrant characters to Puerto Rico, ending with their presumably successful incorporation into Puerto Rico, and second, an unexpected *return* of repressed instincts, customs, and violences. With the irruption of an “other” within the Dominican diasporic community in Rio Piedras, itself an “other” to Puerto Ricans, Vega describes the continuity of historical racial/ethnic conflicts that transcend Dominican displacement processes. The core of the story is about the assassination of a Dominican immigrant by a Haitian immigrant, which returns us to a cycle of border violence historically characteristic of Dominican and Haitian interactions. Vega ultimately presents some of the complex surface tensions that affect the recoding of community spaces crafted by immigrants on models initially diagrammed in their spaces of origin.

The imminent relocation of a borderland relationship to Puerto Rico is also cleverly presented in this story as the recopying of the violent tensions that have historically subsisted between these two characters: one Dominican and one Haitian. The formation of this borderland separating/connecting the Dominican Republic and Haiti brings to mind James Clifford’s usage of the term in his article “Diasporas”, when he indicates that the borderlands: “... are distinct in that they presuppose a territory defined by a geopolitical line: two sides arbitrarily separated and policed, but also joined by legal and illegal practices of crossing and communication” (Clifford 1994, 304). The geopolitical line separating Haiti and the Dominican Republic is forever associated in “El día de los hechos,” with the Haitian massacre of 1937 ordered by the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, which has produced a long legacy of pain and revenge. The

Haitian massacre was the culmination of Trujillo's Dominican nationalist project in the 1930s, which succeeded an already painful history of ethnic and racial cleaning projects. In the Trujillo era, a special jargon was created to explain and concurrently conceive an imagined Dominican sense of identity under a so-called "raza dominicana" or, as it was originally intended, of "dominicanidad" (conceived in term of a *Hispanized* race theory, and not as it is used today). Both terms were based on the construction of a fearful primitivism against which the eastern part of Hispaniola had to strive to wipe away all manifestations of a Haitian presence. This racialized perception of Haiti and its geographical position in relation to the Dominican Republic has been analyzed by the Dominican literary critic Fernando Valerio-Holguín in an article entitled, "Primitive borders: Cultural Identity and Ethnic Cleansing in the Dominican Republic," where he introduces the concept of "floating borders" to analyze the relationship of these two nations. He explains that:

...the absence of precise limits during several centuries, first between two neighboring colonies and afterwards between independent counties of Haiti and the Dominican Republic- constituted a grave problem, since according to politicians, the Dominican Republic found itself thereby prevented from laying the foundation of territorial unity as a nation-state. From this standpoint, for some Dominican intellectuals the genocide of 1937 had a positive outcome because it finally fixed the Dominican-Haitian border. (77)

Obsessed with the idea of suppressing his own black Haitian traits, Trujillo began a systematic project of "dominicanización" and mass murder at the border aiming to purify the Dominican national identity by purging their Haitian neighbors. What Valerio-

Holguín explains is that the official reification, in racial terms, of a separating border was essential to establish these national constructions.

The 1936 Trujillo-Vincent agreement establishing the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, served two purposes for the Dominican Republic under Trujillo. First, it gave Dominicans a negative “other” against which could be constructed a national “imagery” of *dominicanidad*, conceived as the antithesis of the “primitive” Haitians on the “other” side. Secondly, the recognition of an official border made it easier to control the border, based on whatever subjective criteria either governing class decided. Of special concern for Trujillo was the population that lived along the Dominican border. These *rayanos*, mixed people of Haitian and Dominican ethnicity, embodied the feared, imminent ‘darkening’ of the Dominican race if Haitians were allowed to continue crossing into Dominican territory (Howard 2001, 157). They represented the antithesis of everything Dominican. As Valerio-Holguín writes: “Dominican cultural identity emerges as a negation of Haitian culture by means of the primitivization of the ‘natural borders’. Racial, linguistic, and cultural differences are then erected as ‘interior’ borders’- a way of combating the terror and anxiety caused by the instability of ‘floating borders’” (80).

The border, as Valerio-Holguín concludes, which had previously been the space of encounters and cultural exchanges, became a zone of massacring the “other” in 1937. Martínez-San Miguel’s concept of “fronteras intranacionales” thematizes this violence as an element of subject relationing for these characters in the Hispanic Caribbean as they were sucking into transnational migratory/displacement processes. This also touches upon Clifford’s assertion that diasporas: “... connect multiple communities of a

dispersed population. Systematic border crossings may be part of this interconnection, but multi-locale diaspora cultures are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary” (Clifford 1994, 304). As we will see, in “El día de los hechos” the concepts of *border* and *diaspora* will bleed into one another through the migratory experiences of its characters. Furthermore, the resulting interactions of these characters will manifest how:

...diasporic forms of longing, memory, and (dis)identification are shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations...once separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, increasingly find themselves in border relations with the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication, and labor migration. (Clifford 304)

And thus, the aspects of the Dominican migration to Puerto Rico extend over both its own traveling concepts of national identity and a continually refigured line of encounter with the varied racial, ethnic, socio-economic and political Puerto Rican population. In Vega’s story the discord maintained with a Haitian *other* in these Dominican communities will mirror the same type of conflictive relationship experienced by Dominicans in Puerto Rico (Martínez-San Miguel 162-167).

“El día de los hechos” begins to unravel through the narrative filter of a haunting narrative voice that immediately asserts: “Sí, señores, yo estuve allí aquel día a las tres en punto de la tarde...” (18). Setting the scene before telling about the particular occurrence that gives the story its title, the narrator describes the Dominican diasporic community as experienced by Filemón Sagredo, the main character: “...a Filemón Sagredo, hijo, no le iba del todo mal en Puerto Rico...Y en la Arzuaga de Río de Piedras, entre kioscos y

pensiones dominicanas, corrían el sancocho y el morir soñando talmente como en el Cibao” (18). By beginning the narration with an exposition of the Dominican community in Puerto Rico and the integration of typical cultural elements- such as foods and music- along with their labor/economic impact in these communities, Vega describes the very tangible effects of a double invasion experienced when Dominican immigrations came into the Puerto Rican urban area, on the one side of Dominicans into that space, on the other side of the characteristics and customs of that space into the Dominican social order.

Filemón Sagredo’s displacement to Puerto Rico is at first glance perceived as a smooth cultural transition from el Cibao to Río Piedras. The narrator presents the possibility of a smooth integration into viable Dominican enclaves towards which immigrants like Filemón can gravitate. Yet Filemón’s displacement to Puerto Rico did not avoid the illegality and danger that were also integral elements of so many immigrations, as the narrator explains: “Aquel desgraciao de Grullón lo había soltado bastante lejos de la costa por no arriesgar el pellejo. Y con los otros cincuenta ilegales, Filemón había tenido que nadarse el resto a pulmón...” (18) Filemón’s apparent success story as a Dominican immigrant to Puerto Rico and owner of his own laundry establishment in Río Piedras, aptly called “Laundry Quisqueya”, are questioned with these lines and his initial illegal displacement to Puerto Rico. Rather than giving us a description of the difficulties faced in his “naufragio” to Puerto Rico and the equally difficult transition into the Puerto Rican urban space, the narrator emphasizes Filemón’s presumed easy adaptability as an immigrant by presenting Puerto Rico as a land of ample opportunity for illegal immigrants: “Acá un ilegal se cuela donde pueda, vendiendo

barquillas en una heladería *china*, atendiéndole las frituras a cualquier *cubano* desmadrao, cambiando gomas en algun garage *paisano*...o prosperar en el traqueteo de la vida y negociarse la papelería por un par de cientos” (19, my emphasis). The supposed innocence with which the narrator elaborates the Dominican illegal immigrant in Puerto Rico also has an inserted opposite force in this narration. As we perceive in these lines, the Dominican illegal immigrant is first understood precisely through the lens of illegality within his multiple cultural and social exchanges with *other* immigrants. And so, Filemón finds a position in the labor negotiations Vega describes once he was able to: “...enyuntarse...con hembra boricua y arreglar con Inmigración” (19). With his legal status defined we are led to believe that through his acquisition of “Laundry Quisqueya” he has been able to make a *place* for himself in Puerto Rico.

Then there occurs a shift in the narrative register which begins with a surprise visit, that dreaded motif in the illegal’s life: “Pues, sí, señores, yo estaba allí, de cuerpo presente y ví cuando el negro grandote y tofe se le cuadró enfrente a Filemón Sagredo, hijo...” (19). The irruption of a Haitian *other* within his Dominican diasporic community resets a Haitian-Dominican historical tension initiated in their space of origin, but this time effected in a Puerto Rican diaspora setting. The resulting negotiation unchains an intricate process of othering between Filemón (the Dominican immigrant) and Felicien (the Haitian immigrant). Both are understood as foreigners within the Puerto Rican national discourse, but their encounter in Puerto Rico sheds light on the portable “fronteras intranacionales” they have carried with them to Puerto Rico (Martínez San Miguel).



The incident, which is initially hinted at the narrator, occurs precisely when we believe Filemón has succeeded in making his transition to Puerto Rico. With the unsuspected, apparently trivial entrance of Felicien Apolón into Filemón's Laundromat, Filemón is carried back to old feuds: "Felicien Apolón te manda recuerdos" (19). Following this pronouncement of the regards sent by Felicien Apolón, Sr., his son Felicien Apolón, Jr. shoots and kills Filemón Sagredo, Jr. The narrator immediately asserts: "El asunto era más viejo y más hondo que el hambre. Esta servidora podría contarles con lujo de detalles todo lo que sucedió hace tantocientos años en Juana Méndez" (19) In effect this relationship had begun so long ago that it preceded both Felicien Jr. and Filemón Jr., going back to their Haitian and Dominican fathers on the eve of the 1937 Haitian massacre in the Dominican Republic: "Fue durante la semana roja de no acordarse. El Benefactor había proclamado la muerte haitiana a todo lo largo del Masacre. La dominicanización de la frontera estaba en marcha. Todo dominicano que se dijera patriota y macho tenía que tumbarle la chola a algunos de esos prietos culisucios..." (20). Afraid of his fate as a Haitian immigrant in the Dominican Republic, Felicien Sr. stifled his own reactions while he heard the screams of those who were brutally assassinated: "Desde la oscuridad del cuarto, Felicien Apolón escuchaba los aullidos de sus compatriotas moribundos. Algunos habían nacido de este lado de la frontera, críos de haitiano emigrado con dominicana" (20) In a metaphoric narrative spacing, alluding to the geographical positioning of Haiti in and the Dominican Republic, Filemón Sr. waited next door to Felicien Sr. Reluctant to follow Trujillo's orders, Filemón Sr. sat still allowing his mind to remember the times of the North American invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1916: "En la habitación vecina, Filemón Sagredo

el Viejo no acababa de decidirse a denunciar al haitiano...el recuerdo de su padre muerto en Haiti durante la ocupación yanqui era una espina en pleno galillo” (20). In this case the North American invasion becomes one more referent of misdirected conflict in the sibling rivalry between the two symbolic spaces of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The narrator describes Filemón Sr.as another byproduct of the transnational border violence between Haiti and the Dominican Republic: “Lo habían ahorcado los cacos de Peralte, colgándolo del asta de una bandera gringa por espía y delator. Injustamente, por cierto. Lo confundieron con otro dominicano que se largó a Nueva York forrado de billetes y privando de listo...” (20). And thus, seeking to avenge his father’s death in the hands of Haitians, Filemón Jr. recommences the cycle of displaced violence: “Filemón lo pensó tres veces antes de llamar a los verdugos que rondaban como hombre lobos. Porque sangre pesa más que agua...A las seis de la mañana, Paula frotaba el piso con un cepillo para hacerle vomitar sangre de haitiano a las tablas sedientas” (21). The story concludes with a reinstated transnational cycle of revenge/violence in Puerto Rico:

Por eso, aquel día, Filemón Sagredo, hijo, descendiente de tantos Filemones matados y matones, estaba de cara al suelo en el “Laundry Quisqueya” de Río Piedras. El mayor de sus dos hijos, parado en el umbral de la puerta, miraba fijamente...Felicien Apolón, hijo, seguía la pista de sangre pacientemente dibujada por tantos felicienes matones y matados. (21)

The stage set for further dislocated national tensions makes the reader wonder about de-naturalizing the apparent “fate” of violence meted out upon each other by Dominican immigrant subjects in other territories, notably Puerto Rico. In the next section I explore this *other* possibility inhabiting José Luis González’s memoir La luna no era de queso:

memorias de infancia. González's childhood memoir subtly portrays the course of his negotiated identity as a Dominican born subject who adopts a Puerto Rican identity without breaking entirely with his Dominican background.

**As an exile in my Dominican mother's womb: A reading of race and identity negotiations in José Luis González's La luna no era de queso**

In an essay<sup>24</sup> written for La jornada semanal, the Dominican critic Néstor E. Rodríguez recounts his first encounter with José Luis González at the Universidad Autónoma de México. Rodríguez recalls the first words he expressed to his fellow compatriot: "Profesor, me llamo Néstor Rodríguez, soy dominicano y vivo en Puerto Rico desde niño, como usted". While Rodríguez's first words were meant to evoke an ethnic and cultural recognition from his professor José Luis González, what in reality occurred was a (dis)connection of sorts that came across with González's reply: "Entonces es un trasterrado, como todos aquí". With these words he calls attention to both of their positions as displaced subjects, and also points towards their perennial alienness within the Mexican society. What is interesting is González's immediate dissociation from any unidirectional or bidirectional national association that can be derived from Rodríguez's affirmation of "Soy dominicano y vivo en Puerto Rico...". Instead González quickly adopts a "trasterrado" condition denoting that there is no "...como usted" national parallel between them, as suggested by Rodríguez. Ironically both Néstor E. Rodríguez and José Luis González were born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Puerto Rico, but the differences in their cultural, social and political

development, due in part to their generational differences, are in many ways encoded in the national identities they choose to adopt even while in transit or exile.

Going beyond my personal interest in “lo dominicano” in José Luis González, I have allowed myself to envision another mode of analysis. This involves juxtaposing a reading of González’s essay “El escritor y el exilio,” in which he declares: “No exagero en rigor cuando afirmo que mi exilio empezó en el vientre de mi madre” (105) against the “exilic” affirmation in those particular sections of his memoir La luna no era de queso where his racial, cultural and political ideology first takes form.

In this section I re-read the impact of exile in González’s conceptions of race and ethnicity within Puerto Rican and Pan-Caribbean identity constructs. As a Dominican born but self-identified Puerto Rican, González’s writing suggest the various ways in which racial/ethnic discourses from both islands marked him at an early age. Suggesting that this is an effect of different colonial/post-colonial trajectories, González’s memoir also acknowledges the possibility of assuming his *puertorriqueñidad* while subscribing to a Pan Caribbean identity. Furthermore, González’s tracing of particular Puerto Rican political subjectivities, of the Puerto Rico of the 1930s and 1940s, sheds light on his own consequent construction as an *independentista* and *socialista*.

José Luis González’s undeniable impact as both a writer and a critic of Puerto Rican culture goes back to the 1930s. But in 1980 with the publication of El país de cuatro pisos: Notas para una definición de la cultura puertorriqueña, González became a

---

<sup>24</sup> Néstor E. Rodríguez. "Para Llegar a José Luis González." La Jornada Semanal 508 (2004). 12 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/11/28/sem-cara.html>>.

controversial figure due to the sharp historical analysis of Puerto Rican culture he traces in this essay. Working in the long tradition of Latin American cultural definition essays going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century González puts himself in dialogue with such Latin American intellectuals as Eugenio María de Hostos, José Martí, Jose Enrique Rodó, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and Jose Vasconcelos among others. But in this essay, González's blueprint of Puerto Rican culture is founded on his perceptions of Puerto Rico as a country shaped by four historical levels (periods). The first level is the Spanish colonization and its legacy, a Puerto Rican national character compounded from African (which González privileges over the others), and Spanish. The second level is the residue of the massive European and South American migrations to Puerto Rico during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, affecting the economy and political sphere of Puerto Rico at that time. The culmination of the Spanish-American war in 1898 and the U.S. annexation of Puerto Rico is the third level. This level was characterized by the coexistence of a US political presence and the imminent economical changes brought about by US imperialist forces to Puerto Rico leading to the formation of the Estado Libre Asociado (ELA) in 1952. The sociopolitical and economical changes unchained on the third level reverberate on the fourth, which encompasses the accelerated industrialization and capitalist North American ventures that had begun in the 1940s.

The importance of El país de cuatro pisos lies not only in its criticisms towards Puerto Rican culture, but also in González's potent critique of the prevalent, unchallenged Puerto Rican nationalist discourse. González's affirmation of an Afro-Caribbean legacy as the most important constituent of a Puerto Rican ethnic construction provoked a great deal of tension among those who take their ethnic and racial identity

from a supposed Spanish and Taíno ancestry. Furthermore, González's critique of the traditional independentista political movement from the 1940s and 1950s as nothing more than a disguised attempt by the bourgeoisie to preserve their economic and political privileges, inherited from the colonial society, also caused major dissent for those who supported Pedro Albizu Campos and his campaign.

The significance of El país de cuatro pisos also lies in its objective of presenting the multiple cultural, racial, ethnic and components that make up what we understand as "lo puertorriqueño" or "la puertorriqueñidad."<sup>25</sup> As a result González does not present one definitive approximation to "la cultura puertorriqueña," instead we have various notes that leave us with the image of a Puerto Rican national space as a nation constantly "in construction." This multi-level model can be extrapolated to other Caribbean terrains such as the Dominican Republic, where the sociologist and literary critic José Alcántara Almanzar has revised González's Puerto Rico model and adapted it to the Dominican society. If by way of his fictional work González has been unable to reach the island that served as his birthplace, he has reached Dominican intellectual circles with El país de cuatro pisos. It may seem paradoxical that an essay that seeks to historicize key cultural moments in the Puerto Rican society would serve as a point of entry for Alcántara Almanzar's analysis of the Dominican Republic's cultural and national discourse.

In the essay "La cultura dominicana: ¿identidad o diversidad?" contained on the book Los escritores dominicanos y la cultura (1990), Alcántara Almanzar borrows González's essay as the template for his own elaborations on Dominican culture.

---

<sup>25</sup>On this point see, César A. Salgado's "El entierro de González: con(tra)figuraciones del 98 en la narrativa ochentista puertorriqueña," in *Revista Iberoamericana*, no. 184-185 (1998).

Published only ten years after González's El país de cuatro pisos, Alcántara Almánzar's essay has not been as widely studied outside of the Dominican Republic, even though it speaks directly to González's essay. By tracing the different "floors" that compose the Dominican Republic's cultural discourse, Alcántara Almánzar's essay illustrates some of the key differences and similarities that tie both islands. I believe it would be useful to summarize at this point some of the key differences Alcántara Almánzar finds in the Dominican Republic's cultural development, and then see how some of these points manifest themselves on González's memoir.

Just as in Puerto Rico, the first floor that composes the Dominican Republic's national culture is defined by the coexistence of African, Spanish, and Indigenous cultures as a direct result of the Spanish conquest in Hispaniola. As was also the case in Puerto Rico, the cultural changes that the colonizing enterprises generated were felt in two powerful ways. Alcántara Almánzar notes: "La conquista de nuestra isla tuvo una doble vertiente: la explotación de la mano de obra aborígen, y la imposición de la cultura hegemónica del dominador. A mi entender, en la española no hubo un auténtico proceso de transculturación entre españoles y taínos, en el sentido de fusión de culturas" (169). Even though the indigenous population was extinct by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Dominicans still claim an indigenous race in the island. Alcántara Almánzar coincides with González's assessment of the African slaves that were brought to Hispaniola, and the integral part they played in the sugar cane plantation economy. But even today: "Toda la corriente hispanista dominicana acentúa la importancia de la cultura española para disminuir la relevancia del ascendiente africano en la cultura criolla. Los hispanistas postulan que 'el sentido de hispanidad' ha sido más fuerte que la percepción real de la raza" (171). As

these lines indicate there are some similarities between the first floor that constitute the Puerto Rican and Dominican national cultures, but the similarities end on this floor.

Whereas Puerto Rico's second floor was partly defined by massive immigrations to the island during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dominican Republic's would be defined by a singular occurrence: its independence from Haiti in 1844. First noting that: "La Ocupación Haitiana(1822-1844) cortó el sueño colonialista de los grandes propietarios de la tierra, e impuso medidas de índole económica y social...preparaba [también] las condiciones que permitirían la formación de un movimiento independentista" (173-74). This independence movement characterized by a small urban elite group would define the Dominican national discourse under conservative political ideals, an elitist national culture, antihaitian sentiments, and a colonial mindset hoping for the protection and guidance of Spain. These circulating ideas all led to the Anexión a España in 1861, trumping all previous efforts of a large sector of the Dominican population who wanted to create an independent and sovereign nation apart from the colonial powers of both Spain and Haiti. The Annexation to Spain also indicated other things, as Alcántara Almánzar explains: "La Anexión probaba una vez más que en los sectores dominantes de la sociedad había una mentalidad colonialista y antinacional que veía en España a la vieja potencia imperial, o sea, a la nación providencial que nos protegería de las invasiones haitianas" (174). But the War of Restoration fought in 1865 proved once again that the Dominican Republic was ready to be independent on its own accord, and out of Spain's colonial hold. The development of the Dominican society post 1865 is illustrated by political instability in the form of a succession of *caudillos*, of which Ulises Heureaux (as we first saw in chapter 1) was the most prominent. The intellectual thought of the time,



as we first saw with the Henríquez Ureña family, reproduced the vision of a Hispanic consciousness as the predominant element within the Dominican cultural and national production of the time.

The third floor began its development with the first North American occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1916. North American imperialist forces had already set their bases in Puerto Rico and Cuba, and it seemed to be the right time (with Lilís assassinated in 1899) to get control of the Dominican Republic's economy: "La ocupación norteamericana permitió el control de nuestra industria azucarera, las aduanas, los bancos, las actividades militares, políticas y educativas, aunque la penetración cultural no logró 'desdominicanizar' al país" (177). The North American occupation led the path- through the organized repression of popular classes and anti-imperialists factions- for Trujillo's regime. Trujillo assumed his dictatorship in 1930 leading to the longest and most brutal dictatorship in the history of the Dominican Republic. Trujillo's reign was made possible by a persecutory and violent way of ruling that had at its center the idea of eliminating all opposition, and thwarting any popular cultural manifestations from the Dominican population. As Alcántara Almánzar describes: "...el anticomunismo, el culto a la hispanidad, el racismo antihaitiano y el catolicismo acrítico fueron algunos de los elementos de la ideología trujillista que permitieron una eficaz dominación de las clases subordinadas" (178). Trujillo's legacy is still felt today and it comes across directly in González's memoir, since he was born on this precise "floor" to an aristocratic Dominican family directly affected by the dictatorship.

The fourth and last floor was laid after Trujillo's assassination in 1961. One more North American occupation in 1965 and a more perceptible intrusion of North American

imperialist forces in the Dominican Republic characterize this floor. According to Alcántara Almánzar, with this occupation North Americans wanted to avoid losing control of their economic interests, namely of the multinational businesses based in the Dominican Republic. In this manner the Dominican government of the 1960s and 1970s, in close relationship with the United States, has consolidated a dominant upper middle class that has reproduced the same cultural imagery set into motion in the previous century.

González's essay leaves us with the notion of a Puerto Rican or Caribbean identity that in essence is always a product of the bricolage of multiple cultural, racial and ethnic contacts which have historically been folded into the imagined community (nation) of Puerto Rico. The national space González ultimately presents in this essay is further elaborated in his memoir, La luna no era de queso: memorias de infancia (1988), where the Dominican Republic figures as the natal *topos* in which association and dissociation mix in memory when crafting and mapping out his own political, social and cultural views on the Hispanic Caribbean as a whole.

The connections between José Luis González and Pedro Henríquez Ureña seem evident, especially when it pertains to their memoirs. Unlike Henríquez Ureña's memoir, González's writing illustrates a greater commitment to describing the social and political surroundings of the societies he travels to. In other words, literature was his vector into the political dialogues of his time. Henríquez Ureña was the uncle of González's mother, and his image surfaces in González's autobiographical writing as a source of inspiration during his childhood in the Dominican Republic. But their views on race and culture in the Hispanic Caribbean contrast greatly, as we will see.

Decisively different in their appraisal of race and culture in the Hispanic Caribbean, Henríquez Ureña's memoir suggest the preponderant place of Hispanicity over any other ethnic component, while González highlights the importance of Afro-Caribbeans and their cultural and economic labor in Hispanic Caribbean cultures. González's understanding of literature presents the most direct contrast with Henríquez Ureña. In an editorial piece written in 1984 in México to commemorate Henríquez Ureña's death, González goes beyond exalting his famous relative and opts to compare his uncle's cultural legacy with his own professional trajectory in México.<sup>26</sup> Even though we could sense that literature was a point of convergence between González and his uncle, it is also the case that their development in literary studies had different motivations. González elaborates these differences when he describes his professional immersion while in México:

La literatura no me interesaba como carrera universitaria, y ello por diferentes razones, la más importante de las cuales era que concebía el quehacer literario tan sólo como parte de una existencia muy 'activa', completamente ajena a la reflexión y el sosiego académico. Para decirlo en otras palabras, mi modelo de escritor no era Pedro Henríquez Ureña... (15)

For González, literature was an active process attached to social activity, and as such he did not see himself following in Henríquez Ureña's academic career. In these lines, González is also detaching himself from a vision of Latin American intellectuals as elitist observers, and not political activists. Instead, his participation is materialized in

---

<sup>26</sup> José Luis González. "'Tío Pedro' en el álbum familiar." *Los universitarios* XII (1984): 12-15.

literature. His childhood memories can then serve to distinguish his experiences as a working class Dominican born and Puerto Rico raised immigrant, whose Dominican/Puerto Rican upbringing was in stark contrast to Henríquez Ureña's.

Thrust into an exile experience right from his Dominican mother's womb, José Luis González's national subjectivity is presented as existing with the matrix of ties to both of his national spaces. González as the displaced and displacing writing subject becomes a nomadic intellectual crafting his own vision of Caribbean national spaces, borrowing Rosi Braidotti's definition of the nomad as a figure whose properties "...such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrences of many of these at once" (6). As a Dominican born and Puerto Rican exiled man, González consequently adopts particular racial and ethnic views on the Afro-Hispanic Caribbean that play into his political advocacy for a socialist independent Puerto Rico.

Valorizing exile and displacement as the fundamental modes of his intellectual production, González's presentation of a Caribbean subjectivity is further deconstructed as he continues to displace himself, literally from Puerto Rico, to the United States, Europe and finally México where he is finally inspired to write *down* his Caribbean childhood memories, establishing a parallel with Henríquez Ureña, who, as we saw, did the same thing. González's Caribbean intellectual *desvario* is defined not by figurative mental wanderings; instead they are the literal manifestation of his many displacements and exiles. As an exiled intellectual whose work (in fiction and nonfiction) mirrors the spaces he has displaced himself to and from, González's writing in La luna no era de

queso draws the connections James Clifford describes in his article “Diasporas”, when he indicates that:

...transnational connections...need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland...Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology or origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projections of a specific origin. (306)

And thus, González’s intellectual *desvarío* is more than an innocent exposition of his childhood memories, what we have instead is the rhizomatic work of a nomadic intellectual.

This nomadic condition has most recently been analyzed by Guillermo Irizarry in his book José Luis González: El intelectual nómada (2006). Irizarry presents González’s multiple displacements as effecting his decentralized readings and interpretations of Puerto Rican national spaces. What González’s accomplishes, as I have mentioned, is a rhizomatic work, a work of strange underground connections and gaps, conceived in the midst of a Caribbean multiplicity of cultural contacts. We are taken from the Dominican Republic in the 1920s all the way up to Puerto Rico in the 1940s, knowing that these *memorias* are unfinished, because after all what he presents in La luna no era de queso are his childhood memories. Both González and Henríquez Ureña utilize the genre of the memoir to recuperate not only their childhood reminiscences, but also symbolically, their national home(s).

González’s early migration and subsequent exile from the Dominican Republic were directly prompted by Trujillo’s takeover in 1930. As González explains: “A

Trujillo precisamente, ya va siendo tiempo de decirlo, le debo yo cierto modo mi condición de puertorriqueño” (22). We can then ask ourselves, what founds González’s Puerto Rican condition? The answer lies somewhere in between his own Dominican racial/ethnic experiences and also his cultural connections as cultivated by his Dominican mother in Puerto Rico, and the social reality passed down to him and consequently nurtured by his father.

La luna no era de queso has been written consciously to rules which require a suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader, because after all he is retelling or narrating his interpretations of his childhood experiences in Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico. In this fashion dialogues are reenacted, and so are memories that seem too lucid, but as José Luis González explains: “La geometría de la memoria parece ignorar los círculos cerrados. Más vale aceptar desde ahora que ni siquiera al final del libro- ‘final’ ilusorio por demás porque la memoria no acaba sino con la muerte, y aun sobre eso no hay opinión unánime- podré dejar bien tejida la urdimbre del relato” (81). Memory is not the only contested space in this memoir, but so are the linguistic/idiomatic differences crafting González’s Dominican/Puerto Rican subjectivity. Throughout the 297 pages of the memoir, he vividly presents the differences in the Spanish he spoke and heard while growing up in the Dominican Republic and how it differed with what he encountered in Puerto Rico:

...recuerdo que me encantaba oír conversar a mi madre y a mi abuela ‘en dominicano,’ lo cual me daba la oportunidad de ir traduciendo al ‘puertorriqueño’ mientras las escuchaba..yo me preguntaba si mi ilustre pariente habría tenido

puertorriqueños o cubanos en su familia con los que pudiera haber hecho lo que hacía yo... (176)

This unusual autobiographical emphasis on linguistic/idiomatic expressions reflects tonal differences between González's identity as a Puerto Rican and as a Dominican. The translations he made at this early age gave him a talent he used many years later in Mexico, where he did professional translations from French and English to Spanish: "Mi vocación de traductor, pues, nació mucho antes de que en México se convirtiera en profesión... Cuando mi abuela o mi madre decía 'reperpero' yo traducía inmediatamente 'revolú', 'un chin' quería decir 'un chispito'..." (177). These linguistic/idiomatic expressions also serve to illustrate the "fronteras intranacionales" that shaped González during his childhood in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

Growing in a time where both the Dominican Republic (el Trujillato) and Puerto Rico (with the formation of the ELA, and consequent persecution of leftist intellectuals) were undergoing social and political turmoil, González's memoir is literally that of a "border child". Consequently his vision of national, cultural, racial and ethnic identities would be in a state of occasional contradictions that surface most conspicuously through his very own depiction of black Dominicans throughout his memoir.

In the symbolic field of Puerto Rico's racial and ethnic hierarchy of González's childhood, other ethnicities accrued alternate social value. As described by Ramón Grosfoguel, but in relation to New York and Puerto Rican migration to that city: "...a capital of prestige and honor varies for each group contingent upon its historical positioning in the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the city" (99). In this case, González's symbolic capital while in the Dominican Republic was transformed once he migrated to

Puerto Rico. As a result, in La luna no era de queso, we have more than mere representations of a particular national identity, as González carefully describes his different social positionings within the Dominican Republic and then Puerto Rico.

González's maternal grandmother was raised by Francisco Henríquez and Salomé Ureña de Henríquez. The loving re-creation of his Dominican lineage within the elite intellectual Coiscou-Henríquez family situates his Dominican childhood experiences in a very different racial and class structure than what awaited him in Puerto Rico.

González's Puerto Rican family came from a working class rural background, leading to a confluence of two familial classes and ethnicities within La luna no era de queso.

To illustrate his privileged upbringing in the Dominican Republic, González recounts in detail his exchanges with the servants that worked on his maternal home. Two servants, the babysitter and the cook, merit particular attention in González's memoir. It is through their profiles that González subtly presents the awakening of his political consciousness. The first of these was Petronila his babysitter whom he describes as follows: "Yo, claro, tuve una niñera. Su nombre era Petronila, pero yo la llamaba 'Pipí.' Una fotografía que conservo de ella, conmigo en los brazos, me dice que era de una perfecta pureza étnica: en sus venas no debía de haber una sola gota de sangre 'blanca' (39). Reminiscent of aristocratic children at the care of their black nannies, González's image of Petronila or "Pipí" is the familiar stereotype of the roles of servanthood and/or secondary motherhood black women subscribed to in Latin America. Petronila is emblematic of the black slave woman forced to develop her maternal instincts towards the offspring of her oppressors. Furthermore, she embodies all the ailments the society has infected her with, while at the same time she constitutes a sort of



national motherhood. As Jossianna Arroyo describes in her article on Gilberto Freyre “El cuerpo del esclavo y la narrativa de la nación en Casa Grande e Senzala de Gilberto Freyre”: “...la figura de la nana, aunque se pueda ver como transmisora de enfermedades, posee en el discurso de Freyre valores positivos. Es la madre de la nación, la madre de todos, la que con su leche iguala a los hijos de la nación brasileña” (Arroyo 1993, 39). González further illustrates this point when he declares: “...cuenta mi madre que ‘Pipí’ me quería tanto que me llamaba ‘mi hijo blanco.’ Yo siempre he de agradecer esa ausencia de prejuicio racial” (39). Petronila, reduced to the essence of her race, is at this point perceived as nothing more than a “black dominicana,” but in this role, she is the first person to educate a young González on the intricacies of race and class in the Dominican Republic. The racial and class structure that held Petronila down in the Dominican society, and more precisely her economic struggle as a poor Dominican woman are also presented on González’s memoir. Her economic situation does change many years after he has left the Dominican Republic, which is an occasion for his sympathetic response: “Y me alegré mucho el día en que mi madre me informó, hace unos años, que ‘Pipí,’ ya muy anciana [en la República Dominicana], se había sacado el premio mayor de la lotería dominicana. No es ésa, desde luego, la justicia que merecen los pobres del mundo, pero algo es algo” (39). Recognizing early on the plight of blacks within Hispanic Caribbean societies, González discovered his socialist ideas amidst the unequal distribution of wealth, class struggles and racial oppression he found during his initial years in the Dominican Republic, and he took his conclusions from these early experiences with him to Puerto Rico.

Another figure who achieves prominence in González's account of his childhood in the Dominican Republic is his grandparents' cook, "la negra Rafaela." Rafaela's kitchen stories sparked González's narrative creativity and marked it from the beginning with an ethnic/racial awareness. She becomes the template for all the black females he encounters as a child in the Dominican Republic and in Puerto Rico. There is a long tradition of Caribbean folkloric literature in which the kitchen is the first site of memory and instruction, and so it is in González's memoir. Rafaela's talent for narration was José Luis González's first, shaping experience of an oral literature rich in Dominican culture and racial appeal. Rafaela was also the first to listen to his stories, becoming in little time his first critic, as he explains: "Rafaela el primero de mis críticos incomprensivos, pero gracias a ella nació, estoy seguro, mi vocación de cuentista" (78). But as noted by Arroyo, this insertion of "la negra Rafaela" as an instructor of black Dominican culture is very much within the racial discourse constructed by other Latin American intellectuals, such as Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre, whose access to black culture was at times mediated by their interactions with "el servicio doméstico."<sup>27</sup> In the works of these intellectuals, as Arroyo indicates: "El negro transmite historias orales, mitos, sentimentalidad, y sensualidad...De ahí que la nana negra sea una figura central...pues, como figura primordial en la crianza del niño blanco, mantiene el modelo de educación sentimental del que habla el autor. A través de ella se crea un lenguaje, ya que la nana habla un *portugués* roto y suave" (50). In this case both the babysitter and the cook transmit oral traditions, myths and a maternal nurturance to a young González in a

---

<sup>27</sup> A classic example of this literary tradition can be found in the following works of the Cuban born writer, Lydia Cabrera (1899-1991): Cuentos negros de Cuba (1940), El Monte (1954), Yemayá y Ochún:

language that even though at first glance could be seen as broken Spanish was also his first literary and creative language, forever entangled with his fetishized memories of these black women.

Another of Rafaela's characteristics that González enjoyed was her gregariousness, her running conversations and arguments with anyone around her, and, when no humans were around, even with the pots and pans:

Como buena cocinera campesina y negra, Rafaela solía entablar largos y animados diálogos con los trastos de la cocina. Diálogos he dicho y no monólogos, que es lo que pensaría un lector mal enterado de ciertas realidades caribeñas, porque sé con toda certidumbre que los trastos de Rafaela (o de la familia Coiscou-Henriquez, según el concepto que se tenga de los derechos de propiedad) no eran interlocutores pasivos. (76)

As González further describes the nature of these dialogues, we perceive that more than merely enacting a performative or lively conversation with her cooking utensils, Rafaela had found the classic fabulist's way of projecting and mythologizing her frustrations:

“Una cacerola había, por ejemplo, que se resistía con mucha terquedad a desprenderse de los restos de la comida que se había cocinado en ella...Rafaela, la insultaba sin ambages mientras la agredía en lo físico...: ‘Vámoh a ver, malcriá de porra, si puedeh máh que yo!’ ...Al caldero lo trataba Rafaela de ‘negrito lindo’” (76). We perceive that Rafaela's animistic defense mechanism was something more than an amusement for young González; rather, it symbolized her economical and social differences from his family.

As a campesina negra, Rafaela was still reacting to a 19<sup>th</sup> century social reality, which she describes when she responds to González's inquiry regarding the Lili's<sup>28</sup> regime: "¿Malo, Lili's?- dijo Rafaela arrugando la nariz-. A mí nunca me hizo nada, pero cuando lo mató Mon Cáceres mucha gente se alegró. Y desde entonces aquí no ha vuelto a haber un presidente prieto-. Y a continuación contó un nuevo cuento de Pata de Palo" (80).

Rafaela's practical response to González's inquiry alludes to the different coping strategies employed by black Dominican campesinos of her time. With her response of "a mí nunca me hizo nada," Rafaela manages to escape the political charge presented in a question dealing with Lili's nature. Furthermore, Rafaela's final drifting into a "Pata de Palo" folktale intermingles the legendary with the historically linear to explain who and what the Lili's regime represented to the Dominican Republic during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rafaela's narrative strategies, her conjoining of a "Pata de Palo" folktale to a Dominican historical event such as the Lili's regime, was González contact with the reality making power of literature, the political force of the imagination, under the influence of which he shaped himself later as a writer in his short stories, novels and essays.

Rafaela's response is indicative to an extent of the varying racial politics and the zones of their expression (kitchen vs. dining room, masters vs. servants) that existed among affluent Dominican family households from the 1920s in which racial categories were mediated, or held in their antitheses, as their socioeconomic status aligned with

---

<sup>28</sup> Lili's is the nickname popularly used to refer to the Dominican dictator Ulises Heureaux who governed the island at various times: 1882-1884; 1887-1889; 1889-1893; 1893-1897; 1897-1899. Born in Puerto Plata in 1845, both his parents were immigrants. His father was Haitian and his mother was born in the Antillas Menores. During his regime he eliminated civil rights and liberties, and led the island to bankruptcy. He was assassinated in 1899, leaving the island with a great debt and open to foreign attacks.

conventions. This situation allowed certain racial groups the possibility of not having to deal with the social stigmas faced by “los negros.” In the case of Puerto Rico, Jorge Duany has commented: “Like Brazil and other Latin American societies, Puerto Rico developed a ‘mulatto escape hatch’ that allowed some persons of mixed ancestry upward social mobility” (Duany 2002, 241). For this reason Rafaela, a poor rural black Dominican woman, was not on a social level with the mulatto Coiscou-Henríquez family, but instead was the cook, far lower in the social hierarchy. But, as one of the poor and working class, she used her oral storytelling abilities as a way of projecting all her frustrations as a black Dominican woman into archetypal symbols. González’s reading of Rafaela’s situation are summed up in the following lines, when he explains: “... por qué un negro nunca se siente solo: aún extraviado en medio de un bosque se siente acompañado, no digamos ya por animales de cualquier especie que lo rodean, sino por los árboles, los arroyos y las piedras que también viven y tienen el don de comunicarse con él” (77). This “black gift” of managing to escape the material world while living and communicating with nature is perceived by González as something unique to racial subjects (regardless of ethnicity, since at this point race there is no perceived difference between black Dominicans and black Puerto Ricans). González unconsciously adheres to the stereotypes of a racial discourse that endows black bodies with animic/animalistic powers, disempowering their socio-economic demands for a share of the fruits of their production by casting them in the role of naïve subjects who transcend material limitations whilst fostering a spiritual connection with nature. And it is precisely at this juncture that González’s racial and political discourses coalesce:

...aquellos negros cuya convivencia con los blancos no los ha hecho perder todavía ese privilegio...pero los marxistas todavía no acabamos de entender como es debido porque no basta con pensar que las máquinas deben estar al servicio del hombre y no al revés, sino que ya es tiempo de preguntarse cuáles son los límites del “dominio del hombre” sobre la naturaleza. (77)

In recollecting Rafaela and Petronila for his memoirs, González is tracing a personal genealogy of his racial consciousness, and giving us a sense of the place of blackness in the Hispanic Caribbean as a whole. Through his memoir, González is also intending to manifest his empathy, at an early age, with the working class population he grew up with. Here I utilize Arroyo’s reading of empathy as she sees it functioning within Gilberto Freyre’s work in Brazil: “La función representativa del sujeto de la escritura se forma a partir de la necesidad de incorporarse como sujeto en lo que describe. Esta incorporación se traduce en lo que Freyre define como ‘empatía’ con el objeto de investigación, un factor que lo hace penetrar agudamente en las posiciones subjetivas y psicológicas del objeto de análisis” (48). The framing of a socialist framework for Puerto Rico begins, I suggest, with his childhood experiences in the Dominican Republic and more pertinently from his interactions with Rafaela and Petronila. The role of these women in the Dominican society of González’s time were a clear reflection of the class and racial differences instantiated in the island after its independence. In an interview with Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, González clearly delineates his leftist political ideology:

Por ser marxista creo en el socialismo, y por creer en el socialismo repudio el capitalismo, y por repudiar el capitalismo repudio el imperialismo y el colonialismo que son sus secuelas inevitables. Y porque el socialismo y el

colonialismo son incompatibles, soy partidario de la independencia de mi país...En ese sentido se me puede y se me debe considerar independentista puertorriqueño...la independencia nacional sólo puede ser un medio para llegar al verdadero fin, que es el socialismo. (96)

Born in the Dominican Republic, a nation divided along racial and class lines, and raised in Puerto Rico whose neocolonial relationship with the United States is still an ongoing political predicament, González's desire for a total socialist independence for Puerto Rico- and the Dominican Republic- is a thread that runs all the way through his memoir.

Tailoring his memories as a text to be read and imagined as within a pan-Caribbean ideology, González's dedication of it as a "...testimonio de caribeñidad fraternalmente compartible" alludes to the racial and ethnic inequalities that have been fraternally shared in the Hispanic Caribbean as a whole. Once he migrates to Puerto Rico, hierarchies of race and ethnicity in the Dominican Republic are translated to a different hierarchy, one in which the mulatto is given a lower place. Even though González never again lives in the Dominican Republic, his experience there prefigures the transnational space he presents in Memorias. Assumptions derived from his Dominican cultural and racial experiences persist under the discussion of issues dealing with race, ethnicity and class in the Puerto Rico of his youth. Rafaela and Petronila, as problematic as their racial representation may be, help González ultimately situate their struggle as exemplary within a larger model of racial otherness that is translatable not only to the historical-structural dynamics of racialized Dominican subjects, but also to the racialized colonial subjects encountered in Puerto Rico (Grosfoguel and Georas). In the following section, I will take up this theme and develop it by showing how contemporary

Puerto Rican writers such as Magali García Ramis deal with the Dominican immigrant subject within the Puerto Rican urban space. I will also pay particular attention to the significance of Puerto Rico for Dominican immigrants seeking to make sense of the always changing panorama of global migrations.

**The perennial walk of the foreigner: Dominican and Puerto Rican (urban) ethnic constructions in “Retrato del dominicano que pasó por puertorriqueño...”**

The enactment of a particular Puerto Rican identity modified and adapted to migration to the United States for presumed economic and social benefit is the theme elaborated in Magaly García Ramis’s<sup>29</sup> short story, “Cuatro retratos urbanos” in the collection Las noches del riel de oro (1995). In the first “retrato” aptly titled “Retrato del dominicano que pasó por puertorriqueño y pudo emigrar a mejor vida a Estados Unidos,” García Ramis describes the adventures of a Dominican illegal immigrant in Puerto Rico, and the challenges he faces while coping with his illegal status in the Puerto Rico of the 1990s. What is initially presented as an elaboration on the racial/ethnic differences between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, and the ensuing national characters derived from these differences, ultimately leads to points of cultural contacts.

The story delves into the tribulations faced by a Dominican immigrant in Puerto Rico who in order to fulfill his wish of better living opportunities in the United States must assume a new ethnic identity. Consequently, the story narrates the systematic “striping away” of a particular Dominican ethnic identity to embody a Puerto Rican urban ethos. But once this process of “passing” is concluded, the newly constructed

---

<sup>29</sup> Magali García Ramis was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico in 1946. Her works center on the representation of Puerto Rican popular cultures, the roles of women, family and the political situation of the island.



Puerto Rican immigrant is faced by other challenges. Revealing the perennial foreign condition of Dominicans in Puerto Rico, García Ramis's "portrait" also remarks on the constant foreign state of Puerto Rican subjects who are faced with the challenges of migrating/living in the United States. By situating the process of displacement from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico and lastly to the United States, García Ramis presents the struggle of Dominican and Puerto Rican immigrants as one that does not only turn on their cultural differences but also, invariably, on their similarities when immersed within the framework of global migrations and subjected to the gaze of the American cultural hegemon.

Right from the first line of the story we have the apparent useful physical characteristics possessed by the main character, and that set him apart from *other* Dominicans in Puerto Rico: "El dominicano que los muchachos ayudaron a irse a Estados Unidos tenía dos cosas a su favor: un color de piel acaramelado, boricua, y una capacidad fuera de lo común para imitar a la gente" (107). Armed with the necessary discursive cultural layers to make his displacement to the United States a possible endeavor, Asdrúbal is also adept at "passing" as a Puerto Rican due to his skin color and his talent for mimicry. Paradoxically Asdrúbals' skin color as that of "un color de piel acaramelado, boricua" allows him certain benefits not historically afforded to blacks in the Spanish Caribbean as a whole.

Reminiscent of Kristeva's description of the place of the foreigner within the modern-state, Asdrúbals' presumed ability of "passing" points towards the multiple cultural layers or masks he is *able* to adopt. As Kristeva describes: "Without a home, he [the foreigner] disseminates...multiplying masks and 'false selves' he is never

completely true nor completely false, as he is able to tune in to loves and aversions” (8). But Kristeva warns us that the foreigner’s countenance is as much a function of the territories he displaces to as his mimetic talent, and that his strategies have to cope with the reactions/anxieties he/she provokes by irrupting into foreign national spaces: “This does not mean the foreigner necessarily appears absent, absent-minded, or distraught. But the insistent presence of a lining-good or evil, pleasing or death-bearing-disrupts the never regular image of his face and imprints upon it the ambiguous mark of a scar-his very own well-being” (4). As a presumed unstable subject, the foreigner must either conform to his new reality via identity negotiation such as the one taken up by Asdrúbal, or directly suffer the consequences of discrimination and prejudice.

The narrator dryly observes Asdrúbal’s apparent effortless ethnic metamorphosis into a Puerto Rican, a process also observed by a group of friends that include Puerto Ricans and another Dominican residing in Puerto Rico. As the narrator explains:

No llevaba ni un año en la Isla, viviendo con una docena de sus paisanos en dos cuartos mugrosos en Santurce abajo, ya podía *caminar* como puertorriqueño. Practicaba frente a las vitrinas a lo largo de la Ponce de León, por la parada 15, una y otra vez, sobre todo frente al edificio de La Telefónica, que era todo de espejos...Asdrúbal *camínaba* y se miraba, se miraba y *camínaba* como si fuera puertorriqueño. (107, my emphasis)

While Asdrúbal’s wandering/walking along the Puerto Rican city streets is far removed from the peregrinations of the classical flâneur, like Walter Benjamin’s flâneur, he allows himself to be saturated by this city experience, using what he has learned to shuck off his Dominican self in assuming a Puerto Rican persona. The image of Asdrúbal then

surfaces in the text as he walks along the Ponce de León while observing and practicing his Puerto Rican walk. Both Asdrúbal and the city wanderer described by Benjamin lose themselves in the city and, being in no hurry, with no destination, stand back from the crowd observing city cultures. Asdrúbal does more than stand back and observe; this is his school, where he learns to *imitate* and practice his Puerto Rican walk. Here he acquires the instruments that will not only take him from one urban experience to another, but will disconnect him from his previous existence. Homi Bhabha's definition of mimicry comes to mind, here, as it pertains to Asdrubal's own mimicry of a Puerto Rican identity. In "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" Bhabha indicates that:

...colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, not quite. Which is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is stricken by an indeterminacy... (85-86)

I suggest that Asdrúbal's wandering/walking of the Puerto Rican urban streets is a sentimental education in those ethnic/cultural nuances that are necessary to put on the successful Puerto Rican act in this story. Asdrúbal throws himself into *becoming* in the characteristic act of the Kristevan foreigner, putting on multiple masks and 'false selves' he assumes while advancing every more into new territories, all of them *terra incognita* for the Dominican he was.

Thus, the Puerto Rican urban space in this story is marked by dynamic ethnic and racial interactions allowing for the otherwise problematic assimilation of a Dominican *other* whose *becoming* is an attempt to become part of the whole, whose reality becomes figurative by an act of will, or in other words, who inhabits the Puerto Rican multiplicity space as an act of mock ownership described by the author.

These spaces of cultural, ethnic and racial interactions are clear metaphors of the Spanish Caribbean as whole- and they relate to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's definition of the notion of multiplicity (which I use to complement my reading of Asdrúbal's urban experience) in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Asdrúbal's *walk*-as a fringe of one of his many masks or perhaps one of his many 'false selves' as a foreigner-serves as his point entry into this multilevel process of becoming, while at the same time consolidating a bridge between a fictive/performative *puertorriqueñidad* and his masked *dominicanidad*. In other words, Asdrúbal's *walk* is the first step towards a becoming-Puerto Rican process that ultimately situates him within the complex cultural assemblage embodied by the Puerto Rican urban space and the national discourse surrounding it. In defining this assemblage or multiplicity Deleuze and Guattari indicate: \_

This is our hypothesis: a multiplicity is defined not by the elements that compose it in extension, not by the characteristics that compose it in comprehension, but by the lines and dimensions it encompasses in "intension." *If you change dimensions, if you add or subtract one, you change multiplicity*. Thus there is a borderline for each multiplicity; it is no way a center but rather the enveloping line or farthest dimension, as a function of which it is possible to count the others, all those lines

and dimensions constitute the pack at a given moment (beyond the borderline, the multiplicity changes nature). (245, my emphasis)

Asdrúbal's desired absorption into this national space, just like that of any immigrant, also brings new cultural elements into play, where they cease being for-themselves and become for-the-other. Consequently, *walking* a certain way provides the choreography for a specific ethnic marker, and the marching feet create the tune for its national character. As the narrator describes: "Porque esa era la clave para despistar a los de inmigración: que desde lejos, desde que sus ojos falcones te miraran, ya que tú parecieras de aquí, caribeño, isleño, pero de aquí" (108). Pointing towards a "caribeñidad compartida," these lines also indicate the tensions that characterize the (dis)encounters between caribeños in the Spanish Caribbean. These lines also indicate that interactions amongst Caribbean immigrants are still mediated by "fronteras intranacionales" that have historically shaped their encounters. The need for Asdrúbal to *become* "uno de aquí," meaning a *caribeño puertorriqueño*, points towards the still unfulfilled vision of a "caribeñidad fraternalmente compartida" (González 7) that was expressed by José Luis González in his memoir.

The story proceeds with the advice given to Asdrúbal by his Puerto Rican friends on how to make his walk seem more authentically Puerto Rican: "No camines tan derecho, como si te hubieran metío una vara por el culo; déjate ir, tu sabes, mano, suéltate los hombros" (108). But it is perhaps Diosdado, Asdrúbal's Dominican friend, who through his advice to Asdrúbal also posits a crude criticism towards the political situation of Puerto Rico and their circumstances as Dominican immigrants in this society:

Diosdado se lo repetía en susurros- Nosotros *caminamos* muy derechos, porque somos *hombres* de una república. Los de aquí no. Eso me lo dijo un líder sindical hace mucho tiempo. Los Puertorriqueños, estos *muchachos* del barrio, caminan un poco jorobaditos, y como arrastrando los pies, como si no les importa nada y es que ellos ya son ciudadanos y no les preocupa su futuro. (108, my emphasis)

The analogy of walking straight versus walking crooked connotes for Diosdado a presumed weak political condition inherent in the Puerto Rican island and that is clearly (and sarcastically) tied to the neocolonial status of the island. For Diosdado, Asdrúbal is trading the independence of the Dominican Republic for the dependence characterizing the political relationship of Puerto Rico to the United States. While Puerto Rico may be richer, it is, finally, dependant to the United States. Furthermore, for Diosdado the political is tied to sexuality and manhood as we can observe in the severance he makes between Dominican men and Puerto Rican boys and his phrasing of “somos hombres de una república” versus the “muchachos del barrio.” Ironically, in order for Asdrúbal to attain his desired final migration to the United States he must renounce not only to his Dominican ethnicity, but he must concurrently mimic all the “weaknesses” that make up the Puerto Rican boys described by Diosdado.

The next literal step towards Asdrúbal’s new ethnic identity is through losing his real name, deemed too Dominican by his Puerto Rican friends: “Tienes que tener un nombre de aquí, con una identificación, por si acaso, pana, tienes que llamarte Luis, José, Willie, Ilving...” (109). The adoption of a different name also generates the need for a physical change to go along with it, and for Asdrúbal this meant a change of hairstyling:

Asdrúbal sabía que él, como todos los de su país, se recortaba demasiado su pelo malo, como le decían acá. *En Puerto Rico ya los muchachos casi no van a los barberos de hombres, sino a los estilistas esos de mujeres...* se dejan el pelo más largo...con peinados pegaítos abajo y abultados arriba que hacen que la cabeza parezca una goma de lápiz... (109, my emphasis)

Allowing his “bad” hair to grow and styling it in beauty parlors (and not barbers), is yet one more way in which the Puerto Rican masculinity model is emasculated. The long hair is also a continuation of the perceived state of political and cultural disarray that the Dominican characters in this story attach to the Puerto Rican way of walking.

Even though we are led to believe that Asdrúbal’s ethnic metamorphosis went by smoothly, and that he was able to “emigar a mejor vida” in the United States, there is the hinted probability that the “new” Willie Rosario aka Asdrúbal will have to face other issues in the United States: “Desde aquel día que Asdrúbal fijó fecha para el viaje, se llamó Willie Rosario...Willie practicó caminar, mirar y peinarse como los puertorriqueños. En cuanto llegara a Nueva York, el tío de su mamá, lo iba a poner a guiar un taxi. ¿o aprenderé primero inglés?” (110). As a Puerto Rican immigrating to the United States, Willie Rosario will have to face an unexpected national discourse that reads not only “lo puertorriqueño” or “lo dominicano” but “lo caribeño” within different racial, ethnic and class markers. This is a similar situation faced by Henriquez Ureña one hundred years earlier, another Dominican who preferred to pass, although in Henriquez Ureña’s case, the preference was to be a European, and the imitation was not so total. As a soon-to-be foreigner in the a different national space, Willie’s new ethnic identity is immediately put to the test in the symbolic space of border crossings: the airport: “Willie

pasó por donde le quitan a uno los plátanos para que no lleve plagas dañinas a los Estados Unidos; Willie pasó por donde registran a unos para que no vaya a sacar una pistola...” (111).

The texts analyzed in this chapter have explored the intersections of Dominican and Puerto Rican national imaginaries and how these affect the construction of contemporary Caribbean subjects. The insurgent and disturbing presence of this ethnic migrant group in a Puerto Rico attempting to sort out its identity in the dialectic between nationalism and dependence also elaborates the problematic insertion of racial and ethnic constructions within our notions of national subjectivities in the Spanish Caribbean. In the following chapter, I describe the multiplicity of experiences that travel with Dominican immigrants to the United States, and their notions of migration/diaspora. Focusing my analysis on the writings of Junot Díaz, I will center my study on his representation of New York City and New Jersey as sites of (post)colonial encounters (as manifested via his Dominican, Puerto Rican and Cuban characters) and new identity negotiations.



## Chapter Three

### **Of Absent (Nomadic) Fathers and Boys in Construction: Dominican Diasporic Subjectivities in Junot Díaz's Drown**

To write is to become. Not to become a writer (or poet), but to become, intransitively. Not when writing adopts established keynotes or policy, but when it traces for itself lines of evasion.

- Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other (19)

For me it's more like anti-nostalgic.

-Junot Díaz, 2003

I do not recall the precise moment when I *became* a dominicanyork. It occurred gradually, as I methodically moved further and further away from the Bronx, or even New York City, as those places in the city I had always seen as mirror images of the Dominican Republic. Speaking, writing and reacting as a Dominican raised and Bronx born man, I embarked on multiple literal journeys away from “home,” and by so doing unconsciously crafted a nomadic consciousness. A series of moves from the Bronx to Santo Domingo to Sevilla, then back to the U.S. in Ann Arbor, then to Salvador da Bahia and finally to Austin (at the moment) have made me more aware of my own adaptability to different spaces (cultures), while at the same time sharpening my own “fluid” notions of what it means to be Dominican and also from New York City.

Often adapting, often translating (and being translated) and often facing changing conditions, I have assumed a nomadism akin to Rosi Braidotti's conception of it: “...as a theoretical option is also an existential condition that for me translates into a style of thinking” (1). This mode of thinking, according to Braidotti, involves how “...axes of

differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity...” And at this point the notion of nomadism becomes salient, as “the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrences of many of these at once” (6). It is precisely this nomadic style of thinking and being that I perceive as a cultural signifier within the Dominican immigration experience of the United States, beginning with the mass migrations of the 1960s. So it is not surprising that this nomadic style of thinking would appear within Drown (1996) by the Dominican born and New Jersey raised writer Junot Díaz. In his stories, particular emphasis is placed on the multiply layered experiences harbored in the notion of immigration. However, what is critically interesting is that in other key Dominican writers, such as Julia Álvarez, nomadism, or the emphasis on traveling through realms of alternate experiences simply by existing as a Dominican, is muted. Why this difference of emphasis?

Álvarez’s work in poetry, short stories and novels have dealt with the effects of the Rafael Leonidas Trujillo dictatorship on middle and upper class Dominicans. The subsequent immigration experiences and acculturation processes her characters undergo in the United States are infused with a nostalgia for the socioeconomic status lost during the Trujillo regime.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the immigrant motivations of Junot Díaz’s characters

---

<sup>30</sup> Her poetry, short stories and novels have mainly dealt with the effects of the *Trujillato* on middle and upper class Dominicans. The subsequent diaspora experiences and assimilation processes these families face in the United States have been elaborated in over a dozen writings of Julia Alvarez. As one of the first Dominican writers to deal with migration experiences in the United States, it was to be expected that the critics would canonize her. But this *norteamericano* attention has come at the price of a less enthusiastic reception in the Dominican Republic, where many intellectuals feel that Alvarez’s language betrays a greater interest in pleasing an American audience than in the authentic portrayal of Dominican society. Ninna Nyberg Sorenson quotes a typically scathing remark: “Dominica-nada . . . is what she is,” a male, Dominican lawyer told me between two glasses of champagne at a reception given by the Asociación

are triggered by the poor economic circumstances undergone by the Dominican society after Trujillo's assassination in 1961. Díaz's characters move to the United States carrying with them unresolved issues of poverty, race, sexuality and gender, and these in themselves affect their daily life in the communities they craft while in New York City and New Jersey.

Dominican immigrant narratives tend to represent the violent ruptures of its citizens from the Dominican Republic, due to political situations (namely the *Trujillato*) and the difficult adaptation of these subjects within the United States. As a result, nostalgia for a certain idyllic times in the Dominican nation have been jettisoned. A disabused sense of displacement has been put in its place. Another tendency of these narratives has been to elevate the vantage point of the diaspora experience as a hermeneutic key to unlock the history of the Dominican Republic, not merely an accident of that history, in what may be viewed as a total rewriting of history. In this chapter, I am more concerned with establishing and re-reading Díaz as a writer with a critical consciousness who not only gives "voice" to alternate experiences of migration, but who is also exploring ways of creating and recognizing the unique experiences of living and interacting as Dominicans while maintaining an aspect of themselves that

---

Americana de Abogados Dominicanos."["Narrating Identity Across Dominican Worlds" in *Transnationalism from Below* by Michael Peter Smith and Luis Guarnizo, 1998, 253] . This criticism consequently points towards an even greater issue of "dominicanidad" or "lo dominicano" as present or not present in her writing consciousness. For a recent study of Alvarez's work in Santo Domingo, see Giovani Di Pietro's, *La dominicanidad de Julia Álvarez* (San Juan: Editora Imago Mundi, 2002). See also, Efraín Barradas, "La difícil tarea de ser Julia Alvarez," *The Latino Review of Books* (Fall 1996), and see, Andrés Mateo's, "De cómo las chicas García perdieron su acento: diálogo sobre literatura e identidad," *Cuadernos de poética* no. 23 (1994).

demands recognition as integral to the cultural, social, economical and political fabric of the United States.

In his own way Díaz reacts to the critical discourses that have put his work and experiences in the genre of “Dominican immigration literature,” and it is his narrative reaction to the constraints of this label that I will focus on when re-reading his stories. How is the Dominican “community” variously defined in Drown? How do his characters embody resistance? Is this resistance invigorated with a political consciousness and direction, or is it the case that his characters labor under a neurotic socio-historical compulsion to re-enact patterns of behavior from their initial places of departure? These questions immediately remit to James Clifford’s perception of “unresolved histories” as constituting migratory articulations, when he says: “Unresolved historical dialogues between continuity and disruption, essence and positionality, homogeneity and differences (cross-cutting ‘us’ and ‘them’) characterize diasporic articulations” (108). A lingering “unresolved historical dialogue” will be analyzed in these stories, particularly when confronted with issues of race, sexuality and gender and the subsequent assimilation/dissimilation processes necessary for the identity constructions of these constantly displaced/displacing/migrating Dominican subjects.

**Of mother tongues and nomadic encounters: Díaz’s Drown.**

Criticism of Junot Díaz’s Drown (1996) has generally focused on perceived issues of *dominicanidad* and the effects of the Dominican immigration experience in his

stories.<sup>31</sup> For these critics, the numerous effects of immigration/diaspora form a paradigm that contains the livelihoods portrayed in the characters of the De la Casa family as they travel from Santo Domingo to the United States. Interestingly, Díaz presents Drown as a collection of short stories, but each of the stories tell and retell the experiences of the De la Casa family members, and especially so of Yunió who is the protagonist of all the stories contained in this collection. By textually compartmentalizing individual narratives within a larger narrative, Díaz allows for an in-depth exploration of the psyche and experiences of these characters as forming a bodily part of a community of excluded subjects. In an ironic twist, in a 2003 interview Díaz seems to reject the dominant critical line by asserting that: “Drown is a book not about the immigrant experience as much as it’s a how-to guide to building a boy...I will argue that I’m doing something very different than just simply representation.” (45) Díaz indicates here that the theme of migration is at most the invisible thread that weaves the stories of this collection together, but is not by itself the central element of the text. His writing seems to react to certain classifications as obstacles from which he must escape, as his words remind us that to talk about narration, and subsequently about immigration experiences, we are immediately thrown into discussions of Dominican nationality, citizenship and subjectivity. All of these processes experienced on a day-to-day basis in the Dominican Republic, and constantly being shaped and re-shaped have been tightly woven into the Dominican migration narrative in the United States. Díaz’s reaction, it seems to me, should be contextualized as a response to the type of Dominican national

---

<sup>31</sup> On this point see, Ramón Figueroa’s “Fantasmas ultramarinos: la dominicanidad en Julia Álvarez y Junot Díaz,” in Revista Iberoamericana, no. 12 (2005).

consciousnesses portrayed in previous Dominican immigration narratives, from which he seeks to distinguish himself. As Díaz explains:

The first thing that would be helpful is that I never was a good Dominican. I would never get an “A” in Dominican-ness. My family in Santo Domingo, we were not considered [within the Dominican national discourse]...The Dominican nation when it visualizes itself it doesn’t consider people like my parents central to the experience of the Dominican Republic, a bunch of poor campesinos who were the kind of people that everybody was warned not to be. (44)

With these words, Díaz is reacting to the Dominican national project discussed by Martínez-Vergne, a project narrated and put into effect by a Dominican intelligentsia who constituted the Dominican nation, state and its citizens in very particular ways. As previously discussed in chapter one, this Dominican national project, arising among the liberal bourgeoisie in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, had the objective of building an all inclusive Dominican nation, but centered in the urban space. But as we know, the intellectuals selected and preferred certain populations over others, so that “writing down the nation,” was also a process of selection, of minimizing or of assimilating from above the experiences of the working class and the poor, people of color, women and the rural dwellers, whose own experience of *dominicanidad* remains a silenced *Other* to be recovered. What Díaz is noting is basically the unevenness of those nation building projects, which continue to affect the writing consciousness of some of the narrators of Dominican immigrant experiences.

So what is Díaz’s intended purpose with Drown? If not an immigrant experience, what is the boy he ultimately (de)constructs an emblem of? An answer to this initial

inquiry might be found in the often cited poem by Gustavo Pérez-Firmat<sup>32</sup> that opens Díaz's collection: "The fact that I am writing to you in English already falsifies what I wanted to tell you. My subject: how to explain to you that I don't belong to English though I belong nowhere else". Serving as the preface for Díaz's collection, these words leave the reader in a very unsettled position. It seems as if Díaz is intent in reminding us that as he weaves his stories, something is lost and created along the way. These words are provocative in the sense that Díaz's characters seem to surge out of in-between, unmapped spaces, where their living experiences have escaped the socializing resource of language. Or is Díaz merely creating the new *self* alluded by Olivia Espín in her book Women Crossing Boundaries: a Psychology of Immigration when she writes: "Learning a new language may also generate feelings of guilt at being disloyal to the parents' language. Conversely, learning a new language provides the immigrant with the opportunity to 'create a new self'" (135). To open Drown with Pérez-Firmat's quote in mind places us within a narrative that conceives itself as within a sort of abject space in relation to prior Dominican migration narratives. Accepting that the literature of the diaspora will be written, in part, in English, here the problem is not in what language the stories are written, but the relation of language to social spaces. Díaz is making us face the materiality of language, the (im)possibility of representation/narrating from nowhere and somewhere at the same time, of trying to build a space beyond the limits of language (English or Spanish). This is the location of the laboratory in which, I think, the "boy"

---

<sup>32</sup> Gustavo Pérez Firmat was born in Havana, Cuba, and raised in Miami, Florida. A poet, fiction writer and professor, he is the author of various books and essays. His books of literary and cultural criticism include: Idle Fictions (1982; rev. ed. 1993), Literature and Liminality (1986), The Cuban Condition (1989), Do the Americas Have a Common Literature? (editor; 1990), Life on the Hyphen (1994; Spanish version: Vidas en

Díaz is trying to (de)construct comes together. In Drown we are immersed in a process of community/space crafting where only by using a set of escape routes, or seeing the social as a set of escape routes or deterritorializations, will one be able to transcend the limits and histories of Dominican national subjectivities.

The migration experiences of Díaz's characters does not begin when they travel from the Dominican Republic to the United States, but begins, instead, inside the Dominican Republic itself, when the De La Casa family responds to the forces that are displacing Dominicans from the rural areas of the island. They are faced with the necessity of displacing themselves internally before migrating to the US. The effects of migration on the family are first experienced after the father's departure to the US, leaving the mother and the children to contend with life alone on the Dominican Republic. This initial absence of the father, and their own subsequent displacement from their home produces long term emotional effects that are sublimated to one or another degree within their multiple communities in New Jersey and New York. And it is at this affective level that I perceive the functioning of their nomadic subjectivity. Taking into account Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the nomad as a subject constantly becoming (or adapting and recreating their subjectivities) whilst creating variable emotional norms around which their multiple communities converge, I contend that in these stories the Dominican nomad in its numerous *becomings* is trying to create an antimemory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 294) of its experiences prior to any experiences of displacement. The

---

vilo, 2000), My Own Private Cuba (1999), Cincuenta lecciones de exilio y desexilio (2000), and Tongue Ties (2003).



success or failure of this antimemory or anti-nostalgic view of the past will be analyzed in the following the stories.

At the heart of Drown is the failure of a certain Dominican male subjectivity to endure its displacement to the United States. This Dominican male subjectivity has been encapsulated within the label of “el tíguere” that was diffused throughout the island via the political antics of the Trujillo regime. Christian Krohn-Hansen notes that the Dominican “tíguere” label: “Like the other labels and categories used by Dominicans to classify and interpret masculinity...[was used] in order to answer questions about what happens politically- that is, in order to construct legitimacy” (109). Within the Dominican society of the 1930s, the *tigre* embodied all the qualities that defined productive men for the Trujillo regime. A man denominated as “un tigre” was a sly man from the working class urban area that knew how to survive in his particular environment. As an extension of Trujillo himself, a Dominican *tíguere* was the whole package-political, sexual, seductive, articulate-but above all loyal to the “tíguere mayor,” Trujillo (Krohn-Hansen 126). Even after Trujillo was assassinated in 1961 and the barriers to immigration collapsed, these masculine paradigms survived in the Dominican Republic and in the United States, so that it is not unusual to hear the word “tíguere” today in relation to Dominican men, especially when referring to their presumed suaveness and/or sexual prowess. I would argue that in Junot Díaz’s work, sexuality and immigration are two of the most important elements in shaping Dominican diasporic subjectivities. This is particularly explored through Yunior’s character, the protagonist of all the stories contained in Díaz’s collection. Yunior’s dealing with (homo)sexuality in his Dominican community of New Jersey illustrates tensions that are not solely tied to his

sexual orientation, but instead signal towards other emotional issues, such as abandonment.

On this chapter I focus on the relationship of Yuniór with his mother and father, and how these relationships are shaped by immigration. I especially observe Yuniór's unconscious defense mechanism, which deletes the father after the father has deleted himself from the family (through emigration or abandonment). This in itself, indicates an emotional creolization process that is in accord with the fatal paradox of Yuniór's life: rejection of the father ending up as repetition of the father's own defining gesture. This image of abandonment is a continuous one throughout Díaz's collection and many times the same paradox is relayed in the stories I analyze: if Yuniór leaves his mother, as he wants to do, he would be imitating his father, who is a negative image condensing who Yuniór does not want to be.

With the objective of illustrating and analyzing the exercise of cultural practices and their adjustment to the different terms of survival in these diasporic/migratory communities, I will be focusing my analysis on the stories "Fiesta, 1980," "Aguantando," "Drown," and "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" from Junot Díaz's short story collection, Drown. It is my contention that the texts selected articulate the Dominican Republic- and the Hispanic Caribbean as a whole-from another place of enunciation, one that is not directly bound to the myth of return to the island (as the seminal place of significations). Again, this refers me back to Braidotti's framework of nomadism as a : "...kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior...it is the subversion of conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling" (6). As such, Díaz's literary work resists

being defined solely as the representation of the Dominican immigration experience; rather, he is not only narrating and, as a writer, performing the multiplicity of experiences and effects of migration and adaptation, but he is also narrating the multiple displacements - literal and figurative - that have shaped him and his characters *before* becoming part of the Dominican immigration process in the United States.

**My Body, my Story (vomit): “Fiesta, 1980”**

“Fiesta, 1980” begins as a recollection narrated by Yuniór de la Casa. The memory of a party celebrated in honor of his Tía’s arrival from Santo Domingo to the Bronx serves as the entry into the complex dynamics of Yuniór’s family. We are shortly taken from Yuniór’s narration into the present- of the events that transpired in that party of 1980- by way of flashbacks into various incidents from the past, the cumulative effect of which is to tell us more of his own nuclear family’s experience than those occurring in his Tía’s new home. Here the body, understood within the realm of the physical, emotional and the figurative, is the vehicle through which migratory/displacement discourses are experienced. As both the subject and object of migration, repression, violence and conflict, these bodies are constantly- consciously or unconsciously - in the stance of having to react to the tensions inscribed within “la familia.” What happens when unexpected/unexplained indicators (symptoms) arise that affect everyone in these households? In other words, I am referring here to the unexpected surfacing of repressed elements or the instance of what Sigmund Freud has denominated as “the uncanny,” the simultaneous emergence of the authentic and the simulacra, is written in terms of bodies.

With “The Uncanny,” Freud wanted to focus his attention on feelings of repulsion and distress within the subject of aesthetics. Establishing his study within the discourse

of aesthetics, defined as a theory of the quality of feelings, allowed Freud the possibility of approaching literary analysis with a psychoanalytic perspective. And so, making use of a semantic study of the German word *Heimlich* and its antonym, Freud established that a negative definition close to the antonym, *Unheimlich*, was already connected to the positive word *Heimlich*. The sensation of strangeness within the familiar is hypothesized by Freud under the concept of the uncanny: “the uncanny is that class of the frightening, which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.” As he further explains: “(the)uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression...” Likewise in “Fiesta, 1980”, Yuniór’s car sickness, which causes him to vomit when his father takes the car over twenty miles per hour, functions as a return of what has been repressed within Yuniór De La Casa prior to his own displacements to United States. In other words, Yuniór deals with change and distress through repression and silence, a neurotic strategy going back to the displacement of key people in his early life, in particular his father’s departure from Santo Domingo, which was followed by his own departure.

The story begins with the narrator’s father arriving home to a household anxiously getting ready to attend a party. The party celebrated in honor of his father’s sister-in-law, had filled Mami with joy that whole day. A joy that was described as somewhat unusual in Mami’s case: “That morning, when she had gotten us up for school, Mami told us that she wanted to have a good time at the party” (24). But with Papi’s arrival the happiness of expectation is transformed into the normally restrained and uneasy atmosphere that permeates the family interactions in these stories. Immediately Yuniór and his older

brother are once again made aware of a situation only they understood and carried with them: “we both knew Papi had been with that Puerto Rican woman he was seeing and wanted to wash off the evidence quick” (23). Furthermore, the father brings the disciplinary order with him, as the narrator explains: “If Papi had walked in and caught us lounging around in our underwears, he would have kicked our asses something serious” (23). With the father’s arrival and immediate “washing off” of the affair, the family gets ready to depart. This action is thwarted by the father who sharply asks his wife if she permitted Yuniór to eat, which was forbidden. The choice of words by the father is very revealing in the sense that they clearly signal his role as a repressor of sorts, as he asks/tells the wife: “You didn’t let him eat” (25). Not only is Yuniór refrained from eating, but his association with his mother is figuratively repressed via the father’s insistence that the wife not feed her youngest son. Yuniór quite aware of his limits in the household and in relation to his father only notes: “I was never supposed to eat before our car trips...” (25) and quickly assumes responsibility for his mother’s alleged improper conduct: “you couldn’t blame Mami really...I should have reminded her not to feed me but I wasn’t that sort of a son.” (25).

The father’s presence and his constant disciplining and punishments seem to be the way of reaffirming a discourse of masculinity that has traveled with him from the Dominican Republic, and points to his role as head of household: “Papi was old-fashioned; he expected your undivided attention when you were getting your ass whupped” (26). This crude need to make his victim aware of the traditional patriarchal power relationship signaled by punishment is all the cruder as an antithesis to the immigrant fear of not having any control at all. Following this line of reasoning,

Yunior's father's reproduction of masculinity patterns initiated in Santo Domingo, and his fervent need to be included as the head of the household within the family structure after many years of absence is at the root of his behavior towards his children and mistreatment of his wife, as the narrator explains: "It seemed like Papi had always been with her, even when we were waiting in Santo Domingo for him to send for us" (41). As these lines suggest, the narrator, his siblings and his mother had to deal with the father's departure to the United States, an absence that marks his reintegration into the family as an intrusion, one that he seeks to annul through violent assertion.

Punishment, repression and orality become surface elements that characterize Yunior's family. The lack or impossibility of a resistant language in the household, or one that would clarify the dialectic of absence and intrusion, leads the father to exert his role only via punishment. The impossibility of writing about these experiences also marks the narrator as a child, who while narrating as an adult recalls his first ventures into writing about his father: "Earlier that year I'd written an essay in school titled 'My Father the Torturer,' but the teacher made me write a new one. She thought I was kidding." (30). Taken as fictive writing, the written expressions of a young Yunior, which could have possibly allowed him to explore what was occurring in his household, were invalidated by yet another authority figure, the teacher. One more time repression marks Yunior, and his subsequent relationships with his father and surrounding space. Not knowing how to vocalize what he yearns for from his father he says: "Our fights didn't bother me too much. I still wanted him to love me, something that never seemed strange or contradictory until years later, when he was out of our lives." (27) As noted in these lines, abandonment by the father shapes Yunior's actions throughout the story. The

result is the continuous repression of affection and emotions, especially when dealing with bodily reactions to the stress of punishment and pain effected by the father, such as crying: “I won’t, I cried, tears in my eyes, more out of reflex than pain” (26). In acknowledging his tears as a reflex, and not solely tied to pain, Yuniór is rationalizing any immediate emotion attached to his father’s lack of support or love.

The father’s prohibition of Yuniór eat before riding in the car came about due to Yuniór’s tendency to vomit when riding in his father’s new car. As Yuniór recalls: “None of us spoke until we were inside Papi’s Volkswagen van. Brand-new, lime green and bought to impress. Oh, we were impressed, but me, every time I was in that VW and Papi went above twenty miles an hour, I vomited. I’d never had trouble with cars before—that VW was like my curse” (27). Immediate associations can be made between the father’s new Volkswagen, displacements and the ensuing abandonment that ultimately occurs: “The first time I got sick in the van Papi was taking me to the library...Mami fixed me one of her honey-and-onion concoctions and that made my stomach feel better” (29). The unconscious association for Yuniór, as a child, was that of the Volkswagen as the father’s new vehicle of abandonment of the family, this time within the diaspora. The VW also finds another association with the affair the father is having at the time he buys the new car: “I met the Puerto Rican woman right after Papi had gotten the van. He was taking me on short trips, trying to cure me of my vomiting” (34-35). But as in everything related to the infidelities of the father and his ventures outside the home, Yuniór and his brother are forced to silence their emotions: “When we ate dinner at her house, the few times Papi had taken us over there, we still acted like nothing was out of the ordinary...the affair was like a hole in our living room, one we’d gotten so used to

circumnavigating that we sometimes forgot it was there” (39). Furthermore, taking on a helping role that he attaches to virtually all the female characters in the story, Yunior is aided by the Puerto Rican woman after one of his vomiting episodes: “The Puerto Rican woman was there and she helped me clean up. She had dry papery hands and she rubbed the towel on my chest, she did it hard, like I was a bumper she was waxing” (35). As another maternal figure, the Puerto Rican woman seems to embody a tenderness and sensitivity only acquired via constant ruptures and displacements. The emphasis on recalling her ethnic background at all times suggests her own “nomadic” subjectivity as a Puerto Rican woman living in New Jersey. Just like the mother and the Tia, the Puerto Rican woman is accustomed to the traumas of displacement/migration and alleviates Yunior’s immediate need for affection by cleaning him, but as an object – a “bumper”.

The father reacts to Yunior’s ‘cursed’ vomiting as a rejection of his masculine role as father and authority figure over that of the mother, who is seen as a threat to his role since she was the one who raised the children when he had initially migrated from Santo Domingo. The threat to the father’s patriarchal position and Yunior’s vomiting allude not only to the violence experienced at a physical level but on an emotional level. Rejecting or having a physical reaction to the van is associated in the father’s mind as a direct rejection towards him: “It’s the car, he said to Mami. It’s making him sick” (29). The vomit is also symbolic of what the father does not want to see, in other words, it is the bodily rejection of what his masculinity adds up to for Yunior, the initial migration from Santo Domingo to the U.S. and the series of emotional and physical displacements away from his family as they attempt to regroup. So when he threatens Yunior with “If



you throw up” (26), he is also saying “don’t bring it up.” What exactly are the things that are not supposed to be brought up with Yuniór’s vomit?

Yuniór’s vomit, as symptomatic of repressed emotions that extend from other displacements and abandonment in Santo Domingo, unchains a series of uncovered traumas and reactions within the characters surrounding him. As a clear indicator of repression and mobility the vomit is as a “return” of what was meant to remain covered. For example, Yuniór’s family and especially his mother are described as constantly in movement and constantly committing to silence any frustrations and traumas caused by displacements/migration for the sake of survival. Facing the constant abandonment of her husband, Yuniór’s mother has to first deal with raising the children alone in Santo Domingo when her husband left to work in the United States. When she discovers, having migrated with the children to be with him, his further displacements and betrayals, her only defense mechanisms are silence and constant mobility. So once again, Yuniór’s vomiting calls attention to these repressed frustrations, and interestingly these surface at the time when the mother tries to explain the cause of Yuniór’s sickness: “Mami suspected it was upholstery. In her mind, American things-appliances, mouthwash, funny-looking upholstery — all seemed to have intrinsic badness about them” (27). In her mind, everything associated with the United States had an intrinsic negativity, a certain foreignness that in the VW case was associated with the upholstery presumed to make Yuniór sick. Read through these lenses, the mother’s perception on the “American things” is a projection of her real unhappiness, her husband’s initial immigration to the United States: his becoming, in effect, part of the United States as he departed from his family. And even though the story is centered on a fiesta that celebrates the arrival of a

beloved relative to the US, it is implied that the party, rather than a celebration, will become just another moment of repression and mobility.

The fiesta occurs in the Bronx, where the Tía has arrived to reunite with her husband Miguel. At this point the narrator describes how different the migration experience had been for his Tio Miguel: “I remembered how he hadn’t seemed all that troubled to be in another country” (30). And considering how different migration experiences are for women and men, it can be assumed that la Tía was left behind in Santo Domingo to deal with the remnants of her husband’s displacement. Alone and with no children, la Tía’s experience of her husband’s departure can be presumed to be very different than Mami’s experience with her husband’s absence. La Tía differs in the sense that she had no children, and apparently was sterile, a condition that the narrator perceives as a silenced/repressed frustration for la Tia: “Tia didn’t have any kids but I could tell she wanted them. She was the sort of relative who always remembered your birthday but who you only went to visit because you had to” (38). La Tía and Yuniór’s mother, both embody different degrees of the secret history of migrant women. A forsaking of personal desires for the sake of the family, and the nation, and negotiating these concepts within the diaspora’s partial suspension of the rules of patriarchal society signify these women having to make their own sense of the diaspora. The Tia reacts to her new situation as a displaced subject by way of yet another bodily reaction, assuming a new image attuned to her immediate reality: “Tia came out then, with an apron and maybe the longest Lee Press On Nails I’ve ever seen in my life” (31). The nails that Yuniór perceives as strange and uncharacteristic of the Tia allude in a certain way to some of the presumed physical benefits of a displacement to the United States. In a

similar fashion the United States immigration experience has also effected some physical changes in Yuniór's mother: "The United States had finally put some meat on her; she was no longer the same *flaca* who had arrived here three years before" (24). While not the same *flaca*, his mother still carried within some of the emotional scars a lifetime of displacements both in Santo Domingo and in the United States had inflicted upon her.

As a result, "Fiesta, 1980" does not propose a harmonious return even in spirit to the Dominican Republic, since the tensions and conflicts of displacement and immigration began there. Systematic displacements from the rural areas to the urban center of Santo Domingo and ultimately to the United States affect these characters at all levels- physically, emotionally and economically. In the end Yuniór's car sickness is symbolic of the silent frustration and repression of all these movements; that the food he throws up comes from his mother's kitchen makes him, in a sense, the carrier-symbol of his mother's silent history as a Dominican immigrant woman. It is no coincidence that Yuniór accepts his mother's story that it had to be the American upholstery which was causing his nausea: "The smell of the upholstery got all up inside my head and I found myself with a mouthful of saliva. Mami's hand tensed on my shoulder and when I caught Papi's eye, he was like, No way. Don't do it" (29). Yuniór's relationship with his mother is characterized by an untold history of frustrations and pain that Yuniór has come to literally embody, which points us to the over determined embodiment of these traumas and how they ultimately shape the type of communities these subjects gravitate to. This syndrome is furthered explored in "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie," "Drown," and "Aguantando" respectively.

### **The How-To of Telling and Not Telling: Race and Invasion in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie”**

Race as a handbook, as a set of simple “dos” and “don’ts,” is delimited in Díaz’s short story “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie.” In this second person narration, a teenaged Yuniór expresses the complexities of dating as a Dominican man of color; and is instructed in the intricacies of dating “racial” others. This narrative structure brings forth the complexity of race as understood and experienced by a continuously displaced subject, such as Yuniór and his family members. In this story, Yuniór adjusts his masculinity script to the codes he expects that the racial type of his potential dates expect. Reading these women under the socially configured labels of “browngirl”, “blackgirl”, “whitegirl” and “halfie”, he is literally following instructions as to what he *can* tell and *cannot* tell these women about his family and his experiences in the Dominican Republic. In the narration the script runs short at the precise moment Yuniór would share his personal family experiences. At these times Yuniór’s instructions are simple and powerful: he should stay silent because these women– who are presumably so different from him– would not be able to understand his Dominican experiences.

The issue of race in the Dominican Republic is a thorny one due in part to the many stereotypical depictions of blackness circulated on the island. A number of scholars<sup>33</sup> have analyzed the ways in which racial classifications have played a part in the formation of Dominican national identities. These racial classifications served to mask blackness within the Dominican Republic, and we see this in the everyday uses of

racialized prefixes. In this story these old racial classifications are reproduced within the Dominican diasporic space through the “voices” of the narrator and Yunior.

According to Silvio Torres-Saillant, Dominican immigrants like Yunior are constantly dealing with a binary racial system in the United States that does not map over Dominican notions of race, and, especially, ignores the Dominican idea of the imagined Haitian enemy, as it occurs in the Dominican island: “It soon becomes obvious...that the larger U.S. society does not care to distinguish between them and Haitians as the offspring of the two nations of Quisqueya...as they grapple for access to jobs, education, housing, and health...in an ever-increasing anti-immigrant feeling” (141). Díaz’s story describes how Dominican immigration experiences complicate notions of national identity and racial awareness.

If we review Dominican racial formations, we immediately see some connections between the racial categories used by black Dominicans in the island (described against Haitians) and white Dominicans (who even if darker in complexion are described, for complicated reasons of heritage and status as white) and the characters in this story. Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s working definition of racial constructions in their essay, “Racial Formation,” gives us a good feel for what is at stake: “...the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed...racial formation is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. (124) The racial system is both mocked and upheld by Yunior’s rules for sexual interaction with women of

---

<sup>33</sup> See David Howard, Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic. (Oxford: Signal Books, 2001).

different races. The mockery comes from making the rules overt, and thus making them questionable, instead of allowing them to operate implicitly. Situated at a different historical juncture, he continues to interact with these women by utilizing the racial registry that has traveled with him.

Yunior's subjectivity is as much a social construction as it is a product of his previous experiences as a racialized subject in the Dominican Republic, and subsequently also as a racialized "other" in the United States- but clearly under different racial regimes. So in this sense his approach in engaging in intimate interactions with these women goes beyond recognizing their racial demarcations, what occurs in reality is that with each new women he "dates," he is forced to face the limitations of the discourses that have been instilled into him as a Dominican-American man.

From the first lines of the story, Yunior is immediately assessed on what he should do before his first date: "If she's from the Park or Society Hill...Take down any embarrassing photos of your family in the *campo*, especially the one with the half-naked kids dragging a goat on a rope leash" (143). These lines indicate the complex identity negotiations that define Yunior's nomadic state within his community. In order to "become" the desired object for these women, Yunior has to censor his history and present himself as the person who in theory should correspond to the stories and experiences he expects his date can share or, negatively, *not* share. The narrator's comic allusion to the image of "kids dragging goats" conforms to two stereotypes, one having to do with his national identity, which even in the Dominican Republic is governed by the "modernized" space of Santo Domingo, and the other the perception that North American women might expect just such "primitive" behavior on the part of a member of

a peripheral, island culture. Yuniór's association of the Dominican *campo* as "backward" alludes to the mindset with which he interacts with other Dominicans and other ethnic groups in his community.

The photos he shamefully hides are extensions of a lived reality from another space and another time, and these he does not want to coincide with his present state, at least as he presents it to a possible lover. But another element needs to conform to this immediate reality, as the narrator further instructs Yuniór: "Hide the pictures of yourself with an Afro" (43). The afro as a racial artifact in this picture represents the racial tensions inherent in Dominican national discourses. Yuniór's association of an Afro with an imminent rejection is indicative of the racial perceptions and categorizations that mold Dominican national subjectivities. As noted by Ginetta Candelario, "For Dominicans, hair is the principle bodily signifier of race, followed by facial features, skin color and, last, ancestry" (223). Dominican perceptions on the hairstyles often times serve to reproduce the power relations coloring everyday life in the Dominican Republic.<sup>34</sup> Consequently Yuniór's "hiding" of the picture with the afro can be viewed as a symbolic act of "hair straightening" which reenacts racism patterns. This reenactment is synonymous to what Casandra Badillo defines as a ritual of humiliation in these hair processes:

The problem is not changing the hair *per se*, but rather in the power relations it expresses and in the attitudes of domination it reflects. Hair straightening is a sign of docility and subjection to painful acts, such as the application of lye and

---

<sup>34</sup> See also, Ginetta Candelario, "Hair Race-ing. Dominican Beauty Culture and Identity Production," *Meridians* no. 1(Fall 2000).

other chemicals. It is a ritual of humiliation yet also a double game of rejection and reward, since those who resist such norms receive punishment and rejection.

(36)

Likewise, the “hiding” of the afro pictures takes place within the discourse of humiliation. By hiding the picture, Yuniór is subjugated himself to racial discourses conceived in the Dominican Republic, but followed and repeated, with different values, in the United States. He follows a Dominican perception on race that perceives it as a: “...simple one, free of complications or errors. The features of the eyes, skin, hair and nose can be recognized, identified and described. But these categories are not strictly biological and depend on a great deal of cultural encoding” (Badillo 36). Furthermore, “...hair is fundamental to Dominican identity displays and discourses: it marks the boundaries between Dominicans and Haitians and, in New York, between Dominicans and African Americans” (Ginetta 2007, 261).

The afro also has other implications, and especially in relation to Yuniór’s masculinity and sexuality. Closely linked to the racialized sexual stigmas that have constructed male subjectivities since slavery, the afro must be erased in order for Yuniór to impress these women. This is further complicated because Yuniór is primarily interested in white women, as opposed to the “black girls,” “brown girls” and “halfies”. He describes non-white women as imbalanced and irrational, and this leads him to prefer “white girls”: “The white ones are the ones you want the most, aren’t they...” (145). The “black girls,” “halfies,” and “brown girls” are described as coming from his local community and are racially overpoliticized in the eyes of the narrator. Being “overpoliticized” gets in the way of the sexual conquest Yuniór is trying to acquire.



Within this equation, the “halfies” pose an even bigger problem, as the narrator notes: “If she’s a halfie don’t be surprised her mother is white...”(145). Although the “halfie” embodies elements of the white women he desires, she also has black racial and ethnic elements the narrator does not comprehend: “A halfie will tell you that her parents met in the Movement...It will sound like something her parents made her memorize” (146). But a dual misunderstanding is taking place. While the “halfie” is immersed in the complexities of her mixed racial heritage within U.S. based racial markers, Yunior reacts as though the racial markers in play were defined completely within his Dominican diasporic community. The complication of understanding each others’ national and racial identities are clearly stated when the “halfie” tells Yunior: “...Black people...treat me real bad. That’s why I don’t like them. You’ll wonder how she feels about Dominicans” (147).

Consequently the narrator perceives local women as more aware of their surrounding, and as a result more self-confident: “If the girl’s local, don’t sweat it. She’ll flow over when she’s good and ready” (144). These local girls are also within the same diasporic/migrants space that is (in)forming Yunior’s racial and ethnic awareness: “If the girl’s from around the way, take her to El Cibao for dinner. Order everything in your busted-up Spanish. Let her correct you if she’s Latina and amaze her if she’s black” (145). But even if presented as easily impressionable, these local girls do not always respond well to his “game”, knowing its features all too well: “A local girl may have hips...but she won’t be quick about letting you touch” (147). As a result, for Yunior the “whitegirls” are the ones that will fulfill his immediate sexual needs, therefore his

masculinity script must conform to the racial and ethnic demands embodied by these desired whitegirls.

In desiring white women, Yuniór has to proceed by sweeping away the remnants of his Dominican life in the *campo*, which means that he must not reflect out loud or by any accidental sign on issues of poverty, blackness, or US interventions on the island with these women. He must, on the other hand, adopt the male suaveness he observes in white men: “Don’t panic. Say, Hey, no problem. Run a hand through your hair like the whiteboys do even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa” (145). In this game of seduction, the winning or losing depends entirely on what is told and not told. For Yuniór this means censoring family experiences that were passed down to him, and that have ultimately shaped him as an individual. So being the repository of instructions on what to divulge, he is also directed on what can be harmful to the ears of an unprepared listener:

Supply the story about the loco who’d been storing canisters of tear gas in his basement for years, how one day the canisters cracked and the whole neighborhood got a dose of military-strength stuff. Don’t tell her that your moms knew right away what it was, that she recognized its smell from the year the United States invaded your island. (146)

The 1965 North American invasion of the Dominican Republic surfaces in this manner only in the head of Yuniór, the “you,” becoming an intentional silence based on the presumed lack of understanding on the part of the non-Dominican women Yuniór wants to date, although this event is circulated between Yuniór and his mother as yet another manifestation of their close bond. These lines are suggestive of the ways in which the

histories of migrant women become intentional silences, disseminated as overt references only via family members and/or close friends. Furthermore, as a parameter of the lived reality in Dominican Republic, the invasion trauma is inexplicable to someone outside the diaspora.

As the story reaches its climax Yuniór is aggressively instructed on the things he needs to tell his desired subject: “Tell her that you love her hair, that you love her skin, her lips, because, in truth, you love them more than you love your own” (147). In desiring the whitegirl, Yuniór surrenders to a racial discourse that has colonized him with its classifications and standards. In the end, Yuniór’s fantasy is nothing more than that, as he is forced to face the racial/ethnic discourses prevailing in the mindset of his desired white women: “She’ll say, I like Spanish guys, and even though you’ve never been to Spain, say, I like you. You’ll sound smooth” (148). But it all concludes poorly, as the narrator warns Yuniór: “...usually it won’t work this way. Be prepared” (148). Misreadings and the precarious acceptance of erroneous ethnic labels, preclude the intimate encounters of Yuniór with other women.

### **Drowning el pato: Homosexuality, Masculinity and Movement in “Drown”**

As Dominican folktales always told me, “el que se va, si regresa, vuelve diferente,” the one who leaves will always return a different person. It is an idea that has permeated the Dominican Republic since the 1960s, when thousands of Dominicans fled the island for political and economical reasons. As a result, intricate stories of a nation abandoned by those “dominicanos” have been nostalgically presented under the phrase “el dominicano ausente” (See Duany, Martínez-San Miguel). This absence, represented

as a loss of cultural connection with the space of origin, has been incorporated in interesting ways within Dominican diasporic communities in the United States, especially by those who either through education or their professions have abandoned their homes.

Reflective of what Jorge Duany denotes as an “ambivalent folklore surrounding migration to the United States,” this “dominicano ausente” trope continues to mold the construction of the culture of Dominican communities. The “ausente” element embodied by an initial departure is rearticulated in the host country, by way of communities literally bordering around a hybrid space that seeks to repeat the “Dominicanidad” that has been materially left behind.

In those communities just as in the Dominican Republic, “el que regresa, regresa diferente,” the return (to the island or to a Dominican community in the U.S.) is a challenge to the norm. The one who returns has the power of challenging the implicit cultural and political tenets to which the Dominican nation and its enclaves in the diaspora conform.

In “Drown” the frustrations faced by diasporic/immigrant subjects are expressed via the presentation of questioned sexualities. The imminent need for a viable sexual identity is mutually dependent upon the need for better social and economic living conditions in these communities: as always, the libido is essentially entangled with class and status. Throughout “Drown,” the Dominican immigration model, in which abandonment is essential for better living standards and better living standards make one all the more nostalgic for a lost status ante quo, is re-enacted in the environs of the host country: if the community is marginalized and lacking in opportunities then it is necessary to leave its confines and live outside of it. Beto’s departure from the

neighborhood, which is presented as necessary for his educational opportunities, conforms to this template. The problematic effects of this departure is presented in the account of Beto's return. What returns is a "different" man who destabilizes preconceived notions of masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality. As Yuniór, the narrator indicates: "My mother tells me Beto's home, waits for me to say something, but I keep watching the TV...He's a pato *now* but two years ago we were friends..." (91) If we are to consider that prior to Beto's departure he had two sexual encounters with Yuniór, then clearly Yuniór an exit from the community presupposes a sort of sexual border crossing from which one may return a "queered" subject.

Beto's sexually charged return to the "community" places him under the same predicaments or readings of "el dominicano que regresa" who, by the simple act of acknowledging his *patería*, is also embodying the perversions and cultural disconnections with the enclave described by the narrator. Furthermore Beto, as the "pato" against the presence of which both the national and diasporic communities have defined themselves, refuses to succumb to the community pressures. Beto's return and the destabilizing power it has over the neighborhood is endemic of the fragility over which this community has been built, and the anxieties it activates are sublimated in the perception of him as both a man who has crossed sexual boundaries and one who challenges the sexual/gender signifiers that organize the Dominican community in the United States (Lugo-Ortíz). For both the narrator and Beto, the wish to escape to other places is the common discourse of the streets. Beto, however, has discovered a way out of this space: "Beto was leaving for college at the end of the Summer and was delirious from the thought of it- he hated everything about the neighborhood, the break-apart buildings,

the little strip of grass, the piles of garbage around the cans...” (91) But Beto fails to understand why his friend is unable to formulate a flight plan from the neighborhood: “I don’t know how you can do it, he said to me. I would find me a job anywhere and go. Yeah, I said. I wasn’t like him. I had another year to go in high school, no promises elsewhere.” (91) Yuniór has to contend with a family situation that roots him within the space he wishes to escape. Among other things he has had to assume the role of the absent father in order to provide the economical and psychological support his mother needs: “We live alone. My mother has enough for the rent and groceries and I cover the phone bill...she has discovered the secret to silence.” (94) As a constant in this collection of stories, the absent father (be it through diasporic/migratory reasons, or through deceit toward the wife) becomes one of the most traumatic events shaping the lives of these abandoned children and their mothers. The way this abandonment shapes Yuniór’s life is perceived in the disjunction between being his mother’s “emotional guardian” against an estranged abusive father, or following his own desire to leave the neighborhood, thus repeating his father’s fundamental gesture. As a result, a definition of the family in this story is founded on the silent histories of trauma and betrayal between mother-son-father. Furthermore, any desire of self-fulfillment contained within Yuniór is thwarted by this family situation, a condition that ultimately suspends him in a zone both within and outside of his community.

In the other hand, Beto’s mobility in and out of the neighborhood is in itself synonymous to the many movements and negotiations that have surrounded the construction of lesbian and gay subjectivities. In this sense it is easy to see how Beto’s alleged sexual identity could provoke certain anxieties within the narrator, who represents

the Dominican diasporic community. As an “other” within the community, and with the capability of displacing himself outside of it and returning to it, Beto is able to challenge the inner elements that define it.

The text suggests that if Beto is now a *pato*, it is due to his movement across a sort of “transnational” border, symbolically represented by his decision to study outside of the community. This decision challenges the sense of locality felt and lived by the narrator. Beto’s exclusion from his insider status is due in part to his sexuality. The return always brings a different subject, one who has been able to negotiate and exchange cultural elements of the new social reality and has been able to insert them within his or her persona. In other words, diasporic/immigrant subjects like Beto have taken advantage of the opportunity of negotiating their own subjectivities in cultural zones outside of their Dominican communities. While Beto has been able to mobilize himself within the diaspora and outside of the Dominican diasporic community, Yuniór has been unable to explore new modes of socializing outside of it, and so has been unable to create new ways of representing himself (Braidotti 256).

Ironically, Beto’s return intensifies Yuniór’s wish of abandoning the neighborhood. And it is not solely due to Beto’s assumption of an outsider’s sexual identity, but as much the fear that in Beto’s eyes, Yuniór will be judged as one who “stayed behind”. Yuniór’s fear of being perceived as a failure for not having taken off to “an out there” ultimately colors his behavior towards Beto. He immediately recalls their childhood neighborhood wanderings, and especially the times when Beto ventured outside of the neighborhood, leaving him behind to form other friendships and experiencing new cultural contacts outside of New Jersey:

Beto would usually be home or down by the swings, but other times he wouldn't be around at all. Out visiting other neighborhoods. He knew a lot of folks I didn't - a messed up black kid from Madison Park, two brothers who were into that *N.Y. club scene*, who spent money on *platform shoes* and leather backpacks...you need to learn how to walk the world, he told me. There's a lot out there. (102)

It was in those brief encounters with other cultures that Beto begins to re-figure his identity and sexuality. The "out there" symbolically alludes to all the other possibilities of living that Beto incorporates into his sense of *dominicanidad* in the diaspora. As Beto realizes that there are spaces where he can explore his sexuality freely without the constraints and stereotypes he finds on his Dominican neighborhood, the bond holding him to the community snaps: for this reason he is able to leave and come back.

Beto's reappearance in Yuniór's life after a few years of being away from his best friend, receives the deprecating reaction of "he is a pato now..." (91) Alluding to his rejection towards Beto's new life and sexual identity, the use of "pato" also reflects Yuniór's homophobia. But let's not forget that Beto returns as something *more* than a gay man, he returns as a man that has been able to fulfill the narrator's dream of leaving the community and bettering himself. I think "pato" signifies more than Yuniór's homophobia, but rather sums up the collectivity of his own fears, frustrations and repressions. It is Beto who initiates Yuniór into a new world sexual and cultural possibilities, but then leaves him as well as the Dominican community of New Jersey. In this way Beto's return implies dealing with feelings placed in the back burner, which is why "pato" names not Beto's condition so much as Yuniór's hurt.



With Beto back in town, Yuniór is forced to recall their sexual encounters, and as he remembers they occurred: “Twice. That’s it. The first time was at the end of that summer.” (103) That first encounter occurred in Beto’s apartment after an afternoon of roaming the streets. Yuniór then recalls the oral sex scene that developed with Beto. In this scene, Yuniór describes himself as a passive recipient of what seems to be the culmination of a much desired sexual activity between both men. Immediately after, the narrator fears for his sexuality and masculinity, and blames Beto for what happened between them, as he recounts: “[I was] ...terrified that I would end up abnormal, a fucking *pato*, but he was my bestfriend and back then that mattered to me more than anything. This alone got me out of the apartment and over to the pool that night he was already there...” (104). The excuse of friendship is used as a rationalization for what had just occurred. All the blame is directed towards Beto, since the narrator had just let himself go and done everything he did for “friendship”. This way they both are outside of any signifying force that would classify them as “fucking patos.” If in that first sexual encounter the narrator would play a passive role in the second and last encounter he would be the pursuer. Even though Beto also plays a more active role in this last encounter, it is the narrator who arrives at his apartment and silently waits for Beto to get closer to him: “We sat in front of his television, in our towels, his hands bracing against my abdomen and thighs. I’ll stop if you want, he said and I didn’t respond. After I was done, he laid his head in my lap. I wasn’t asleep or awake, but caught somewhere in between... in three weeks he was leaving” (105).

Having Beto around would have helped the narrator explore problematic notions of sexuality and masculinity passed down from his own estranged father. Beto’s

departure leads the narrator towards old patterns of tíguere masculinity solely geared towards survival in the mean streets. The narrator continues to be his mother's protector and emotional support against the possible return of his father.

Successfully drowning Beto out of his life during those last few years allowed Yuniór the possibility of negotiating and rationalizing his place within the community as that of a "survivor," as opposed to Beto who he views as one who has succumbed to the "perversions" of an out there, a traitor. But with Beto back in the neighborhood Yuniór has to either deal with the anxiety Beto provokes, or finally leave the community.

### **Photographing (her)story: Motherhood and Abandonment in "Aguantando"**

In "Aguantando" we have a retelling of displacement and abandonment experiences, this time from Yuniór's remembered past in Santo Domingo. If we can trust the order of the stories in the book, we can place this story as a tracing out, at a later time, of the memories of the same Yuniór who narrated the infidelities and punishments of his father in "Fiesta, 1980," as though he needs to return compulsively to his father's initial departure to the United States, and the painful effects of this experience on those left behind. As the title "Aguantando" indicates, those left behind- Yuniór, his mother, brother and grandfather- have to conceive of ways of dealing with the father's departure while keeping a grip on their past. The question we advance to here is: how are the scars of displacement and abandonment embodied by Yuniór and his mother? In other words, what are some of the psychological effects of the nomadic subjectivities they have been forced to assume?

As with the other stories in this collection, photographs are presented as artifacts imbued with a power of recollection, or spatializing lost or forgotten lived experiences. For Yuniór, his father has become a forgotten experience or a lost recollection imprinted in these photos: “I lived without a father for the first nine years of my life. He was in the States, working, and the only way I knew him was through the photographs my moms kept in a plastic sandwich bag under her bed” (69). For Yuniór, the United States connotes a space of loss, or an emotional limbo of sorts. The father wears this emotional limbo as an aura in the memory of his son, moving at once away from the family and returning as phantasmagoric memories infused with the father’s promise of a return: “He had left for Nueva York when I was four but since I couldn’t remember a single moment with him I excused him from all nine years of my life” (70). The realization of this broken promise to return, leads to the first manifestation of emotional trauma in Yuniór’s character: “I didn’t know him at all. I didn’t know that he’d abandoned us. That this waiting for him was all a sham” (70). Yuniór unconscious defense mechanism, which deletes the father after the father has deleted himself, indicates an emotional trauma in accord with the fatal paradox of Yuniór’s life: rejection of the father ending up as repetition of the father’s own failed masculinity.

Yuniór’s reaction towards his father’s abandonment is initially very physical, as he tried wholeheartedly to recapture his father’s presence, even if through photographs: “It didn’t help matter that me and Rafa kept asking her when we were leaving for the States, when Papi was coming. I am told that I wanted to see his picture almost every day” (83). It is striking that even though Yuniór was the one most visibly affected by his father’s departure he has gradually repressed that painful experience to the degree that he

has “forgotten” his life with prior to that departure. Seeing her son so distraught leads his mother to take matters in her own hands even as she looked for ways to lessen the pain her son’s outbursts provoked in her: “First Mami tried slapping me quiet but that did little. Then she locked me in my room where my brother told me to cool it but I shook my head and screamed louder. I was inconsolable” (83). To cope with her son’s pain, she has to escape herself: “She’s gone, he said....I learned later from Rafa that she was in Ocoa with our tíos” (84). Her return a few weeks brought a different person, one Yuniór recognized as more distant and tougher: “That seemed to suit her fine. And I was young enough to grow out of her rejection” (84). The distance she had placed between herself and her family’s own grieving process is subsumed in the characteristic recourse of silence assumed by these characters as a defense mechanism: “Mami’s time away was never discussed, then or now. When she returned to us, five weeks later, she was thinner and darker and her hands were heavy with calluses. She looked younger, like the girl who had arrived in Santo Domingo fifteen years before, burning to be married” (84). A return to the campo and the manual labor it entailed, aided Yuniór’s mother’s objective of putting behind her husband’s betrayal. Consequently a return to the *campo* clearly illustrates the numerous displacements and possible hardships she had endured. In going back and copying her earlier path from the country to the city, recapitulating the single girl she was, she becomes herself again – but under the sign of return, the same self made different. Thus, becoming an immigrant in the United States would ultimately just continue the process of nomadic subjectivization that started in the Dominican Republic. And as a poor rural Dominican woman the societal forces surrounding her delimited her role in society to particular tasks, such as marriage, childrearing and

working alongside her husband. But the scission made by migration within the nuclear family, along with the subsequent departure/abandonment of her husband, leads her to take on the role of economical and emotional support for her children.

The father's departure leads to Yuniór's mother taking on the breadwinner role both for her children and her father: "Mami worked at Embajador Chocolate, putting in ten-, twelve-hour shifts for almost no money (71). The low pay, grueling work at the chocolate factory was typical of Santo Domingo's labor conditions in the 1970s, and the way Yuniór's family lived situated them squarely in the urban working class : "We lived south of the Cementerio Nacional in a woodframe house with three rooms. We were poor. The only way we could be poorer was to have lived in the *campo* or to have been Haitian immigrants..."(70) Poor and abandoned, Yuniór's mother is forced to endure the physical strains of working arduously while having to bear the emotional strains left by her husband's abandonment/betrayal: "Two years after he left, Papi wrote her saying he was coming for us and like an innocent Mami believed him" (82). Yuniór, the narrator, has a privileged position vis-à-vis his mother's body – his intimacy with it is not that of a third person observer, nor of a lover, but of a child whose mother's body is, in a sense, his habitus. It is a body literally marked by the deeper traumas of Dominican history:

She was a tiny woman and in the water closet she looked smaller, her skin dark and her hair surprisingly straight and across her stomach and back the scars from the rocket attack she survived in 1965. None of the scars showed when she wore clothes, though if you embraced her you'd feel them hard under your wrist, against the soft part of your palm. (72)

Carrying with her as an indissoluble part of her physical being the evidences of invasion and violence, Mami opts for strategic silence as her mode of dealing, or “aguantar.” Yuniór’s mother makes a habit of intentional silences – silences that form a peculiarly familial linguistic code. Furthermore, she is the only one who safeguards the memories of her family, when the United States still “wasn’t something folks planned on” (73). Nothing seems to remain of the apparent happiness she felt at the beginning of her marriage, to which the photographs bear witness – testimony to a prehistory Yuniór never experienced: “When I thought of Papi I thought of one shot in specifically. Taken days before the U.S. invasion: 1965...Mami had been pregnant with my first never-born brother and Abuelo could still see well enough to hold a job” (69). The meaningful silence here of that never-born first brother signifies the recurring traumatic experience of the U.S. invasion. The narrator never explicitly tells us why she miscarried, but Mami’s scars and the stray photographs (never even sorted into an album, and thus available for indefinite recombinations, like fragments of an old myth) give us clues that lead us back to the historical events lived “days’ before the invasion.” In this way, the “fall’ of the Dominican Republic becomes, in miniature, the fall from grace of Yuniór’s family.

In all of the stories I have discussed, the most enduring and intense emotional bond is the relationship between Yuniór and his mother. They both foster an intimate relationship based on a shared experience of abandonment and displacements. In “Aguantando,” however, even that bond is threatened by the fact that, the economical situation being what it was, Mami could not always support her children: “when times were real flojo...she packed us off to our relatives” (74). A “packing off” that immediately remitted to possible permanent separations that brought back the thought of

his father: “I never wanted to be away from the family. Intuitively, I knew how easy distances could harden and become permanent” (75). In those periods when he was sent to stay with his Aunt Miranda, Yuniór was forced to face another reality and another class structure that were very different from the one he was accustomed to: “Tía Miranda...All her neighbors were administrators and *hombres de negocios* and you had to walk three blocks to find any sort of colmado. It was *that* sort of neighborhood” (75). But a lot more was revealed at those times, since it was in those moments when he was forced out of the household that he was instructed on the painful life his mother had endured with his father: “Tía also had a penchant for uttering cryptic oneliners about my father, usually after she’d downed a couple of shots of Brugal” (76). As with the loose photographs, so with the information Yuniór gathers from his aunt – it is not systematic, but diverse, cryptic, fragmentary, putting him, as a boy with no father figure and a mother given to a code of silences, in the position of having to create his own background story, his own myth. In this story, we can sense something of the epigraph from Trinh T. Minh-ha that I put at the beginning of this chapter. In connecting these fragments for himself, Yuniór is, in a sense, taking on the role of a writer and Minh-ha sees it– he is writing himself into history. So with each forced displacement within the island itself, Yuniór is coerced to adjust without warning to the alternate social, economical and political forces shaping him and his family.

In these stories, Díaz’s characters are marked psychological, racially, and sexually by different migratory processes that pre-existed in the Dominican Republic and continued in the United States. The immigrant story, in which a culture is transposed

and re-enacted in another territory, is a troping of the idea of return to the place of origin, which presumes the preservation of a timeless place of origin; such timelessness is our clue that we are dealing with myth here. The reality of return, however, is enacted under the sign of “el que regresa, regresa diferente” – the very intention to be the same marks an essential difference, whether the one returning is Yuniór’s father to the family, or Yuniór’s friend Beto to the neighborhood. Return, which is ideally viewed as a moment of healing and wholeness, becomes symptomatic, instead, of the effects and multiple causes of immigration in Santo Domingo and the United States. In these stories the Dominican community forged in the diaspora continues, through its culture or its *dominicanidad*, to delineate borders in which race, gender and sexuality are still measured against the patriarchal model assumed in the country of origin. Though it is certain that the immigrant women Díaz describes, as we see with Yuniór’s mother, break away from the gender restraints these models pose, it is also certain that the community continues to create borders of ownership regarding what is deemed Dominican and what is not. In this sense a character like Beto is condemned, by his escape from the community, to be outside of the Dominican community when he tries to return to it, based on his sexuality. Just like other immigrant groups in the United States, Dominicans discover many things about themselves when they migrate, but as with other groups, too, their main challenge is to build tolerance while negotiating the complex hierarchies (gendered, sexual, racial) which have historically defined their national identities.



## Chapter Four

### **Crooked City Women: A Reading of Race, Ethnicity and Migration in Narratives of Late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dominican Women Writers**

Even he who has the misfortune of being born in the country of a great literature must write in its language...writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. And to do that, finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own *patois*, his own third world, his own desert.

-Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature (18).

The slippery grasp of a foreign language as a tool of writing in the hands of a migrant subject can provoke the most surprising and uncanny apparitions. Within its disconcerting grammatical form and the multilingual exposure of images and vocabulary, erupts a parallel dimension mirroring their reality as foreigners or citizens-to-come via the dominant language they simultaneously engage in and destabilize. As a conduit to the greater journey of negotiating a social, political and cultural position within their new host societies, these immigrant subjects assume the task of writing and *becoming* foreign subjects inside a dominant or “major” language. The “becoming” element is key in understanding the never finished task of representation that is implicit with any project pretending to expound on immigrant experiences.

In the last few years the writings of two Dominican women writers have challenged the geographic coordinates of Dominican national spaces, while also deconstructing the patriarchal forms of expression, racial and sexual norms first rooted in the homeland and then disseminated in US diasporic Dominican communities. As a

result in Josefina Báez's Dominicanish (2000) and Loida Maritza Pérez's Geographies of Home (1999) the urban space takes the form of a "crooked city", or a twisted city harboring the multiple cultural and social encounters and evasions amongst Dominican immigrants in the United States. The resulting contacts and tensions represented in these works elaborate on the constantly evolving notions of *dominicanidad* that are triggered in a "crooked city", and that I perceive as being more acutely exposed through the female characters Báez and Pérez portray.

Embodying different racial and class structures the roles these women migrate with are consequently altered in their new communities. In this sense, these women cross not only national borders but also cultural, racial and gender boundaries that contrast drastically from what had surrounded them in their previous rural or urban spaces in the Dominican Republic. In accordance to these thoughts Oliva M. Espín notes that women migrants: "...also cross emotional and behavioral boundaries. Becoming a member of a new society stretches the boundaries of what is possible in several ways. It also curtails what might have been possible in the country of origin. One's life and roles change. With them, identities change as well. The identities expected and permitted in the home culture are frequently no longer expected or permitted in the host society" (20). The conscious task of writing and performing in a foreign language, as explicitly depicted on these works, illustrates the difficulties of being (becoming) a Dominican immigrant female subject and locating a political and cultural position within the "crooked city" represented. Furthermore the permanence of a traumatic past and the teachings of patriarchic gender roles, live on in the space of immigration via the first and second generation Dominican female characters portrayed. These characters bridge the physical

gap between Santo Domingo and the United States by way of the preexisting notions of race, ethnicity, sexuality and nationality that travel with them. Upon their arrival to the United States these preexistent notions are traversed with other social factors that in turn reshuffle the national identities they assume.

The acculturation of Dominican women in the United States, as we will see, could lead to problematic confrontations between gender and racial roles afforded to them in the island and the ones they encounter in their host societies. In this regard the mechanisms of reversion and diversion ultimately emphasize the problematic fissures inherent in the female national subjectivities initially assumed in the place of origin and then reconstructed in the site of immigration for these Dominican and Dominican-American women. These considerations go hand in hand with what Espín indicates in regards to the ongoing pressures women face once they migrate to the United States:

Immigrant women and girls in the United States attempt acculturation into American society amid ever-changing role expectations for women. Some immigrants come from countries whose official governmental policies or cultural beliefs foster the transformation of women's roles. Other migrate from an urban professional environment that reflects the global feminist movement. In other instances, immigrants come from very traditional rural or religious environments where minimal social change has taken place...(23)

The multiple societal pressures of conforming or adapting into the “changing role expectations” for these Dominican women culminates, as I prove, in the uncanny resurgences of unresolved conflicts with race, gender and ethnicity from the Dominican Republic and that are passed down in the diaspora.

I believe that the image of the “crooked city” represented in these works is also a metaphor of the “literary machine” Deleuze and Guattari first describe on their work, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature (1986). For Deleuze and Guattari the “literary machine” functions within the greater conceptual framework of new literary genres-to-come where minority groups struggle to represent their experiences utilizing a dominant language. As such the “literary machine” Deleuze and Guattari describe is itself a symbol of what is lacking in the host societies of immigrant subjects, and this is especially clear in the following lines: “The literary machine...becomes the relay for a revolution machine to-come, not at all for ideological reasons but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu: *literature is the people’s concern*” (18). Much like the “literary machine,” the “crooked city” first presented as such in Báez’s Dominicanish (2000), is itself an unfixed space representative of the state of uncertainty and foreignness that ensues with immigration processes. The Dominican poet Sherezada (Chiqui) Vicioso also situates her experience in this “crooked city” on the piece Dominicanyorkness: A Metropolitan Discovery of the Triangle (1998), where she notes that New York city: “...soon began tearing down all my paradigms...having been reduced to the local stigma of Dominicanyorkness but without the skyscraper’s immense verticality, I ask myself, what now? How do you go up to the *basement*?” (65-66). The seemingly impossible task of “going up to the basement” is itself paralleled in my mind to the task of “writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow...finding his own *patois*, his own third world, his own desert” (18) that Deleuze and Guattari see functioning in the writing consciousness of migrant subjects.

Language in these works will be analyzed solely a symbol of the deeper issues of immersion and identity negotiations these Dominican women face in the United States. I do not pretend to elaborate on the mechanisms of translation from Spanish to English as they naturally occur in these works, but instead I want to focus my attention on the psychological and emotional effects of immigration that are directly signaled in the writings of these authors and their female characters, and especially when reworking/negotiating/understanding their identities as *dominicanas*, *Latinas* and *negras* in the context of the United States. In this sense I draw in from Juan Flores's perceptive commentary of a Latino culture in urban spaces, when he highlights that it is manifested in: "...*practice* rather than *representation* of a Latino identity. And it is on this terrain that Latinos wage cultural politics as a social movement."<sup>35</sup> In the narratives presented by Báez and Pérez, New York city factors in as the site where these cultural politics and social movements take place. Most recently in Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City (2001), Agustín Laó-Montes coins the term of a mambo montage to characterize the varied ethnic and cultural experiences that conform these movements in New York city, noting that: "New York is a montage of Latin American, Caribbean, and Afro-diasporic cultures. Montage is quintessentially modern art form in which disparate images are collaged, overlapping or juxtaposed, in pictures and film" (2). Through the apparent intermarriage of these different Latino nationalities in these texts, we may be initially led to conclude that in the "crooked city," the projects of a Pan Latin American national space, initially proposed by Bolívar, Eugenio María de Hostos and Martí, have

---

<sup>35</sup> Juan Flores, Divided borders: essays on Puerto Rican identity (Houston, Tex. : Arte Público Press, 1993) 203.

come to fruition. As Silvio Torres-Saillant asserts on his essay, “Visions of Dominicanness in the United States”: “...Simon Bolívar’s desideratum of a unified Latin American nation and the ideal upheld by Eugenio María de Hostos of an Antillian federation find in the United States a strange kind of fulfillment. We have come to articulate a collective identity, not in our native homelands, as Bolívar and Hostos had dreamed, but within the insecure space of the diaspora” (141). But even in this New York style cultural syncretism and the creolized identities conforming it, some issues arise when it comes to attending to the particular racial, ethnic and gender concerns that affect the individual factions conforming this Pan Latino urban expanse (Davis 22).

My analysis on this chapter parts from the viewpoint that language, literature and performance are used as both a tools of appropriation and of consequent disavowal of the particular elements Báez’s and Pérez’s characters do not perceive as constitutive to their new identities as Dominican women immigrants. It is through their writing and consequent depiction of a social reality that pertains to them in this “crooked city” that these authors and their characters become part of the “cultural politics” Flores indicates, while also inserting themselves within the literary cannon of narratives of migration that have historically underrepresented Dominican experiences, and especially those of women (Suárez 161).

### **Of Minor literatures**

The minor literature conceptual framework developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature (1986) serves as my point of entry in the analysis of the works cited above. In their work, Deleuze and Guattari read Franz

Kafka's narrative constructions as taking form through the usage of a dominant language to represent the experiences of minorities within the greater society described. Parting from Kafka's own contradictory situation as a Prague Jew writing in German sets the foundation to what Deleuze and Guattari denominate as a "minor literature."<sup>36</sup> Minor literature is then not solely defined as the literature written by minority ethnic groups, but also as Deleuze and Guattari indicate: "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). In the process of writing a minor literature its writers consciously take over of the steering wheel of the dominant language and drive it down a path of destabilization, and in the process imbue their personal experiences within it.

What interests Deleuze and Guattari in Kafka's writing is precisely the fact that he does not opt to write in Czech, an action that would reposition a literary Czech in Prague, nor does he partake in the common use of Yiddish for his writing. Somewhere in between his experiences as a Czech national and the oral expressions made possible in the Jewish community through Yiddish, the German language in the hands of Kafka is maneuvered in such a way as to allow for the insertion of minor expressions (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 26). On this point Deleuze and Guattari indicate that:

Since Prague German is deterritorialized to several degrees, he will always take it farther, to a greater degree of intensity...He will make the German language take flight on a line of escape...he will tear out of Prague German all the qualities of underdevelopment that it has tried to hide...He will push it toward a

---

<sup>36</sup> In Kafka's time (1883-1924) the local population in Prague spoke largely Czech, German was the official language used mostly in businesses and by the upper classes. As Deleuze and Guattari indicate, the

deterritorialization that will no longer be saved by culture or by myth...To bring language slowly and progressively to the dessert. To use syntax in order to cry, to give syntax to the cry. (26)

The core of Kafka's minor literature is then defined as a narrative assemblage with the following characteristics: "The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (18). There are certain elements of this minor literature framework that are particularly relevant to our case. The image of the "crooked city" and the multiple negotiations these women face are initially experienced at a language level. Their experiences as Dominican women deterritorialized, and their immediate immersion in an urban space defined in part by the political immediacy with which its subjects make themselves culturally and socially visible, lays the foundation to the type of narratives Báez and Pérez elaborate. I do believe their narratives could be read as a minor literature in the sense that they voice, write and perform stories and experiences that are underrepresented, and they do it within a dominant language. In this sense they give body to the experiences of Dominican immigrant women in the United States, allowing for narrative enunciations that have been minimally explored or critically attended to in the past. But more than forming part of a minor literature, I believe their works bring about what I term as an *emotional*

---

social elite and entrepreneurs were largely German-speaking.



*creolization* whereby their characters draw from past notions of gender, sexuality and race acquired in the Dominican Republic along with adjusting to the pressures of assimilating into other cultural processes in the United States. This process simultaneously unhinges and weaves new forms of gender, sexual, racial and ethnic identity constructs in the context of the United States.

### **Forging a Multilayered Dominican(york) Laughter: Language, Race and Gender in Distress**

Dominicanish, originally conceived as a piece to be performed rather than read, destabilizes right from its title homogenous conceptions of national identities. Taking it upon herself to embody, through a performative piece, the incumbencies and contradictions inherent in the national identities Dominican immigrant women assume in the United States, Báez reduces the matter in a simple yet profound way, by *becoming dominicanish*. Indicating someone or something more or less Dominican, the term *dominicanish* calls for a play of fluctuations that invariably depend, as we will see, on the cultural zones the character is in contact with.

As a Dominican born woman residing in New York city, Josefina Báez's body of work reflects the ever evolving views of nationality, gender, race and ethnicity and how they coalesce in the urban setting she characterizes as a "crooked city." Her work as a poet, performer, and actress accordingly reflect a social reality that goes beyond discourses of Dominicanness or "lo dominicano". In this sense the title, Dominicanish, is a significant one because it calls into question who and what is considered Dominican in a pure state. And then much like a performance, in Dominicanish being Dominican is a

practice or *ejercicio* enacted differently depending on the stage and its spectator. As Báez herself remarks in the preface in English she titles “in Inglis,” Dominicanish occurs in: “A chosen geography, La Romana, New York, and India. Eclectic use of symbols, times, and places where the past, present, and future happen in the here today now...monologue dialogue conversation. In an acute awareness of the ordinary from my gladly, not so unique life.” (6). Diffused between these three very different locations, past, present and future experiences are narrated as if happening at once and reflective, I propose, of the emotional condition of Báez’s *dominicanish* character.

Báez’s use of different literary structures such as poetry, drama and prose to convey her vision of a *dominicanish* entity, are also indicative of the multiple elements that assemble national conditions of this character. In this sense, we are beyond the national discourse Benedict Anderson defines in his foundational work, Imagined Communities (1983). In his text, Anderson defines the nation as a modern entity that is “...an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Báez consequently presents a different type of national imagining that centers on how an immigrant subject can concurrently forge a national identity, as a black woman in the context of the United States, while also contending with the national signifiers acquired prior to migration but that continue to reverberate in the host society. The binds that tie these spaces-New York city and La Romana- are then enacted in a performative manner, allowing for a different narrative construction of the postnational condition Báez elaborates. The text itself is an amalgam of images and symbols that equally concern Josefina’s social and cultural reality in La Romana and New York city, and this process is reflected in the nonlinear and somewhat chaotic narrative structure.

While we do not have a text that narrates a national consciousness in a novelesque form, Báez's work through its disembodied and nonlinear sequence of events alludes to the limits of a national consciousness at the time of writing/performing outside the confines of an imagined national space. Invoking Anderson once again, I would like to propose the idea that through the mobility of Báez's heroine in Dominicanish we are presented with the multiple cultural and social realities that characterize current global communities. The mobility of Báez's solitary heroine in communities located in Manhattan, La Romana, and India is partly in accordance with Anderson's perception of the role of the hero in 19<sup>th</sup> century novels. In the imagined communities elaborated in these novels, Anderson asserts that through the hero: "...we see 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (30). The fusing of multiple worlds, even if chaotic, is what makes Báez's text a rich in-your face elaboration on nationality, gender and ethnic discourses in the context of immigration.

In the preface, Báez locates her Dominican background within the locality New York city affords. Ironically she explicitly affirms her national condition not on the preface she writes in English or as she indicates "In Inglis," but instead she does it in the preface she writes in Spanish and titles phonetically "Pikin epanis." In "Pikin epanis" she expands on the reasons for creating the text: "Hay cosas pequeñas que me interesan mucho: las que algunas veces hastían, las que muchas veces pasan por desapercibido por ser tan obvias; las que una lleva consigo y otras que hace siempre (aquí también los pantis se tienden en el baño)" (7). It is important to emphasize the importance of the image and phrasing of "aquí también los pantis se tienden en el baño," because as a

recurrent image in the text it signals towards the possibility of having an experience that transcends the geographical and cultural expanses that immigration processes delineate. Furthermore the demonstrative adjective of “aquí también” is one of the most unsettled concepts throughout the text. As such, the national home(s) Báez describes are characterized by not having a clear cut “aquí” and one of the images that connects them all is precisely that fact Báez playfully asserts of: aquí también los pantis se tienden en el baño.

The stage where all these experiences find temporary moments of confluence, if not of negotiation, is New York city. In New York as Báez explains: “...yo soy igual a un fracatán de gente que tenemos orígenes sociales similares; quienes intercalamos risa y llanto, gustos y sustos, dolores y tambores, bachata y rap, aquí y allá. Yo soy una Dominican York. Y esta condición me otorga una infinidad de estímulos constantes y variados. Enriqueciendo mi cultura personal en formas inesperadas (7). Báez’s self-identification as a *dominicanyork* in these lines is in agreement with that of other Dominican born and New York resident professionals such as Silvio Tórres-Saillant, who affirms his *dominicanyork* identity on the preface to his book, El retorno de las yolas: ensayos sobre diáspora, democracia y dominicanidad (1999). The concept of a *dominicanyork*, according to Torres-Saillant, has served to illustrate and differentiate the immigrant experiences of those that were part of the first massive group of Dominicans who migrated to the United States after the assassination of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in 1961. In this regard the concept of a *dominicanyork* does not necessarily imply that these immigrants only migrated to New York, even though this location was the initial site of major Dominican immigrant communities. Adopting the

concept from the vantage point of the United States implies a number of things, as Torres-Saillant elucidates: "...se evade dicha denominación al pertenecer a una clase social acomodada o haber residido en los Estados Unidos previo a la migración masiva de la gente de extracción humilde que salió de la República Dominicana a partir de los sesenta" (18). Torres-Saillant further describes the elements that define the concept itself and how it is indicative of the class, racial and economic status of the Dominican immigrants that arrived after the 1960s: "El *dominican-york* debe carecer por lo general de linaje aristocrático, ganarse la vida como trabajador de cuello azul y compartir un vecindario habitado por sus iguales, sean compatriotas, inmigrantes de otros países latinoamericanos o negros norteamericanos" (18). The considerations Torres-Saillant illustrates in these lines sheds light onto the reasons why Dominican immigrants in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, such as Pedro Henríquez Ureña, did not perceive it as a necessity to tie themselves to their emerging Dominican communities or considered their Dominican immigrant identities within the North American society.

Even though Báez and Torres-Saillant assume their *dominican-york* identity in the United States as a reflection of the multiple cultural, political and ethnic elements enriching their sense of *dominicanidad*, it is important to remember that as an identity it is a social construction, and as so with must locate it within the historical context and precise social functions it had in the Dominican society after 1961.

The assassination of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in 1961 marked the beginning of many rebirths for the Dominican Republic. Confronted with the growing pains of an emerging democratic national consciousness, the Dominican island was also faced with an unprecedented circumstance: a massive exodus that displaced

thousands of Dominicans to the United States and Puerto Rico. Instigated primarily by an economic impulse, this first massive migration of Dominicans to the United States and Puerto Rico would be regarded in various ways by those Dominicans intent on defining the nation after 1961. The identity of a *dominicanyork* was conceived in the Dominican Republic by a middle class who vilified those Dominicans leaving the island for a better life in New York city, used as a metaphor for the entire United States (18).

Furthermore, the *dominicanyork* as initially conceived in the island was an entity that harbored all the negative elements against which the Dominican national subject were defining themselves, as Torres-Saillant expounds: “El dominican-york existe en el país como un subalterno que ocupa el más bajo tramo del orden moral. Funge como chivo expiatorio para una clase media interiorizada por siete décadas de desenfrenada violencia y soborno estatal, una clase media que busca desesperada de alguien con respecto a quien sentirse superior” (20). In reclaiming a *dominicanyork* identity in the United States, Báez and Torres-Saillant recharge the concept giving it a positive spin. They appropriate it in order to ascertain their position as black Dominican immigrants in the United States whose social mobility, even though hindered at times, has allowed them the possibility of counteracting the defining characteristics of contemporary Dominican migrations to the United States, which Torres-Saillant defines as: “La emigración dominicana contemporánea procede de los estratos inferiores de la sociedad emisora y ocupa los predios de la marginalidad en la sociedad receptora” (34). Báez’s Dominicanish is a clear example of a contemporary work that combats the marginal positions afforded to Dominican immigrant women in the United States, and it further destabilizes labels such

as *dominicanyorkness* by proclaiming yet another identity to illustrate the unpredictable qualities that assemble socially constructed labels.

In Dominicanish, the difficult process of immersion into New York city manifests itself initially through the acquisition of English, a process that for the main character proves to be a difficult and traumatic task:

I thought that I will never learn English  
No way I will not put my mouth like that  
No way jamás ni never no way  
**Gosh** to pronounce one little phrase one must  
Become another person with the mouth all  
twisted yo no voy a poner la boca así como  
un guante. (22)

Long past the formulation of expressions written/spoken in Spanglish or sentences written “ungrammatically,” what these lines emphasize is that learning English is a physical and an emotional process for the narrator. The physical performance involved in this new language, represents the mechanisms of social and cultural negotiations Josefina’s character is engaged in as she simultaneously creates and inserts herself in the “crooked city” she narrates. The allusion of becoming another person in the process of learning English, demarcates the experience of letting go of a homogenous conception of *dominicanidad* (with which Josefina immigrates) while also attaining the oral skills to communicate in this space.

Learning another language allows Báez the possibility of creating a “new self” that reacts to the reinstated gender roles women sometimes resume in their immigrant

communities (Espín 135). For instance the symbolic representation of a “crooked city,” is an elaboration on Dominican female subjectivities re-erected in the context of New York city. Báez’s crooked city is a space of multiethnic encounters, but most importantly it is a feminine entity with an androgynous sexuality:

Crooked cupid

A woman named City

Hips swing male or female

**We swing creating our tale**

Male or female we swing...

Crooked city

A woman named cupid

City glorifying the finest brutality in blue

City nuestro canto con viva emoción

City a la guerra a morir se lanzó. (42)

Such a feminization construction is in accordance with our conceptions in Spanish of national spaces, or *la nación*. In these lines Báez replants this gendered sequence of national consciousness in New York when she affirms it as “a woman named city.” The violent acts committed against the Dominican community in New York is then also a direct abuse towards the female body (representative of the city,) we can substantiate this claim via Báez’s indication of the city embodying (glorifying) “the finest brutality in blue.” It is clear that the color blue is an allusion to the history of violence and tension between the NYPD and the inner city inhabitants dwelling in the immigrant communities. The *city* in this text is a “crooked” structure and the site of death for a homogeneous



notion of *dominicanidad*. We see this through the pairings of city with the *nuestro canto* fragment of the anthem, and then the image changes when *city* is paired with “a la Guerra a morir se lanzó.” In other words these lines suggest the idea of death of a collective notion of *dominicanidad* that is necessarily affected with migration. What is interesting is that we are at once in a present (New York experience for an immigrant) and past (Dominicans fighting for independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) time frame. The simultaneity that national anthems provide has been acutely described by Anderson, when he indicates that: “...anthems...No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody” (145). While the anthem sings of the virtuous actions of Dominican men fighting for the independence of their silent feminine nation, *la nación*, Báez’s unique inclusion of these fragments tells another story of struggle that takes shape in the setting of the diaspora. After migration, the site of violence and the deposit of frustrations is still a female entity in male terms. The learning of another language gives Josefina another take at reconstructing herself-as Dominican woman in New York.

Through the acquisition of a new language and vocabulary Josefina enters the “crooked city,” a space of cultural hybridity that not only represents her condition as an immigrant but also on how her Dominican experience coexists with the social reality she encounters in New York. The site where these experiences coexists in the text, is indicative of what Homi Bhabha describes as an “in-between space”:

The move away from the singularities of ‘class’ or ‘gender’ as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject

positions- or race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation- that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity. (1)

The awareness of this cultural hybridity is expressed as Josefina *becomes another person* and begins to communicate in English and Spanish.

In the learning process of this new language some uncanny returns materialize themselves depicting, at least for me, the hybrid element that mediates the construction of Josefina’s immigrant subjectivity in New York. This hybrid element surfaces in the text through Josefina’s symbolic naming of a *lista* that in the text is associated with the Dominican cultural, political and social elements that define the Dominican immigrant community she describes:

me da vergüenza poner la boca así

La lista crece La lista creció

Presente y pasado simple

**Crece creció creciendo**

One way to Santo Domingo

Exchange today 12.50

Trips to the airport rest in perace

Balaguer leave us the fuck alone leave us alone

Man leave Me alone Dominican cake any

Occasion march to take back our streets

March against police brutality celebrando. (23)

As Josefina begins to physically (me da vuergenza poner la boca así) change in order to communicate in her new surrounding, we begin to see how the cultural overlaps transcending the geographic coordinates of Santo Domingo are represented in New York. The flight tickets to Santo Domingo sold, Dominican cakes and remittances advertised in these lines are indicative of this cultural overlap. Much like a child learning to speak and naming everything it sees, Josefina lists everything she *sees* in her neighborhood, and what she sees is as much a part of her experience as an immigrant in New York as it is a reflection of her Dominican past. For instance, the march against police brutality mentioned in these lines are indicative of community led efforts to protect the safety of its members in New York, but the mention of Balaguer in this setting factors in an uncanny irruption. The former president Joaquín Balaguer (1906-2002) was the leader of the Partido Reformista Social Cristiano, and also the most elected president in the history of the Dominican Republic (served 7 terms in office.) Balaguer was the Foreign Minister during Trujillo's dictatorship and as speculations go, he is charged with being one of the supervisors of the 1937 Haitian massacre in Santo Domingo orchestrated by Trujillo. Báez's mention of Balaguer in these lines, is an indication of his haunting presence as an active memory for those Dominicans in New York. Balaguer was also in part responsible for the massive migration of Dominicans in the 1960s, when he reportedly lifted visa restrictions in the island in order to promote the migration of those Dominicans that were not partisan to his political system after Trujillo's assassination. His apparition in Báez's

text and the apparent disdain with which he is regarded, can also be attributed to the racist ideology Balaguer maintained throughout his political career in the Dominican Republic, and that still permeates racial and ethnic interactions in the Dominican communities found in the United States.<sup>37</sup> Balaguer's apparition in the text can also be a literal reflection of the fear maintained by many Dominicans in the island and in the United States, when Balaguer threatened to run for presidency one more time in 2001. His project was thwarted with his death in 2002 (Suárez 155-156).

Josefina's racial consciousness is also influenced by the foreign language she studies in New York city. Beyond the physical distorting qualities of English for a Dominican subject like Josefina, her learning of it consequently points her in the direction of other ethnicities that make up the cultural world she inhabits. As the following lines indicate, the impact of a vibrant African-American culture proves to be fundamental in Josefina's racial self-identification in the United States:

Aquí los discos traen un cancionero.

Discos del alma con afro. Con afro black is  
beautiful. Black is a color. Black is my color.

My cat is black...

I U a e o iu you

you in a secret you in a whisper

In a cloud of smoke I found my teachers.

In an LP jacket I found my teachers

---

<sup>37</sup> Balaguer who was known for his racist ideology especially towards Haiti, was still very popular for his his book titled La isla alrevés: Haití y el destino dominicano (1983), where he made use of scientific racism

Stitched suede bell bottoms on  
Openly displaying their horoscope signs  
Gemini Capricorn pisces leo lio  
In that cover I found my teachers  
Los hermanos Toga Isley  
Los hermanos Isley  
The Isley Brothers. (26-27)

The cover and the *cancionero*, or the lyrics booklet, in the Isley Brothers LP become one of the most important textbooks in Josefina's cultural and racial education in the city. The lines above suggest the image of Josefina gazing at the lyrics and the cover while she also gazes at herself in an imaginary mirror. The connection she draws between what she sees on the cover and herself culminates with an affirmation of her own skin color. The cultural and national implications of this affirmation both in the Dominican Republic and for Dominicans in the United States are best understood if we are to remember the place race, and more particularly blackness, has had in the construction of Dominican national discourses. I suggest that her experiences as a black Dominican in the island, had been experienced in silence or as a secret up to that point. The album cover of the Isley Brothers album then represents the enactment of black pride, and this in turn affects Josefina in such a way that she sees in them the role of teachers and inspiration. Her teachers are then also performers who are proud of their race and ethnicity and reenact this pride time and time through Josefina's own self-affirmation of "Black is my color."

---

to demonstrate the inefficiency of the "negro race" in the Dominican Republic.

The urban space in Dominicanish is a space of cultural and racial contacts between different ethnic groups, and this in turn nurtures the identities the narrator assumes. We could in fact indicate that that the “crooked city” is a didactic space of sorts that faces the narrator with parts of her identity as a Dominican woman that could only surface via active contact with other minorities in the United States. But what happens when Josefina returns to Santo Domingo embodying all these changes immigration has caused? In this configuration, the English language once again becomes one of the building blocks for Josefina’s mobility in the city, but it also demarcates the extent of change (physical and emotional) she has gone through. This signaling of change is best perceived in the way Dominicans in the island perceive Josefina once she returns to visit, as she indicates:

I went back there on vacation

There is La Romana

Here is 107<sup>th</sup> street ok

**Tú sabes inglés?**

**Ay habla un chin para nosotros ver sí**

**tu sabes**

I was changed they were changed he she it

were changed too

Pretérito pluscuamperfecto indicativo

imperativo

Back home home is 107 ok (31)

The coordinates of the national home are irreparably altered after immigration, and language is the signaling indicator of foreignness for Josefina, once a return to the national space takes place. But as she recounts everyone had changed including herself, and once an acknowledgement of these changes surfaces so does her perception of what is home. Home, as these lines suggest, is a dual symbol that represents the place where she grew up along with the values acquired there, but home is also where she ultimately becomes *more* than what was available to her as a woman in the Dominican Republic. Nowhere is this more clear than when Josefina enumerates all the things she is able to do as a female in New York that could possibly be considered an indecent behavior for a “lady” in the Dominican Republic. As she enumerates these actions one can see point by point some of the characteristics that construct a female national subjectivity in the island and how these are in direct contrast to the society encountered in New York:

Me chulié en el hall

Metí mano en el rufo

Craqueo chicle como Shameka Brown

Hablo como boricua

y me peino como Morena...

Jangeo con el pájaro del barrio

Me junto con la muchacha que salió preñá

Salgo con mi ex

Hablo con el muchacho que estaba preso

Garabatié paredes y trenes

## City

I pulled the emergency cord...(43-45)

It is inevitable not to note the ethnic and racial parameters prevailing in the notion of Dominican national identity Josefina challenges with her actions in New York city. Everything indicates that these parameters have been broken and that her New York experience has allowed her the possibility of considering other realities. Race, sexuality, and decency are just a few of the concepts Josefina taunts with her conduct. But Josefina also challenges the city itself by placing graffiti art throughout the city walls and trains, and in this sense she combats any societal forces that may try to stall her newfound liberty in the city. In this sense we can also consider the symbolic action of pulling the emergency cord, as Josefina's way of literally stopping any exterior forces- Dominican or North American- from dictating how and where she lives her life. But even though Josefina is able to transcend, to a certain extent, some of the social barriers that could inhibit her mobility in the city via her transformation into a *dominicanish* entity, she maintains a very firm self-representation both in the context of the United States and the Dominican Republic.

Being a *dominicanish* woman is a push towards the notion of "double consciousness" theorized by W.E.B Dubois and that I see functioning in Josefina's case as well. In DuBois's essay titled "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" from the collection The Souls of Black Folk (1903), he elaborates on the experiences of seeing oneself through the gaze of others and in this process measuring and validating oneself through these gazes. DuBois in this case was theorizing about the experiences of African-Americans in the United States, and referring specifically to the racial and ethnic tensions that tainted



their experiences at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he describes this tension in the following way:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa; he does not wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes that Negro blood has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development. (365)

DuBois is in a sense also theorizing on the manifestations of a creolized social reality that emerged during slavery, and that is now a continued source of struggle in the formation and consciousness of an African-American identity that manifests both the African and North American cultural components in one subject. The gaze of a white America upon blacks provokes the internal struggle of conceiving themselves as African and American in the United States. For Josefina, the reality in New York city is a multilayered one. As a black woman (albeit as a black Dominican woman) in the United States she has to contend with other social factors that can possible affect her visibility and mobility in the “crooked city.” The double consciousness in her case appears once she has achieved a certain degree of acculturation into New York City, and soon realizes that even then:

**There’s no guarantee**

Now I’m another person

Mouth twisted

Gui ri gui ri on dreams

Gui ri gui ri business

Even laughing

### **Laughing in Dominicanish**

There's no guarantee

Ni aquí ni allá

Not even with your gui ri gui ri papers

There's no guarantee

Here, there, anywhere

There's no guarantee

Without accent or PhD

Higher education took me to places of pain and

pleasure History in black and white...

teaching me the ups and downs (47-48)

In Josefina Báez's Dominicanish, her *emotional creolization* is apparent in the continuous contradictions and limits placed on female subjects in the context of the Dominican Republic and then New York city. The arrival and contact of the narrator with other ethnic groups in the "crooked city," leads to alternative forms of *dominicanidad* that are nurtured by the lived experiences of race, ethnicity and sexuality of these ethnic groups. Her adopted views on gender, race and sexuality elaborate on the problematic codes of decency that shape the social interactions of females in the Dominican Republic and how these are altered with migration. In the following section, I

explore a different type *home* in the diaspora through Loida Maritza Pérez novel, Geographies of Home (1999).

### **The Psychological and Emotional Junctures of Home**

The novel, Geographies of Home (1999) by the Dominican born and New York city resident Loida Maritza Pérez, introduces us into the continued cycle of violence and insecurities that permeate the lives of a Dominican family in the United States. The novel illustrates the individual and collective journeys of Aurelia and Papito as they became part of the first massive exodus of Dominicans to the United States after the assassination of Trujillo. In hopes of attaining better economical opportunities in the New York city, Aurelia and Papito migrate leaving their children behind in order to set themselves up first before bringing their children with them. The intricacies of relocation and the makings of a new home in the United States, while intending to preserve a Dominican cultural identity, are reflected on this novel. Facing problems that are characteristic to ethnic minorities in the United States, such as discrimination and poverty, the family must also find ways to negotiate their experiences within a new language and deal with the racial and ethnic vocabulary describing them in the United States.

Pérez especially draws our attention towards the ways in which violence and silencing have been foundational in crafting of female subjectivities in the Dominican Republic-the national home (Suárez 158). While in Josefina Báez's Dominicanish we see a clear emphasis in subverting these gender roles from the vantage point of the diaspora, in Pérez we see how these gender roles are rooted within the historical context

of the Trujillo regime, and how they are continued in the setting of immigration with the presumable function of maintaining the family intact.

The novel, as the title alludes, plays with the notion of home and more precisely that of the national home as the first site of social and cultural formation in the lives of its members. As the first place of social instruction, the home represented in the novel mutates and takes many forms, hence the title Geographies of Home. But the term *geographies* suggests both the idea of multiple homes in different physical localities, as it also alludes to the various angles of *one* space when repositioning ourselves and our gazes upon it, from the inside and the outside. The difficulty of defining the concept of *home* in a theoretical fashion becomes apparent in Pérez's novel. Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternbach ponder on this difficulty in their book, Stages of Life: Transcultural Performance and Identity in U.S. Latina Theater (2001), when they note the following:

Pinning down a concrete definition of home always seems to be a slippery enterprise because home is not only a material and physical space and location, but also an abstract idea, a sentimentalized repository of sensory images and memories. It is not until a subject leaves home and is at a distance from it that s/he can enunciate the narration of home and initiate her/his relation to that place called home. (154)

The repositioning outside one national space and the relationship with it, as suggested in the lines above, are represented in the novel through the particular cases of Iliana, Aurelia and Marina. I see them reflecting and literally embodying different features of the Dominican immigrant experience and the symbolic homes each seeks in Brooklyn. The

experiences of women in the formation of the nation and of their homes have often times been occluded, a point that Lucía Suárez details on her work, The Tears of Hispaniola:

Haitian and Dominican Diaspora Memory (2006):

Home, whether in the Dominican Republic or the United States, is plagued by a long history of violations against women that precludes the recognition of their very important work in a nation building and diasporic memory making. Almost in defiance of the Dominican Republic's buried histories, Pérez creates a character, Iliana, whose story maps the experience of an immigrant family weakened by the myths, sexism, and violence that have dominated Dominican culture and bled into its diaspora. (153)

Much like Suárez, I am interested in analyzing the traumatic experiences filtering the interactions of Iliana, Aurelia and Marina. Where I differ from Suárez's reading of Geographies of Home is in her perception of defiance as solely presented in Iliana's character. Suárez deems Aurelia as a silent matriarch who decides to *stay* a prisoner in her own home. Such a dismissal of Aurelia's actual power in the household, as a figure that ties all the members of the family together even amidst their constant fights and the extraneous social factors that may separate them in the city, does not fully recognize the very important work she conducts in her building of a Dominican home in the Diaspora. Suárez also describes Marina as a woman who has succumbed to madness due to her inability to accept her racial constitution. I instead perceive glimpses of defiance in all three women, and these acts of defiance are manifested in very different ways throughout the novel.

The different effects of immigration inevitably factor into the notions of home each of these characters maintain and challenge, and thus the home becomes a strategic site for questioning the imposed order acquired in the national space (Sandoval-Sánchez and Saporta Sternbach 155). In this section, I argue that Iliana, Aurelia and Marina question their home (national space) at different emotional and psychological junctures that reflect, I suggest, their own personal experiences of gender and race in both the United States and the Dominican Republic. While Pérez describes to varying degrees the lives of the fourteen characters that conform this family I will focus my attention on this three characters because I believe they diffuse the main themes of the novel.

The story centers on Iliana, the youngest daughter of Aurelia and Papito. Seeking to escape her conservative and religious household, Iliana decides to attend school in upstate New York where she hopes the distance from her family will allow her the possibility of breaking the cycle of violence and misfortunes that have tainted them since migrating to the United States. But the impossibility of this break from the family irrupts in Iliana's school via a mysterious voice that constantly beckons her return to her parent's home in Brooklyn:

She was also leaving because a voice had been waking her with news of what was taking place at home. The accounts had started several months earlier and, depending on the news, had lasted until dawn. It had gotten so that she rarely slept. As soon as her head touched the pillow the disembodied voice crept close. On hearing it for the first time, her eyes had flashed open, her heart had slammed against her ribs. (2)

It is no coincidence that this voice irrupts in Iliana's new adopted home-space, the school, because as I suggest what we have in Iliana's case is the reenactment of the scenario of the *dominicano ausente* trope. We were initially presented to this trope in Junot Díaz's "Drown," where Beto was the subject who after abandoning the Dominican diasporic community in order to attend school, returns to it a changed (homosexual) man. In Iliana's case it is a bit different since she is unable to reap the full benefits of self-discovery that are potentially achieved outside the confines of the national home. With Iliana's impending return to her home in Brooklyn, she succumbs to the impossibility of totally breaking away from her familial pressures and traumas, as represented by the voice that follows her to the new locality the school would have represented. The voice roots her in the place of origin and renders her experiences in the school to an exterior reality that does not concern her family experiences.

The mysterious voice is not the only element to blame in Iliana's return to her home. Indirectly her upbringing in the Dominican Republic and in her Brooklyn household, which I view as a microcosm of the Dominican national space, dictated the way she would interact with people outside her home base. Raised under strict codes of gender decency, the interactions Iliana maintains with other ethnic minorities in the settings of the school consequently undergo a misreading especially when others judge her silent and shy demeanor as arrogant and racist: "Whenever she had attended parties, even those sponsored by minority organizations, she had never been asked to dance. And she had attended with Ed, rumors had spread that she dated only white men...Not only had no one-black, white, yellow, or red- ever asked he out, Ed was Mexican and preferred to sleep with men" (5). As an active zone of cultural contact, the school and

the interactions Iliana has with other ethnicities reflects both the gender codes that have been instilled in her in terms of what is considered decent behavior for a Dominican woman, and the codes that dictate racial and ethnic relations in the setting of the United States. But if we pay close attention to the opening scene of the novel, we note that Iliana's own racial constitution is used in a pejorative manner, and in such a way that it inserts her own Dominican ethnic identity within the greater struggle against racism: "The ghostly trace of "NIGGER" on a message board hanging from Iliana's door failed to assault her as it had the first time she returned to her dorm room to find it" (1). The apparent continued acts of racist and violent attacks against Iliana bring forth the message of institutional racism that still factors in daily social interactions, and in this case, in a presumably liberal campus, such as the one Iliana attends.

The confluence of these racist acts with the immersion of the mysterious voice in Iliana's room suggests the continuity of a Dominican cultural identity that throughout the novel is represented as a feminine body. In fact, the first scene of the novel is that of pregnant Aurelia carrying Iliana in her womb while having a premonitory dream that announces the death of her mother, Bienvenida. We are led to believe that the psychic or spiritual connection that Aurelia had with her mother is passed down to Iliana, because as soon as Bienvenida dies the contractions of Aurelia intensify. All elements associated with nurturance, culture, spiritually and family are then all filtered through Aurelia's body, and thus it is no coincidence that the mysterious voice as a guiding light appears when Iliana herself is in need of it: "Initially the visitations had occurred sporadically. But as the racial slurs began appearing on Iliana's door, they increased in frequency. Though unable to explain the phenomenon, she became convinced that the voice was in



fact her mother's" (4). In her description of Iliana and Aurelia's relationship, Pérez continually hints at the spiritual connection they have, and that is manifested in their psychic abilities. Both Iliana and Aurelia have psychic abilities that allow them the possibility of *knowing* what is not *told*. In this regard they are both equipped with the tools to deal with the untold histories that surround and include them. In a premonitory manner the voice tells Iliana the things happening at home keeping her informed and connected to her home: "She willed the voice to go away, but it persisted, hounding her as her mother's had at home. It spoke of her brother Emmanuel's visit from Seattle; of the two eldest, Mauricio and Chaco, who, with their families, had moved back to the Dominican Republic..." (3). Making it virtually impossible for her to inhabit another location without first returning home and facing her fears, Iliana decides to leave school: "It was these events, more than her disappointment with the university, which had convinced Iliana to leave school" (5).

The return to the national home is a performance of retraction because in order to embark on the journey back there, Iliana has to forego the physical and emotional changes acquired in school. This is evidenced when she packs her bags: "When packing, she had reluctantly given away the items she dared not take home with her: skirts which, though just above the knees, would be considered indecent..." (8). The politics of return to the national home are apparent in these lines, and also the inevitability of returning a changed person. Iliana's journey to school is a symbolic representation of immigration, and no matter how much she thinks she can conceal or leave behind, the reality is that she returns to her home as a different somewhat more confident woman that has discovered many things about herself and the people around her. One thing remains intact, and that

is the fear of being home exudes. Her return to the city and her home is a return to the politics of fear and adoration her father, Papito, has unleashed at home.

It is key to situate the violence of the father in the home, as both a reinstating mechanism of the patriarchal order and also as the literal manifestation of Trujillo's transnational hold. As I briefly elaborated in the previous chapter, the Trujillo regime led to the formation of a very particular masculinity subjectivity embodied in the concept of "el tíguere." In Pérez's novel, we have yet another reflection of the masculine model developed during the Trujillato, that of a man who having lived and experienced the violent acts committed has unconsciously continued the cycle of violence with the excuse of protecting his family, from the immoral and harmful ways of the "crooked city." In Pérez's novel we have a reformulation of the model of the global city, but here it takes a different definition. Whereas Báez's "crooked city" was a site of cultural encounters that provided the main characters with beneficial educational lessons about her own Dominican identity alongside the city of New York, Pérez's New York city is a reflection of the fears Papito had induced in her mind. While describing her trip to Manhattan as a very young girl during an expedition to the hospital when she had faked an appendicitis, Iliana reminisces on her initial perceptions of the city:

As they drove across the Williamsburg Bridge, the sight of Manhattan- a city Papito had often compared to Sodom and Gomorrah- increased Iliana's fear.

Although she had not fully understood what he'd meant when he'd said men on that island slept with other men and women with women (hadn't she herself slept with her sisters?), she had concluded that Manhattan too would be destroyed (9).

The city is then a simulacrum of indecencies for Papito, and this clearly reflects the *macho* ideology he adheres to and that he fosters throughout novel through his religious fanaticism. Violence and religious dependency are the mechanism of order that Papito utilizes to protect his family in the diaspora. Papito instills fear in the household and especially on his children in order to avoid their active contact with the city, that for him is a depository of sins, danger and immorality. Suárez accurately depicts Papito's violent acts-and especially those towards Iliana as a continuation of the cycle of violence and fear he himself had experienced in the Dominican Republic, as she explains:

"...Pérez constructs Papito's character to help us understand the kind of terror people bring with them when they come from such repressive circumstances. Papito lives with this sense that anything horrible can happen and that no one will do anything to help of kind justice" (158). Suárez's assertion echoes what Papito himself responds to Iliana, when she confronts him about hitting her as a child when she had run off to a river: "You were headstrong even then. I had to teach you a lesson so that you'd learn to be afraid. Without fear, anything could've happened to you. It was my responsibility to teach you about danger and keep you safe" (318). Iliana's confrontation of Papito occurs at the end of the novel after she has experienced multiple violent acts of which one stands out as the most traumatic: her rape in the hands of her mentally ill sister, Marina. I believe that in the end Iliana's previous experience outside the home sheds light onto the possibility of forging a life outside. For Iliana, surviving the abuses of her father and a rape, conditions her to believe that there is a life outside those walls, and that even though she carries a legacy of violence and abuse her reality could be different. After making peace with her

father and realizing his many shortcomings but also the many obstacles both he and her mother had overcome in order to raise a family of fourteen, Iliana also realizes that:

...she still had to leave, she did not pull away. Like her mother's and father's too, her soul had transformed into a complex and resilient thing able to accommodate the best and worst. Everything she had experienced; everything she continued to feel for those whose lives would be inextricably bound with hers; everything she had inherited from her parents and had gleaned from her siblings would aid her in her passage through the world. (321)

Aurelia, as I describe below, is a source of inspiration for Iliana and factors into her decision to embark on a journey of self-discovery outside the walls of her home.

Through Aurelia's character we have a presentation of an emotional creolization process. Her experiences as a woman in the Dominican Republic coalesce with many factors that continue to affect her and sometimes limit her mobility in the United States. Immigrating to the United States with Papito and leaving her children behind, even if for a short period of time, represents some of the emotional and psychological hurdles that immigration poses. And as a woman her role in her family's spiritual and cultural education proves to be very important throughout the novel. Just like Papito, Aurelia grew up during the Trujillo regime, a situation that for her does not translate into a mechanism of fear and violence in order to survive in the United States, as it had Papito. Surviving the violence and disappearance of many of her friends during the regime, Aurelia manages to see beyond the strict codes of obedience and decency operating at the time. Aurelia's presence in her home, I suggest, provides a model of dissidence against the roles women have been made to assume under a patriarchal order. Furthermore, her

conversations with her youngest daughter, Iliana, reflect her views against any ideology-religious or political- that seeks to oppress. Numerous times, Pérez presents some of the ways in which Aurelia challenges her gender role and her position in the household, and challenges that Aurelia unchains in her own household, and in this way providing useful lessons of transgression to her children, and especially to Iliana.

Aurelia's positive influence in Iliana, manifests itself at the beginning of the novel, when Iliana is confronted with the racial slurs at school. Aurelia's image factors into Iliana's mind as a source of strength, nurturance and resilience. The resilience factor is important to remember, because it counteracts what Suárez indicates in her analysis of Aurelia. Especially when she proclaims that: "Aurelia is a prisoner of her own house, but Iliana has found the confidence to leave. She decides to go back to school in the fall. While she cannot change her family or her history, she can change herself...She is not a defeated woman, but rather a person, a citizen of the world, with rights and goals. Unlike Aurelia, she will not remain silent" (178). Suárez's reading does not take into account the fact that Aurelia herself has been a source of inspiration for Iliana by signaling the possibility of living a present that is not tied to her past. I note this especially in Iliana's recollection of her mother's physical appearance and of the work she conduct's at home. The image of sacrificing herself and youth for the happiness of her children in the diaspora is illustrated in the following lines:

Cowering beside her bed, Iliana recalled her mother's ears. Those ears, with holes pierced during a past Aurelia rarely spoke of, had both frightened and intrigued her. Raised in a religion which condemned as pagan the piercing of body parts, she had imagined that, were mother's clogged holes pried open, she

would transform into a sorceress dancing, not secretly on a Sabbath when she stayed home by feigning illness, but freely, unleashing impulses Papito's religion had suppressed. This image had sharpened whenever Aurelia had undone the braids wound tightly around her head. At such moments, before Iliana's intruding eyes caused her to braid the cascading locks into submission, she had smiled at her own reflection shifting from an aging matriarch's to that of a young girl's with hoops dangling from her ears. (3)

The complicity these lines suggest between mother and daughter, and their ability to know what each says and believes without words, is a clear indication of the life lessons Aurelia provides her youngest daughter. And it is through this memory of a symbolic home construction by the mother, that Iliana is ultimately inspired to move beyond the gender roles that the Dominican culture had vested upon her mother: "This memory evoked others to which Iliana had previously attached no significance: Aurelia waking restlessly before dawn to scrub clean floors...This incessant activity; even at moments when she might have opted to relax, now suggested an effort to contain forces struggling to escape" (4). Not only is she is not a defeated woman, Aurelia is also not a silent figure in the household.

Aurelia's presence is felt in every single moment of Iliana's life, and for that matter in the whole family's living experience in the United States. This is pointedly illustrated in one scene where Aurelia, alone in the kitchen reminisces about the trajectories their lives had taken from the Dominican Republic all the way to Brooklyn. It soon becomes clear that Aurelia's strength is the one element that has maintained the family together. Unlike Papito, she does not shield her weaknesses and fears behind a

religious ideology, and this makes her feel vulnerable in the space of immigration, even more so than when she experienced the Trujillo regime:

It wasn't that she romanticized the past or believed that things had been better long ago. She had been poor even in the Dominican Republic, but something had flourished from within which had enabled her to greet each day rather than cringe from it in dread... Yet assaulted by the unfamiliar and surrounded by hard concrete and looming buildings, she had become as vulnerable as even the Trujillo regime had failed to make her feel. (23)

The unfamiliar in this sense is the experience of immigration itself. Aurelia is the active parent in this equation, because Papito's blind faith in religion has positioned him outside of the reality his family lives on a daily basis.

The toll all this work has on Aurelia's health leads to a heart attack and a consequent hospital stay that lasts nine months. But even in her sick bed Aurelia is unable to detach herself from the home she constructed, and even feels guilty at the thought of her dying and leaving her children and husband without the support only she could provide:

Only the realization that her children would be left motherless in a country whose language and customs she still barely understood had inclined her toward health in defiance of the doctor's prediction that she would die. But although she had recovered, she had emerged from a nine-month hospital stay profoundly changed. Gone were her confidence and self-respect. How could she trust herself when she had willingly brought herself to the brink of death? More importantly, how could she expect her children to grow strong and independent after they had witnessed

her emotional collapse and increasing deference to Papito who, in turn, placed his burden in the hands of God? (24)

Aurelia represents the national body weakened by immigration. The pressures of acculturation into a new cultural territory along with the unresolved issues her children immigrate with in regards to race, sexual trauma, and abandonment all come together in the home space Aurelia constructs with her husband. But as the emotional support to her family, Aurelia sees herself as the one in charge of the spiritual and independence of her children in the United States. For this reason it is no surprise that would blame herself for getting sick, and is ashamed to having shown weakness, even if it occurred unwillingly, in front of her children.

If we warrant Aurelia's character to an emblem of the weakened body of the nation after immigration, then in Marina's case we have the direct ramifications of this immigration process at a psychological level. Unresolved issues caused by the violent detachment from her family, and by extension of the Dominican nation, affect Marina in ways that no one else in the family experiences. While we can correctly asses that Marina's mental health is affected by the sexual abuse she suffers, it is also important to situate the element of abandonment in her interactions after immigration. Even though Marina, the second eldest child of Aurelia and Papito, is considered to be psychologically unstable throughout novel, she proves to be the character that is most aware of where her problems come from.

Ironically enough the issue of abandonment as a consequent factor in her inability to form cohesive sexual relationships or even associations with other racial groups in the



United States, has been left out of Suárez's reading of Marina. Even so, I partly agree with Suárez's reading of Marina when she indicates the following:

Theoretically, Marina's madness suggests the madness provoked by the denial of one's self. Her madness physically obliterates the body that has been historically shunned. Her robust womanhood, the deep color of her skin, and her sensual needs were squelched by Dominican racism and sexism. She was further disembodied when she confronted the same racism and sexism in her host nation, the land that was supposed to offer her freedom. Marina's case is beyond recovery, because she is trapped by her family's protection and lack of understanding. (172)

But as we first saw in Junot Díaz's story "Fiesta, 1980," issues of abandonment by the father shape the actions Yunió takes after immigration. We see in Marina the same type of behavior, especially in her repression of affection and her inability to control her rage to the point that she is physically isolated from the family. She represents, I believe, the Kristevan abject, and her presence destabilizes the emotional and psychological walls of the home Aurelia and Papito have created in Brooklyn. The only way to keep Marina from ruining the home they have created is through their action of placing her in the basement, where they think they are protecting her from the harms of the world, but unconsciously their action says a lot more about their own fears and guilt. Aurelia and Papito keep her in the basement, not because they solely want to protect her but also because she reminds them of the psychological effects immigration can have on a person, and furthermore I believe they feel guilty for having abandoned her in the Dominican Republic. Marina is the literal abject in this home, and through her residence in the

basement of the house (detached from the family) Marina is forced to daily relive the trauma of abandonment and abjection she has endured throughout her whole life.

The abject, as Julia Kristeva theorizes in her essay, “The Powers of Horror” is: “...the jettisoned object...radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses...it lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (230). As so Marina is the abject, and her abjection is manifested at a psychological level through her insane behavior at home. All her actions are geared towards punishing the one person she blames for all her misfortunes, her mother, Aurelia. This is explicitly described in one of the many confrontations Marina has with Aurelia, that occurs when Iliana returns to the household. Marina, sensing the return of Iliana, makes it a point to make a dramatic entrance into the living room where Iliana, Aurelia and Rebeca, the eldest daughter, are all sitting. Upon her entrance Marina goes up to Iliana and makes her smell her fingers, and then inquires what scent she gets from them. Smelling only perfume on Marina’s fingers, Iliana shrugs her away and calls her crazy. Marina then reacts in the following way:

“If I’m crazy, then what the fuck is this?”

Marina yanked her skirt above her naked hips. Revulsion contorted her face as she parted the soft, shaved area between her thighs to pull from it what only she could see. Then, enacting a pantomime of something wriggling in her hand, she dangled empty fingers before her mother’s eyes.

“Tell me! What the fuck is this?”...

Marina's fingers move as if releasing something. Her feet stomped the floor as if pounding into a pulp whatever it was she'd dropped. Breathing heavily, she approached Aurelia.

"You can't say anything, can you?" she asked, merciless yet sorrowful eyes pinioning her mother. "Not even, 'I'm sorry this has happened'?"

Tears welled in Aurelia's eyes. "Would you believe me?" she asked, braving her daughter's gaze. "would it help....?"

Marina's lips curled with contempt. "So I'm supposed to feel sorry for you, the great self-sacrificing mother who left me in the Dominican Republic when you came here?" (32)

Marina's irruption into the scene and her symbolic castration of an invisible phallus, can be her way of casting off the order and protection both her father and her mother have tried to offer her after immigration. Another way of seeing this is by consulting the Lacanian phallus that symbolically replaces everything the subject loses by entering into the realm of language. In this case, Marina refuses the entrance into language and the control, laws and knowledge it represents by discarding the imaginary phallus. In Marina's mind, I suggest, by letting go of the phallus she can remain in the abject position she has been forced to occupy, and does not have to deal nor face her reality. In a sense, her entrance into the living room is also a transgression of the border that was created for her, since she has been placed in the basement.

Marina is an example of the effects abandonment on a child, and how the arrival to a new space with its own cultural codes can prove to be yet another traumatic experience, that for Marina manifests itself at a psychological level. Marina is a

schizophrenic and suicidal subject, as illustrated in various episodes of the novel. At one point she has visions of black spiders that are supposedly crawling on the walls of the kitchen, so she decides to set the wall on fire. It is unclear when her schizophrenia began, but we are led to believe that it is associated to a rape claim Marina made at one point, but that is not validated by the family. Iliana herself learns about this claim while she is still in school by way of the mysterious voice: “She learned that...Marina wishing to know her future told, had visited an astrologer to later claim that he had raped her...”

(4). Pérez never confirms this rape in the novel. In either case, this scene is later paralleled in the novel to Marina’s claim that her brother, Tico, had also tried to rape her in the basement. The presentation of that last rape claim casts a shadow of doubt on whether one or both claims are false, and have only occurred in her mind.

Marina relives the rape scene in her mind a number of times in her bedroom. In her reenactment of the rape scene a series of elements end up illustrating her internalized racism. It is important to first note that as a black Dominican woman, Marina has been unable to accept her black ancestry and has opted instead to claim a Hispanic identity in the United States, that she sees as entirely apart from blackness. This situation is made very apparent when Marina asks Iliana about her dating preference and Iliana responds:

“Blue-eyed wouldn’t be my first choice,” she muttered.

“Why? What do you have against white people?”

“I didn’t say I had anything against them. And all whites aren’t blue-eyed.”

Marina snickered. “A big, black stud. That’s what you want.”

“Yeah,” Iliana retorted. “A big-black-man-with-a-great-big dick. What would be wrong with that if I did?”

“Only that you could do much better”...

“What are you saying? That blacks are inferior? Is that what you think about yourself?”

“I’m Hispanic, not black.”

“What color is your skin?”

“I’m Hispanic!” (38)

In Marina’s mind blackness belongs in the domain of the other, and as a result as Suárez proclaims: “She has adopted the anti-Haitian and anti-African ideologies crafted and affirmed by Trujillo” (174). It is then no surprise that in Marina’s mind blackness is associated with evilness. In fact, the prompting of the abuse towards her body is perceived to be racially motivated:

Marina’s thoughts bypassed the blame she had heaped on herself for visiting an astrologer and for remaining despite encountering, not a woman with a turban wrapped around her head, but a man with dreads coiled tight as if to strike: a Blackman who had divined her loneliness and had predicted the coming of a dark stranger like himself; a seer who became enraged when she said no—surely a white man or at least a light-skinned Hispanic like herself would come into her life. (17)

Again it is unclear whether this rape actually occurred, even so for Marina blackness is a foreign and violent element that irrupts into her body, and threatens her survival.

Not having her family validate her rape claims seems to throw her off into the abandonment mode once again. Secluded in the basement, Marina is left to live out her schizophrenic visions alone in her bedroom and away from the family, until Iliana

returns. The fact that Iliana is made to share the bedroom with Marina leads, I believe, to a sort of sibling rivalry. Iliana as the literal outsider who has returned and has been warmly accepted back, is then seen as an intruder that seeks to order and control Marina in her abject domain. The only way that Marina sees herself taking back control of this situation is by castrating Iliana, who she sees as a man in her last delirious episode in the novel. The castration is really Marina's literal raping of Iliana while this one slept. By violently defiling Iliana's body, Marina seeks two things. The first one, as I mentioned, is to reclaim her abject space represented by the basement. The second is more problematic because through Iliana, Marina seeks to insert her story within the national home she has been shun from due to her psychological imbalances.

Home, as we see through Iliana's, Aurelia's and Marina's characters, is a concept deeply entangled with the sensation of belonging somewhere. Immigration processes complicate these sensations leading as we have seen to an imminent undoing and redoing of the coordinates that make up the individual and collective notions of home these women construct and search for in the diaspora.

## Conclusions

Migration experiences complicate notions of national, racial, sexual, gender and class awareness. In the case of Dominican migrations to the United States and Puerto Rico we have seen how these complications have surfaced within disparate narratives that simultaneously react and, at times, dissociate themselves from the new host societies represented. Spanning multiple geographical locales and depicting different lived experiences of class, race, nationality, sexuality and gender, I have intended to deconstruct what we understand as a Dominican diaspora, by both providing a narrative reference that antecedes such a denomination, and by also fleshing out this concept with my re-reading of some of the most popular writers within this genre.

The need to readdress our critical attention towards a Dominican diaspora narrative genre has also been central to this project. My concern on this matter is not an isolated one, and it is very much in line with other contemporary Dominican literary critics such Daisy Cocco De Filippis. Her book, Desde la diáspora: selección bilingüe de ensayos (2003), begins with a fundamental question: “¿Existe una literatura dominicana en los Estados Unidos antes de que existiera el llamado fenómeno histórico de la presencia de una comunidad dominicana en los Estados Unidos a partir de los años setenta?” (29). Her inquiry as we have seen throughout my dissertation, rings true if we detain ourselves on the particular historical situations prompting Dominican migrations to the United States. On this regard the representation of immigration and traveling in New

York city depicted on Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir is drastically different from the ones Josefina Báez, Junot Díaz and Loida Maritza Pérez portray. Their representations reflect the racial, ethnic, class and gender experiences that have marked their internalized conceptions of *dominicanidad*, and as an extension of their experiences as Caribbean subjects migrating during the twentieth and twenty first centuries. The salience or unimportance given to issues of race, class, gender and sexuality on their writings, correspond, as I have described on this project, to their lived experiences in the Dominican Republic and then factor directly into the social context that awaits them in the United States and Puerto Rico.

The answer to Cocco De Filippi's inquiry, as her own work evidences, is then a preponderant yes. Even though Dominican writers elaborating on their experiences as immigrants became more visible during the 1980s, there was an even earlier presence that both Daisy Cocco De Filippis and Franklyn Gutiérrez have brilliantly compiled on the anthology Literatura dominicana en los Estados Unidos: presencia temprana, 1900-1950 (2001). This book exemplifies one of the major risks in establishing a particular historical reference (the assassination of Trujillo) as a specific event for an ethnic groups' narrative depiction of migration. In other words, solely attending to a Dominican diaspora in the United States can leave out other important literary contributions that are also a fundamental part of the history of Dominicans in the United States. Cocco De Filippis's and Gutiérrez's work illuminates the literary production of writers in the United



States between 1900 and 1950, creating a much needed space for their production within the Dominican literary depiction in the United States.<sup>38</sup>

In the preceding chapters I analyzed the dynamic intercultural and interethnic exchanges that nurture the work of Dominican writers and intellectuals in transit at particular historical junctures (as is the case of Pedro Henríquez Ureña whose memoir presents a unique vision of an elite intellectual's Dominican national consciousness while in New York at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). This project also seeks to expand the study of narrative representations of Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico by Dominican born writers (such as José Luis González) or Puerto Rican writers whose interest in depicting Dominican immigrants within a particular Puerto Rican national discourse illustrates some of the racial and ethnic tensions that found both national spaces (as is illustrated by the works of Ana Lydia Vega and Magaly Garcia Ramis). Lastly, I have analyzed how the diasporic communities elaborated in the narratives of Dominican and Dominican-American writers, such as Junot Díaz, Josefina Báez and Loida Maritza Pérez concurrently partake and detach themselves from racial, ethnic, sexual and gender patterns attained within the Dominican society but that are thrown into upheaval when forced to interact with other ethnic groups in the host society.

In chapter one, I proposed my own working definition of a Dominican transnational subjectivity at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir. My analysis on this chapter expounded on the cultural implications of

---

<sup>38</sup>This volume includes some of the most significant works written in the United States of these Dominican writers: Fabio Fiallo Cabral, Manuel Florentino Cestero, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Jesusa Alfau Galván de Solalinde, Gustavo Bergés Bordas, Angel Rafael Lamarche, Virginia de Peña de Bordas and Andrés

what it meant to be Dominican at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for an intellectual mulatto man such as Henríquez Ureña in New York city. In order to elaborate my case, I reviewed his memoir, the poetry he writes while in New York city, and his correspondence of the time with Alfonso Reyes. Deeply affected by the racial, national and ethnic discourses permeating the Dominican Republic, he continues to partake in these discourses upon his arrival to New York city. An emotional creolization processes is noted on Henríquez Ureña's problematic claims of a creole identity and culture that fails to acknowledge the presence of African cultures in the Dominican Republic. This in itself roots his claims for an universal culture within a Dominican identity that is primarily defined by its Hispanic legacy. Henríquez Ureña's class, racial and ethnic self-perception are then, as expected, affected by the society he encounters in New York city at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter two explored the narrative representation of Dominican migrations to Puerto Rico and the challenges they bring about to the Puerto Rican national discourse constituted in the late 1930s. This chapter analyzed José Luis González's La luna no era de queso: memorias de infancia (1988), Ana Lydia Vega's "El día de los hechos" from her short story collection Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio (1982) and Magali García Ramis's "Cuatro retratos urbanos" from the short story collection Las noches del riel de oro (1995). My focus in this chapter was aimed at reading, defining and elaborating the characters presented on these narratives as foreigners constantly negotiating their identity, their very presence, in contrast with the reality of Puerto Rico.

---

Francisco Requena. It is important to remember that until the publication of this volume the works of these writers in the United States had received very little critical attention.

The representation of Dominican immigrants in Puerto Rican narratives, goes through an ambivalent exposure depicting an emotional creolization process that touches upon the sometimes conflicting racial and ethnic markers that demarcate the national and the cultural fields of both Caribbean spaces.

In chapter three I analyzed Junot Díaz's short story collection, Drown (1993). My reading of Díaz's work situated his characters as gravitating towards communities in which they become active components of multi-racial and multi-ethnic communities fostered by global migrations. On this chapter I emphasized the relationship of Yunió with his mother and father, and how these relationships are shaped by immigration. I especially noted Yunió's unconscious defense mechanism, which deletes the father after the father has deleted himself from the family. This in itself, indicates an emotional trauma in accord with the fatal paradox of Yunió's life: rejection of the father ending up as repetition of the father's own defining gesture. This image of abandonment is a continuous one throughout Díaz's collection and many times the same paradox is relayed in the stories I analyze: if Yunió leaves his mother, as he wants to do, he would be imitating his father, who is a negative image condensing who Yunió does not want to be.

In chapter four I resumed the problematic effects of immigration for Dominican women through the works of Josefina Báez and Loida Maritza Pérez. Both Dominicanish (2000) and Geographies of Home (1999) challenge the geographic coordinates of Dominican national spaces, while also challenging patriarchal forms of expression rooted in the homeland and then disseminated in U.S. diasporic Dominican communities. I emphasize the image of the "crooked city," or a twisted city harboring the multiple cultural and social encounters and evasions amongst Dominican immigrants in the United

States, in order to illustrate the constantly evolving notions of *dominicanidad* that are triggered in an urban space; and that I perceive as being more acutely exposed through the female characters Báez and Pérez portray.

Writing between national/state/island borders and languages, these writers have charted multifaceted narrative strategies of mediation and translation of national, ethnic, class and gender experiences-which are also a reflection of their own culturally multiple Caribbean identities. Immigration from the Dominican Republic does not immediately evoke the image of a social rupture from the host country as a central metaphor on these works. Azade Zeyhan's definition of "cultural memory" comes to mind at this point, when she indicates that:

Social ruptures caused by displacement, migrancy, and exile lead to an impoverishment of communal life and shared cultural histories. This loss requires the restorative work of cultural memory to accord meaning, purpose, and integrity to the past. I use the term cultural memory to describe an intentional remembering through actual records and experiences or symbolic interpretations thereof by any community that shares a common 'culture.' (15)

But as Glissant has previously stated, the Caribbean has been historically characterized by social, cultural and ethnic ruptures. The sensation of rupture from the host country is not what these authors have sought to reproduce; instead, I believe, they each respond to the perennial sense of self-redefinition that is continued from the Dominican Republic on to their new host societies. Rather than seeking to reproduce or reenact a cultural memory through their writings, writers like Pedro Henríquez Ureña, José Luis González, Junot Díaz, Josefina Baez and Loida Maritza Pérez depict in their works the need to

create new experiences that are not necessarily always tied directly to the Dominican Republic.

Throughout this project I have intended to analyze some of the ways in which contact with new host societies can result in creative identity negotiations, that even if at first sight demonstrate tensions that travel with the subjects represented, can also be seen as positive sites of explorations (be it psychologically, emotionally, and creatively). I have conceived an emotional creolization process that is inherent within any immigration, displacement or travel experience of Caribbean immigrants, in order to ascertain the already present sensation of self-redefinitions and cultural, ethnic and racial multiplicity embodied by peoples from Caribbean societies.

In my analysis of Dominican narratives of migration and displacements to the United States and Puerto Rico, I have been very cautious in historicizing the different processes of racial and identity constructions Dominicans experience in the Dominican Republic prior to their movement to the United States. Borrowing Earl Lewis's term of a "world of overlapping diasporas" (767) to indicate the culturally and ethnically relational atmosphere on which African Americans and Afro-diasporic peoples have been living and interacting in the United States, I have provided a similar trajectory for Dominicans in the United States and Puerto Rico. While Lewis emphasizes Du Bois's notion of a "double consciousness" to indicate the qualms of being an African American and having to constantly stake out a place in the North American society as both a black person and an American, I have presented the case that for immigrant groups like Dominicans, the double consciousnesses framework is simply not enough. For this reason I note an *emotional creolization* process that bears on Dominican immigrant subject's everyday

tasks of consolidating past notions of gender, sexuality and race acquired in the Dominican Republic along with adjusting to the pressures of assimilating into other cultural processes. This process simultaneously unhinges and weaves new forms of *dominicanidad* in the context of the United States. An *emotional creolization process* is the byproduct of mechanisms of identity constructions that draw from the legacy of racial and ethnic cultures defining the Caribbean region as a whole, while it also draws upon the mixture of ethnic groups present in the United States and their own trajectories of myth and identity. The *emotional creolization process* is embedded on a process of learning and maneuvering lived experiences of race, class and nationality in the Dominican Republic, while also facing a social context with its own identity constructs. Carrying a plethora of racial and historical conjectures to the site of immigration, be it in New York, New Jersey or San Juan, Dominican migrations brings to light contradictions and tensions that only through active contact with other cultures and ethnic groups could be lessened and/or negotiated.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. New York: Verso, 1983.
- Arce, Chrissy, Edrick López, and Anna Deeny. "Junot Díaz: Writer, Tigre, Ghetto Nerd, College Professor." Lucero Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies. 14(2003): 42-49.
- Arroyo, Jossianna. Travestismos culturales: literatura y etnografía en Cuba y Brasil. Editorial Iberoamericana: Pittsburgh: Nuevo Siglo, 2003.
- . "Historias de familia: migraciones y escritura homosexual en la literatura puertorriqueña." Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos. 26(2002): 361-378.
- . "El cuerpo del esclavo y la narrativa de la nación en Casa-Grande & Senzala de Gilberto Freyre." Lucero Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies. 4 (1993): 31-42.
- Badillo, Casandra. "Only My Hairdresser Knows for Sure: Stories of Race, Hair and Gender." North American Congress on Latin America Report on the Americas. 34(2001): 35-37.
- Báez, Josefina. Dominicanish. New York: I Ombe, 2000.
- Balutansky, Kathleen M., and Marie-Agnès Sourieau, eds. Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity. University of Florida: Gainesville, 1998.
- Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. New York: Schocken, 1988.
- Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Braidotti, Rosi. Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Clifford, James. "Diasporas." Cultural Anthropology. 9 (1994): 302-338.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Cocco De Filippis, Daisy, ed. Desde la diáspora: selección bilingüe de ensayos. New York: Ediciones Alcance, 2003.

- . Literatura dominicana en los Estados Unidos: presencia temprana 19000-1950. Santo Domingo: Editora Búho, 2001.
- . La literatura dominicana al final del siglo: diálogo entre la tierra natal y la diáspora. New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 1999.
- Davis, Mike. Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City. London: Verso, 2000.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- . Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Díaz Quiñónez, Arcadio. "Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884-1946): la tradición y el exilio." Sobre los principios: los intelectuales caribeños y la tradición. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional De Quilmes, 2006. 167-254.
- Díaz, Junot. Drown. New York: Riverhead, 1996.
- Duany, Jorge. The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- . Los dominicanos en Puerto Rico: migración en la semi-periferia. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1990.
- Dubois, WEB. Writings. New York: The Library of America, 1986.
- Dzidzienyo, Anani, and Suzanna Oboler, eds. Neither Friends Nor Enemies: Latinos, Blacks, Afro-Latinos. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- Espín, Oliva M. Women Crossing Boundaries: A Psychology of Immigration and Transformations of Sexuality. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Forgas, Joseph P., ed. Affect in Social Thinking and Behavior. New York: Psychology Press, 2006.
- Fornerín, Miguel Ángel. Ensayos sobre literatura puertorriqueña y dominicana. Santo Domingo: Dirección General Feria del Libro, 2004.
- . La dominicanidad viajera: ensayos sobre diáspora, cultura, sociedad, política y literatura en el Santo Domingo de fin de siglo. Santo Domingo: Editora Imago Mundi, 2001.
- Freud, Sigmund. The Uncanny. San Diego State University Rohan Academic



- Computing. 06 April. 2006  
< <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html>>.
- García-Passalacqua, Juan M. "The Grand Dilemma: Viability and Sovereignty for Puerto Rico." Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 533 (1994): 151-164.
- Gleber, Anke. The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Glick Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, eds. Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered. New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992.
- Glissant, Edouard. Poetics of Relation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- . Caribbean Discourse : Selected Essays. Charlottesville: University P of Virginia, 1989.
- González, José Luis. La luna no era de queso: memorias de infancia. San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1988.
- Hannerz, Ulf. Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Henríquez Ureña, Pedro. Memorias. Diario. Notas De Viaje. Comp. Enrique Zuleta Álvarez. México: Fondo De Cultura Económica, 2000.
- . Epistolario intimo. Vol. I. Santo Domingo: Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña, 1981.
- . La utopía de América. Comp. Angel Rama and Rafael Gutierrez Girardot. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1978.
- Hernández, Ramona. The Mobility of Workers Under Advanced Capitalism. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Grosfoguel, Ramón and Chloé S. Georas. "Latino Caribbean Diasporas in New York." Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York, edited by Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Howard, David J. Coloring the Nation : Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic. Oxford: Signal Books, 2001.
- Irizarry, Guillermo B. José Luis González: el intelectual nómada. San Juan: Ediciones

- Callejón, 2006.
- Kristeva, Julia. Strangers to Ourselves, translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- . Black Sun: Depresión and Melancolía, translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- . Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Krohn-Hansen, Christian. "Masculinity and the Political among Dominicans: The Dominican Tiger." Machos, Mistresses, Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagery, edited by Marit Melhuus and Kristi Anne Stolen. New York: Verso, 1996.
- Levitt, Peggy. "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion." International Migration Review 32 (1998): 926-948.
- Lewis, Earl. "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans Into a History of Overlapping Diasporas." The American Historical Review 100 (1995): 765-787.
- Lugo-Ortíz, Agnes I. "Community at Its Limits: Orality, Law, Silence, and the Homosexual Body in Luis Rafael Sánchez's ¡Jum!" ¿Entiendes?: Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings, edited by Emilie L. Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Maffi, Mario. New York City: an Outsider's Inside View. Columbus: The Ohio State P, 2004.
- Martínez-Vergne, Teresita. Nation and Citizen in the Dominican Republic, 1880-1916. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina P, 2005.
- Mateo, Andrés L. Pedro Henríquez Ureña: errancia y creación. Bogota: Taurus, 2001.
- Neuman, W. Russell, George E. Marcus, Ann G. Crigler, and Michael Mackuen, eds. The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Oboler, Suzanne. Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Omi Michael and Howard Winant. Race Critical Theories.

- Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Parr, Adrian, ed. The Deleuze Dictionary. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Pérez, Loida Maritza. Geographies of Home. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.
- Portes, Alejandro and Ramón Grosfoguel. "Caribbean Diasporas: Migration and Ethnic Communities." Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 533 (1994): 48-69.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. Imperial Eyes : Travel Writing and Transculturation. New York: Routledge.
- Ramis, Magali García. Las noches del riel de oro. San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1995.
- Sandoval-Sánchez, Alberto, and Nancy Saporta Sternbach. Stages of Life: Transcultural Performance and Identity in U.S. Latina Theater. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001.
- Sang, Mu-Kien A. Ulises Heureaux: biografía de un dictador. Santo Domingo: Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, 1996.
- Sagás, Ernesto, and Sintia E. Molina, eds. Dominican Migration: Transnational Perspectives. Gainesville: University P of Florida, 2004.
- Salgado, César A. "El entierro de González: con(tra)figuraciones del 98 en la narrativa ochentista puertorriqueña." Revista Iberoamericana LXIV (1998): 413-439.
- Seyhan, Azade. Writing Outside the Nation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- . "Ethnic Selves/Ethnic Signs: Invention of Self, Space, and Genealogy in Immigrant Writing." Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literary Studies. Ed. E. Valentine Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 175-195.
- Stutzman, Ronald. "El Mestizaje: an All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion." Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador. Urbana: University of Illinois P, 1981. 45-94.
- Stychin, Carl F. "A Stranger to its Laws?: Sovereign Bodies, Global Sexualities, and Transnational Citizens." Journal of Law and Society. 27(2000): 601-625.
- Suárez, Lucía M. The Tears of Hispaniola: Haitian and Dominican Diaspora Memory. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006.

- Torres-Saillant, Silvio. El retorno de las yolas : ensayos sobre diáspora, democracia y dominicanidad. Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 1999.
- . "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity." Latin American Perspectives 25 (1998): 126-145.
- Trinh, T. Minh-ha. Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Turits, Richard. "Race, Slavery, and Freedom in Santo Domingo." Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Valerio-Holguín, Fernando. "Primitive Borders: Cultural Identity and Ethnic Cleansing in the Dominican Republic." Primitivism and Identity in Latin America : Essays on Art, Literature, and Culture. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000.
- Vicioso, Sherezada (chiqui). "Dominicanyorkness: a Metropolitan Discovery of the Triangle." Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity. Ed. Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnes Sourieau. Gainesville: University P of Florida, 1998. 62-67.
- . "An Oral History." Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States. Ed. Denis L. Heyck. New York: Routledge, 1994. 270-275.
- Vega, Ana Lydia. Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio. La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1982.
- Zuleta Álvarez, Enrique. Literatura y sociedad: estudios sobre Pedro Henríquez Ureña. Bueno Aires: Ediciones Atril, 1999.

## Vita

Danny Méndez was born April 22, 1980 in The Bronx, New York. He is the son of Pedro Florentino Méndez Bretón and Ramona Altagracia Gómez de Méndez. After graduating from Theodore Roosevelt High School, he attended Cornell University where he was awarded a B.A. (magna cum laude) in Spanish with a minor in Psychology. In 2004 he earned his M.A. in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American literature from the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. In the Fall of 2005 he successfully completed his PhD. Comprehensive examinations at the University of Texas at Austin. A portion of his dissertation, “De lengua materna y padres ausentes: los negocios de Junot Díaz,” was selected for publication in a forthcoming edited volume titled, Aproximaciones a la literatura dominicana, volumen II (1980-2005). He is currently doing preliminary research on what will be his next academic project. On that project he will analyze the genre of telenovelas (predominantly those produced in Miami and Puerto Rico), as another type of narrative construction that exposes its very own national discourse.

Permanent address: 2770 Briggs Avenue Apt# 3B, Bronx, NY 10458

This dissertation was typed by the author.