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NATION, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY: The Colonial Subject's Search  
for Identity in the Works of Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré,  
and Ana Lydia Vega.

By

Eda Henao

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in  
Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York.

2001

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

NATION, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY: The Colonial Subject's Search for Identity in the Works of Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega.

By

Eda Henao

Adviser: Professor Fred Nichols

This thesis examines selected narratives of Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega in relation to the colonial subject's search for identity--be it as an individual or as part of a national entity. It looks into the connection that some of the characters make between women's identity and that of the nation. The work explores in particular the identity/identities of female characters in the fiction of these three contemporary Caribbean writers. It problematizes issues of presentation and representation and the tendency often found in the agendas of feminism, nationalism, and the new historiography to homogenize culture, ethnicity, and national identity. The thesis investigates as well some of the means colonial subjects utilize in order to gain agency, and thus subvert, reject, and resist oppressive and colonialist practices.

## PREFACE

The beginnings of this doctoral dissertation can be traced back to the readings I undertook while preparing for my oral exams in the Comparative Literature Department of the C.U.N.Y. Graduate Center. One of the areas I had chosen to research was contemporary Latin American women writers and the reading list that my advisors and I came up with, included works by three Caribbean women writers: Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega. Early in my research, I began to feel that the work of these writers diverged dramatically from the works of most continental Latin American women writers not only at a thematic level, but also at the formal and discursive levels. I began to notice that women's identities seemed to be a central concern of the Caribbean writers and that somehow this theme was linked to the issue of national identity and coloniality, both at an individual and geo-political levels. After my oral exams, I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega, in order to investigate in depth the issues of identity and coloniality of the subject and the nation that I had noticed in their works.

Following the advice of my dissertation advisor,

Professor Fred Nichols--and given the fact that when my investigation began there was not a sizeable body of critical work on contemporary women writers of the Spanish Caribbean--I took the authors' texts rather than critical texts as my primary source of investigation. I tried to follow my thesis director's advice to make my dissertation a development of my thesis, and ideas, rather than those of a collection of critics and their ideas. Thus, I used criticism as a way of enlightening my readings of the texts and as a system whereupon I buttressed my findings. It is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to the dialogue that is already taking place in relation to an area of Hispanic American literature which--despite its quality, originality, and power--has been traditionally ignored and/or underestimated in anthologies, textbooks, and critical research.

*A mis padres, Armando y Eda, germinadores y sustentadores de sueños. Gracias por su tesón, apoyo y amor.*

*To my children Jace, Nicole, and Dylan, for making me keep in mind what really matters and for their infinite patience and tolerance.*

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I wish to convey my gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee, Professors Marithelma Costa, Electa Arenal, and Fred Nichols. I am particularly grateful to Professor Nichols, my mentor and counselor. Without his dedication and willingness, this thesis would have never been completed. I am thankful to Professor Arenal for her words of encouragement and for the countless hours she has spent editing my work and guiding me. I would hope to be able to emulate the generosity and academic integrity that Professors Arenal and Nichols showed me when it is my turn to mentor others. I would also like to thank my sister, Clara, for her invaluable help and unconditional love and support.

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## INTRODUCTION

Questions of identity are crucial for individuals as well as for countries. When we are dealing with the colonized, questions of alliances, identification, cultural wholeness, and integrity become issues of primary importance both at a personal and national levels. Latin America--whose indigenous cultures were sometimes annihilated and at other times repressed, devalued, and degraded--has been grappling with some of these questions since before that region's nineteenth century wars of independence. Latin America has been forging and questioning its social, economic, and cultural identity in the arts as well as in other areas for centuries.

In the Spanish Caribbean, because of its geographical location, history, and direct contacts with the United States, this struggle for identity is more intense. In addition, the Spanish Caribbean is often not recognized as an integral part of Latin America by other Latin American countries; thus, the relationship of the Caribbean with the rest of Latin America is an ambivalent one, particularly when it comes to matters of the arts and literature. While one may question notions of categorizing literary works in

terms of national or continental literature, or point out the arbitrariness of such sorting, the fact remains that such categorizing does persist, and it often leaves the works of Spanish Caribbean writers, not to mention those of North American writers of Latin descent, in a literary limbo. It seems as though the term "Latin American Literature" refers only to the literature of continental Latin America; the literature of the Spanish Caribbean is often omitted.

The reason for this omission from the canon is not the focus of this work. However, if Caribbean literary works are not included with the rest of Latin American literature, despite the quality of its production (particularly that of women), then how should we classify it? Does it belong under a general rubric of Caribbean Literature or should it be broken down into distinct national literatures; e.g., Cuban Literature, Puerto Rican Literature, Dominican Literature? And how should we regard the body of literature being produced in the United States by writers of Hispanic descent? If a work is written in Spanish, should it be considered Latin American, or should it be considered American Literature because it originated in the United States? If the work was written in English, but deals with

Latin American concerns and culture, where does it fit? And even more puzzling, what do we do with hybrid literary productions--works that are written both in Spanish and English, or in English, but following Spanish syntax as does some of the work of Julia Alvarez? This latter production, in particular, seems to transcend traditional boundaries of classification. The writers of such works devote a great deal of energy to questions of identity, both personal and literary, and they are forging an independent 'category' for their literary production: Latino Literature. The term is controversial, but it provides a "home" or "label" for these works.

A person's identity both as an individual and a member of society has become one of the central issues of contemporary Latin American literature. This is especially true in Puerto Rico where these questions of identity, as well as the potentially dogmatic prescriptiveness of nationalist and feminist agendas (as Ana Lydia Vega points out) are central to the work of its contemporary writers. The condition of women, colonial subjects, and colonial nations are important themes in the writings under discussion. Although gender oppression, imperialism and neo-colonialism are not synonymous, these categories intersect

repeatedly in the narratives I have studied.

My intention in this thesis, is to show how the selected works by Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega explore issues of identity confusion, ambivalence, and plurality created by gender, class, and national oppression. I examine how these authors try to find the center, the identity of both their colonized female characters as well as that of their nation of origin or descent. Not only do I examine some of the dynamics of power and privilege and the impact of these on the colonized subject, but I also look at the colonized subject's subversive strategies to undermine colonialist practices, resist oppression, and gain agency. I study the narrative strategies of Julia Alvarez' (In the Time of the Butterflies, How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accent), Rosario Ferré's (House of the Lagoon, La batalla de las vírgenes), and Ana Lydia Vega's (Vírgenes y Mártires, Pasión de Historia y otras historias de pasión, Falsas crónicas del sur) and the connection these works establish between women's identity and the colonial cultures of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Latinos living in the United States.

In the first chapter, I concentrate on questions of

privilege and stratification raised by the narratives and how these factors operate to create and problematize issues of identity, oppression, and victimization. Among the colonized, in general, there is an entire system of stratification that responds to questions of gender, race, color, economic solvency, sexual orientation, family connections and descent. Thus the colonized subject may be a colonizer in turn. This paradox poses many interesting questions with respect to feminism, for it depicts women both as victims and victimizers.

Latin American feminist thought problematizes the adoption of Anglo-European and North American feminism and questions the claim of universalism either implied or overtly asserted by traditional feminist rhetoric. How, for example, can Anglo/European feminist thought represent or speak for the conditions of women in Latin America? Some of the issues, to mention but a few, involve social status, class, race, and economic situation. Women are often oppressed and colonized by other women: the mistress/servant relationship is widespread in Latin America and constitutes one of the problematic issues of Latin American feminist thought. Discrimination and oppression based on race and skin color are also important issues raised in Ferré,

Alvarez, and Vega's narratives; not surprisingly, they are burning issues in Latin American thought at large. But though these three authors deal with the problem of race and color, they deal with it in various ways. In their narratives, different kinds of prejudices are examined differently, perhaps because the historical development of race relations is different in each country, and because the ethnic makeup of each nation--at least at an imaginary level--is different.<sup>1</sup> Evident as well, in the narratives, is the tension and privilege created by economic status and family name. The main characters of the various works are often light skinned or from well-to-do families or from families whose name and reputation compensate for any financial shortcomings. These characters often experience conflicts provoked by their position of privilege, conflicts that reveal the tension, oppression, injustice, and prejudice that permeates their societies.

The second chapter takes up the role of writing as

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Torres Saillant notes that the Spanish-speaking Caribbean has neglected to acknowledge and/or denied the African component in their culture. In the case of the Dominican Republic, he points out, the ethnic composition fairly resembles that of Puerto Rico and Cuba where 80 percent of the population is either black or mulatto. Nonetheless, literary artists have adopted the "Indian" as a symbol of Dominican patriotism even though "the native pre-Columbian population of Santo Domingo had practically become extinct by the end of the sixteenth century." The reason for this, Torres Saillant explains, is to hide the "overwhelming reality of the African presence" in the culture. (47-48) Indeed in Julia Alvarez' fiction, blacks are seen as Haitians while the skin color of Dominicans tends to be described as "café con leche."

viewed by the narratives' main characters and with writing the self/home--in this case, "home" being country. Since in most instances Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega allow their characters to write themselves into the narrative by means of letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and biographical novels, I focus primarily on issues of presentation and representation. I look at the characters' subversive and contestational response to the representation and identities assigned to them and to their nations. Thus I uncover how these characters relate to the writing process, what kind of self-image they have, and in turn, what kind of image they present of their nation. The way in which the characters relate to their country--be it country of origin or descent--and the image they have of it varies, especially because one of the three authors I discuss grew up in the United States while the other two were raised primarily in their country of origin. The ambivalent nature of the characters' relationship to their country permeates the works and mirrors a similarly ambivalent vision of women.

As a result of the multiple identities that 'define' many of the female characters, many times it is not clear exactly what prompts their actions and decisions. Take, for instance, Alvarez' In the Time of the Butterflies. Are the

Mirabals real national heroines? Were their actions prompted by self-consciousness, by their own will and awareness, or were they somehow compelled by the same factors that determine decisions made by stereotypical traditional women who are motivated by their husbands, their children, or their own fears. Does this ambivalence mirror the Dominican Republic's attempt to decide whether to overthrow Trujillo by following Cuba's revolutionary tactics or by following the United States sympathizers who rumored a CIA plot to overthrow him? Does Puerto Rico's political ambivalence over statehood, independence, or continuation of the *status quo* resemble the ambivalence that affects some of Ferré's and Vega's female characters? At different times protagonists defend different positions relating to Puerto Rico's autonomy, and sometimes they simultaneously espouse different political alternatives. Such self-reflective narratives look closely at traditional and stereotypical representations of women and nation in order to challenge and subvert them. Ultimately, these writers offer a comprehensive and holistic picture of their societies. For the characters, the act of writing oneself becomes a liberating act, a celebration and recognition of the

multiphrenic<sup>2</sup> nature of their identities and those of their nations.

The third chapter explores aspects of anti-colonial discourse and how the discourses and narratological strategies devised by the writers under consideration constitute "feminine writing." I examine the feminist discourse--or lack of it--in these women's narratives. One issue worth examining, as noted by several critics such as Jean Franco, Sylvia Molloy, and Debra Castillo, is that Latin American women writers are reluctant to call themselves, or to allow themselves to be called, "feminists". I focus on the writers' degree of awareness and self-consciousness regarding women's issues: women's identity, relationship to men, children, parents, society, nation. Ana Lydia Vega and Rosario Ferré, for instance, are at times militant feminists--albeit differing and re-defining the Western feminist concept of 'feminist'--while Alvarez, although aware of the issues, doesn't make them central aspects of her fiction. The issues are present and

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I use Pnina Webner's understanding of this term: the coexistence of multiple, often contradictory, identities in an individual. The subjects that she studied would use their identities in order to negotiate some degree of agency in the different contexts and circumstances that they encountered. ( Ranger et al. 72)

an important part of her novels; but they are inconspicuously woven into the main theme of her narrative. Thus, certain elements like irony and sarcasm, as well as questions of frontal vs. oblique criticism, will surface and function differently in the works of Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega.

Anti-colonial discourse and its implications vis à vis personal and national autonomy and integrity are more evident in Ferré and Ana Lydia Vega's novels than in those of Alvarez. In Ferré's La batalla de las vírgenes, for example, it is almost impossible not to see the main character of the novel, Mariana, as an emblem of Puerto Rico itself. She expressly refers to the need to hold on to Puerto Rican culture, yet the manner in which she delves into her society and its roots causes the reader to question what exactly that culture may be. Is it Spanish?--the culture of one of its colonizers. Is it African? Is it a mixture of Spanish, African, indigenous, and now, traces of United States culture? This issue is most evident in the work of Ferré.

Anti-colonial discourse in the work of Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega also assumes a demythifying role that rejects

official history and re-writes it in order to uncover the history that has been denied, hidden, or ignored. This concern with history is partially due to, as pointed out by Torres Saillant, the fact that "the literature of a marginal people [...] cannot be chronicled by means of the same historiographical taxonomy devised for chronicling the literature of the dominant culture." (6) Nevertheless Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega's demythifying discourse tries to avoid the myth-making tendencies of some feminist and nationalist agendas by revealing less flattering aspects of Dominican, Latino, and Puerto Rican cultures and by exposing the potentially dogmatic and restrictive nature of feminist and nationalist ideologies.

In chapter four I explore maroonage<sup>3</sup> as a tactic for resistance, subversion, transformation, and, ultimately, creation. In many instances, maroonage has been a survival technique, not only at a personal level, but at a cultural and linguistic level. The tactic is exemplified by black and mulatto characters particularly, as we shall see, in characters such as Vega's Bela, Alvarez' Chucha, and Ferré's Petra--who resist Western epistemological structures.

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See definition of this term in Chapter 4.

Despite their portrayal as colonized subjects, emblematic of those conquered and enslaved, these characters are also seen using the "tricks of the weak," as Josefina Ludmer calls it, in order to resist, subvert, and gain agency. In some cases, they appropriate the stereotypical expectations and characterizations of blacks in order to resist and preserve their culture and build some room for themselves.

Further, I look at how the works of Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega mix languages, genres, history and fiction, linguistic registers, cultures and contesting modes of knowledge. I point to how these elements combine to constitute a form of maroonage which, in turn, is used to render (an)other view(s) that differs from the colonial gaze. Such new perspective(s) rejects official history, official language, canonical and traditional conventions regarding women, culture, and literature. Maroonage allows for a more complete representation of women, culture, history, and nation, inasmuch as it defies homogenization while permitting multiple aspects, versions, visions, and histories to co-exist in multi-faceted representations.

## **CHAPTER 1 STRATIFICATION AND PRIVILEGE**

In this chapter I will study how privilege in the narratives of Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega determines relationships between the various characters, the identity or identities assigned to them as well as those that they themselves derive from their particular positional and relational notions of privilege. The chapter will focus on some of the colonial dynamics which cause the protagonists to internalize and identify with the colonial mentality to the point where they protect and perpetuate the very oppressive systems and relationships of which they are victims. I will also show how the subaltern/colonial subject sometimes uses subversive tactics in order to manipulate the power inherent in the colonizer's privilege. Such analysis will bring forth questions relating to the subaltern/colonized as they relate to feminist theories and practice in Latin America. I will also examine the objectivity and validity of traditional historiography, and call into question issues of voice and agency among the colonized.

When observing relationships between the colonizer and the colonized with regard to national and individual identities, we must raise the question of privilege as a fundamental element from which all interactions and mutual

perceptions derive. Privilege rests on the premise that the colonial subject's identity has to be formed and manipulated to fit the official culture, discourse, and *Weltanschauung* of the colonizer so as to develop in the subject a feeling of acceptance of the colonial system as something given and natural, if not of divine origin. The notion of privilege or profit in a colonial society belongs to the colonizers who enjoy their comforts and advantages at the expense of the colonized.

In Latin America, privilege is recognized and allotted to the individual according to traditional hierarchical structures. These structures may be built on complex criteria that take into account such factors as economics, gender, race, shades of skin color, and lineage. Once the colonial subject has internalized a colonial identity and a society's hierarchical structures, s/he tends to reproduce these models throughout all aspects of life so as to create microcosms that mirror the basic societal model.

Thus, hierarchy is not just an artificial and conscious means of accessing and distributing power, but a way of understanding reality. Hierarchy is, then, a model recreated at all levels of society and in all sorts of units, from the ruling class of society down to the individual family. Such a model is present as well in the family units at the base

of the hierarchical pyramid. As such, these pyramidal structures may become an entanglement and/or overlapping of pyramids; an individual who stands at the base of one particular pyramid may be at the top of another one. For example, the mother/wife of a bourgeois family who stands at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid in relation to her husband, older sons, parents, male relatives and in-laws may at the same time stand on top of a pyramid in relation to her younger sons, daughters, servants, and to everyone of lower social status. This entanglement of pyramids continues *ad infinitum*, for the daughter may enjoy a privileged position within a particular pyramid that may include younger siblings, servants, and other families. Even the servants reproduce the same structure within their own families.

The Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos illustrates the distribution of power from the most privileged of settings down to the Mexican Indian family, which in her stories usually stands at the bottom of the societal structure.<sup>4</sup> Her work depicts the dominant culture's process of identity-making which "... is the process by which groups, movements, institutions, try to locate us for the purpose of regulating resources away from us" (Stuart Hall 130) and in which the

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See for instance, Oficio de tinieblas, and Balún Canán.

notion of privilege is crucial. It is central in the process of the adoption of identities and the image of self that colonial subjects hold.

As the fiction under discussion exemplifies, colonized groups such as women, slaves, servants, and children are defenders, enforcers, and facilitators of the colonial system and its oppressive practices--the very system that victimizes them. In the writings of Rosario Ferré, Ana Lydia Vega, and Julia Alvarez, the questions of class and privilege arise as central themes. The bourgeois and petit bourgeois societies of the Dominican Republic during and after the Trujillo regime and of Puerto Rico after independence from Spain, are recreated in some of their narratives. One of the novels also deals with the petit bourgeois' feeling of displacement after being forced to emigrate to the United States. Three works in particular, albeit critical of the injustice and hypocrisy of the world they describe, view their societies also with the nostalgic gaze of one contemplating something already gone or on the verge of extinction: In the Time of the Butterflies,<sup>5</sup> How

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Julia Alvarez. In the Time of the Butterflies. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1994. Further reference to this work will appear within the text as Butterflies.

the García Girls Lost Their Accents,<sup>6</sup> and The House on the Lagoon.<sup>7</sup>

"El baúl de Miss Florence"<sup>8</sup>, in Falsas crónicas del sur, takes place also in such a bourgeois setting, but the author's gaze is ironically unsympathetic to the bourgeois attitudes of the story's protagonists. Vega ridicules the narrator because she tries to emulate the life led by the protagonists of romance novels. Like them, Miss Florence spends her entire life waiting for her prince. She is faithful to Mr. Lind's memory; a sad phantom; a shadow that once inhabited her nightmares and feverish dreams. His purported attraction to her outside of her dreams was, at best, an equivocal game of gestures, gazes, and insinuations in her sad life. But Susan Lind is the character most criticized in this novel because, despite her awareness of her position as an oppressed woman, an awareness gained from reading about feminism, she remains silent and mortgages her freedom and voice in order to cling to her privileged

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\_\_\_\_\_. Alvarez. How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1991. Further references to this work will appear within the text as GG.

7

Rosario Ferré. The House on the Lagoon. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1995. Further reference to this work will appear within the text as HOL.

8

Ana Lydia Vega. "En el baúl de Ms. Florence" in Falsas crónicas del sur. Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1991. Further reference to this short story will appear within the text as "EBDMF".

status.

All four novels deal with families that enjoy financial success, a high social status within their communities, and privileges derived from their position. Ferré's and Vega's narratives picture a world of opulence, excesses of power and luxury that border on decadence. In Alvarez' fictional universes the opulence is not as decadent as the one described by the Puerto Rican writers, yet they all take issue with the notion of privilege inherent in their societies and explore the tensions, changes, injustices, and the nature of this privilege at a national, social, and individual level. Although they do not deal exclusively with the situation of women, these works reflect, explore, denounce, and demythify women's role, both as victims and victimizers, and their societies' understanding of privilege.

Yet the relativity of privilege becomes obvious in the narratives. On the one hand, it is clear that privilege, as a way of viewing and sifting through reality, is a model which has been internalized by the oppressed, whose parameters and divisiveness trickle all the way down to the bottom of society's hierarchical structure. On the other hand, the adoption, defense, and support of colonialist practices, as Memmi notes, is not merely the result of

internalizing social models. It also occurs because the colonized, as oppressed as s/he may be, "benefits from [this colonial system] to some extent" (Memmi 11). Thus, Petra in The House on the Lagoon stands at the bottom of the Mendizábal family's pyramid along with the rest of the servants (a fact which is clearly symbolized by the labyrinth-like cellars in which they live beneath the main house) but tops her own family's hierarchical structure, as well as those of the community of blacks and servants. She is in charge of the rest of the servants and exerts authority over them. Since it is up to her to hire the help, she exercises her authority by choosing those who come to serve at the main house. Because of this privilege she enjoys, her family must show respect to her at all times. She advises them on how to behave among the masters, asks them to be silent in the face of injustice and/or mistreatment and bids them to be obedient and attend devotedly to their masters' needs and desires. Thus, she can be said to be an agent of colonialist practices, perpetuating and defending the very system that oppresses her and her people.

Bela performs a similar role in "El baúl de Miss Florence" (although she is not as strongly developed a character as Petra) and so does Chucha in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. Interestingly enough, Chucha's

character is more overtly subversive and complex than Bela's and Petra's for, like them, she is an agent for the oppressive system, but in a contradictory way. Chucha's agency is realized by subverting the official culture. That is, she protects her masters in her own way, according to her own culture and religion: she spreads protective spells and concoctions all over the house despite direct orders to keep her magic away from the house and also despite the fact that African culture is mocked, devalued, and rejected:

Chucha always had a voodoo job going, some spell she was casting or spirit she was courting or enemy she was punishing. I mean, you'd open a closet door, and there, in the corner behind your shoes, would sit a jar of something wicked that you weren't supposed to touch. Or you'd find a candle burning in her room right in front of someone's picture and a little dish with a cigar on it and red and white crepe streamers on certain days crisscrossing her room. (GG 219)

Having become aware of her inferior position as a maid within the master's family--and her potentially lower status among the rest of the mestizo servants because of her African roots and her status as a Haitian foreigner--Chucha resorts to tactics similar to the ones Josefina Ludmer calls "Las tretas del débil" (47-54). Chucha's strategy for the manipulation of privilege consists of reinforcing, accepting, and acting out the stereotypes assigned to her. Thus, she uses her magic and concoctions in order to consolidate a position of power in relation to the rest of

the maids and as a way of manipulating her masters into granting her requests. Through scare tactics derived from her magic and the assertion of her roots, she is able to negotiate some space for herself, thus compensating for her minority status as a black Haitian immigrant woman who is ethnically different from everyone else in the house. By using to her own advantage the stereotypical image of Haitians as evil voodoo practitioners and witches, she is able to make a statement, solidify some sense of power, and get herself some room. As such, the markings that identify her as different and which cause her to be discriminated against are turned into weapons against her oppressors:

Mami finally had to give her a room to herself because none of the other maids wanted to sleep with her[...] The maids said she got mounted by spirits. They said she cast spells on them. (GG 219)

Within the constraints of discrimination and the prejudicial identities assigned to them, servants may be able, at times--as Chucha's example shows--to use these identities to their advantage in order to transform, subvert, and negotiate. At other times, they remain agents of the system because, as colonial subjects, they have internalized and identified with a colonial or imperialist system which has used white and male values to set societal standards of culture, identity, and acceptable behavior.

This sort of identification with the colonial

mentality, also includes another traditionally oppressed group: women, particularly in their roles as wives and mothers. As noted by Chevigny, "often, of course, the mother is an agent, complicit or reluctant, of patriarchy" (148). This is a behavior similar to the role of the main servants who protect the system that victimizes them and, in turn, become, to a greater or lesser degree, victimizers themselves. Whereas the black servants and slaves in these narratives don't abuse their higher position relative to other slaves and servants--as some Mexican Indians do in the fiction of Rosario Castellanos, for instance--wives and mothers, may do so in more or less hideous ways, depending on the character.

Thus, Mercedes, in In the Time of the Butterflies, is a traditional wife and mother who expects her daughters to follow the traditional role of women as she and her mother before her have done. This she does without questioning the fact that her daughters, most likely, will have no say in the running of their lives and finances. Like her, probably, after years of sacrificing themselves to their husbands, they may have to face the pain, humiliation, and disrespect of their husbands' betrayal with another woman--who in Mercedes' case, adding to her anger and pain--is a woman from the lowest stratum.

Laura, in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, has similar expectations of her daughters, but her unfair treatment of a maid suspected of theft exposes her callous abuse of the power she holds. After it becomes clear that the maid never stole anything, Laura, fearing loss of authority, still fires her because supposedly they could no longer trust her.

Still another facilitator/victimizer is Rebeca in The House on the Lagoon. She has been broken like a rag doll by Mendizábal who finally succeeds in vanquishing her will for personal freedom, after her numerous attempts to assert her desire to be a poet and a dancer. Bitter and resentful, her way of asserting herself as an individual, of getting back at her husband, and of engaging in a subversive behavior is embracing what is expected from her to the point of exaggeration:

It was almost as if, taking her penance to heart, Rebecca was determined to prove she had more willpower than anyone else. One can be a rebel by being obedient; in fact, absolute obedience can be the most perfect kind of rebellion, as saints who embraced the hairshirt under silk garments discovered long ago. (HOL 119)

She illustrates, by means of hyperbole, the absurdity and unfairness of what is imposed on her. Her hyperbolic gesture extends to her emulating, and at times, surpassing Mendizábal in her abuse of power. Rebeca becomes a

capricious tyrant to her children, and servants, particularly Petra, whose strength and closeness to Mendizábal she resents. She adopts the role of the beautiful decorative doll (supportive of her husband's social and financial needs) with a vengeance. But in becoming a doll, she loses her conscience and humanity.

And as critical as Isabel wants to be of Rebeca, Mendizábal and Quintín's behavior, she does nothing to change their behavior or to stop their abuses. Although more sympathetic towards the lower and darkest classes, she is still quite at peace enjoying the fruits of her husband's chauvinistic, racist, elitist, and fratricidal practices as well as the services of all the servants living in the cellars beneath her house. Her quest for justice and her efforts to terminate the authoritarian and patriarchal schema that oppress her are strictly personal motivations. It does not cross her mind to identify with others who, as women and as members of lower classes and different races, are experiencing her silence and lack of control of their lives. Her identity as a bourgeois white woman--and the privileges she derives from this position--preclude any possible identification with other oppressed individuals.

This type of stratification exposed by the narratives in question, whereby women are exploited and colonized by

other women, represents a pervasive and real problem in Latin America and will be further discussed in Chapter 3. Yet the relationship between feminism and privilege is pertinent at this point and perhaps one of the reasons why many writers are reluctant to see themselves as or to be called feminists. This is so not only because of the prejudiced, chauvinistic view which qualifies feminists as homosexuals, communists, and carriers of other evils against culture, family, and society in general, but because of the implications of traditional Western feminism which is seen as mainly concerning itself with privileged women while ignoring other groups oppressed by reasons of gender, sexuality or class. Besides, the question of whether feminism can accomplish any sort of change in this situation presents a problem because of the antithetical character of the idea of feminism in Latin American societies. It is antithetical because the notion of feminism bears the mark of colonialism and imperialism at two levels. First of all, once one places feminism within Latin America's stratified societies, one has to ask who is speaking, acting, writing on feminism and what makes it possible for her to do so. One must ask who, in this case, is taking woman as a category and ascribing primordial identities as ways of effecting political action but ignoring the different claims to knowledge and alternative modes of resistance of the other groups of women whose ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality

are different. The answer, most likely, will be that it is the privileged who are writing, speaking, and furthering feminist thought in Latin America.<sup>9</sup>

Although with time and more consciousness-raising these societies may eventually benefit from feminism, the fact remains that presently quite a few writers in Latin America are women of means. They have the money to pursue an education, to travel, and to be in touch with other cultures, other approaches to life and culture. In addition, the economic advantages of some of these writers liberate them not only from hard labor, but also from traditional female domestic responsibilities which are taken over by hired female help. Thus, the ability to write and to be a thinker in Latin America rests, for the most part, on privilege, and on the shoulders of the people on the bottom of the pyramid. Guilt, then, as pointed out by Trinh Minh-ha, may be one of the common denominators of Third World women writing(6-11), precisely because it is privilege--privilege that rests on the shoulders of the oppressed--that gives them the opportunity to make their voices heard and allows them to realize themselves as more complete human

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9

Issues of ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality have begun to be addressed by North American feminism as well as by political and social international feminism, but the traditional disregard for these issues is still present in the agendas of the literary and aesthetic elites of liberal bourgeois feminism which in Latin America is still the most visible movement.

beings.<sup>10</sup>

If we accept the premise that stratification is not an artificial socioeconomic schema, but an intrinsic element of culture and of its vision and understanding of reality, then the question arises, who would feminism in Latin American work for? This question has been raised by women of lower strata who may have been brought into the debate of women's liberation via workers' rights movements, the search for the 'desaparecidos' (a phenomenon unfortunately not limited only to Argentina), or the rural violence brought to the countryside by the military and the guerrillas. Domitila Barrios de Chungara, for instance, asks the chair of the Mexican delegation to the Steering Committee of the International Year of the Woman:

Señora, hace una semana que yo la conozco a usted. Cada mañana llega usted con un traje diferente; y sin embargo, yo no. Cada día llega usted pintada y peinada como quien tiene tiempo de pasar en una peluquería bien elegante y puede gastar buena plata en eso; y, sin embargo, yo no. Yo veo que usted tiene cada tarde un chofer en un carro esperándola a la puerta de este local para recogerla a su casa; y, sin embargo,

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Although the lives and experiences of women like Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios de Chungara, could be seen as examples of non-privileged women writers, the fact remains that their voices and experiences were not written by them, at least not originally and therefore lack the unadulterated sharpness of an authentic utterance void of the filters and 'translations' of the scribes. Their lives were recorded by women who fit into the privileged women writers' mold: an anthropologist and a journalist. See, for instance, Debra Castillo's observations on the subject in her Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism, p. 27, as well as Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal, "Spanish American Ethnobiography and the Slave Narrative Tradition: *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*." Modern Language Studies 20 (1990), pp. 100-110.

yo no. Y para presentarse aquí como se presenta, estoy segura de que usted vive en una vivienda bien elegante, en un barrio también elegante, ¿no? Y, sin embargo, nosotras las mujeres de los mineros, tenemos solamente una pequeña vivienda prestada y cuando se muere nuestro esposo o se enferma o lo retiran de la empresa, tenemos noventa días para abandonar la vivienda y estamos en la calle.

Ahora, señora, dígame: ¿tiene usted algo semejante a mi situación? ¿Tengo yo algo semejante a su situación de usted? Entonces, ¿de qué igualdad vamos a hablar entre nosotras? ¿Si usted y yo no nos parecemos, si usted y yo somos tan diferentes? Nosotras no podemos, en este momento, ser iguales, aun como mujeres. (Quoted in Castillo 13-14)

The above quote is a direct quotation of Domitila and can be considered her unadulterated voice--unlike what has been pointed out on footnote number 10--because it lacks, among other things, the organizational selectivity required when a writer weaves the content of a biography. Domitila's comments signal the fact that feminism can become a conversation among the elite and be further reduced to a discussion among women writers of the elite, thus rendering it a dialogue that remains within that particular circle. But, as Kaminsky asserts in her book Body Politic, the political and the personal; the political and the individual body are so intermingled in Latin America that it is a solipsistic, narcissistic, and unconscious endeavor for any theory of liberation not to involve the poor, regardless of gender, race, and ethnicity. (15)

Yet, given the privileged status of those working on

feminist issues in Latin America, even if the feminist agenda were more inclusive of the groups above mentioned, there still remain questions of the authenticity of the female voices of different races and socio-economic strata. As problematic and/or debilitating to feminism as this issue may be, as suggested by Sara Sureli, the question is still pertinent:

The claim to authenticity -only a black can speak for a black; only a postcolonial subcontinental feminist can adequately represent the lived experience of that culture- points to the great difficulty posited by the 'authenticity' of female racial voices in the great game that claims to be the first narrative of what the ethnically constructed woman is deemed to want. (275)

Besides, there remains another question: can or is one willing to argue, struggle for, and defend the poor when doing so may mean losing one's privileged position?

This issue becomes evident in the works of the three writers here discussed. In The House on the Lagoon, Isabel's grandmother, Gabriela, is described as a proto-feminist. After having discerned that childbearing enslaves women, for "babies are a powerful link in the iron chain with which men tie women down and make them their prisoners" (HOL 85), she refuses to make love to her husband. Yet, after deciding she does not want to have children and, despite her sexual desires and love for her husband, she is only too happy to have her husband relieve his sexual desires with other women

of black and mestizo background. Taking control over her reproductive options, means that other women suffer the consequences of being not only stigmatized by being a married man's sexual toy, but burdened by the illegitimate children her husband begets everywhere, not to mention the dubious future of these children given their illegitimate status--despite the Antonsanti last name--and mixed blood. Her assertion as an individual and the preservation of the privileges that she derives from being Don Vincenzo Antonsanti's wife are thus achieved, and rest on the shoulders of less privileged women:

Soon both of Abuelo's mistresses became pregnant. Abuela was so relieved that it was someone else's task to give birth, nourish, and bring up the new babies that she gave them both her blessings. (HOL 84)

When the grandmother argues that women need to take control of their lives, she doesn't mean every woman, only the ones that matter: the women from the elite, like her daughter and granddaughters. The rights of the slaves and servants obviously don't even enter her mind.

The narrator takes a similar approach. Writing in search of herself, her voice, her independence from a marriage that has imprisoned her for so many years, Isabel is able to do so thanks to the servants she has to relieve her from domestic duties. She had to stop writing and her novel sat abandoned for a while because after Petra died,

she "could only get part-time help [and] the new women who came to work during the day were not dependable; [she] had to do half of the work at the house... (HOL 398) Her example illustrates her inability or unwillingness to speak for the subaltern. It also shows how the system of hierarchy and privilege is so deeply ingrained in Isabel that she fails to take note of the elitist, racist nature of her remark. She never questions her right to her privileges, on whose shoulders they rest, or the fact that it is precisely those privileges that grant her the opportunity to explore her rights as a woman. This inherent contradiction in her beliefs was mockingly pointed out by Coral:

I know all about you, Isabel and your `liberal' ideas. Manuel talks about them all the time. But this house, the life you lead, is a complete contradiction of them [...] you're nothing but a sellout and a sham. (HOL 353)

Similarly, Laura, the García Girls' mother, does not question her somewhat free existence while living in the Dominican Republic with her horde of servants, nor does the family include defense of the poor or the rights of women in their subversive activities on behalf of democracy. When achieved, this would be--and indeed becomes--a democracy that would not dislocate the family's previous privileged economic position in the Dominican Republic, as evidenced by the fact that the relatives they left behind still enjoy a high economic and social status. This democracy would not

challenge the position of superiority of males over women, nor that of the lighter population over the darker. For the Garcías, the loss of these privileges once living as refugees in the United States, creates the nostalgic gaze of the narrator as she revisits the past. It also becomes one of the many factors which make their adjustment to the new society more difficult, as Sandi discovered the night of the outing with the Fannings:

Sandi realized with a pang one of the things that had been missing in the last few months. It was precisely this kind of special attention paid to them. At home there had always been a chauffeur opening a car door or a gardener tipping his hat and a half a dozen maids and nursemaids acting as if the health and well-being of the de la Torre-García children were of wide public concern. (GG 174)

This loss of privilege also causes the mother to try to invent things that would bring her the notoriety that she had been accustomed to in the Dominican Republic, the place of importance that she enjoyed there:

She needed that acknowledgment. It had come to her automatically in the old country from being a de la Torre [...] But the blank smiles [of the North Americans] had never heard of her name. She would show them. She would prove to these Americans what a smart woman could do with a pencil and pad. (GG 139)

Her attitude, of course, is also reminiscent of the colonial subject's need to imitate the colonizer, and to prove his/her worth to him/herself by dispelling notions of laziness, inferior intellect which colonial, imperialist

systems hold of the colonized as a means of justifying and legitimizing their control, oppression, and paternalism.

Underlying and woven within the main theme in In the Time of the Butterflies is the question of privilege; of woman's role and position in the Dominican Republic prior and during Trujillo's time. While the Mirabals are not as affluent as Yoyo's family in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, the basic stratified structure prevails in this rural community. The Mirabal family is a petit bourgeois landowning family with the male at the head and center of it--so much so, that the crisis within the family is sparked by the fact that he has been unsuccessful at conceiving a boy. Four girls will inherit the family's name and assets. Searching for the proverbial boy, and taking advantage of his privileged status, the father develops a relationship with a poor woman--who only bears girls as well. He keeps her and their children living in the most abject misery, hidden in a corner of his land, without access to education or to any of the privileges that his legitimate children enjoy, despite the fact that money is not lacking. The situation of women in this novel is like the traditional one seen in the other narratives, with the added and obvious statement that women without men in the family are unacceptable and represent a disgrace to the husband. The man's inability to father boys is blamed on the women and

accepted by them as another one of the traditional deficiencies that plague women when compared to men -by men- within patriarchal models of what it means to be a human being. These values are made obvious by Laura's apologetic explanation: "I can't help it, Lolo, they come out girls"(GG 58). Paradoxically, because the lack of male descent is an affront to the father, he appropriates this lack in order to save face and to deny woman's participation in his shame. Thus, he adopts a "sour grapes" approach by saying "Good bulls sire cows".

Infidelity is culturally an 'acceptable' or, at the very least, an 'expected' practice on the part of men. This does not mean that women don't hurt when they discover their husbands' disloyalty. What seems to enrage most of the women in these narratives is not the betrayal itself, but, as in the case of Laura, Mercedes, and Isabel, the fact that 'the other woman' belongs to the lower class. Thus, Mercedes' assertion of her rights as a woman and legitimate wife stems from finding out about her husband's infidelity. She empowers herself by having 'the other woman' thrown out of their land, without concerning herself about the woman and her illegitimate children's well-being. Nor does she care that her husband abused his privileged position. As a woman, herself victimized like this illegitimate lover, and as a mother, she fails to show solidarity for her partner in

oppression and victimization.<sup>11</sup> It will be up to Minerva, her oldest daughter, to see beyond the stratification and society's prejudicial double standards, to understand that it is the father who is truly at fault here and who should be punished. It becomes evident to her that the lover is like many women in that society, another victim who needs respect and help for her and her girls in order to become self-sufficient and to break away from the circle of oppression she is trapped in because of ignorance and poverty. Minerva's financial help, without her family's knowledge, so that her half-sisters acquire an education, is one of the ways in which she subverts and reinterprets women's role in society. One of these sisters will become a pharmacist and become instrumental in her fight against Trujillo's regime in one of Minerva's most vulnerable, lonely, and difficult hours.

Minerva's attitude towards her father's lover and her half-sisters brings to mind some of the questions of quasi-paternalism or "maternalism"--as well as some concerning the subaltern's voice--that plague feminist thought in Latin America. Minerva does not stand up to speak and fight for these women's rights to education and equal opportunity; she

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Ferré poignantly develops the subject of the legitimate wife and the 'other woman' both fighting each other for the favor of the male, instead of realizing that they are both one and the same inasmuch as both of them are being victimized by the male in her short story "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres" in Papeles de Pandora. México: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz S.A., 1976.

is instrumental in their search for their own goals and their being able to conduct their lives according to their better judgment. One could reproach her for not having come into the open with her act of solidarity and for not having recognized her half-sisters' right to their inheritance. Yet Despite her limitations, Minerva tries to enable them to acquire voices of their own, rather than claiming for herself the right to speak and act for the subaltern as is the case and the attitude of many feminists and writers who see themselves as the voice of those who have none.<sup>12</sup>

Minerva is a classic feminist inasmuch as she becomes aware of and denounces her marginal position as a woman within the patriarchal society she lives in. Yet her feminism exhibits a more comprehensive embrace--unlike Isabel's, Yoyo's, and Ms. Lind's--since her struggle does not stop at the level of her personal liberation, but includes the poor and the oppressed in her society. Nonetheless, her struggle rests on privilege: the privilege that allowed her to attend Law School and to socialize with Trujillo and the Dominican elite. Her struggle is one for

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This has been classically the image of the poet and writer. They are the mouthpiece of the less fortunate ones. They are the chosen vehicles through which inspiration, the muses, etc., chose to manifest themselves. They possess the unique sensibility and ability to express what the rest of us lack the ability to do. Besides the arrogance of such a position is the fact that the subalterns do have a voice, they do have the ability to think and to understand their unfavorable situation; they just don't have access, many times, to the official voice, the official discourse and media granted to the educated, the literate, and the elite.

justice, fairness, and dignity to the best of her ability within the historical and societal parameters she is in, independent of race, gender or color. This is not to say that her stance is clear and unproblematic. She fights against the traditional, against the way she has been brought up which, despite her rebellion, still pulls at her and marks her decisions. Since very young she rebels against her father, questions religious authority, even challenges and symbolically attacks Trujillo at a school play. Yet the struggle between her traditional self and her rebellious one is always juggling for balance:

"All I knew was I was not falling in love, no matter how deserving I thought Lío was. So what? I'd argue with myself. What's more important, romance or revolution? But a little voice kept saying, *Both, both, I want both.* Back and forth my mind went, weaving a yes by night and unraveling it by day to a no. (Butterflies 86)

The tension between the traditional and what she understands as liberating, becomes apparent when her marriage starts to crumble, a victim of the typical predicament: her husband is having an affair.

At this point her verbal, personal and theoretical approach to the cause of liberation becomes pragmatic. The time and economic solvency that she enjoys, allow her to join her husband's armed struggle to overthrow Trujillo's regime. This joint struggle brings her close again to her husband and since it saves her marriage, she embraces the

struggle with more fortitude and conviction than she might have done otherwise. Her privileged position exposes her to the ideologies of liberation during her career in jurisprudence. Yet, despite her progressive thinking, it is clear that there are stereotypical elements of the traditional behavior of women here. Does she join the rebel movement because she is following on her husband's footsteps and wants to save her marriage or does she do it out of personal conviction? The tension between the personal, the traditional, and the civic merge here in armed struggle; and one may venture that the answer is probably a combination of the two. Her struggle to balance the ideological and the pragmatic aspects of the theory of liberation in combination with her perspective as a woman who still cares about her marriage, husband, and child, causes critics like Roberto González Echevarría to perceive her role, and that of her sisters in the struggle for the liberation of their country, as "reactive and passive" and lacking "any deeply felt or intellectually justified commitment."

There is no question that besides the Mirabals' knowledge that Trujillo's murderous and lecherous excesses and abuses were intolerable, the final catalyst for their taking part in the armed struggle is their family. Mate joins after she finds out that the man she has fallen in love with is a rebel, and Patria helps found the 14<sup>th</sup> of June

Movement after she sees a boy--who as she claims could have been her own--shot in the back by military troops. Yet both of their decisions to join the rebels' cause required a great deal of courage and defiance given their gentle characters, their naivete, their love for their children and fear of what might happen to them should they die. In Patria's case the decision to join the struggle against Trujillo clashes with her religious beliefs. These women risk a loss of status, respectability, and the degree of protection that their privileged position ensured them. Like Dedé, they could have chosen to bury their heads in the sand and decide "not to read the papers anymore. They were turning her upside down inside." (Butterflies 78) Like her, they could have refused to become involved in the struggle because of the conflict this might have brought, in the face of their husbands' prohibitions, or fenced themselves behind the religious ready-made phrase that the "Lord will provide" or that "He works in mysterious ways." Quite the contrary, Patria even rebels against God and what she perceives as His indifference towards the suffering of her people. She implicitly condemns and questions His judgment:

I'm not going to sit back and watch my babies die,  
Lord, even if that's what You in Your great wisdom  
decide. (Butterflies 162)

What González Echevarría finds objectionable is the fact that the Mirabals' commitment to the struggle was prompted by more immediate factors like the killing of children and

"Trujillo's intolerable wickedness", rather than by more masculine abstract and intellectual reasons. As Gene Brown's editorial response to González Echevarría notes, his "sense of the connection between life and politics [...] should be questioned. And his suggestion of what constitutes the roots of authentic political commitment sounds gender-limited."

The Mirabals' commitment, then, can be seen as an all-encompassing feminism which is inclusive and very courageous. It is harder to go against the feelings they faced--thanks to the way they were educated--and still join a war, than it is to defend a country, because it is expected from you as a man. Women have to overcome a historical and cultural context that demands passivity and anonymity, which made the characters' decision to join in the struggle an agonizing and heart-wrenching one because they were faced with the possibility of separation from their family, particularly from their babies. In this respect, then, by virtue of crossing the boundaries circumscribed by privilege, their feminism, or proto-feminism, bears the seed of what some women writers and intellectuals in Latin America are beginning to conceive as elements of a kind of feminist theory that will address Latin American issues.

Indeed, the Mirabals' feminism, almost an autochthonous

and intuitive kind, is one that does not call attention to itself and does not place any labels on itself. Theirs is more representative of the sort of feminism that is more acceptable and less suspect in Latin America. Thus, when Minerva's mother reproaches her that "[she is] going to fight everyone's fight", Minerva answers: "It's all the same fight, Mamá." (Butterflies 108) This sort of feminism has everything to do with solidarity and humanity rather than with imported ideologies from Europe and the United States. It does not adopt theories and practices devised by the privileged for the privileged, or with paternalistic/maternalistic approaches to the subaltern-- when at all considered. Euro/Anglo feminism is not only suspect in Latin America because of the differences in cultures and sociopolitical structures of the societies in which these theories were developed, but also because the unquestioned adoption of foreign ideologies is reminiscent of imperialistic, colonialist, and paternalistic impositions on the Third World. Many of these theories not only do not address the needs of the majority of women in Latin America, they also create conflicting and irreconcilable contradictions brought about by the difference in cultures. They also may represent another dogma, another imprisoning structure by which one has to abide.

Ana Lydia Vega, for one, is skeptical of feminism on

several levels. In particular, she distrusts the restrictive, imposing, and self-righteous character of some feminist theories which depart very little, if at all, from the hierarchical, patriarchal structure of colonialist practices based on privilege. Guiomar in "Sobre tumbas y héroes", a Nuyorrican woman living in Puerto Rico, who seems to have a command of both languages and cultures, problematizes the possibility of feminism within her culture. Are the feminist ideas to which she has access compatible with the cultural codes with which she has been raised? Is it possible to obliterate this cultural code in favor of feminist, or for that matter, any other, ideology? At the risk of falling into deterministic speculations, the answer seems to be no; at least not without taking into account the contextual elements of the different communities. It is not possible to erase our past, to deny the cultural encoding within us. It is possible to try to alter and to consciously modify and change some circumstances and behavior, but quite a bit is left in the unconscious. As a result, Guiomar is an ambivalent character whose feminism seems to be more an intellectual pose than a belief that permeates every aspect of her life.

Although conscious of the pitfalls of adopting the traditional passive, anonymous, and disinterested (giving) behavior of women, Guiomar falls into it despite herself.

She postpones her research and studies for Manuel--whom she has just met--while rationalizing her inactivity as something she is doing for the sake of her country. Ironically, she has just regretted the unfair treatment of Puerto Rican women patriots thanks to the giving and anonymous nature of their contributions. Vega emphasizes the foreign nature of her feminism as it clashes with her culture by jumping into a code-switching mode between Spanish and English.

¿Qué se estará creyendo este tipo?, ruge su monólogo interior, si no es por Tío Virgilio ese research no da pie con bola, God, y pensar que yo no he vuelto a dar un tajo en el mío, pero *that's what we get* por pasarnos cosiendo banderas y cuidando enfermos para que ellos se queden a la larga con la gloria, *if you know what I mean...*

Sí, porque a Guiomar se le sube la niuyorricanidad cuando se enfogona. La niuyorricanidad y el feminismo, por si las dudas. Pero se tranquiliza con el eterno Todo Sea Por La Patria. Su maestría en Estudios Puertorriqueños tendrá que esperar y *That's all.*<sup>13</sup>

Desiring Manuel, she suppresses her libido and engages in the stereotypical sexual "hard-to-get" routine that is expected of her, only to later regret her inability to exercise her sexual freedom.

Anyway, confiesa *off-the-record* para consumo de potenciales cronistas, *it pisses me off* que un tipo me trate de yompear en horas de trabajo [...] Y de maldad, se duerme. (Pasión 123)

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Ana Lydia Vega. "Sobre tumbas y héroes (folletín de caballería boricua)" in Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1987., p.116. Further reference to short stories in this collection will appear within the text as Pasión.

The result of this suffusion of ideologies seems to be some sort of mixture of the two. Guiomar, like many of the characters of this study--Yoyo in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents and Isabel in The House on the Lagoon, Suzie Bermiudez in "Pollito Chicken" (Vírgenes 73-79)--is a plural subject. Different personalities flourish within her. The plural subject will be discussed in more detail later on.

Vega's "Ajustes S.A." (Pasión 39-53) exposes the concern expressed by some critics like Spivak that some sorts of feminism can be as chauvinistic and privilege-oriented as a male construct which hides its oppressive nature by giving women the illusion of control and personal freedom. Ajustes S.A. is an organization designed to save women from themselves. Its purpose is to destroy and dissolve women's marriages, even if these are happy, and the husbands are ideal mates. The point is that women, in order to be liberated, and feminists have to follow a specific set of rules which dictate that they cannot be married and free. The ironic twist at the end of the story is that the head of the organization is a man dressed up as a woman--the husband of the protagonist--who, in order to save the reputation of the organization, orders her execution and destruction of her file. This hilarious short story exposes the potential chauvinism hiding behind feminist discourse and ideology for

as Vega says: "...la rebeldía de las mujeres contra un orden social aplastante se convierte a veces en un revanchismo tan machista como su causa directa."<sup>14</sup>

The mistrust that Vega shows towards any kind of totalizing and categoric affirmation, (Loló 43) which engenders more dogmas and straightjacketing structures, finds an echo in Ferré's The House on the Lagoon in the grandmother's proto-feminism. It also questions the validity and/or effectiveness of imposing one set of solutions over a different set of circumstances, time frame, and culture. Isabel's grandmother forces her daughter to have an abortion against her will in order to free her from the enslaving dangers of motherhood. With the best of intentions, and thanks to the intransigent nature of her beliefs, she destroys her daughter's life by imposing her solutions and by disregarding her daughter's wishes and her dignity as a human being. She never questions the arbitrariness and authoritarian nature of her 'liberating' acts on her daughter and rationalizes her actions by thinking that she will later thank her for them. The inherent question of some Latin American writers seems to be, given that we are the result of constrictive, authoritarian cultures, can we, by virtue of being aware of them, make a clean break from these

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Ana Lydia Vega. "Encuentro con el hombre lobo" in Esperando a Loló. San Juan: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994., p. 26. Further reference to essays in this collection will appear within the text as Loló.

structures and effect changes without emulating the totalitarian structures we are trying to escape? Also, from the stance of a privileged and/or hierarchically higher position, can/should one speak and decide for the subaltern?

One of the possible answers to this question is offered by Vega herself. She proposes that we pick and choose, adapt foreign ideologies to our needs, cultures, and ourselves, (Loló 35) always questioning everything, even our own beliefs. In "La Gurúa Talía: correo de San Valentín",<sup>15</sup> she exposes the oppression of the female by her male "comrade"/husband who supports his chauvinism behind what Vega calls "los mil proteicos disfraces del machismo-leninismo" (Loló 93). He prohibits her from doing anything that does not involve taking care of him. Thus wearing make-up and jeans is forbidden because they are "afeites y vestimentas extranjerizantes" ("Gurúa" 263). The wife is not even to peek out the balcony to avoid fostering "'...el machismo reaccionario' a los pupilos del hospedaje" ("Gurúa" 264). She is to sacrifice herself completely for the sake of her country so that her husband may become a defender of the proletariat. In reality, she becomes a prisoner in her own house while her husband enjoys the oppressive privileges of

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\_\_\_\_ Vega. "La gurúa Talía: correo de San Valentín" in El Tramo Ancla: ensayos puertorriqueños de hoy. Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico., 1988. pp. 262-268. Further reference to this work will appear in the text as "Gurúa".

the typical male chauvinist husband while hiding behind a Marxist-Leninist rhetoric.

The narrator's solution to this woman's subjection is for her to leave the man and his "neo-machismo" which deforms and manipulates any revolutionary thesis to please his own purposes. The main point is that the woman must remember that she should question any idea she comes across, that love is free, that an authentic revolution is a permanent adventure, but above all, that she should never mortgage her freedom to set her own standards to anyone: "No le hipotecas tu independencia de criterio a nadie" ("Gurúa" 267). Paradoxically, this advice is almost oxymoronic because its very premise is that it should not be taken at face value and, like everything else, should be questioned. This is the reason for the ironic and humorous ending of the story: once the protagonist has found her independence physically and intellectually, she comments on the advice that she has received from Gurúa Talía--and which has been instrumental in her gaining her voice--: "su tono tiende a ser un poco autoritario" ("Gurúa" 268).

In exploring the issue of race as a social determinant of privilege, the characters in Alvarez' fiction may suggest a less tyrannical race division in the Dominican Republic than that experienced in Puerto Rico, which might be

explained by those who claim that the Dominican Republic has a more mestizo population than Puerto Rico--a fact which by no means implies lack of racism in the Dominican Republic. All of these narratives describe the blatant racism that Latin American societies inherited from the Spanish colonizers, who used racism as a means of exerting their authority and keeping control over their colonized territories and their inhabitants. These are pigmentocratic societies where skin shades are as important as money.

Alvarez' narrations present mestizo characters who on more than one occasion suggest that the North Americans' white skin is less than attractive to them with comments like: "their pale look-alike pale bodies." (GG 164) Despite the size of the population of African descent in the Dominican Republic, the blacks in Alvarez' fiction are not viewed as Dominicans; they are Haitians. Haitians are the embodiment of the Other. They represent the hidden, the feared, the mysterious, exotic and somehow this otherness, identifiable by the deep blackness--Haitian blue-black, not Dominican *café-con-leche* black (GG 218)--justifies their social status as servants, as subaltern and dispossessed. Alvarez' novels mirror a society dominated by the light-skinned mestizos and the white-skinned foreigners, although there is also prejudice towards the white characters. Particularly in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents,

whites come across as condescending, authoritarian, reactionary, secretive, sexually deviant and just plain weird. Such is the case, for instance of the German music teacher and her husband, the sculptor of whores and virgins who was kept isolated and chained like a dog. The CIA fellow is a lecherous dilettante interested only in abusing the special status that his skin color and his foreign status grant him in the Dominican Republic while despoiling one of the country's `natural resources': its young women. The political implications and colonial symbolism of this character are obvious.

In the United States, the Fannings, the white North Americans who are supposed to be the father's benefactors in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, are also seen as hypocritically paternalistic, and willing to lend a hand only as a means of appearing self-important, of asserting their paternalistic superiority. The North American "benefactors" represent the typical colonizer because knowing that the Garcías depend on their approval of them, they don't mind insulting them by disregarding and mocking their cultural prejudices, stepping over their dignity, and enjoying their helplessness when they are unable to assert themselves. They know that the Garcías will not stand up against this humiliating treatment for fear of `offending' their benefactors and losing their only possible link to the

respectable position they used to enjoy in the Dominican Republic. The Fannings knew this family while they enjoyed the privileges and respect doctors receive in the Dominican Republic. As such, the Fannings become valuable for the Garcías' identities and sense of self-worth. They represent a validation of by-gone privilege; of their previous role as colonizers; of the status they used to possess and which ultimately defines their identities, self-respect and sense of dignity. The Garcías hope that the Fannings' privileged position in the United States will somehow aid in the recovery of their lost privilege, signifies an implicit understanding on both sides by which one side freely insults and denigrates while the other accepts and bows to the humiliation. This is a prime example of the relationship between colonizer and colonized and the acceptance of colonialist practices based on the opportunity to share the benefits enjoyed by the colonizer.

Contrary to Alvarez' characters, most of Ferré's and Vega's main characters are white and make a point of saying they are white. They try, even in the face of imminent tragedy and destruction, to protect their blood lines, i.e., the privilege that rests on their skin color. Thus Quintín tells his son:

You see this blood, Manuel? It doesn't have a drop of Arab, Jewish, or black blood in it. Thousands of people have died for it to stay

that way. We fought the Moors, and in 1492 we expelled them from Spain, together with Jews. When our ancestors came to this island, special books were set up to keep track of white marriages. They were set up to keep track of white marriages. They were called the Bloodline Books and were jealously guarded by the Church. (HOL 346)

For his part, Mr. Lind "no veía con buenos ojos las pretensiones de su hijo; no era lo mismo llevar amores a escondidas con las negras que querer casar con una mulata." ("EBDMF" 72) Ferré's description of many of her female characters and heroines as of alabaster skin borders on the cliché, perhaps as an ironic and implicit comment on Puerto Rico's preoccupation with race and lineage.

The white, Puerto Rican landowners of The House on the Lagoon and "El baúl de Miss Florence" perceive and keep the 'purity' of their blood as a family treasure for in great part, it is the base of their privileged position. As Bridget Brereton points out about race relations in Trinidad, "the essential points were racial purity and aristocratic traditions, marriage outside the group meant automatic loss of membership" (36). Both, The House on the Lagoon and "El baúl de Miss Florence" attest to the existence of the blood-lines books in Puerto Rico, kept by the Church, which traced the unmixed white blood of the inhabitants of the island so as to prevent any marriage that might stain the blood-lines of the parties involved. The

dynamic of the protection of the blood-lines, then, becomes the catalyst for both the foundation of the families described as well as for their destruction. In The House on the Lagoon Mendizábal, who came to the island with only the shirt on his back, is able to marry into the richest families of the island because of the color of his skin and his alleged Spanish heraldry. He is obviously Spanish and claims to be a direct descendant of Francisco Pizarro, the conqueror of Perú. This marriage would continue the sanitized fusion of white blood which would ensure the ruling power of the elite creoles who were as white as the 'conquistadores'--their only sin that of being born in the New World. Moreover, it would also add dignity and renown to the everlasting-thirst for aristocratic lineage of the elite creoles.

Ironically, both in The House on the Lagoon and in "El baúl de Miss Florence", this same intransigent view towards maintaining the purity of blood upon which power is anchored, becomes the destruction of both Mendizábal's and Mr. Lind's family. By denying their children unions with mulatto women, both men unchained the series of events that brought death and destruction to their legacy of power and abuse. Vega's short story varies only in that her white characters are not Spanish, but from the United States, for both stories exhibit similar types of prejudices and

hypocritical and abusive behavior relevant to black and mulatto women.

The double standard that privilege grants white colonialist men and which permeates these societies is in this case twofold. Not only are men the only ones allowed, and almost expected, to have extramarital relationships, but the racial prejudice that demands marital unions to be performed with a 'certified' white woman only, causes no problem in permitting unions with blacks and mulattos as long as they are only used for the purpose of sexual exploitation by privileged men. The mixed children born from these illicit unions, of course, are undesirable because of the compromising color of their skin, their illegitimate status, and their lack of economic means.

Black and mulatto women in the narratives, then, are not only victims of colonization as slaves, servants, and sexual toys of their male owners, servants and rivals of their mistresses, but of women of their own race. After having 'enjoyed' the attention of their masters, they now see themselves as deserving or participating in some of the privileges of the whites and expect subservience from the other black and mulatto women who had not been as 'lucky' as them as to have deserved the master's attention.

This brings us again into a dynamic of the victim as victimizer. The corollary of whites imposing their superiority, of justifying their privileges based on race and color is that the colonized internalizes and accepts such constructs of judgment as unquestionable and natural facts. They are alienated from their own skin and see themselves as inferior to the lighter skinned person. Not surprisingly one hears, even today, mothers telling their children that they ought to try to marry people of lighter skin so as to `better the race'. Even the illiterate women of the poorest of conditions have internalized such notions as Petra, Jesusa's sister in Poniatowska's Hasta no verte Jesús mío shows when explaining why she would not marry José: "Why the hell should I get married?[...] José is very short, very very short with fat pushed-out lips, and black as night; with him so black and me so dark, a fine pair of tadpoles we would of made" (Quoted in Chevigny 233).

This internalization of a devalued self determined by privilege and the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized, is evident when some of the black and mulatto women in these fictions feel proud to be the center of the white master's sexual interest and/or accept serving them as maids, but refuse to serve other black women. Bela in "En el baúl de Miss Florence", refuses to serve the mulatto woman that Mr. Lind brought to the house after the death of his

son by implying that serving whites is admissible for they are people, while blacks are nobodies: "...un buen día preparé mi lío de ropa y fui a colocarme en el pueblo. *Aquella negra no era quien para tenerme a mí de criada.*" ("EBDMF" 79, my emphasis).

Another facet of this devalued image of the self is the paralysis that results in contradictory, pluralistic constructions of the subject, in terms of both individual and national identities. At a national level, The House on the Lagoon, In the Time of the Butterflies, and How the García Girls Lost Their Accents express a nation's ambivalence--after being under colonialists, totalitarian or imperialist governments--between the search for and assertion of one's independence or accepting imperialist liberating intervention. The Dominican Republic in In the Time of the Butterflies is trying to determine whether it should wait for the CIA to help overthrow Trujillo--who had U.S. support for most of the time of his regime--or to take matters into their own hands and stage their own coup d'etat. The Mirabal sisters and their group opt for the latter. Others, like Dedé are paralyzed, although deeply troubled by the alternatives in front of her, while other dissidents decide to wait for the CIA to intervene.

The House on the Lagoon also explores the issue of

Puerto Rico's independence. The novel starts at the time the United States grants citizenship to Puerto Ricans, re-writes some historical aspects of Puerto Rico's existence under the Spanish colonial regime, and ends with the choice the country must make between independence, statehood, or commonwealth. For the privileged, independence is problematic on at least two levels. On the one hand, the great fear that afflicts the elite is their possible loss of status and political and economic control should the country become independent. On the other hand is the example of most Latin American countries, which after their wars of independence, inexperienced as they were in self-government and attempting to follow the example of a colonial totalitarian government, were ruled by chaos and ultimately dictators. And of course, there is the knowledge that, given their present colonial status, which has kept capital and economic development out of the island, independence would bring with it great economic distress. Ferré's La batalla de las vírgenes<sup>16</sup> illustrates this latter point both at a personal and a national level. Mariana, the protagonist--who could be seen as symbolizing Puerto Rico--denies her Puerto Rican roots, as typically the colonized will do, and then imitates and adopts the colonizer's "elevated world". (Memmi

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\_\_\_\_ Ferré. La batalla de las vírgenes. Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993. Further reference to this work will appear within the text as Batalla.

13) She thus tries to live both in Spain and in the elitist and Americanized culture of Puerto Rico. She eventually opts to return to her country, to find her roots, and to validate them by living a life according to what she perceives as authentic and more native to her country. She attempts to live her life according to her own criteria of fairness and morals but with disastrous results. The almost insurmountable barriers facing both the nation and its women in their search for their identities and freedom are made apparent by the case of Mariana in La batalla de las vírgenes.

Isabel, one of the narrators in The House on the Lagoon, is also looking for her voice, the identity that, despite her relative position of privilege, she has slowly lost while married to Quintín. Although a college graduate, highly educated and more aware perhaps than most of the characters in the novel of the unfairness and oppressive nature of her family, she is an ambivalent character for--as noted earlier--she refuses to stand up against the injustices she witnesses. What may be interpreted as an act of assertion when she makes her husband take in the illegitimate child he begot is, in reality, an act of vengeance and a kind of punishment. His having to adopt a mulatto child and have him share equally with his white child, and to face the humiliation of the public outcry over

this, is punishment enough. This suffices to subdue Isabel's anger over her husband's rape of a black girl; at least in this way she does not jeopardize her privileged position as Quintín Mendizábal's wife. This is the attitude that she holds throughout the novel. Although critical of Quintín's actions, she dares not contradict or oppose him. The fact remains that she is quite ambivalent about defending her voice, her right to be herself, and to denounce and/or reject the injustices from which she has derived her privilege. She doesn't even stand up for her son when Quintín decides to throw him out of the house because of his relationship with a mulatto woman. She doesn't dare to threaten her position, not even for what is most dear to her: her son. To use Ana Lydia Vega's term, she mortgages her conscience in exchange for her privilege. Despite her education, she fears independence from her master for up until now, like a colonial nation, she has depended on her husband's capital and on his management of her resources. Paralysis and fear overcome her when faced with the possibility of a life on her own. Even at the end of the novel, when she has found an instinctive strength to defend herself, she turns to her adopted son for anchorage. She says she does not know what would have become of her without him.

Similarly, Ms. Morse in "El baúl de Miss Florence" is

aware of the fact that hers is an abusive relationship. Her library and choice of reading attest to the fact that she is familiar with notions of women's oppression. Yet because of her diminished view of herself, her lack of an identity independent of a man, she stays in Lind's house. Like Isabel and Rebeca in The House on the Lagoon, she remains in the asphyxiating, and demoralizing existence with her husband to be relegated to a corner of the house like a pretty toy that brings respectability to her husband's name and house. Like them, Ms. Morse endures the humiliation of her husband's affairs with mulatto women, loses her son for not standing up to the racial double standards of her husband, and eventually loses her mind rather than step out of her husband's abusive and overpowering control.

As Florence says, Ms. Morse stays a prisoner by choice at Lind's estate, just as Florence herself does. The difference between Florence and Ms. Morse is that Florence chooses to remain in the Linds' house and to become one of those who feeds Mr. Lind's ego because she has fallen in love with him despite the fact that she is aware of his excesses and abusive behavior towards everyone he comes in contact with. She also is a victim of her culture; a culture that favors the notion of woman as portrayed in the novels of romance. She, an avid reader of this type of novel behaves like the forever-giving, forever-waiting heroine who

passively expects the male protagonist's approval, who blushes under his gaze, and who finds his chauvinism romantic, mysterious, and alluring. Vega parodies in this short story the ridiculous character of this view of love and the women's appropriate behavior as encouraged by novels of romance by having Florence give up her entire existence to solitude and sadness, while living off the illusion of the ghost of this man who hardly ever even speaks to her. After 30 years of sighing and devoting her life to his memory, she finds out that he has died many years ago, not without first destroying his life as well as those of his wife and son, thanks to his racist, intransigent, and abusive behavior.

Ms. Morse, on the other hand, mortgages her opinion and conscience for the privileges she enjoys. She accepts her husband's oppressive behavior and her subordinate and child-like position in relation to him for fear of losing her economic and social status. Symbolically, at least, this behavior is reminiscent of the fear dependent nations have of breaking away from the colonial/imperialist power. The colonial power has drained their resources and kept them in a state of dependency. Not equipped with the capital and/or know-how necessary to compete with the colonial power, and being circumscribed by the model of the colonial power, these societies develop an ambivalent and contradictory view

towards their masters. While thirsty for the self, for independence, they also fear what they stand to lose once the colonial power retreats.

Yet the attitude towards culture, towards what is its 'own' remains an ambivalent one in these writers. On the one hand, there is a genuine concern in terms of the cultures of less developed nations about being lost in the ever-reaching arm of technology and First World nations' imperialist efforts. This is the case particularly in Puerto Rico where attempts have been made to impose the culture and language of the United States while attempting to obliterate the island's language, history, and culture. Yet, although the defense of the culture is an essential part of the nationalism that rises out of what Memmi labels countermythology, (139) and a valid concern for countries with a neo-colonial status, the fact remains that culture and tradition are among the elements which are most constrictive in terms of women's rights and opportunities. Therein resides the ambivalent and problematic nature of culture in the writing of women.

Thus, while at times Alvarez and Ferré describe nostalgically the "golden age" of elite communities, interwoven with this feeling also are efforts to demythify and denounce women's role and position within these

societies. Thus, despite the fact that part of the search for the identity of oneself and of one's nation depends on the search for one's culture, this does not and should not imply that one ought to praise that culture blindly and overlook its shortcomings and the oppressive elements within it. Besides, Ana Lydia Vega seems to be wary of the possible entrapments of the myth-making of a national identity. Such 'myth-making' could become an essentializing effort that ignores and denies the plurality within the nation which is marked by issues of generation, race, class, sexuality, among others. Vega explains this point when answering critics and writers who seem to think that one of the 'duties' of Puerto Rican writers is to always write about and praise Puerto Rican culture:

¿Y si el machismo resultara ser uno de esos tan proclamados Valores Nacionales que todo escritor criollo debe defender so pena de dejar de serlo?  
¿Y si tus personajes masculinos son pobres-puertorriqueños-oprimidos-por-el-imperialismo-yanqui pero a la vez sinvergüenzas opresores de sus pobres-puertorriqueñas-oprimidas-por-el-imperialismo-yanqui-mujeres? (Loló 93)

The straightjacketing implications of such 'writers' duties' will be discussed in chapter III.

Along with culture, history is another one of the concerns of contemporary writers from nations stepping out of or still under colonial or imperialist influence. Part of the subversive gesture that seeks to establish an authentic

identity, is to re-write history, to contest the official history that has suppressed local history and along with it, the history of the women, the poor, and of the least favored races. Such a re-visionary approach is an effort to undermine the privilege of the colonizing culture of the male and to appropriate and turn official historical discourse on its head. The fictions of all three writers discussed here deal with history as one of their main thematic concerns. Vega calls this "furor historizante", (Loló 104) but although critical of this latest literary `fashion', she is lured by the temptation and the need to fill in the blanks and to give voice to the silences left by official history. All three, Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega are concerned with the re-writing of history from the perspective of women and/or the dispossessed, but mainly, from women's perspective. As such, they are not interested in writing history following canonical models set out by traditional patriarchal discourse.

Thus, Alvarez in In the Time of the Butterflies is not only deconstructing and rewriting history from the point of view of a woman, but subverting the traditional notion of what is historically worthwhile to record, what it is important to fight, to go to war and to sacrifice for. In this sense, she also subverts what is traditionally understood as history, for history is not only made up of

dates, battles, and numbers. It also consists of the voice and vision of those who have been asked and forced to remain anonymous despite their role in struggles and in the accomplishment of changes. Since Alvarez' novel departs from the canon, from official history and discourse, the traditional reader is troubled by the fact that "the actual history in "In the Time of the Butterflies" is very blurry" (González Echevarría), as well as the fact that one "find(s) no connection between the specific dates Ms. Alvarez gives to mark periods in the Mirabals' lives and either Dominican or broader Latin American history" (González Echevarría). A case in point is that of Roberto González Echevarría himself who dismisses Alvarez's work as not serious for "serious historical fiction establishes links between individual destiny and pivotal political events." These authors' history contests notions of truth and exposes the fact that truth, like history, depends on the perspective and interest of the recorder. They contend that fiction and lies are necessary at times in order to re-create what actually took place. Vega theorizes thus on the subject:

Escribir podría ser, entonces, ese intento de armar el rompecabezas histórico, no precisamente en los archivos ni en las estadísticas, sino desde la propia biografía del escribiente, a través de los dramas vividos y los cuentos escuchados, en las memorias soñolientas que despiertan las voces y los objetos, en las imágenes del tiempo que cargan sin saberlo las palabras, en los baúles rebozantes de obsesiones

de nuestra propia fabulación. Si en el proceso de historiarse a sí mismo se pesca a ciegas alguna verdad objetiva; si por alguna juguetona casualidad en los trazos del cuento o los pliegos de la novela se cuelga también un pedazo de la época; si inclusive otros llegan a reclamar para sí ese berenjenal rescatado al olvido que encuadra el texto literario, es precisamente porque ni la ficción ni la historia son objetos ajenos a nuestras ordinarias vidas cotidianas. Estamos, como dice Manuel, pinchados entre las dos. Por eso, la historia que deseamos, que soñamos, que inventamos y falsificamos los escritores puede, de alguna extraña manera, colmar las expectativas de un público tan sediento de epopeya como privado de referencias historiográficas concretas. (Loló 105)

Julia Alvarez shares a similar opinion when she explains part of the process of writing about the Mirabal sisters:

What were their last thoughts on the mountain road? Why after she got out of the torture prison, was María Teresa a much more serious and grown-up woman? These were things I had to imagine and understand about them. Also, there were no records, just the stories. So that I realized even history is a fiction, ... (Koch)

Regarding the question of truth and fiction, she adds:

"there's a way in which a story lies and tells a deeper truth to me than the facts." This is so, because as she says: "in a story, you have to lie to tell the truth. You're trying to get at the truth of an experience, and sometimes the best way to get at that is not through the facts. The facts don't capture as much as the remaking and the recasting" (Hickey).

Notions of privilege and its different voices depending

on who holds it at a particular time, become evident when fiction and history come face to face in Ferré's The House on the Lagoon in the characters of Quintín and Isabel. She is a literature specialist, he a historian. Ferré, aware of the divergence of her version of history from the official history, has her characters confront each other over this issue. Quintín, voicing the objections of a traditional reader/critic, criticizes Isabel, in a mocking way, for her lack of accuracy in her dates and disputes the truthfulness of Isabel's accounts of the facts. As an implicit response, Ferré has Quintín offer his own version on the novel's margins in a dual effort to reverse the traditional role of history that places women on the margin, and as a way of making obvious the question of the relativity of truth depending on who is telling it. Her anachronisms allow her to better picture her people, her family, and the injustices they have been subjected to both as a nation under the rule of Spain and the United States, and as human beings crushed by a hierarchical, elitist, and racist society.

In the collection of stories in Falsas crónicas del sur, Vega explores different aspects of official history vis á vis the ignorance general among people of long-suppressed local history. She examines as well the selective action of official history when choosing what to record. With her book's title Vega emphasizes that the history in it is

false,<sup>17</sup> and then proceeds to demythify historical personalities of Puerto Rico. In "El baúl de Ms. Florence" she exposes the Lind family and Samuel Morse, to whom the town of Arroyo dedicated a street. In "Cupido y Clío en el Bazar Otero" (Falsas 151-161) she exposes traditional history's anonymization of women who fought side by side with male Puerto Rican patriots for the independence of Puerto Rico. She also revives less flattering incidents and characters of Puerto Rican history in "El regreso del héroe" (Falsas 123-134) and in "Cuaderno de bitácora" (Falsas 135-149). These stories offer the other side of the efforts to re-write, and dig up one's history. What should be done if one uncovers facts that are not exactly what one expected? Should one suppress them and thus imitate the historical structure one is criticizing and subverting, or should one record it alongside the more sublime facts? Her characters in "Sobre tumbas y héroes" wonder about this "furor historizante." With her characteristic skepticism, even regarding her own ideas, she exposes some of the shortcomings of this nationalist movement of historization.

The examination of many aspects of privilege, then, as a basis for an analysis of colonization, neo- or post-

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Incidentally, the same defensive measure is taken by Alvarez, when in her postscript, she explains that this is her fictional version of the Mirabals' lives.

colonization is central, though not always direct, in the narratives of Ferré, Vega, and Alvarez. It is an issue that has to be explored and denounced while exposing its effect, not only on socio-economic levels, but on aspects of culture, nation, the community's episteme. The privilege factor not only affects social relationships, history, theory, and understanding of reality, but most importantly, it shapes the individual's view and understanding of the self.

The narratives discussed above take issue with the notion of privilege and its resulting paradigms. Their demythification of national and family history and of theoretical notions of liberation expose also the possible pitfalls these theories might face, such as reconstructing the same parameters and structures they purport to combat. Even without dealing with every single issue or accomplishing a complete liberation of colonialist/totalitarian schema, Alvarez', Ferré's and Vega's narratives engage the canon and totalitarianism subversively. These fictions mimic and parody dominant discourse and forms as a way, not only of questioning privilege at socio-political and economic levels, but to challenge canonicity and literary and speech standards. One of their ultimate goals is that of winning a voice for the subaltern.

## **CHAPTER 2 SELF-REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE**

As discussed in the previous chapter, one tactic available to the colonized who seek to undermine the colonizer's privilege is to develop a voice that contests official versions of history, identity and stereotypes while re-gaining autonomy and the ability to speak for her/himself. Empowerment through writing, then, is the goal of many of the protagonists in the novels and short stories in this study. Further, the pseudo-autobiographical nature of these narratives makes it clear that the creators of these characters are concerned with questions of the presentation and representation. As Gikandi says, the works of Caribbean writers are motivated by the "need to inscribe [...] selves and voices within an [established] economy of representation" (10).

The preponderance of first-person narratives is thus, a clear way of empowering the "I" of the subject, and of apparently eliminating the authoritarian imposition of an author's will upon the characters. I say "apparently" because the authors' meddling hand is absent from the fictional universe in which the reader immerses her/himself during the reading process. One must remember, nevertheless,

that these are fictional autobiographies. Yet autobiography as a form could undermine the revolutionary aspect of what these narratives are trying to do in terms of their re-visionary approach to masculinist forms and to the canonical literary and historical standards. This could be the case because autobiography can be seen as a form that follows the exigencies of the canon. This form can also be seen as a way to access official discourse. As Doris Sommer asks:

Is [autobiography] the model for imperializing the consciousness of colonized peoples, replacing their collective potential for resistance with a cult of individuality and even loneliness? Or is it a medium of resistance and counterdiscourse, the legitimate space for producing that excess which throws doubt on the coherence and power of an exclusive historiography?(111)

The very act of accessing official discourse, however, of enjoying recognition and accepting such a discourse, may also be a way of using the tools of the master in order to subvert, negate, expose, and invalidate the official forms of autobiography.

Through a series of subversive discourses and diaries, characters create re-visionary representations of themselves, their nations, their cultures, and of general forms of domination. A tension is thus created between the subversive, non-traditional nature of their writings and the fact that this is done with diaries. The diary is a form, as

pointed out by Ferré, associated with women and cultivated by them for about two hundred years:

"por su forma misma, se adecuaba cómodamente a la vida de la mujer. Como ella, es una escritura restringida, eternamente interrumpida, que se ocupa de los detalles más nimios y a la vez de los más fundamentales. Su diseño, al igual que el diseño de la vida de la mujer en el hogar, jamás logra completarse en un orden reconocible, por falta de tiempo y de tranquilidad."<sup>13</sup>

The autobiographical nature of diaries, their intimate and private character, allows the representation of untraditional literary topics and themes. In the diaries, female characters capture their lives--all the bits and pieces of reality that are important to them--and in so doing, they go beyond the writer's efforts to substitute one world for another, for they have attempted to "abolir el paso del tiempo." (Sitio 20)

Diaries become a place where the protagonists can attain a voice; they are subversive tools against silence. Through such autobiographical accounts, the women in these narratives demonstrate their need to exist on their own terms, to see themselves, and to grow. As María Teresa finds out in In the Time of the Butterflies, her diary is, in

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Rosario Ferré. Sitio a Eros: 13 ensayos literarios. México: Ed. Joaquín Mortiz, 1980, p 21. Further reference to this work will appear within the text as Sitio.

Minerva's words, "a way to reflect [to] deepen[] one's soul." (Butterflies 30) After getting used to writing in her diary, María Teresa discovers that her "soul has gotten deeper since [she] started writing" in it. (Butterflies 43) She feels a great void which she does not know how to fill when she is forced to conceal her diary for fear of what Trujillo's forces would do to her family if they knew what was written in it. (Butterflies 43) This is a clear example of the tension created between the subjective and the objective, the intimate and the public/political, the role of the text, via the diaries, and the space which must be mediated between them.

Instead of being spoken for in a third-person narration, the characters in these narratives are given the power of the word, a word normally associated with patriarchy and oppression. Diaries or pseudo-diaries, as is the case in these fictions, allow the authors to accomplish more effective portrayals of their characters since they are perceived by the reader with more credibility. Through the subject matter she chooses to write about in her diary, for instance, each of the girls in In the Time of the Butterflies allows the reader to picture her with a degree of immediacy and certainty that a third-person narration

would not be able to convey. Within the fictional universe, what one is reading seems truthful because the character herself is writing it, not a remote voice of omnipotence and omnipresence.

At a metaliterary level, Quintín, one of the protagonists of The House on the Lagoon, brings the question of representation directly to the author of the autobiographical work in which he is a character. On the margins of the novel, he inscribes his editorial comments contesting the author and telling her that he does not like the way he is being portrayed. Thus, he decides to write his version of the facts on the margins of his wife's writing in order to represent himself as he sees himself.

Quintín's questioning of Isabel's representation allows this novel to subvert the autobiographical form at several levels. First, the narrative is self-referential and meta-literary: one of the characters rebels against its author, who is a character herself. With this gesture, Quintín introduces another voice(his) into Isabel's narrative which, from then on, creates a tug of war between the two autobiographical accounts.

In order to emphasize the lack of communication in Isabel and Quintín's relationship as a couple, Ferré refrains from presenting their conflicting stories as a dialogue. Isabel allows Quintín to write down his views, perhaps in an attempt to impart a greater degree of psychological complexity to the novel. In a way, then, Isabel uses Quintín to validate her narration. The very retaliatory and angry character of Quintín's remarks, causes the reader to doubt Quintín's story and to dismiss it as an act of revenge, as a way of boycotting Isabel's version of their lives. He hopes that by belittling her narrative for not adhering strictly to historical facts and for committing the stylistic errors that he points out, she will give up writing the novel. The narrative, then, questions and criticizes itself, and anticipates the voice of the critic through the characters' questions and criticism of their narratives.

Secondly, the novel blurs the distinction between autobiography, history, and fiction. The work is a fictional autobiography which consciously refuses to adhere to the official history in order to create a more truthful picture and description of the people of Puerto Rico and of the Mendizábals and Monforts.

Third, despite the fact that Isabel is accessing the power and privileges of the written word--and with it all the implications of making use of patriarchal tools--she departs from traditional patriarchal discourse by favoring the orality of the oppressed. This she does by telling a story that, in many cases, has been suppressed by the powerful yet has survived in the form of gossip and oral accounts among poor people, women, and slaves. They have preserved histories in their characteristic way of keeping alive traditions, history, and culture.

Yet another way in which the novel subverts traditional representation of masculine views is by the manner in which Quintín, a dominant male character, is forced to speak and to view his universe from the margins, a place that has been customarily reserved for women. Until she decided to start writing, or, to put it another way, until she became the main character in her own writing, Isabel had been assigned to this marginal place. By having a woman create autobiographical writing, Ferré offers and juxtaposes Isabel's sometimes complementary view of life from her marginalized perspective as a woman, with Quintín's perspective from the center. By doing so, the author is allowing someone who in most instances has been forced into

silence to voice another side of a reality not recognized or named by the powerful. Ferré's play with the margins hints at Bhabha's assertion that "particularly in the sphere of cultural expression, the voices of the margin have decentered the dominant discourses and created a third space".(qtd. in Ranger et al., 114) Isabel's view from the margins thus becomes the central view of the novel.

The traditional patriarchal structure of the novel is further reversed by having a representative of the world from the top (hierarchically speaking), a rich, powerful man, offer his views on the margins. In this way, the tension between the center and the periphery is highlighted and reversed in the fashion described above. Yet Quintín unlike Isabel, is not silenced; although Isabel ignores his comments, she allows them into her narrative.

It could be expected, as posited by Claire Alexander, that margin and center interlock and transform themselves within the 'third space' created by both discourses.(Ranger et al. 114) Yet in Isabel and Quintín's dual text, the margins and the center never meet. The two accounts run parallel to each other for the benefit of the reader, but they never engage each other, never achieve any degree of

reflection of each other, let alone a synthesis or consensus. Reflecting once more the actual marital relationship between Quintín and Isabel, the two presentations, their exposition of two different experiences, of two different sub-cultures within the dominant culture, remain alienated from each other throughout the novel.

The view from a marginal observer, Isabel--made central in this narrative--does not merely complement the view of reality and the world as it is seen by the dominant male pushed to the margin. Isabel's view also challenges the notion of a unique homogeneous experience and reality by naming the reality of the subaltern; a reality or series of realities which exist contemporaneously with those of the one that is traditionally named and validated.

Through the discourses of the periphery and the center, Ferré also shows that history is multifaceted, that it has different versions and perspectives, some of which remain unspoken and unrecorded because they do not serve the purposes or agenda of the historian. Thus, to the chagrin of Quintín, Isabel retells the story of the massacre of Ponce

from the point of view of Coronel Arrigotia.<sup>19</sup> General Blanton Winship, Governor of Puerto Rico at the time and intellectual author of the crime, places the blame on Arrigotia. According to the version offered in the novel, Arrigotia, like his country, is guilty of trying to gain recognition in the eyes of the United States Government. As is common among colonial subjects, he is willing to humiliate himself, and descend to a level of servility, in order to demonstrate that he, and his homeland, are honorable, hard-working, and capable of self-determination. Above all, he is trying to gain the approval of the neo-colonial powers that be: the United States and its North American representatives in Puerto Rico. Nonetheless, as Isabel re-writes history, it becomes clear that he is not guilty of the decision to kill his own unarmed people. At the last minute, despite his initial refusal to do so, he follows direct orders from Governor Winship and gives the command to fire. Isabel's understanding of how and why this

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The Ponce massacre took place on Palm Sunday of 1937. Puerto Rico was living a very tense political moment which led to several confrontations between members of the Nationalist Party and the police. In one of these confrontations, five people were killed. After having lost the elections of 1932, Pedro Albizu Campos, head of the Nationalist Party, convinced that the electoral route was leading Puerto Rico's independence efforts no where, accused chief of police Francis Riggs for the killings. Riggs was later killed by Elías Beauchamp and Hiram Rosado who themselves were later killed while at a police precinct. Governor Winship, convinced that a popular rebellion was imminent, and in order to avenge Riggs' murder, gave the order to suppress the march that the Nationalist Party had organized in order to commemorate the end of slavery in Puerto Rico. The Ponce massacre described in The House on the Lagoon by Ferré left twenty-one dead.

historical account had been adulterated is that the "island's press was ordered to protect the governor's public image and Chief of Police Arrigoitia was blamed for the decision to open fire on the unarmed cadets" (HOL 131).

Coincidentally, Ana Lydia Vega, who is also concerned with questions of representation, makes the same incident the center of one of her short stories in Falsas crónicas del sur.<sup>20</sup> In "Un domingo de Lilianne" (107-120), the story of the massacre is retold, this time as seen through the eyes of a little girl, who paradoxically was not present during the massacre. Vega's version of the same historical fact, concentrates on varying perspectives of the moments before, during, and after the massacre. The historical landmark is viewed by the photographer who would become famous for his photograph of the incident, by a boy named Angel, who died during the shootout and whose only sin was his curiosity (he wanted to see who these "nacionalistas" were), and by Lilianne. She, the daughter of the public prosecutor, belongs to a family enjoying the privileges of its higher status, in contrast to the lives of those who were more

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Ana Lydia Vega. Falsas crónicas del sur. Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1991. With the exception of "El baúl de Miss Florence", further reference to this work will appear within the text as Falsas.

directly involved in the massacre. The poor are central to the events on that day either because--unlike the prosecutor's family--they dare to challenge the status quo; to photograph, and thus expose, its methods of self-preservation; or simply because they are trying to gain access to a public spectacle they are not allowed to see.

The need to show that there is more than one side to any account is a strong motive for all three writers under discussion. The need is evident in Ana Lydia Vega's "Cuento en camino" (Falsas 175-188). In this story a firefighter, knowing all the facts, chooses to tell only part of them so as to justify his theory that women are unfaithful and wanton. A woman who travels with him on the bus offers another side of the story, a side that he is concealing, one that would assign blame to the woman's husband in the story. The point is that her version of the story does not negate the firefighter's version; it supplements, challenges and brings new information that offers a more complete account of what really has transpired. The story could be interpreted as a warning to the reader/listener to take every version of any story, and by extension, any historical account, with a grain of salt.

The use of diaries, letters, and narratives to allow different characters to speak for themselves is a device that facilitates the presentation of a multiplicity of voices. Such an approach negates the homogenous view that a dominant culture holds of a minority and overturns the colonial practice of 'static primordialism.' (Ranger et al. 2) As Stuart Hall explains, this practice by colonialists "classif[ies] and invent[s] and impose[s] ethnicities [identities] as a way of defining/confining their subjects" (Ranger et al. 2-3). Instead of developing an ideology of "differentialist culturalism which has the double effect of breaking up the solidarities of oppression and of mystifying a social reality of stunning diversity," (Ranger et al. 1) the texts here studied allow each character to present her/himself as a distinct individual. In the case of In the time of the Butterflies, the Mirabals' diaries recreate the intimate and sometimes trivial experiences of the heroines. As such, their writings become counter-discourses which depart from "conventional modes of representation associated with colonial domination and colonizing cultural structures" (Gikandi 5). The Mirabals' diaries do not focus on the political, intellectual, or other extrinsic aspects of the Mirabals' lives. Instead, they concentrate on accounts of everyday

life, their fears, their dreams. The diaries expose the way in which the Mirabals deal with the chauvinistic society that limits and imprisons them, metaphorically and literally, forcing them to curtail their physical desires and intellectual aspirations.

The Mirabals' stories of self-assertion under the cloak of conformity depict a strategy of social survival as practiced by complex characters with plural--or as Pnina Werbner calls it, 'multiphrenic, overlapping identities'. (Ranger et al. 72) Patria, for instance, is a very sensual woman who at the same time is extremely religious. She has even contemplated joining a religious order and adopting a life of celibacy. Stereotypically masculine in her ability to contribute to the management of her farm, she is also very maternal and loving. She knows that she must allow her husband to feel in control at all times, so she asserts herself in a non-threatening way. But when the time comes for her to stand up for her beliefs, she sticks to her guns, literally, by joining the rebels' movement, and rebelling even against God. She will do whatever it takes to defend her family, people, and country.

Sensuality does not appeal too much to María Teresa,

yet she is very worried about her appearance. She seems to be the least certain about why she is involved in the rebels' movement, yet she holds on to the purported values of the revolution without betraying her own values. She shows great strength of character, for instance, when, despite her sister Minerva's insistence, she refuses to be disloyal to a guard who has been good to them while they were imprisoned. She stands her ground because she knows that the guard will get in trouble should she accede to her sister's demands. María Teresa refuses to follow anyone's dictates but those of her own conscience. She does not allow the dictatorial system, nor the dictates of the revolution, nor family pressure to control her.

Minerva, on the other hand, thinks nothing of trying to impose her judgment on others. The rebellious character that has accompanied her since childhood is marked by strength, but also by a willingness to be as authoritarian as those whom she opposes. Her desire for control and for freedom for women and for her country are valid reasons, in her eyes, to exert authoritarian demands on people. Her attitude recreates the very pattern of subjugation and limitation that she is trying to subvert.

Her very strength of character sometimes overburdens her. Minerva's dilemma raises questions of representation as her construction of self clashes with the way she is represented by others (family, friends, and supporters). For this reason Minerva ends up wearing a mask of strength for the benefit of the others who picture her only as a centered, unidimensional person. Her family and friends are oblivious to the fact that she also thirsts for love, that at times she is as afraid as her child, that she is tempted by the safety of inertia and compliance, that she is as maternal as Patria. In a contradictory way, Minerva's quest for freedom entraps her in another cage of her own making: she must always appear strong, unmoved, and invulnerable. It is perhaps for this reason that she hides from her family the responsibility she feels for, and the help she gives to, her half sisters. Since this generous act of solidarity does not fit her image of powerfulness, she keeps it a secret. She can't help continuing to recreate a conventional patriarchal pattern of behavior. She behaves like a stereotypical male who must always appear tough, unmoved, and emotionless.

The ambivalent, plural self-portrait of the sisters mirrors the ambivalent nature of their representation of

their country. They present a country whose socio-political structures favor family values and union, but at the cost of the coercion, limitation, and subjugation of women. It is a chauvinistic society that favors the male at every level--familial, social, and political. Although the society demands loyalty and fidelity from women and sanctifies the family unit, it overlooks men's infidelity and their casual fathering of children who will obviously exist outside the privileged, legitimate family units. Thus, as viewed through the eyes of the Mirabal sisters, and despite the love they may feel for them, men are often represented as weak, irresponsible lechers and opportunists. Even while advocating socialism and rebellion against social and political constraints, they do not renounce their supposed superiority to women. This portrayal of men is present also--cast in her humorous and ironic style--in Vega's exposition of the tricks of 'machismo-leninismo' in her "La Gurúa Talía: correo de San Valentín" as well as in Alvarez' How the García Girls Lost Their Accents.

In Alvarez' novel, the García girls hold conflicting views of the Dominican Republic. Despite the fact that they view their experiences in their country of origin with nostalgia and affection, they also disapprove of and fear

the restrictive division of gender exhibited by their compatriots and relatives, their Americanized, sometimes even American-born, relatives. One of these relatives is Mundín who may behave in a more 'liberated' way while in the United States, but once he is "back in the Island, he struts and turns macho, needling us with the unfair advantage being male here gives him" (GG 127). This particular example brings up questions of the representation of culture and tradition. Despite the Garcia's nostalgic view of the Dominican Republic, they don't fall for a myth-making of nationalism which tends to homogenize culture, ethnicity, and national identity. They are not blind, and neither is Vega, to the fact that, as explained by Terence Ranger, to "focus on the primordial core of ethnic identity overemphasizes boundaries; overstates continuity; over-privileges men and elders; forecloses debates about identity" (15).

Like the characters mentioned above, Mariana Duslabón, in Ferré's La batalla de las vírgenes, is also a plural figure. She is a character in search of her identity in a much more explicit way than many of the others here considered. Her situation questions issues of the presentation and perception of the self vis à vis the way one is perceived as 'other' and controlled by way of

manipulation of one's own perception of self. Despite her privileged position and her education, her apparent feminism and independence is an illusion in which her husband allows her to indulge. Mariana's illusory perception of herself as a feminist allows her husband to better control her while she performs tasks that reinforce his social and economic status. Once she discovers that what she has with her husband is nothing but a mirage, she returns to Puerto Rico to find out who she really is. The Bildungsroman picture of her life could be seen as symbolic of Puerto Rico. She forsakes her roots, her family--whom she views as restrictive and asphyxiating--for a marriage of convenience whose main purpose is to enable her to shed the paternal home that limits her. This could be a metaphor for the union of Puerto Rico with the United States, which Puerto Ricans viewed as a convenient means of liberating themselves of Spanish rule. Mariana, like Puerto Rico, finds out that, under the guise of more freedom and agency, there hides a limiting, oppressive power similar to the one from which they are trying to escape: one master is traded for another.

The question now is, as Nicanor Parra would say: "who will liberate us from our liberators"? Mariana's answer is to return to her roots to try to find out who she is, and

what those roots are all about. She, like Puerto Rico, finds that hers is a hybrid identity and that one has to accept oneself as one is. Her search for identity, like that of many nations, rests on the adoption, emulation, and/or distortion of foreign elements which foster ambivalence, hypocrisy and hybridization.

The way religion and the Catholic Church is presented in La batalla de las vírgenes emphasizes this point. The hypocrisy of the Church as an institution which purports to represent the weak and dispossessed, yet invariably sides with the government and the privileged in its constant search for financial backing and wealth, is denounced strongly. The situation is dramatized through the correspondence between father Angel and his superiors in Spain. Hypocrisy is also present in the privileged parishioners whose self-centeredness and lack of solidarity with the underprivileged is less than Christian. Yet what is truly representative of Latin America's creole cultures and of Mariana's personality is the description of Catholicism as a mixture of religions, cultures, and superstitions rooted in native, African, and consumerist practices which, in the novel, give birth to a hybrid local virgin and her cult. The competition among the different virgins, the

imported and the local, underlies not just the ridiculous and frivolous nature of the Church's interests, but also its intransigent, authoritarian policies as well as those of the privileged classes in Puerto Rico.

Mariana, although accused of being a feminist, and even despite the fact that she believes herself to be one, is always dependent on a male. At different times she depends on her husband, on Padre Angel, on Ariel, and on the inheritance her father left her. This inheritance allows her to delve into her soul-searching while raising her child "like it should be" and without working, as the family court demanded. Mariana asserts herself as a woman by rejecting the exigencies of her relatives and by insisting on performing the social work she committed herself to. She attempts to attain her independence by relying on folklore and popular culture, their wisdom and generosity in her search for her true self. Nevertheless, like many of Ferre's characters, she is unable to claim her right to her voice and her own self on her terms. Rather, she depends on those of the priest or the male members of the street gang. She is also unable to shed her bourgeois upbringing and the structures which make her always the victim waiting to be rescued. These factors prevent her from achieving her goals.

At a national level, she represents Puerto Rico as a society without cohesion, still burdened by deep class divisions, and overall a plural, hybrid, and complex society. She sees a nation in search of its identity, but still doing it, like herself, in terms defined by colonial powers, a mixture of restrictive traditions and institutions inherited from Spain and those imported from the United States.

Ana Lydia Vega also accomplishes a more realistic representation of her female protagonists by refusing to develop unidimensional and homogeneous characters. Thus, Guiomar in "Sobre tumbas y héroes", Florence and Ms. Morse in "El baúl de Ms. Florence", Suzie Bermúdez in "Pollito Chicken",<sup>21</sup> la Tipa in "Letra para salsa y tres soneos por encargo" (Virgenes 81-88) are characters defined by their plurality and contradictory behavior. Florence, although strong and decisive when she deems it appropriate, and Ms. Morse, versed in feminist rhetoric, choose to remain prisoners of their oppressive master for different reasons. Ms. Morse accepts her situation for fear of losing the privileged position her marriage provides. Florence, on the

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Ana Lydia Vega et al. "Pollito Chicken" in Virgenes y mártires. Río Piedras: Editorial Antillana, 1994, pp. 73-79. Further reference to this work will appear within the text as Virgenes.

other hand, remains in such an oppressive and depressing household for fear of losing her chance of being 'loved' by Mr. Lind.

In the case of Suzie Bermiúdez, her speech, an amalgamation of English and Spanish, as well as her inability to express herself completely in either language, mark her hybrid personality. She has internalized a colonized view/representation of herself and the Puerto Rican people, especially of Puerto Rican men, who are "drunken bastard[s] de billar, de esos que nacen con la caneca incrustada en la mano y encierran a la fat ugly housewife en la casa con diez screaming kids entre los cellulitic muslos mientras ellos hacen pretty-body y le aplanan la calle a cualquier shameless bitch" (Virgenes 74). Despite her colonial view of inferiority of herself and Puerto Rico, she ends up voicing her 'puertorriqueñidad' by shouting at the moment of reaching an orgasm with a Puerto Rican man: ";VIVA PUELTO RICO LIBREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!" (Virgenes 79).

'La Tipa' in "Letra para salsa y tres soneos por encargo" also exhibits contradictory behavior. She reverses the role she is meant to play as a sexual object of desire

and that of her harasser. Yet in what she believes to be a feminist moment of self-assertion, she takes control of his "masculine role", enjoys the bewilderment she causes in 'el Tipo', but her reason for engaging with him sexually is not fulfillment of her desires, but a way of getting back at the boyfriend who had married someone else.

The existence of these plural identities is one of the factors which cause the protagonists of the fictions here studied to embark in a search for, and exploration of, their identities, sometimes consciously, at others, unconsciously. At times, as in Alvarez, migration creates the need to rewrite home and re-present its history. As Carole Boyce Davies points out,

Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or the longing for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. (113)

Yet, the writing of home, its representation, encompasses a revisionary effort at the levels of form and content. At the formal level, we are faced with diaries, which, as mentioned earlier, have traditionally been associated with women and are not canonical tools of narrative. Although at times, third person narrators develop the plots, most of the narrations involve first person narrators, who narrate by

means of diaries (as discussed above), letters, and autobiography. The relationship of form and content becomes central because, unlike traditional narratives, the structure of most of Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega's narratives is fragmented; they seldom follow a linear development. At a metaphorical level, this is done in order to facilitate a more truthful representation of people and nation because nations are not homogeneous, linear, but multiphrenic, plural, and heterogeneous.

Timothy Brennan believes that the novel is an elitist genre:

The novel has been an elitist and minority form in developing countries when compared to poem, song, television, and film. Almost inevitably it has been the form through which a thin, foreign-educated stratum (however sensitive or committed to domestic political interests) has communicated to metropolitan reading publics, often in translation. It has been, in short, a naturally cosmopolitan form that empire has allowed to play a national role, as it were, only in an international arena. (Bhabha 56)

The narratives here studied, however, for the most part, try to avoid such elitism. Democratization is accomplished through the unassuming and intimate appearance of diaries, letters, and autobiographical accounts; the wide usage of colloquial, everyday language with its mixture of languages, and the inclusion of popular aphorisms and prejudices. Such

techniques allow for the representation of different constituencies and the sometimes plural and contradictory character of women, culture, and nation. Such a narratological strategy seems to overcome the elitism that Brennan finds in novel writing and reading. There is no denying, still, that these authors are privileged. They are educated, they have been educated abroad, and at the very least on an intellectual level, they belong to the elite.

Nevertheless, literature in Latin America has traditionally been linked to politics and social issues. It is assumed that literature can have an effect on history and its shaping, that it can facilitate social change. Yet is literature not produced and consumed primarily by the elite? Still, Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega stand in opposition to and/or hold a contestational stance towards the traditional nineteenth-century Latin American nation-building novel and its representation of nation, culture and women. "In the epistemological gaps that the non-science of history leaves open," (Bhabha 76) and those left in the traditional nation-building novels of Latin America, these authors use narrative to write history. Yet they are no longer attempting to "build nations" like Bartolomé Mitre in Argentina or José Martí in Cuba who were notable

propagandists of the nation-building novel. (Bhabha 77) Their representation of nation is different inasmuch as their narratives are attempts at self-examination, self-criticism, and revisionism.

Rather than building nations, these women authors deconstruct them from the point of view of women and their place, function, and historical role in them. They examine the peripheral role that women have been forced to adopt, particularly at a literary level, where women were made the object of desire, synonymous with the land that had to be conquered, possessed and worked on in order to achieve harmony and legitimacy. (Bhabha 85)

Most of the women's works here studied, seem to be at first glance nation-building fictions. They purport to continue to portray men as civilizers, hard-workers, creators of dynasties and enclaves of power; like the male protagonists of the nation-building novels who "husband[ed] the land and father[ed] their countries". (Bhabha 87) In reality, nevertheless, Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega unveil men's tyrannical, authoritarian, intransigent character which, instead of harmony, brings destruction, death, and chaos. Moreover, instead of presenting women as passive objects of

desire waiting to be possessed and legitimized, female characters write themselves into fiction and mold, form their own fictional universe. Instead of 'imagined Others', they are the ones deconstructing, defining, creating representations of themselves and of their nations as a means of finding an identity for both. These characters do not limit themselves to "an exploration of deprivation [which] will inexorably suggest that [they] lack the capacity to take charge of their own destiny" (Ranger et al. 57). Instead, as Ballard suggests, they are active subjects engaged in the exploration of "the diverse way in which [they and their nations] have resisted [...] forms of exclusions mentally, physically, and culturally" (Ranger et al. 57).

Continuing the demythifying task of the 'Boom' writers, as Sommers notes, who "tried to depart from historical novels and novelized history" (Bhabha 74), these women writers are also discrediting myths created by the nation-building novel like the one which caused Latin American societies to "at least rhetorically assume a racially mixed identity" (Bhabha 81). They also exposed the novelistic myth that equated family with nation to show that rape, pillaging, and power-play were the basis of the building of

nations. Their deconstruction of nation, as a way of achieving a more clear view/representation, includes, not just the oppression of women by reason of gender, but their oppression--as well as that of men--for reasons of class, and race. Such representation also offers a picture of the woman herself as oppressor.

Although women in these works are not explicitly identified with nations, their search for identity results in the attempts to find their place within the nations. As women become aware of their status as colonial subjects, they may begin to draw parallels between themselves and their homeland. This is the case because women's writing of home, while an attempt to see themselves within their nations, involves those nations' search for identity. Both woman and nation appear as colonial subjects, be it of chauvinistic relationships/societies, or of colonial/imperialist cultures. This parallel is placed in evidence in Brennan's article:

It has become increasingly clear that the effects of intellectual and cultural dependence are as serious as those of political subjection or economic dependence. (Bhabha 60)

He also notes that "the argument [] has been made that a nation whose mass media are under foreign domination cannot claim to be a nation" (Bhabha 60). As such, most of Latin

American nations stand in this colonial predicament. Yet it is particularly true and troublesome for citizens of nations that have a more direct contact with an imperialist power like the United States. Such is the case of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Needless to say, the sort of unsettling effect and identity crisis present in neo-colonial societies and their citizens could also be experienced by members of cultural minorities residing within an imperialist power which demands assimilation. This is so, among other reasons, because of the discrepancy between the immigrant's representation of the self and the dominant culture's attitude toward the immigrant. Racial prejudice and discrimination instill a sense of inferiority in the immigrant.

The need to write home as an identity search is the underlying current in all the narratives here studied, but made more obvious in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. Yoyo has struggled to gain a vision of herself while astray between two cultures: her new home in the United States, and the one she remembers, and which is partially alive in her parents' home. She tries to understand the processes of representation by which she and her family could imagine and view themselves in an all-

inclusive way. Perhaps they could find a hybrid view; one in which they might create a consensus of the differences between the imagined self and the external assigned representation their new cultural environment imposes on them. Yoyo's picture of the home in the States is dominated by an authoritarian father who is the center of the family, although his authority has suffered somewhat because of the exposure of 'his girls' to the culture of the United States. Despite her position as second in command in the family, the mother does not want to go back to live in the Dominican Republic. In the United States sometimes she is able to subvert her position thanks to her knowledge of English which the father lacks, and she enjoys more freedom than she would in the Island.

She did not want to go back to the old country where, de la Torre or not, she was only a wife and a mother (and a failed one at that, since she had never provided the required son). Better an independent nobody than a high-class houseslave. (144)

Yoyo is a young woman who has remained close to her roots as a Dominican girl, upholding some of the basic values instilled in her by her parents. Still, within the home, she has also been exposed to her mother's questioning and somewhat rebellious attitude, at times, towards her husband's authoritarian demands. Her portrayal, like that of

her family, is that of a colonial subject who has internalized a feeling of inferiority created by the supposed superiority of the culture of the United States. Thanks to the feeling of displacement that her ethnic identity creates within her vis à vis the dominant culture of the United States, she rebels against her roots because they prevent her from assimilating into that dominant culture. Clearly ashamed of her parents, whom she perceives as the bearers and representatives of the ethnicity she wants to flee, she wishes she had 'more American' parents who went skiing every winter in Colorado. Yoyo's Hispanic accent marks her as 'other' and feeds her feelings of inferiority. For this reason she grows to resent her native tongue. She wishes English were her native language so that she could make sense of her friends' jokes and not feel alienated when unable to decipher their insinuations. Her experience as a colonial subject has created a thirst for assimilation which in her case, means an obliteration of the self so that she may cease to be 'other'. Such experience has developed in Yoyo a vivid sense of cultural inferiority which becomes obvious, for example, when she discourages her mother from pursuing her inventions because "Americans have already thought of everything" (138).

Having accepted North American values and nearly obliterated one half of herself, Yoyo is now trying to see herself, to imagine her own representation. She needs a vision that would allow her a more inclusive and holistic view of her fragmented self. Thus, she decides to embark on a trip to the Dominican Republic and into its culture, in an effort, by rediscovering home, to heal her psyche and to rediscover the part of herself she has repressed. But, from the onset, she is prejudiced against her own people. She has internalized the North American representation of her country and ethnicity. Like them, she believes that everything outside of the United States, particularly when it relates to the so called 'Third World', is 'Banana Land'. She has a vision of Dominican people as thieves, rapists, and, in general, individuals unable to resist criminal behavior. This typical colonialist view is not discouraged by her relatives in the Dominican Republic. Because of their contextual status as colonizers of the poor, they hold a similar opinion of those who don't enjoy their social and economic privileges. In this way, the most affluent stratum asserts its privileges and justifies the poor's inferior position in society. Besides, it is useful to hold this kind of view/representation of what lies outside their privileged circle, for in that way it is possible to control women's

mobility and independence by denying them, for example, the possibility of traveling without a male escort.

As a whole, Yoyo's representation of the Dominican Republic in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents is that of a nation that she sees as unchanging, for good or evil. Her relatives don't seem to have changed a bit in the five years since she last saw them. She knows in advance what each of them will say, and she responds with ready-made phrases and behaviors that they expect from her. Such predictability offers her a comfortable sensation. The unchanging character of Dominican culture allows tradition to stay alive and offers her the possibility of exploring her roots, of returning from the United States a few years later and being able to experience the culture and its traditions again. Yet she realizes that the forces of tradition and customs can be enslaving and oppressive. She is able to gaze with nostalgia at a bourgeois class that she was a part of when a child and which she relinquished on her flight into safety in the United States, but she is aware also of the superficial nature of this class. For her relatives appearances are of uttermost importance, evident in the way they dress, looking like "Dominican magazine models, a look that has always made Yolanda think of call

girls"(5). The cult of appearances extends also to the way they gesticulate. Their gestures emulate poses taken out of television, magazines, classical paintings, or from respectable priests. Even the way they smile is artificial, as illustrated by the ready-made smiles of tía Flor who "is capable of that smile no matter the circumstances"(5). Yoyo is aware of another negative side of tradition: it perpetuates the repressive chauvinistic treatment she and her sisters experienced every time they visited the Island. It also protects class and racial divisions, as well as the right of the powerful to exploit and humiliate others on the basis of differences of class, gender, and color.

Despite the socio-economic, and at times even political image she presents of the Dominican Republic, Yoyo's writing of home is basically restricted to the representation of the domestic. She focuses on the family setting, the complex of houses the relatives share, their yards, and the servants' dwellings, particularly that of Chucha, the black maid who is the head of the servants. This underscores the female position in her culture which at times is reminiscent of that of children. Writing mainly about the domestic sphere allows her to explore the 'tricks of the weak', as Josefina Ludmer calls them, and present how children, women, and

servants, try to circumvent restrictions in order to achieve a little bit of independence.

For Yoyo, home is marked by a dual definition which coalesces in her own identity. The Island is complex like her. It defies homogenization by virtue of its chauvinism, its class and racial divisions, by its gaze towards the culture of the United States as an enviable country of technological might. Such socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity is further enriched by a class of people still tied to the fields who, as Yoyo sees them, can still afford to be open, generous, and naive, despite their inferior position within society. Home is a place, which like her, has internalized a concept of the self as inferior vis à vis foreign, white, and/or male cultures, but which still remains a loved place, despite the faults and shortcomings that her nostalgic and loving gaze cannot and will not deny.

Migration, as in the Garcías' case, can create the need for writing home and for researching one's identity, yet is not the only catalyst. In addition, one culture's imposition of its culture, history, values, on another and a dominant culture's attempts to deny, denigrate, and devalue another, can create a feeling of homelessness, of being a migrant in

one's own country. This is described in Boyce Davies' article:

When white people come to your Home, steal your land and impose their language, culture and religion, force you to live in ghettos, shantytowns or reservations, can you still call your country Home?(114)

The question in Puerto Rico is not one of homelessness within Home, but one of identity which goes back as far as its status as a colony under Spanish rule. As evidenced in the writings of Pedreira, José Luis González, Juan Flores, Ana Lydia Vega (who humorously questions having to write about the cultural and identity crisis in Puerto Rico if one wants to be taken as a serious writer in Puerto Rico) (Loló 85) the theme of defining a Puerto Rican identity is a national obsession. This is an obsession that has become more imperative since the United States became a political and economic presence in the country. The influence of the economic, political, cultural and consumerist policies of the United States on the culture of Puerto Rico has created an ambivalent perception of its culture and identity. Such influence has formed a "veritable stew" of languages and cultures, as defined by Flores, which at this point makes hybridity the essential Puerto Rican identity, or as Flores calls it, "el revolú que nos identifica"(Flores 391).

Issues of personal and national--intrinsic and extrinsic--representation arise when the authors try to define identities. Ferré's female protagonists in The House on the Lagoon and La batalla de las vírgenes are mainly searching for their personal identity, but the question of the nation's identity comes up throughout the novels. In The House on the Lagoon, as a background to Isabel's search for her roots lies the question of Puerto Rico's independence. The novel presents the country's dependence on the United States and its search for a consensus of what it would like to do in terms of its political status. Ferré's novel portrays a nation divided on this question and whose ambivalence between statehood, commonwealth and independence may create a view of inertia that favors the Status Quo "out of fear for an uncertain future under statehood or independence" (Carr 10).

The House on the Lagoon begins as Puerto Ricans are granted citizenship in the United States. It describes how it was implicitly understood that Puerto Rico would eventually become a state, how this assumption failed to materialize and how Puerto Rico became the Commonwealth that it is now. Although freely chosen, the Commonwealth status is seen by many of its critics as "colonialism by consent

[which is] colonialism nevertheless" (Carr 10). The purported generosity of the United States via props which include "access to American capital and the American market[...], federal transfer payments and unrestricted emigration" (Carr 405) are seen as ways to hide the failure of the Puerto Rican economy. Without these economic props, the Puerto Rican economy would "if not collapse, [...] sink to the level of the Dominican Republic" (Carr 405). As noted by Carr, this economic policy is a way of reinforcing and consolidating dependence (Carr 10).

A similar situation, in which a colonial subject joins a colonial power in the search for freedom, is presented in La batalla de las vírgenes, but at a personal level. Mariana's marriage to Marcos is seen, to a certain extent, as a marriage of convenience, as a way to escape an oppressive reality, as a union that would engender freedom. At a symbolic level, then, the union of Puerto Rico with the United States as it attempts to attain freedom from Spain could be said to resemble Mariana's union with Marcos. Furthermore, the economic dependence of colonial nations on colonial masters which cause them to relinquish their claim to independence for fear of the uncertainty independence would bring, is reminiscent of the position of female

characters in these narratives. Many of them, conscious of their oppression, 'choose' to remain in subjugation for fear of not being able to fare for themselves, as discussed in chapter one.

The above two points are made by Isabel in The House on the Lagoon when she comments on the connection between woman and nation and the metaphoric nuptial union between Puerto Rico and the United States:

The way I see it, our island is like a betrothed, always on the verge of marriage. If one day Puerto Rico becomes a state, it will have to accept English--the language of her future husband--. (HOL 184)

And the economic aspect at the root of Puerto Rico's indecision between independence and statehood is made clear by Isabel's look at her own political ambivalence:

Maybe my indecision is rooted in the Sears catalogue; it goes back to the times I sat as a child in the living room of our house in Ponce with the catalogue on my lap, wishing for independence and at the same time dreaming about our island being part of the modern world. (HOL 184)

Ana Lydia Vega in Falsas crónicas del sur and Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión and Julia Alvarez in In the Time of the Butterflies, offer, as it were, a contrasting working out of the politics of identity and representation as compared with Ferré. They embark directly and clearly on a

revisionist correction typical of the "new historiography" by rewriting the nation's history and reformulating its identity with all its "colonial, class, gender, and racial biases" (Flores 383). What underlies their narratives, contrary to Ferré's, is women's ambivalent, plural identities and their oppressive situation within those societies. The Mirabals do question their beliefs, and their personalities at times, although not for long--after all their energies are taken by plotting against Trujillo--though this does not mean that their doubts and ambivalence are trivial or less problematic than those of Ferré's characters. The Mirabals are seen as split between their plural identities as daughters, aunts, political and militant rebels, mothers, wives, lovers, neighbors, and self-assertive women.

Vega's characters, for example, in "Sobre tumbas y héroes" and "El baúl de Miss Florence" also display plural identities. Ms. Florence is aware of her multifaceted personality, her oppression, and the fact that she chooses to remain oppressed. Guiomar, as well, is aware of the contradictory nature of her behavior and personality, but does not question it. She accepts a hybrid, contradictory, ambivalent personality as her identity. She has apparently chosen bits and pieces of the cultures she has been exposed

to while living in the United States and Puerto Rico. She has, as Esmeralda Santiago says of herself, forgiven herself for her mixed identity; an identity which may not know everything about the Puerto Rican culture, but which marks her with a "peculiar brand of Puerto Rican identity" (qtd in Flores 389). Perhaps the need for homogeneity is another oppressive goal as it mirrors the dominant power's need to eradicate difference. Perhaps then, as Gikandi argues, "rather than denying the historicity of the Caribbean experience," writers have tried "to engage the colonial condition on their own terms" (Gikandi 26). By extension, this means that the present neo-colonial status of Latin American societies cannot be denied. Perhaps, then, the multiphrenic identities of Latin American nations could be seen as a positive, strengthening element. Rather than fear what is foreign, one ought to choose and pick from what is useful and positive in foreign cultures. In this way, choosing from what one knows will become a privilege, regardless of whether one is working with autochthonous or foreign elements. Thus, the potpourri of Latin American identities will be understood as what defines them; what constitutes these nations' strengths, not their shortcomings. Torres Saillant shares this view when he intimates in relation to the Caribbean cultures that "one could construe that duplicity as a source of cultural

strength." (Torres Saillant 46)

This point is made clear by all three authors under discussion here. In their narratives, alternative modes of knowledge coalesce. In them, reality is formed by Amerindian, African, European, and North American elements as a part of a whole, as divided as this whole/self may be. Thus, in the novels and short stories, the scientific method exists side by side with the knowledge of African Gods, with voodoo, witchcraft, magic, wives tales, and seances. This is so, because as pointed out by Gikandi about the Caribbean, but applicable also to Latin American nations on the continent:

Although the Enlightenment pretends to be the triumph of Western reason and knowledge over nature and magic, it does not have effective remedies for the Caribbean Landscape and its realities." (164)

As Ana Lydia Vega says of the particular case of Puerto Rico, rather than fearing and rejecting the English language as an imperialist tool of domination, it would be more constructive to accept it as a foreign language, a key to knowledge. English not only facilitates communication and the sharing of knowledge with a number of peoples throughout the world, but also with Puerto Rico's English-speaking neighbors in the Caribbean. (Loló 17)

In sum, the self-reflective character of the primordially first-person narratives here studied offer their female characters the possibility of claiming agency and voice for themselves and their nations. In so doing, the protagonists are able to challenge stereotypical perceptions assigned to them by colonial powers while presenting themselves and their nations as they see them. The multiplicity of voices present in the narratives unmask complex, rich, and multiphrenic individuals and nations. Such heterogeneity contests and negates homogenizing and essentializing colonial practices on colonial subjects. Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega's narratives not only expose the abuses, oppression, unfairness, and falsehood of colonial practices and models of representation. These narratives also offer the freedom of accepting oneself as one is. In this way one may be able to confront the foreign, the other, the colonial and without fear pick and choose favorable elements from them in order to enrich, grow, and liberate oneself and one's cultures with them.

### CHAPTER 3 CONFIGURATIONAL DISCOURSES

In this chapter I will examine how the works and authors that form the subject of this thesis contest traditional literary forms, discourses, and themes. Contestational discourses, along with particular approaches to certain problems, mark their narratives as different while defining certain characteristics of what I call "feminine writing."<sup>22</sup> I will focus on the mechanics of writing. That is to say, I will look at the work of Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega as they develop different discourses, mix linguistic registers, and play with narratological techniques to subvert and develop notions of feminine writing.

While looking for common elements that characterize some women's literature, Ethel Krauze, analyzing her own writing, noted:

"...women dominated more than I might have

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It is true that the traditional nuances and associations of the word "feminine" in the term "feminine writing" brings to mind concepts such as soft, weak sex, pretty, dependent, quiet, passive, gracious, among many others. On the other hand, the term "women's literature" doesn't qualify the literary production other than to say that it is literature produced by women. Yet not all women's writings are feminist, subversive or a challenge to traditional masculinist forms and styles of literary production. Some women's writings do not attempt to break away from a patriarchal voice in order to inject the work with a particular women's quality. For this reason, I will re-appropriate the terms "feminine writing" and "feminine literature" to reply to the traditional associations mentioned above as I refer to literature written by women and which shows awareness of and takes issue with women's position in society and/or challenges, subverts, distorts or somehow contests traditional and canonical views of literary production.

proposed. And reading them over, I realized, then, that it is the same world, with its swamps and its heat, only that it is seen, or better, felt, from a woman's profile. Masculine literature has made its contribution: to describe man and invent woman; probably feminine literature will cover the other half, there where woman will be really herself, and man will begin to see himself, to his own amazement, through her eyes. (Castillo xx)

This is Krauze's evaluation of the question of whether there is such a thing as feminine writing. She is of the opinion that literature has no sex, that she can't "create true literature", i.e. write like a man, for she would always be a woman. As Castillo analyzes it, Krauze does not propose "to approximate writing by women to a supposedly sexless but inherently masculinist model of "good" writing but rather the development of male writing's complementary other side" (Castillo xx). The word "complementary", however, seems somewhat reactionary inasmuch as it appears to uphold the traditional view of woman as man's complement, his other half, the rib from his side. Such a term still defines women's writing in terms of men's writing. The discourses of the authors here studied do not merely complement, but also (as Ana Lydia Vega explains) "juxtapose, contradict and crash against the male historical, narratological and traditional accounts of reality."<sup>23</sup> Although at times women's writing may

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Conversation with Ana Lydia Vega at City College of CUNY on 3/12/98.

seem complementary because it deals with what has not been covered in male writings, and appears to offer the other side of issues, this writing cannot be considered *only* complementary because it often denies or exists alongside official accounts of history.

At a formal level as well, women's work does more than complement men's. It builds on, contests, subverts, distorts, molds and twists masculinist literary forms as the authors weave different discourses, registers, languages into their writings.

As they take up the task of writing, interpreting facts, and expressing their vision and truth, Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega develop discourses that at times are reminiscent of each other, but nevertheless remain distinct. Rosario Ferré is much more canonical in her approach to writing than Ana Lydia Vega and Julia Alvarez. Although by no means lacking feminist or subversive elements, Ferré does uphold a traditional prescriptive conception of writing. She thinks that "today's women writers *must* above all, write well, and that one succeeds in writing well only by mastering the techniques of writing" (García Pinto 96, *my italics*). The prescriptive, almost dogmatic nature of this view on writing is rejected by

Minh-ha as authoritarian and oppressive. Minh-ha claims that clarity, one of the classical ingredients of good writing, is "a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power"(16). Like Vega, Ferré does not believe in 'gynowriting'; she is of the opinion that "no distinct feminine literature exists. To insist that one does exist implies, in a parallel fashion, the existence of a feminine nature, distinct from the masculine, when [...] it seems most logical to emphasize the existence of a radically different experience"(García Pinto 96).

It is my contention that the expression of this "radically different experience" through writing constitutes one of the aspects of 'feminine writing'. This of course does not mean that all literature by women throughout history can be considered "feminine writing". At the same time, some writing by female authors of previous centuries can be considered feminine writing despite the fact that it predates theories of feminist discourse. It is writing that express women's "radically different experience." Despite Susana Reisz's skepticism about being able to sustain the existence of a "feminine writing" through time, it is possible to do so because I am not referring to an essentialist description of

the feminine based on biology. Instead, I allude to a description based on "discursive strategies that are able to express--or denounce--a specific form of marginality [upon] becoming aware of woman's marginal position within a patriarchal society"(Reisz, "Hipótesis" 200. My translation).

Although not all writing authored by women can be considered 'feminine writing', it is also true that it is not only contemporary women authors who have been aware of their marginal position within society, as attested by the writings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and those of seventeenth-century nuns compiled by Arenal and Schlau in Untold Sisters.

Subversion, then, could be said to be at the base of 'feminine writing' for as Reisz points out, "the expression of marginality--even if indirectly--constitutes a gesture of rebellion"(Reisz, "Hipótesis" 200). This is "a new praxis of writing, subverting the authoritarian language that puts [women] 'in their place,' displacing themselves"(García Pinto 147). Yet for a Latin American woman writer, it may not be enough to subvert the language that keeps her in her place. Her feminist struggle not only embraces issues relative to her position as woman in a patriarchal society, but extends

beyond issues of marginality and oppression based on gender to include issues of class, race, sexuality, and poverty which are crucial in Latin American societies. These are issues that cross the gender barrier.

Commenting on feminism in Latin America, Debra Castillo discusses the absurdity of appropriating First World feminist theories "uncritically for a Latin American critical practice, for [their] theories and [their] conclusions derive from specific conditions that may not be duplicated in Latin America where circumstance of race, gender, class, and cultural relationships exist which may not obtain in the Anglo-French sphere" (Castillo xvii). These are some of the dynamics that mold 'feminism' in Latin America, and which for our purposes, are part of the subversive discourses that shape 'feminine writing' in the writers here studied. Nonetheless, it is a feminism that remains undefined as a theoretical construct because of its multifaceted nature and the fact that it is in its developing stages. Perhaps this lack of definition is one of the reasons that many thinkers and writers in Latin America seem reluctant to be called "feminists." On the one hand is the issue of sexuality, as pointed out by Amy Kaminsky. Women fear that they will be labeled lesbians if they call themselves feminists (Kaminsky

22). The stigma of lesbianism is widely used to discredit feminism.

Another barrier feminism faces in Latin America is the fear of imperialism. Feminist theories can be another way in which First World nations impose their values on Third World nations. The charge is that such theories are irrelevant to the problems and differences of Latin American societies (Castillo 13). Ana Lydia Vega points out the fact that this latter attack on feminism is one often used by patriarchal ideologues, who invoke the sacred cause of national pride in an effort to forestall the introduction of feminist consciousness into Latin America.<sup>24</sup>

My solution to the problem of feminism in Latin America is to redefine it. Feminism in Latin American societies must be more inclusive; it must embrace social, economic, cultural, racial, sexual, and political issues. Perhaps when feminism is redefined to include these issues in its agenda, there will be a clearer path towards the development of feminism in Latin America. Once these considerations are in place, and subversion, the expression of marginality, and women's issues

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Conversation with Ana Lydia Vega at City College, 3/12/98.

are taken as some of the basic elements of this type of feminism, the works of writers like Ana Lydia Vega, Rosario Ferré, Julia Alvarez and many of their predecessors and contemporaries will be justly considered feminist writings.

Not surprisingly, feminist narrative, like feminist thought in Latin America, may be permeated by ambivalence and resemble a collage, since these writers have a tendency to mix tradition with First World feminist theory and thus take "a pinch of this, and a smidgeon of that" (Castillo 36). The works of Rosario Ferré, despite her prescriptive view of writing, are feminist inasmuch as they are expressed from a woman's point of view. They denounce the oppression and injustices to which marginal people in general, are subjected. Although there have been novels with female protagonists for a long time, Ferré was one of the first to subvert the traditional focus of the novel, not just by giving agency to a female character, but also (in The House on the Lagoon, for instance) by having the main character present herself and the world as she sees it. In addition, she makes obvious the confrontation between the center and the margins. In this novel, as we see in Chapter Two, the view from the margin becomes the center of the novel because Isabel's marginal view is the authoritative and shaping

force, while Quintín's view from the center becomes, both literally and metaphorically, scribbles on the margins.

Through the hiding game that ensues between Isabel and Quintín, Isabel also consciously plays with his insecurities while addressing the issues of the oppressive authority of the dominant (Quintín) and the purported need for approval and the fear of the dominated. The fact that she hides the chapters of the novel as she writes them, knowing that Quintín will look for them, find and read them, plays on his sense of superiority by letting him think that she is fearful of him, yet paradoxically, she does this as a means of asserting herself and her independence from him. By continuing the game of hide-and-seek, she not only goes against his expressed wishes that she stop writing the novel. She also shows him that she regards his editorial comments with indifference and that he is powerless against her intention of telling her truth and expressing her reality from her perspective, based upon her experience as a woman. The growing awareness of her strength and control over the situation, the power that she as an author exercises over Quintín as a reader is evidenced by the fact that she hides the chapters where she knows Quintín will find them. She knows that he will be unwilling to destroy them for he wants

to know how the novel will end.

Ferré's feminine writing creates, in The House on the Lagoon, a locus, as described by Krauze, "where woman [is] really herself, and man will begin to see himself, to his own amazement, through her eyes"(Castillo xx). Indeed, Quintín's surprise at his portrayal in the manuscript and his contestational scribbles on the margins reinforce the idea that Isabel is engaging in 'feminine writing'. Quintín can't stand the untraditional and unexpected insights produced by her depiction of their lives.

Part of Ferré's feminist discourse, as discussed in chapters one and two, is a social picture and criticism of the system of oppression within the different hierarchical levels of a society that, among other things, obliterates women. Her portrayal of self-effacement in The House on the Lagoon takes the shape of Isabel's self-portrait; how she slowly loses herself within the authoritative and oppressive ways of the family she married into, and also the slow resurgence of her features, her voice and self through writing. Her picture is accompanied by those of other women among which is her mother, who escapes her oppressive world through madness. There is also the picture of her mother-in-

law, Rebeca, a silenced woman whose humanity and spirituality have been destroyed by her husband's violence. Rebeca's subversion is achieved through hyperbole. She becomes the thoughtless, beautiful doll that her husband wants; a doll that adopts her husband's means of coercion and oppression. Thus she asserts herself by becoming a vengeful, capricious, vain, and superficial persona.

Similarly, Ermelinda, one of the most important mulatto characters in the novel, accomplishes subversion by hyperbolizing what is expected from her as a woman. She makes strategic use of her female identity--the very attributes that lead to her rape and oppression--to manipulate men to her own advantage. She uses desire as "the iron spike on which the world turns" because "fair or foul, one day she was going to win the struggle against powerful men" (HOL 22). And of course there is Petra, the head maid of the Mendizábals, who at times takes advantage of Buenaventura Mendizábal's superstitious nature. Through her African magic and wisdom, she is able to control him and instill fear and respect in him. Ferré's feminist discourse in this instance, shows the world through these women's visions and describes ways in which they fight back. They take control of colonial practices, turn them around, modify and subvert them to their

advantage to negotiate some room, individuality, and power for themselves.

Yet the feminism inherent in the portrayal of the oppressed does not stop with the description of women. All three writers exhibit a feminism that challenges tenets of traditional liberal North American feminism. Adopting a more inclusive portrayal of injustice, they don't stop at issues affecting women; instead, their demythifying efforts reject a monolithic, homogeneous and imagined definition of nation and culture. Their narratives depict oppression of men as well as well as by men. Julia Alvarez, for instance in In the Time of the Butterflies, makes an effort to humanize Trujillo's main henchman, Peña. Despite his brutal job as the chief of the murderous and abusive military police, his vulnerability at the hands of Trujillo is also obvious. He is also ashamed about what he and his subordinates have done to the Mirabals. Peña's position as a subaltern is clear when Patria writes about him while he is trying to get her son released:

Peña lay down his pathetic key ring, picked up the phone, and dialed headquarters in the capital. His voice shifted from its usual bullying bark to an accommodating softness, "yes, yes General, absolutely [...]" The devil I was so used to seeing disappeared, and for a moment, like his tilting prism, I saw an overgrown, fat boy, ashamed of himself for kicking the cat and pulling the wings off butterflies. (216-217)

When the Mirabals are stopped while on their way to see their imprisoned husbands bearing a pass Peña has given them,

Minerva observes:

"Captain Peña has authorized this trip. I hope there will be no problems for us to report back to him." The paroxysm of blinking made me pity the poor man. His own terror was a window that opened onto the rotten weakness at the heart of Trujillo's system. (278)

A similar picture can be found in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. Julia Alvarez' feminist writing approaches the exigencies of a more accurate description of the oppressed by resorting to a discourse of multiple perspectives. Thus women not only express their vision of their oppression, but their own oppressive practices. Alvarez allows as well in her novels, the perspectives of the oppressor in instances where the roles change and s/he becomes the oppressed.

Sometimes the characters' identities as oppressors and victims co-exist simultaneously. For instance, Alvarez allows one of the policemen to offer his perspective on the search for Dr. García at his home. Although the policeman is an agent of oppression in this instance, the reader is able to see his humble origins, his own position as a colonial

subject of higher classes and of higher-ups in the military. Alvarez presents also the voicelessness and facelessness of Carlos, the Garcías' somewhat oppressive father and husband, as the youngest of his father's thirty-five children whose past and whose memories were given him by innumerable family accounts of what he did and who he was as a child. Carlos wonders if his memories are real or just the amalgamation of the recollection of his siblings as they told him how different events took place:

He wonders if this might be what he felt as a small child before the impressions, and tones and presences were overlaid by memories, memories which are mostly others' stories about his past[...] he has no past of his own. (216)

We are able to glance into his overpowering fear of falling victim, falling into the tyrannical and murderous hands of Trujillo. He hides like a rat in a compartment in a bathroom while his little girls, maids, and wife face the military police.

In "El baúl de Ms. Florence" Ana Lydia Vega's anti-colonialist discourse not only pictures the oppressive worlds of Ms. Florence and Ms. Morse, but also exposes the oppression of the son at the hands of the father. In his loneliness and anguish at the violent and oppressive hands of his father, Charlie locks Miss Florence, his tutor, in a

turret. When he lets her out after a long while, he explains to her:

Perdóneme: sólo quería hacerle comprender lo que es la vida para un prisionero. ("EBDMF" 23)

In The House on the Lagoon, Ferré also extends the picture of injustice to include race and class oppression as well as oppression within the same class and gender. She accomplishes this by illustrating the abusive behavior of fathers toward their sons, of one sibling toward another. This intra-familial competition for power and control does not stop with mere backstabbing, but goes so far as to precipitate a suicide. Once in control, the formerly oppressed son proceeds to reproduce the same pattern of abuse in his relations with his own son. The dynamics of oppressor and the oppressed, the institutionalization and perpetuation of exploitative practices, is metaphorized throughout the novel by the resilience of the crabs. The servants keep the crabs at bay, but they take over the house on the lagoon once the servants are gone.

The symbolism of the crabs suggests that the entire system of oppression exists, is supported, and fueled by groups of oppressed elements which act as its agents. Victims become, consciously or not, active accomplices to the

ideologies that victimize them.

The House on the Lagoon also seems to assert the strength and potential ability of the oppressed to overcome their oppressors. It is another one of the commentaries on Puerto Rico's political liaison with the United States that permeates the novel. The symbol of the crabs suggests the liveliness, strength, and resilience of Puerto Rican culture in the face of a foreign culture and political system. The crabs' passivity and patience sharply contrasts with Manuel's resolution to join the armed struggle to end political, economic, and racial oppression in his homeland.

Yet another facet of Ferré's feminist discourse in The House on the Lagoon is an anti-clerical discourse. Ferré depicts the hypocrisy and superficiality of the privileged who attend church, call themselves Christians, and yet show themselves time and again as capable of inhumane behavior. The pious are also extremely superstitious. Despite their so-called Christianity, they fearfully seek the help of Petra's African magic. There is also, by implication, a question of the morality of an institution that supposedly protects and represents the destitute and weak yet, at the same time, overlooks abuses committed by members of its congregation.

Nevertheless, Ferré's feminist anti-clerical discourse is much stronger and clearly seen in La batalla de las vírgenes. This type of discourse is not new in Latin American writing, but Ferré's feminine perspective in this novel, distinguishes her anti-clericalism from that of male writers. Gabriel García Márquez, for instance, is one of the strongest critics of the role of the Church in Latin America and of the enormous influence--often negative, repressive and reactionary--it has wielded at all levels in Latin American societies.

From the earliest incursions of the Spanish into the New World, the Church has attempted to impose its will on Latin America. As early as 1493, it granted Spanish monarchs the right to rule "all lands 100 leagues West and South of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands..." (Rosenberg 209), based on the quality of 'other' of the aborigines. Their paganism was justification enough to subject them to Catholic rule (Rosenberg 210). In spite of the fact that some clergymen, such as Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, objected to and actively worked against the oppression and exploitation of aborigines and African slaves, and despite the role that some clergy played in the Latin American independence movements, "overall [...] the Catholic Church in colonial

Latin America helped reinforce Iberian control" (Rosenberg 210).

Furthermore, the Church has pervasively allied itself with governmental power and defended the status quo in exchange for land and riches. The issue was raised within the Church itself during the nineteen-sixties by radical thinkers who developed the "theology of liberation." Their "...conception of salvation require[s] the faithful to struggle for social justice and to identify with the poor and oppressed" (Rosenberg 213). These controversial ideas, eventually denounced by the Church hierarchy, had a broad and lasting influence among many segments of its rank and file.

Ferré's La batalla de las vírgenes presents as its main characters Mariana, a Puerto Rican woman in search of herself, and Padre Angel, a Spanish priest sent to Puerto Rico to collect funds to build a cathedral in one of the most affluent neighborhoods of the island. Mariana is perceived as a feminist by most of the characters in the novel, including herself. Her name, part of Ferré's anti-clerical discourse, is an ironic gesture vis-à-vis her so-called feminism for it is meant to remind us of the Marian myths. Her name brings to mind the figure of the Virgin Mary whose image has been

imposed by the Church as a model for women to follow, given the fact that she is, as Magali García Ramis points out:

una mujer perfecta porque cumple con los dos requisitos que para los hombres son importantes: no haber conocido placer sexual antes de conocer a su Señor, y cumplir con el rol de reproductora que es el que le toca por naturaleza. (García Ramis 66)

It also reminds us of her traditional portrayal as a long-suffering, secondary and domestic character and of the homilies, prayers and churches dedicated to her in an attempt to give her some sort of importance within Catholicism. (García Ramis 67) Similarly, women's roles as mothers and wives have been sanctified and mythified even as they were made subservient to the family and sexually subordinated to their husbands.

Mariana's soul-searching engenders a discourse of self questioning. As her search brings her closer to the underprivileged classes of San Juan, it causes her to question her own prejudices. Her questioning and behavior towards people of the lower classes cause Padre Angel to question his orders and the Church's attitude towards the poor. Ferré initially presents Padre Angel as a liberal priest who rebels and challenges his superiors' orders out of a commitment to justice. His rebellion, nonetheless, is not overt; his letters to his superiors show the subterfuges of

the subaltern trying to get what s/he wants without threatening the powerful. His epistolary discourse resembles the feminine discourse analyzed and labeled by Ludmer as "the strategies of the weak" whereby the writer attempts to subvert and challenge authority in an oblique, non-threatening way. Nevertheless, his attitude towards Mariana's search for freedom remains a reactionary chauvinistic one. He tries to dominate all her acts and decisions. Because she deviates somewhat from his image of what 'good women'--of which his dead sister is his archetypal example--should do, he comes to reject her and withdraw his support from her.

The novel, thus, advances the idea that the Church is one of most oppressive forces--perhaps the most oppressive force--operating against women in Latin American society. It has traditionally kept women in the homes, asked them to endure and accept abusive treatment, and denied them control and knowledge of their own bodies. The Church has alienated the Latin American woman from her own body, even making it taboo for a woman to look at her naked body in the mirror. It has also successfully tied women to the domestic sphere by forbidding them to control their reproductive capacity. By fostering a culture that condemns women to procreation, ignorance, and self-effacement, the Church has conditioned

them to accept abusive and repressive situations. It has convinced women to trade their freedom and dignity for whatever security there may be--sometimes minimal, sometimes entirely illusory--in depending on a man's economic resources. La batalla de las vírgenes also suggests that in spite of more liberal approaches of some sectors of the Church towards issues of marginality and social injustice, these challenges to traditional practices and beliefs still fail to address the oppression of women and the Church's age-old attitudes towards them.

Ferré's anti-clerical discourse in La batalla de las vírgenes, moves beyond the Church's oppression of women and engages in a wider social criticism. Thus, it underscores Church's policies that subdue the masses for monetary gain by encouraging the adoration of saints and virgins to such a point that all religious values become irrelevant. The only thing that matters is the "victory" of the Virgin of the privileged over that of the poor. The Church literally sponsors a war between the upper and lower classes in order to impose a foreign, imported Virgin over the creole Virgin of the deprived natives. The symbolism that denounces the Church and reminds the reader of the Church's role in colonial and economic conquest is clear.

Similarly, Ana Lydia Vega's anti-clerical discourse helps her develop a anti-patriarchal narrative. She resorts to humor, pointing out the absurdities and incongruities inherent in the code of behavior to which women are expected to adhere. In the book's short stories, with its suggestive title Virgenes y mártires, Vega explores female archetypal models, including the ideal of virginity and that of her martyrdom at the hands of the male. Her suffering is accepted, taken for granted, and regarded as something as natural to her gender as her sex. In some stories like "trabajando 'pal inglés", (99-108) Vega satirizes models of appropriate behavior for good, Catholic women as embraced by well-to-do families and how any questioning of these behavior models is refuted with accusations of communism and feminism. Her portrayal of these behavior models in "Despedida de duelo" (109-115) reveals the hypocrisy and double standards of conventional values, as well as men's lecherous, abusive behavior, and the sense of insecurity that overcomes them when women take control of their sexuality, as is the case in "Letra para salsa y 3 soneos de encargo". (81-88)

The fact that women may not abide by the pre-ordained codes of behavior means the crumbling of an entire culture, and this disintegration means confusion, incomprehension, and

anxiety, especially for those accustomed to be in control. While this topsy-turvy world will also be new to the oppressed woman, her traditional oppressor has a lot more to lose than she. This is perhaps the reason why Yoyo's mother in Alvarez' How the García Girls Lost their Accent wishes to remain in the United States. Life in this new country means losing an entire culture, a position of privilege and prominence, and even simple understanding of what is going on around her. Yet Yoyo's mother prefers to remain in the United States and retain her newly found freedom (limited though it may be) rather than return to the Dominican Republic "where, de la Torre or not, she would 'only' be a wife and a mother (and a failed one at that, since she never provided the required son)" (143-144).

Whereas Ferré's work focuses on social criticism and only implies cultural criticism, Ana Lydia Vega's criticism offers a reversed schema; her work involves cultural criticism mainly with social criticism implied. Such is the undercurrent in works like Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión, Vírgenes y mártires, Falsas crónicas del sur. In them Vega employs a discourse of demythification to explore aspects of Puerto Rican culture which value unity, solidarity, the easy pleasures of chatting among families or

strangers. She brings forth the wealth hidden in oral history, and in storytelling, the subversive character of Spanglish, and the desire to keep alive a culture and tradition constantly under attack. Her narrative, notably, escapes the uncritical super-valorization of tradition and culture by pointing out the negative and oppressive aspects of Puerto Rican culture--many of which are prevalent also in numerous other Latin American societies.

Thus, Vega's demythifying discourse calls attention to the fact that oppression does not exist in Puerto Rico only at a political level as a residue of the colonial status of the country. It shows that there is also a prevalent oppressive element within the culture that cannot be ignored. The effort to foster the view of Puerto Rican culture as a defensive counter-attack against the United States' imperialist encroachments does not excuse Puerto Rico from self-examination. From her particular feminist stance, Vega is aware of the possible politics of "reproduction [of tradition] by institutionalization" which, as pointed out by Vertovec, "has much to do with processes of representation" (Ranger et al. 81). Her narrative refuses to accept the processes of representation typical of agendas like nationalism and universalizing feminism which tend to

homogenize culture and nation in their efforts--well intentioned as they may be--to reproduce or transform tradition and culture according to their own interests. For Vega, then, the imposition of an uncritical nationalist agenda on Puerto Rican writers would be an authoritarian praxis and would foster more oppressive patterns because, as she asks:

¿Y si el machismo resultara ser uno de esos tan proclamados Valores Nacionales que todo escritor criollo debe defender so pena de dejar de serlo?  
¿Y si tus personajes masculinos son pobres-puertorriqueños-oprimidos-por-el-imperialismo-yanqui pero a la vez sinvergüenzas opresores de sus pobres-puertorriqueñas-oprimidas-por-el imperialismo-yanqui mujeres?"(Loló 93)

Thus, her feminist discourse includes maintaining a critical and vigilant attitude towards any theory and denouncing and rejecting those that hold a dogmatic, prescriptive agenda. This questioning is to be extended to feminist, anti-colonial and economic theories and does not exclude self-questioning because any opinion, like any theory, regardless of how liberating its intentions, can begin to set up barriers and become just another normative and repressive structure.

Vega, like Ferré, believes that women's writings are tinged by their experience as women:

Porque no se puede (ni se debe) tapar el sexo con la mano. Porque no es cierto lo que decía el otro día una colega cubana, aquello de que el mar es

azul para hombres y mujeres por igual. La realidad desmiente tan democrática pero ingenua concepción. Desde este sexo, el mar se ve a veces bien rojo y hace tiempo que dejó de abrirse en dos para salvarnos de Yul Brynner y sus hordas implacables de soldados egipcios. (Loló 92)

Vega considers herself a feminist writer yet, with an irrepressible sense of humor, rejects being pigeonholed as such.<sup>25</sup> Her reluctance perhaps has to do with the prescriptiveness she perceives in traditional feminist theory as well as in the Puerto Rican feminist agenda. She denounces its masculinist base which becomes as oppressive, repressive, and dogmatic as canonical criticism. She uproariously rejects feminist prescriptiveness in "De bipeda desplumada a Escritora Puertorriqueña (con E y P machúscula)" by asserting the woman writer's no-win situation before the critics, be they chauvinist or feminist. In order to signal the 'machismo' potentially implicit in the feminist Puerto Rican agenda, she changes the "y" in "mayúscula" to "ch" so as to emulate the word 'macho':

Si optas por quedarte en casa, es decir, por rebuscar en el baúl de abuela a ver qué reliquias falopianas encuentras, a los acordes intimistas de un bolero de Puchi Balseiro, la crítica macha (si se molesta) despacha tu trabajo con frasecitas tipo "fina sensibilidad", "suave lirismo", "cordialidad de tono", con lo cual puedes estar segura de que a nadie le van a dar ganas de leerte. La crítica feminista, por otra parte, te martillará los

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Conversation with Ana Lydia Vega at City College on 3/12/98.

deditos para que acabes de caerte del bote, denunciando airada la reafirmación de los arquetipos sexistas de la Sirvienta Nupcial y la *Mater Dolorosa* y deplorando la flagrante ausencia de abogadas, médicas y mujeres de negocio en tu modesta obra. (Loló 96)

Vega's demythifying discourse shows that prescriptiveness is not limited to the Puerto Rican feminist agenda. It is present as well in those who try to further the nationalist agenda--conveniently disregarding or ignoring the fact that some "National Values" may be negative ones. As she notes, what if "machismo" is one of our "National Values"? She has identified an oppressive and limiting "imaginary manual for aspiring Puerto Rican writers" that criticizes any writing that does not deal with the nationalist agenda and which includes:

1. Escoger temas serios y profundos, preferiblemente de tipo histórico, que tengan una total e incuestionable trascendencia y puedan propiciar una reflexión crítica en nuestros ingenuos y desinformados lectores.
2. Evitar, bajo cualquier circunstancia, burlarse de nuestros siempre amenazados Valores Nacionales, cualesquiera que éstos pudieran ser.
3. Mostrar, a la menor provocación, el perfil más favorable posible de nuestro Pueblo-en-lucha.
4. Cultivar con febril esmero los desenlaces optimistas que dejen entrever--a corto plazo--el deslumbrante resplandor de la Gran Aurora Popular.
5. Y sobre todo, mantener contra viento y marea un tono digno y solemne que no deje lugar a dudas en cuanto a la absoluta seriedad de nuestras nobles intenciones. (Loló 86)

Her feminist approach to culture allows her to reject

the straitjacketing formulations of both the bourgeois feminist and nationalist ideologies. One of the prevalent elements in the culture--to which the nationalist agenda turns a blind eye--is domestic violence of which, according to Vega, two out of three women are victims in Puerto Rico. These, she avers, are official statistics; one can't imagine how many women must be assaulted daily by their husbands, ex-husbands, lovers, boyfriends and fathers. (Loló 25)

Vega examines this violence in "Pasión de Historia," a first person narration in which the narrator, having just ended a relationship with a married man, is trying to write a semi-detective novel based on the journalistic account of the murder of a woman in Puerto Rico by her ex-lover. Her story, instead, ends up narrating--via diaries--a fragmentary version of her friend's marriage on the rocks. It relates an insufferable situation, that her friend tolerates, despite having been an assertive, strong woman. She is unable or unwilling to leave her husband and it is hinted in the story that she may have died a victim of her husband. Despite the narrator's awareness of, and curiosity regarding, the issue of domestic violence, she is unable to prevent her own death, presumably at the hands of her ex-lover. Vega's feminist discourse exposes one of Puerto Rico's least discussed

"national values." The notion that woman is man's possession is well-spread and ingrained in the culture. This belief becomes the basis and justification of the 'right' (by popular law) of a man not just to dominate 'his woman, but to kill her whenever he fears tarnishing of his honor--i.e. manhood, virility, the image of he-who-wears-the-pants.

"Pasión de historia" (Pasión 7-38) exposes the ugly reality of domestic violence and suggests that it is not limited to the lower classes, the uneducated, or the weak-willed. Any woman can be the target of domestic violence, whether or not she is strong and assertive enough to leave a bad relationship. The narrator of this story is presumably killed by her ex-boyfriend even though she had left him. Vega's feminist discourse in this collection of stories does not offer solutions--her characters are killed independently of whether they leave or stay with their oppressors--but exposes, explores and voices questions. Vega brings to the forefront cultural traits which are very real, and by no means positive. Vega is not afraid to examine flaws in the feminist or nationalist agendas which threaten to harden into a new form of dogma. Her stories examine various aspects of Puerto Rican culture, of feminist, nationalist and anti-imperialist agendas. Her characters, at times, contradict,

problematize, or represent the ambivalence and contradictions within these new agendas.

Thus, while "Pasión de historia" (Pasión 7-38) also describes the contradictory behavior, agony, and to a certain extent, self-imprisonment suffered by a woman trapped in a bad relationship, the underlying theme of the story is domestic violence. Vilma's marital experience is one of domestic violence because the devastation of a woman's psyche created by the kind of situation experienced by Vilma, is a form of violence. The protagonists of other stories in Pasión de Historia y otras historias de pasión either die victims of domestic violence--like the woman in "Ajustes S.A." (39-53) and the one in "Más acá" (98) whose husband comes to claim his right to her as his property even after death!--or they express the anxiety they live with knowing they may become victims of their mate's murderous hand, like the woman in "Delito sin cuerpo" (97). Throughout the stories it becomes evident how little value the life of a woman has in the popular culture and how little value it retains even before the law. A woman's murder at the hands of her lover or "ex" is a message with a "moraleja reaccionaria para mujeres chochicalientes" (9) intended to force women to deny their sexuality.

In "Caso omiso" the female protagonist is not only a victim of her ex-husband's violence, living in constant fear of him, she is the potential victim of any man, even her neighbor, who takes a fancy to her, particularly if she refuses him. In this story, again, the issue of men's physical violence towards women is the central theme. The protagonists are investigating the possible murder of the neighbor--whose physical abuse by her husband they have heard through the apartment walls. And even though it becomes clear that the wife is alive, the neighbor has apparently killed a prostitute. Vega's portrayal of Dalia is not just a facile, superficial portrayal of the woman-victim; her subversive discourse essays a more complex description of culturally based interactions between men and women. True, Dalia is a sexual object to be possessed by her ex-boyfriend (and if she survives, by subsequent boyfriends). She is coveted by her neighbor and the young man narrating the story. But she plays along with this image by wearing tight and provocative clothes to create--much like Lucinda, Yoyo's cousin in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, "a look that has always made Yolanda think of call girls"(GG 5). Una, the female character in "Tres aeróbicos de amor"(Pasión 55-63) also dresses with a "blusa del escote criminal" and "la falda tubo lila"(Pasión 58).

Characters such as Dalia, Lucinda, and Una also serve to problematize the sexual freedom some women and men have understood as the only issue, goal, and achievement of feminism. Dalia is like some of the female characters of The House on the Lagoon, discussed above. Knowing the effect she has on men, and as a means of exercising power over them, she uses her feminine identity and the stereotypical characteristics assigned to her as a female. She teases the narrator throughout the entire story by making him think that a sexual union is imminent. His constant attention and desire for her allow her to feel younger and to enjoy the sexual power she knows she exerts on him. At times, her sexuality is also a weapon, as when she uses it to distract Don Danilo while the narrator and his friends search for the supposed dead wife. The fact that she is a separated woman may lead the reader to think of her as an independent person who has asserted herself and terminated an abusive relationship. Quite on the contrary: she is petrified by her ex-husband and is still subservient to him whenever he decides to come to her house to make sure she is not with another man.

Vega's anti-colonial discourse in "Caso Omiso" creates a character whose ambivalent identities seem to signal the hybrid character of a woman who has internalized aspects of

different cultures and amalgamated them. On the one hand, she is not the sort of woman who accepts her lot until "death does us part". She thinks nothing of developing a sexual relationship with someone she is not married to and who, contrary to the tacit rules of courtship, is at least ten years younger than she. Economically independent, she isn't afraid of what people say. On the other hand, she takes part in the provoking, teasing, shy-yet-bold type of amorous game that she plays coyly with the narrator. Using her sexuality to accomplish her goals she is, nevertheless, subservient to both Don Danilo and to her ex-husband even after they are divorced. She represents the somewhat schizophrenic woman that Vega labels "the seduced and seductive Little Red Riding Hood" (Loló 24, my translation) who, despite living in a time that potentially allows her to be herself, knowing how lethal and abusive men can be, cannot shed a lifetime of contradictory messages furnished by family and culture.

Vega's demythifying discourse continues to denounce culture and tradition. Songs, for instance, are one of society's vehicles for the propagation of contradictory, reactionary views. Their non-threatening, repetitive, and melodious rhymes have a hypnotic, almost subliminal effect on people and leave a mark that is hard to erase. As Vega says:

La educación sentimental del bolero se va infiltrando tiernamente a son de guitarras, llenándonos las cabecitas de floridas cursilerías que nunca olvidaremos y románticas expectativas de felicidad que nunca conoceremos. (Loló 24)

As a consequence, "we are inhabited until death by the double vision of the ferocious and tender werewolf and its inseparable corollary, the seduced and seductive Little Red Riding Hood" (Loló 24, my translation). Dalia's character is reminiscent of that of Guiomar in "Sobre tumbas y héroes" (Pasión 101-145) who, with a better education than Dalia, schooled in the United States, and versed in feminist rhetoric, displays a similar kind of behavior with Emanuel, her nationalist counterpart in the story.

Yet Vega does not limit psychic ambivalence to the female characters or to the feminist agenda. Emanuel, also educated and embarked in the nationalist, demythifying endeavor of re-writing the history of his country that has been erased or silenced by the oppressive influence of imperialist policies, also displays the behavior of the typical "mamitólogo"<sup>26</sup> when interacting with Guiomar. Despite his acquaintance with theories of colonialism's effect on countries, cultures, and women, he can't help engaging in

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Humorous term with which Vega combines oral and scientific registers (*mami* and *logos*) to describe men who engage in practices which include addressing women with flattering 'lines', cat calling, and who offer behavior which purports to make a woman melt and accept their 'seductive' advances.

chauvinistic behavior that at times enrages Guiomar. Vega makes clear to the reader that the subversive, rebellious spirit within Emanuel that seeks to liberate the repressed history and culture of his country will do nothing to change the traditional view and status of women. He is a prime example of what Vega satirically terms the "militant neo-machismo" or "machismo-leninismo" which she thinks is much more sophisticated and perverse than the conventional "paleo-machismo" because its chameleon-like rhetoric hides behind years of studies, deforming and manipulating genuine philosophical ideas in order to maintain male privileges. Revolutionary theses are used to justify capricious excesses and to repress women. (Vega, Tramo 266-267)

The anti-colonial discourse of all the three authors I am studying also develops the theme of ambivalence in men. Manolo, Minerva's husband in In the Time of the Butterflies, much like Emanuel in "Sobre tumbas y héroes" and Father Angel in La batalla de las vírgenes, is another prime example of "machismo-leninismo." He is educated, a militant revolutionary with leftist inclinations, is set on a struggle to free his country from an authoritarian, unfair, and abusive regime, but does not, at any point question the position of women within that regime. And when he does, it is

only to fuel his cause against Trujillo, not to propose any change in the status of women in the Dominican Republic. He is quite content with the privileges that his being a male in that society offers him. He is obviously the figure of authority in his family and, like his father-in-law and many other men in the novel, he engages in extra-marital affairs and becomes abusive to his wife by means of his passive-aggressive behavior towards her. Within the rebel movement, the men are in charge of the operation and the women are supposed to be there to help them. Once the men are incarcerated, nevertheless, the women don't disband in fear; instead, they decide to take charge and actually get more communal support than the men ever dreamed of. In essence, most "liberal" male characters in the narratives of Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega, favor liberation and justice, as long as women's subservient position within society and in relation to men is not altered.

Hilarity is another powerful configurational discourse utilized by the three authors of this study. They use humor and satire to denounce and place emphasis on particular historical, social, political, and cultural aspects of their societies. Nevertheless, laughter is Ana Lydia Vega's stylistic *Tour de Force* and is present in her narrative much

often and openly than in those of Alvarez and Ferré. Humor, sarcasm, and irony are her most powerful tools of subversion. Her use of laughter echoes Rosario Castellanos' recipe for the destruction of customs that enslave women and men:

Ante esto yo sugeriría una campaña: no arremeter contra las costumbres con la espada flamígera de la indignación ni con el trémulo lamentable del llanto sino poner en evidencia lo que tienen de ridículas, de obsoletas, de cursis y de imbéciles. Les aseguro que tenemos un material inagotable para la risa. Y necesitamos tanto reír porque la risa es la forma más inmediata de la liberación de lo que nos oprime, del distanciamiento de lo que nos aprisiona! (39)

Vega's mixture of the different registers of Spanish: educated, literary, scientific used side by side with popular slang, Spanglish, ready-made phrases and clichés taken from religious, romantic, popular aphorisms, songs, poems, etc. and phonetic renditions of everyday speech produce a hilarious effect. The amalgamation of registers brings open laughter by making obvious to the readers--and perhaps by allowing them to see themselves in it--the absurdity and the ridiculous nature of some beliefs, practices and behaviors. It also serves to spoof and to offer a counter-discourse to traditional discursive schema.

Vega's tendency to amalgamate and hybridize does not stop at a linguistic level. She successfully mixes genres to attain irony and humor, to satirize and break down the

barriers set down by the canonical division of genres in literature. On this subject, Vega remarks:

Las escritoras han dado un certero golpe de estado, echando abajo las fronteras mismas de los géneros. Pregúntenle, si no, a Carmen Lugo Filippi, que agarró la novela rosa y le inyectó varios cc de contenido crítico. O a Rosario Ferré, que plantó bombas en el terreno sagrado del cuento infantil. O a Magali García Ramis, que parodió con gran acierto el ensayo de polémica cultural. Así, con entradas inesperadas y salidas originales, se ha liquidado eficientemente el bloqueo literario que controlaba el acceso a los géneros. (Loló 95)

Exemplifying her critical evaluation, Vega uses a collage of genres in Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión, by mixing elements from the detective story with those of the romance novel, autobiographical novel, novel by installments, the picaresque, oral literature of ghosts and spirits, and historical novel. Invariably, her writing is a liberating act of transgression meant to dissolve the ties imposed on people in general, not only on women, by traditional culture, official discourse, and the ideologies of the dominant. Vega's formal and stylistic irreverence becomes a means of resistance.

Falsas crónicas del sur exhibits a mixture similar to Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión. The latter's emphasis is on challenging the official history of Puerto Rico. She is trying to unveil the history that has been

silenced and conveniently ignored: the multicultural past of the country of Tainos and Africans, and of course the history of women. According to the official curriculum taught in schools, Puerto Rican history begins with the alliance of Puerto Rico with the United States through the commonwealth system. Puerto Rican history predating this event has been ignored because:

¡Si lo importante era saber que los americanos habían creado el mundo en siete días (sin descansar el domingo); si la verdadera historia del país había empezado en 1952, D.M. (Después de Muñoz), el año inolvidable del *Big Bang* Popular; si la estábamos protagonizando estelarmente nosotros mismos, los maniqués gordos y coloraos de la irrompible Vitrina del Caribe! (Loló 102)

Discovering the existence of a hidden history, according to Magali García Ramis, was like discovering that one's parents had been lying to you your entire life and waited until you were forty to let you know that you were adopted (Loló 101). Vega thinks that this is the reason for the patriotic-historic obsession of Puerto Rican literature and for the sense of a frustrated calling as historians that tortures some writers of [her] generation" (Loló 102, my translation). This need for history exists because, according to her, there is a link between one's sense of identity as an individual and that of one's country. Knowing the history of one's country facilitates the knowledge of one's own history and, thus, the appraisal of the identity of both:

Para poder ser gente, para existir como individuos y poder insertarnos en algún punto de la experiencia humana, íbamos a tener que hacer un indispensable vuelo de reconocimiento en la máquina del tiempo, íbamos a tener que convertirnos en detectives aficionados y salir, a como diera lugar, tras la pista del pasado. De un pasado por lo menos revoltoso, si no glorioso; de un pasado un poco más interesante, un poco menos aplastante, en el que figuráramos, aunque fuera como extras, nosotros mismos. (Loló 103)

Julia Alvarez' feminist discourse in In the time of the Butterflies, also takes the shape of a questioning of traditional history. Her transgressive gesture includes looking into the lives of three women who were killed for opposing Trujillo's regime in the Dominican Republic. Unlike many traditional historical novels, hers is not full of dates, battles, military meetings and strategies. She focuses her gaze on the everyday lives of the three Mirabal women. She looks into their intimate existence and thoughts, their childhood dreams, their fears, establishing their ordinary rather than mythical character and validating their concerns as worth writing about. By focusing on the ordinary nature of these women, Alvarez is able to subvert "the traditional story line of the great man in history born to take heroic action." (Walsh) But she also raises questions about the character of heroism, because sacrifice, a basic requirement of the hero, is present in many women's everyday lives. As

Denise Chavez poignantly asserts:

And in serving people and giving the gift of ourselves, the gift of love and mercy, the hardest person we have to be loving and merciful to is ourselves. We women sacrifice for ourselves and the people we love. We don't even go to the bathroom when we have to."(Garza)

Thus, the Mirabals' experiences as women, what they treasured, and their vision of what they considered worth fighting for is made the center of the novel. By bringing the domestic, the personal and intimate to the forefront the author contests canonical literature that denigrates or stereotypes the domestic and/or personal sphere of women. Alvarez' historical discourse is also transgressive by "weaving together the domestic and the political [...] where the totality of a woman's life--the babies, the sex, the professional aspirations, the pretty dresses and the gardens--is discussed in the same breath as stockpiles of guns and wiring bombs"(Walsh). Roberto González Echevarría, caught in the net of canonical criticism, dismisses this kind of narrative as "hagiography" and melodrama since it does not fit the usual content of the historical novel. The novel deals at some points with matters directly linked to women's experience such as abortions, miscarriages, rapes, their torture and indignities at the hands of male guards, their shock at knowing children were being killed around them. González Echevarría complains against what he considers a

cluttering up with misdeeds which creates "much too much crying in this novel" (González Echevarría).

What González Echevarría labels clutter, I analyze as amalgamation. Both Alvarez and Vega, it is my contention, use it as a subversive tool. By mixing the domestic and the political, the personal and the public, the body of the individual with the body of the nation, Alvarez presents a more truthful rendition, through fiction, of what life was like under Trujillo's authoritarian regime. In the historical records of the 'desaparecidos' and the testimonies of those who survived political persecution in many Latin American countries lie confirmation of the link between the body and politics (Kaminsky 15). As Amy Kaminsky explains: "In much of Latin America, the official and unofficial policies of the state are played out on the bodies of its citizens..." (xv). The Mirabals' experiences echo those of thousands of people living under authoritarian regimes, even when their tyranny is disguised by pretenses of democracy.

Alvarez' use of diaries as a way of empowering her characters by allowing them rather than an authoritative historian/author to tell their story can also be seen as

transgressive. Her protagonists present themselves to the reader in the unassuming and private prose of diaries. The diaries seem to be a place in which they seem to be who they really are. The readers too are incorporated into the fiction for the immediacy of style gives the illusion of a self-defined character who is not being invented by an author.

Alvarez' attempt to render a truthful account of the Mirabals' story is further realized by her amalgamation of historical and fictional elements. Intertwining fiction and history she tells the truth, for "there's a way in which a story lies and tells a deeper truth to me than the facts" (Koch). Alvarez discovered while researching her novel, "there were things I had to imagine and understand about them [the Mirabals]. Also, there were no records, just the stories. So that I realized even history is a fiction" (Koch).

González Echevarría, again, seems to have missed the point. What he objects to as a flaw in the novel, that "her [Alvarez'] English is sometimes marred by Hispanisms," I praise as a rich mixing of Spanish and English syntax throughout the novel, a daring comment on strict academic rules of good writing and good literature. The Spanish inflection in English is jarring enough to deny the reader

the opportunity to simply 'assimilate' the sisters. They are not to be confused at any point for English-speakers or as belonging to Anglo culture. Despite González Echevarría's belief that "once we accept the idea of English-speaking Mirabals, there is no reason for them to have accents," Spanish syntax is present in the novel as a mark of their identity as Dominicans and a reminder of their roots. Unlike the García Girls, they are not to lose their 'accent'; it stands defiantly as an assertion of where they come from and who they are.

Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega's juxtaposition of discourses (anti-colonial, feminist, anti-clerical, etc.) and the mixture of linguistic registers and genres, create a locus where women are allowed to be. The fictions here studied present place, culture, history, politics, morality and life in general as seen through women's eyes and in a way that opposes accepted clichés and reveals a more truthful and complete image of their worlds.

The narratives under study validate women's experience, be it at home or on the trenches of anti-colonialism, fighting personal, cultural or political battles. Basic elements of writing such as the themes, the structure of the

narratives, the maroonage<sup>27</sup> of tone, registers, genres, fiction and non-fiction become weapons with which the writers accuse, expose, present, demythify, and claim some justice and agency for themselves, their characters, and, symbolically, for their nations.

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**Maroonage will be discussed in the following chapter.**

#### CHAPTER 4 (RE)(DE) FORMING MAROONAGE<sup>23</sup>

Once colonial subjects empower themselves, claiming a voice through writing, the question, as Simon Gikandi asks in reference to West Caribbean writers poses itself: "Since the colonial language is an instrument of domination and submission, how is it going to be adapted to the narrative and discourse of liberation?" (19). Gikandi's contention is that

"Caribbean writers, in response to their historical marginalization, have evolved a discourse of alterity which is predicated on a deliberate act of self-displacement from the hegemonic culture and its central tenets. The Maroon is the most visible symbol of this gesture of cultural *dédoublement*" (Gikandi 20).

The notion of maroonage--the politics, strategies, and practices of mixing languages, cultures, generational discourses for the manner in which they point out gaps, amalgamations, similarities and differences between the

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I use Simon Gikandi's comparison of the Maroon or runaway African Slave "who managed to maintain [his] autonomy from the dominant culture by both mastering European modes of resistance and improvising American ones." (20) Gikandi maintains that "like the slaves fleeing into the hills to establish autonomy," many Caribbean writers have adopted "maroonage as a metaphor for cultural production and, specifically, for writing in a colonial status." In this way, "the modern Caribbean writer seeks to rework European forms and genres to rename the experience of the "other" American. I use the term maroonage in this thesis to signify a sort of "creolization," mixing of often antithetical elements from the "master culture" and from an "other" epistemological stance and histories in order to re-create and re-define existing forms by virtue of deforming, and transforming those that don't apply to the colonized landscape. As Houston Baker points out, maroonage evinces a discourse that adopts skills and knowledge borrowed from the "master culture" to represent "a community of national interests set in direct opposition to the general economic, political, and theological tenets of a racist land." (Gikandi 21)

"marooned" elements--will be the focus of the chapter. We will see how maroonage is used to reject homogeneity and to resist the essentialization of national and personal identities, thus becoming a tool for the mapping and validation of difference. We will also see the way in which maroonage allows for experimentation with language(s) while it transforms and creates epistemologies and new systems of knowledge.

As exemplified by black and mulatto characters in the narratives under study, the amalgamation, mixture, and maroonage of heterogeneous elements becomes yet another survival technique, another act of subversion. The various narratological discourses developed by Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega foreground the maroonage of European, African, and Amerindian cultures and emphasize the degree to which African and Amerindian cultures and languages have not only survived, but in fact permeate the very fibre of Latin American societies. These writers' narratives reveal the extent to which African and Amerindian legacies resisted and managed to withstand, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the dominant Spanish colonial culture. Some African practices--which may well contain Amerindian elements--have persisted behind the masks worn in the

presence of the colonizers. Black men and women, for instance, have inventively given their African gods and goddesses the faces and dresses of the canonized saints of the white church. Hiding the African Pantheon behind practices and rites of Catholicism, they have given birth to a unique religion known as 'santería'. African language, medicinal wisdom, and other parts of African cultural heritage like clothing, food, dances, and music survived in this way, becoming a stronghold of black resistance to the abuses of the powerful, as most of the narratives here studied show.

Cultural maroonage is a strong element in Ferré's novel, The House on the Lagoon. Petra's magic and wisdom is what keeps the house on the lagoon running. Despite Mendizábal's proclaimed Catholicism and the contempt he exhibits towards blacks, he trusts Petra's opinion more than that of his wife and son. He resorts to Petra when he is in need of solace and healing and dies in her arms, soothed by her ancestral language. Chucha, in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, also presents her magic and concoctions as a normal thing associated with 'blacks blacks' or 'blue blacks'--as the girls' mother calls them to emphasize their darkness and their more or less pure African blood. Chucha's religion and

magic are symbolic of historical resistance and endurance in the face of the colonizing and oppressive white power. They also represent a means of resistance in the present. Chucha employs an incomprehensible language to speak to her gods and uses her magic and dialects in order to scare her masters and co-workers. Despite express orders that forbid her from doing so,

“Chucha always had a voodoo job going, some spell she was casting or spirit she was courting or enemy she was punishing. I mean, you’d open a closed door, and there, in the corner behind your shoes, would sit a jar of something wicked that you weren’t supposed to touch. Or you’d find a candle burning in her room right in front of someone’s picture and a little dish with a cigar on it and red and white crepe streamers on certain days crisscrossing her room.”(GG 219)

Chucha manipulates her master’s fear in order to accomplish her wishes as when she requests a coffin for her bed. Sophia explains how she gets around her master’s refusal:

The thing was, you couldn’t stand in Chucha’s way even if you were Mami. Soon there were jars in Mami’s closet, and her picture from when she was a baby being held by Chucha was out on Chucha’s altar with mints on a little tin dish, and a constant votary candle going. Inside a week, Mami relented. She said poor Chucha never asked for a blessed thing from the family, and had always been so loyal and good, and so, heavens to Betsy, if sleeping in her coffin would make the old woman happy, Mami would have a nice box built for her, and she did.(GG 220)

Ana Lydia Vega has her own version of Petra and Chucha

in the character of Bela of "El baúl de Miss Florence" But in "Sobre tumbas y héroes" she shows more clearly how elements of African and Amerindian cultures survive and live intermingled with those of the Spanish to become an integral part of Latin America's present day cultures. Vega manages this by having Don Virgilio, the link between the present and the "espíritus patrióticos", withdraw from the real world into his room where he resorts to seances and visions to ascertain historical truth. The fact that the old man uses these practices as ways to gain knowledge and truth shows his mistrust of the 'dominant episteme.' Don Virgilio's inter-dimensional journey into the world of the dead not only reminds us of the presence of popular non-European models of belief within the culture, but also serves as an example of the amalgamation of European, African, and Amerindian belief systems--an example, in short, of maroonage. His seances are a refusal to read and write about the dead heroes whose stories have been appropriated by the official discourse. These seances are an attempt to get the stories directly and as it were, 'hear it from the horse's mouth'.

In Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega's narratives, the maroonage of languages raises issues of culture and identity. In the particular case of Puerto Rico, both Spanish and English are

languages that have facilitated imperialist efforts in the Island. Both languages can be seen as instruments of domination and submission, yet the historical past as defined by Spain and the United States cannot be erased, nor can Taíno culture and language be recovered. Spanish has become the national language and it is bound to issues of national identity and political definition. When faced with the United States' early efforts to impose English as Puerto Rico's national language, Puerto Ricans held on to Spanish. Nevertheless, the influence of English in the everyday language and culture of the Island is pervasive. As Juan Flores points out when questioning the validity of a "Spanish-only" campaign, "what can be gained from defining an *only* language in the face of the hybridity and mixing of Spanish, English, and Spanglish that one hears spoken in Bayamón, Puerto Nuevo, or Union City?" (Flores, "Broken" 391) Ferré also discusses the ambivalent nature of language in Puerto Rico:

What's sad is that we've forgotten Spanish and never learned to speak English. We have no language of our own. There's definitely a problem of expression, which I share. Perhaps that's why I don't like to speak in public. I can write and formulate my thoughts much more clearly on paper; when I have to speak in public I feel constrained. Margot Glantz or Sylvia Molloy, for example, have an amazing mastery of language that reflects an instantaneous unfurling of thought that I find quite difficult. (García Pinto 83)

Although Ferré's assertion may not necessarily apply to the general population of Puerto Rico, and her feelings of inadequacy in relation to the Spanish language may be the result of her privileged bilingual education, the influence of English on the Spanish language and culture of Puerto Rico is undeniable. Its effects, as one might expect, are visible in the literature, particularly contemporary writing. Where earlier literature may have been limited by precepts of 'good writing' and 'proper Spanish' as the creation of educated and cultured authors, contemporary authors are freer to experiment with language and break down prescriptive writing in their efforts to re-define, demythify, and subvert traditional forms.

Maroonage of languages, linguistic registers, and literary genres becomes a tool with which writers can explore, construct, and mirror issues of national and personal identity as they try to overcome the overbearing influence of certain models of thought. These models, imposed by a patriarchal mentality, establish "the mold of 'civilized' humanity that a racist and Eurocentric logic proposes to mestizo societies: the image of a white person travestied with racial indetermination." (Reisz, Voces 19, my

translation)

The subversive use of language differs in the works of the three authors that are the subject of this study, even though two of them share the same nationality. It differs, sometimes, in different works by the same author. Ferré uses language quite differently in Papeles de Pandora than she does in La batalla de las vírgenes. Her subversive maroonage of linguistic registers in the former involves a greater use of obscenities that she mixes with "proper" and "literary" Spanish as a means of contesting a literary discourse in which this kind of rhetoric is not allowed. Linguistic maroonage also goes against the language considered proper for ladies of a certain status. Ferré's tone is much more satiric in Papeles de Pandora. Her attack on the bourgeois class, especially its hypocrisy and repression of women, is notably more direct than in La batalla de las vírgenes. In the latter her tone is more controlled and part of her subversive and revisionary agenda rests on a maroonage of English and Spanish which consists in the strategic sprinkling of English throughout the novel. Ferré points up the degree to which English has permeated Puerto Rican culture and invaded the marketplace. The infiltration of English into the Spanish language has reached the point where

ordinary language has to resort to English words to name objects that have become part of daily life, such as *broccoli, celery, van, kleenex, catsup*.

Ferré's marronage of languages also points to the absurdity, hypocrisy and colonialist origin of particular practices or statements. It becomes obvious that English and American customs and idioms have become status symbols among certain segments of the population. That English is considered superior to Spanish is, of course, the colonial subject's internalization of his/her inferiority vis à vis the colonial culture. The criticism in this type of mixing of languages is twofold: on one hand a stratum of society is identified by its discourse, and by its superficiality and hypocrisy; on the other hand there is the unveiling of the colonial subject's mentality as a victim/agent of cultural imperialism. The adoption of foreign customs not only changes the country's national fibre, it changes the language as well. Words used to name foreign customs are simply brought over into the normal Spanish discourse untranslated because there is obviously no equivalent for a new practice like, for example, a "wedding shower". The incorporation of foreign words into the language, as recreated by Ferré in La batalla de las vírgenes, reinforces one of the central themes of the

novel, which is that the colonized mentality of a country believes that what is foreign is better--as seen by the ridiculous attempt of the Church in Puerto Rico to impose a European virgin while prohibiting and threatening excommunication for anyone who worships the local 'Virgen del Pozo'.

The maroonage of English and Spanish in La batalla de las vírgenes also mirrors certain aspects of Puerto Rican culture, especially the at times absurd juxtaposition of the foreign with the local. Note, for example the satiric description of the taxi-cab that picks Mariana up at the airport:

Mariana dejó de leer y miró con más detenimiento la muchedumbre de estampas, escapularios y medallas que decoraban el taxi por dentro. En el *dashboard* el chofer tenía un altar, con velas votivas y tapete de volantitos de perlé, sobre el cual reposaban la imagen da la Virgen del Pozo. Del espejo retrovisor colgaba un rosario de cuentas de vidrio, y debajo de éste un retrato de Madonna cantando "Like a Virgin", con el cuello adornado de crucifijos y medallas. La melena rubia le nimbaba la cabeza y llevaba el torso calzado dentro de un corsé tan apretado como un látigo de seda negra. (Batalla 5)

The incongruity of the cab's interior shocks Mariana and is, for her, indicative of the current cultural climate on the Island: a hybridity that both result and is the cause of great ambivalence at every level. The taxi stands as a

perfect symbol of marronage since it reflects the reconstruction or transformation of tradition as it is faced with new epistemologies and systems of knowledge. It shows, says John Eade, one of the ways in which members of a community "resist in highly creative and diverse ways the external constraints of racial discrimination, structural inequalities and state actions" (Ranger et al. 58). Although Eade is referring to ethnic minorities, a similar argument can be made with regard to communities whose societies and cultures face the constant bombardment of competing imperialist cultural structures. These communities under attack, like ethnic minorities, also mobilize "internal cultural resources" (Ranger et al. 58) as a way to respond, resist, and transform neo-colonial structural impositions. The result, as exemplified by Ferré's description, transforms their own culture as well.

Politically, in La batalla de las vírgenes, the Island is debating the question of independence, annexation, or the continuation of the commonwealth. Mariana sees the resolution of this political dilemma as part of the solution to the ambivalence that corrodes the country's sense of identity because:

Si el plebiscito ayudaba a que aquel Ballet de la Mesa Verde tocara a su fin, Mariana se alegraba de

ello. La identidad era algo tan importante para los pueblos como para las personas. Había que atreverse a ser lo que se era, lo que uno nunca había dejado de ser. (Batalla 16)

In the above passage Ferré makes clear the relationship between an individual's identity and that of the nation. A nation is composed of individuals, and an individual's sense of identity depends to a great measure on social, economic, cultural, and political conditions. Inasmuch as such elements constitute a nation's identity, which in turn will help shape an individual's sense of self and belonging, then, the connection between the two identities is clear, as Mariana realizes.

Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega's attempt to deconstruct society and reveal its incongruities, the fibre that lays in the infrastructure of a culture, as well as its tools of control and manipulation is an attempt to deconstruct the individual into the different elements which have shaped his/her selfhood and an effort to get a clearer picture, a holistic image of self. In the case of the three writers in this study, given their close connection to two cultures, language becomes a central concern. Paradoxically, it is also a tool that mirrors and reveals as it creates a narrative of liberation.

Maroonage as a narrative strategy that creates a discourse "that adopts skills and knowledge borrowed from the 'master culture'" to represent "a community of national interests set in direct opposition to the general economic, political, and theological tenets..." (Gikandi 21) is also evident in Ana Lydia Vega. The most evident example is found in "Pollito Chicken" in which the entire short story is characterized by a mixture of Spanish and English known as 'Spanglish'. The heterogeneity of the story form which changes from conventional narration to stream of consciousness is paralleled by Suzie Bermiudez' changing from English to Spanish. In her case, such switching or maroonage of languages signifies a split consciousness and an ambivalent cultural identity which does not identify completely with either the culture of the United States nor that of Puerto Rico. The protagonist does not mix the two cultures in order to attain a synthesis, but instead creates a different kind of meaning and reality by juxtaposing fragments of each. As a 'Nuyorrican', her English is similar to that which Vega described in "Saludo a los Niuyorricans": "un inglés muy especial que combinaba los ritmos y sonoridades de los negros de Harlem con la presencia subversiva y escandalosa de un español tropical." (Loló 34) Through language, then, Suzie asserts her 'otherness' and

challenges stereotypical expectations of her as immigrant and/or woman in the contexts of both New York and Puerto Rico.

In the case of women writers in Puerto Rico, then, the maroonage of English and Spanish represents a discourse that adapts skills and knowledge of two "master cultures" in a mixture whereby the two dominant cultures are subverted. The authors subvert traditional Spanish precepts regarding women's proper vocabulary and discourse, as well as common norms for the evaluation of good literature and writing which customarily excluded women and are still used as a status marker. Such maroonage also subverts U.S. English and its ambition to impose itself, and the culture that it expresses, on the Island.

While bitter-sweet irony and satire are effects of Ferré's and Vega's maroonage, their code-switching involves a masterful playfulness with the languages. Their narratives lack the desperation attributed to Caribbean writers like Brathwaite who is said to exemplify "the Caribbean writer's often desperate search for a decolonized language, one that would authentically express the Caribbean worldview." (Torres Saillant 10-11) Unlike the anxiety that Gikandi finds in

other Caribbean writers like Aimé Césaire, whom he claims was "painfully imprisoned in the French language," (Gikandi 21), Ferré's and Vega's writings point to the absurd in the colonial mentality through humor. Ferré's discourse rests on deprecatory sarcasm, while Vega's bases itself on laughter and irony. The latter craftily delights in the mixture of languages and of registers in order to denounce and subvert. Rather than imparting a sense of struggle with the language, she gives an idea of linguistic richness, color, liveliness and pleasure and of the potential creativity that different registers, and even English, bring to it. Perhaps she takes pleasure in the language because she doesn't view English as "el enemigo ancestral de la puertorriqueñidad ni un contaminador malévoló de lenguas maternas." (Loló 17)

Instead, she perceives English as an "herramienta clave, [...] una llave imprescindible al conocimiento universal." (Loló 17)

Vega's mixing of registers reveals the Spanish language of Puerto Rico in all its fullness and diversity. It emphasizes the strength and richness of the Island's Spanish and suggests that a partial solution to problems of identity might be to become aware of what one's language has to offer and to strengthen the teaching of Spanish:

"Un pueblo seguro de su propia lengua puede encarar, sin miedo y con orgullo, el conocimiento de otras que ya no representarían una amenaza de desintegración moral sino más bien una promesa de expansión espiritual." (Loló 18)

Thus, instead of supervalorizing English, as some did at the early stages of the U.S. invasion, or swinging to the other extreme, with a defensive nationalism, people should not fear English but teach it in Puerto Rico as a foreign language; this would legitimize its role in society (Loló 15-18). Vega does not fear language as a tool traditionally denied to women--as the works of Alejandra Pizarnik do, for instance. Nor does she dismiss English as an implement of colonization. Rather, Vega's writing becomes a "celebration of the word" which resembles "a magic act" (Loló 89, my translation). She asserts her identity as a woman and as a Puerto Rican by appropriating language and making it her own, her ally, for she does not have to prove her right to it to anyone; nor does she have to prove her mastery of it according to a masculinist norm. As she points out:

La batalla de la lengua que tan dignamente ocupó a nuestros predecesores está, a mi parecer, ganada. No tenemos que probarle a nadie nuestro derecho al español. Podemos jugar, subvertir, desmitificar, mezclar inglés y español, jerga culta y popular, buenas y malas palabras, multiplicando la saludable irreverencia que se prohibían a sí mismos la gran mayoría de los escritores de pasadas generaciones. (Loló 89)

Ana Lydia Vega's narrative thus confirms Gikandi's

assertion that "the mastery of form goes hand in hand with its deformation." (Gikandi 23) Her narrative of maroonage is achieved, many times, through a carnivalesque discourse which taunts, quips, hides and disguises itself behind different masks. The proper, sometimes pompous style and register of the powerful masculinist discourse is deformed and ridiculed by weaving into it the registers of orality, popular songs, romance novels, clichés, aphorisms, etc. This narrative strategy is also a tool in the exploration of national identity, for her use of languages encompasses the different groups within the nation so as to reject a homogeneous formulation of national identity. To ignore the differences between groups, generations, gender, class, and race is to fall into a myth-making exercise that sets forth a model to be followed. Such a practice assumes yet another colonial and authoritarian strategy that denies different groups their particularities, while demanding their incorporation into a prescribed national model or identity. Although a myth-making type of definition, which represents communities, ethnic groups and nations as homogeneous and unitary characterizes the discourse of community leaders and could be said to be their means of inspiring political action, the fact remains that it is an imaginary definition imposed and adopted to respond to particular political purposes. Vega's narrative

questions the notion of essentializing national identity; it questions which features are included as belonging to a national character, who gets to be represented and who is doing this representation.

In making a statement regarding identity, and in rejecting traditional norms of discourse and classification, In the Time of the Butterflies offers yet another type of maroonage. The strategy in this case consists of mixing the English language with the syntax of Spanish. In essence, what Alvarez does is to give a Spanish accent to her English writing. Instead of getting rid of the Spanish inflection, like she had the García girls do, in this novel she injects her narrative with a "Spanish flavor", as some critics call it, thereby establishing the identities of the Mirabals as Dominicans whose Hispanic roots and culture have molded their universe, their personalities, their priorities, and their decisions. As discussed in chapter three, the "accent" that the characters maintain throughout the novel has some of the *Ferfremdung* effect that Bertolt Brecht wanted to impose on his theatrical audience. In this case, however, the intention is to prevent the reader from getting carried away by the novel and forgetting the cultural identities of these women.

At another level, Alvarez' strategy of syntactical maroonage allows her to insert and assert her own identity as a Dominican writing in English. Her mixed cultural background is emphasized by the syntactical mixture of languages within the narrative which thus becomes emblematic of her own identity. Alvarez' technique also allows her to subvert conventional evaluations of literary writing, for the novel does not follow canonical norms of good writing either in English or in Spanish. Her agenda also includes resistance to widely accepted norms of classification. Alvarez' syntactical maroonage does not allow for her novel to be tagged according to traditional guidelines for cataloguing literary works. Because of its theme, the author's nationality at birth, and the novel's insistence on 'sounding' Spanish, it is unclear whether it should be considered a Dominican novel or could be added to the annals of U.S. literature. Is this Latin American literature produced in the United States, or is it an example of the growing number of works produced in the United States and labeled 'Latino Literature'? Perhaps it is symbolic of the Hispanic immigrant in the United States who does not blend cultures nor assimilate, but rather inhabits two cultures and draws from both of them simultaneously, creating a new and unique system of meanings.

This double-edged strategy, by the way, defies the potentially oppressive structures not only of a dominant culture but also those of a Dominican tradition which may become even more repressive within the United States than it would be in the Dominican Republic. Such excess of repression is a defensive exaggeration of traditional customs and practices; it is a common, if not natural, response of ethnic minorities to the majority Other. Anthropologists call this a "vis à vis dynamics" which "entails an increasing collective self-consciousness, as members of groups grow aware of how others see them, and as they come to realise and to articulate how they wish to see themselves in new and changing contexts"(Ranger et al. 87).

Like The House on the Lagoon, In the Time of the Butterflies also engages in a literary maroonage in its depiction of power structures, for the narrative mixes and reverses traditional relationships between the oppressors and the oppressed. Ferré had accomplished a similar maroonage in The House on the Lagoon by mixing and upsetting traditional relations of power via a metaliterary game between two of the novel's main characters, Quintín and Isabel. In Ferré's novel (as discussed in chapter three) Isabel, the marginal character who has inserted herself in the center of the

fictional universe, plays with Quintín's expectations as a character representative of power and domination. She allows him to 'find' the chapters of her novel as she writes them and lets him exercise his expected role of critic and arbiter of reality and truth, only to ignore his comments on the margins of the novel. She controls the fiction, while presumably allowing Quintín access to it. In reality, she denies him access by continuing the novel as if his marginal comments were not there. In reversing roles she makes him feel what it is like to be in her position; during their marriage he has always ignored her voice and presence.

Alvarez's maroonage in depicting linguistic power, unlike Ferré's, does not only take place within the boundaries of the fictional universe of the novel. Instead, in In the Time of the Butterflies, the author engages in a tacit game with her English-speaking readers by mixing English with Spanish syntax. By writing the novel in English she allows readers some access to her characters and their Dominican culture, but she also denies them total access by rendering in English literal translations of Spanish aphorisms and expressions which in some cases would be incomprehensible to someone without a knowledge of Spanish. Even when the readers may get an idea of what the expressions

mean, they are unable to appreciate fully their texture, connotations and flavor. Unlike Ferré in House on the Lagoon, Alvarez refuses to translate. Instead, she provides the reader with the experience (in reverse) of a Hispanic immigrant who is sometimes unable to ascertain the meaning of English expressions and sayings because of their highly idiomatic character.

A similar technique is used in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. The narrator does not have an "accent," but when she quotes the father, the mother, or the children when they are small, the "accent" appears. In so doing, she places the English-speaking reader in a situation like that of the García girls--as described particularly by Yoyo--as they wrestle with English. More than any of the other novels, this one explicitly affirms the intrinsic connection between language and identity. Yoyo's linguistic crisis is symptomatic of an identity crisis. Having to learn the language of her adoptive new culture makes her feel "like [she] was imitating someone else", (GG 95) makes her and her sisters doubtful of who they are. Their identities crumble in the face of this new language and the culture that rejects them for their 'otherness' which is made obvious, apart from their skin color, by their lack of mastery of the English

language, as Carla's experience indicates:

"I don't speak very much English," she said in a small voice by way of apology. She hated having to admit this since such an admission proved, no doubt, the boy gang's point that she didn't belong here. (GG 156)

Language, then, becomes the center of their reality in the new country; they have to master it in order to belong, in order to grow whole again. It will not become clear to them until later, that the sense of unity of the self, the emptiness that has invaded them since they left the Dominican Republic will not be filled by suppressing their native culture and mastering English and the models of success the new culture asks them to follow:

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

Yoyo, for instance, takes "root in the language" (GG 141) in an attempt to see herself again. Thus, the significance of the traumatic experience of her father destroying the speech she has made and through which "she finally sounded like herself in English!" (GG 143)

The destruction of this speech symbolizes the imposition of authoritarian codes of patriarchal behavior and language.

Yoyo will have to wait for years before she is able to find her voice in English again. Yet, as important as mastering English has become to the Garcías as a way of belonging, in the characteristic ambivalent nature of their experience, they hold on to Spanish as a way of blocking English-speakers out. Through Spanish they are able to create some room for themselves as individuals and to attain some privacy as well, as evidenced by the girls' observation to their parents in the Spanish restaurant, that "Spanish was not a secret language in this place" (GG 176). Alvarez' refusal to translate Spanish idioms for the benefit of non-Spanish speakers is a locus of resistance similar to Yolanda's refusal to allow John to mold her, to allow him access and possession of her by asserting herself through language:

"Yo rhymes with *cielo* in Spanish." Yo's words fell into the dark, mute cavern of John's mouth. *Cielo, cielo*, the word echoed. And Yo was running, like the mad, into the safety of her first tongue, where the proudly monolingual John could not catch her, even if he tried. (GG 72)

Obviously, Alvarez is not addressing a Spanish-speaking reader either, but one who shares knowledge of both languages and perhaps even of the Garcías' immigrant experience in the United States. As Gikandi points out about Lamming, Alvarez' maroonage is "an attempt to expropriate the master's language to redefine and transform the colonized cultural space." (41)

In both novels, How the García Girls Lost Their Accents and In the Time of the Butterflies, the language of the dominant culture grants access to the immigrant even while it alienates her from herself. It is the authoritative tool of writing, but it is changed and molded as it is seen and understood through the perspective of Dominican Spanish. Thus, language becomes incomprehensible, at times, to the monolingual English-speaker because English is being twisted into new meanings which are neither Spanish nor English. From the mixture of the two languages arises new epistemological and hermeneutical assumptions.

Rosario Ferré's *modus operandi* are completely different in her The House on the Lagoon. Like Alvarez, she is not addressing a Spanish-speaking audience, but unlike her she is trying to reach a reader who is English dominant and who does not know the most basic aspects of Spanish language and culture. She painstakingly translates any occurrence of Spanish in the novel to allow the English-speaking reader access to the fiction. The audiences the two writers have in mind are completely different. The issue raises questions of purpose and colonization. At the risk of reading too much into Alvarez's objectives, I would like to suggest that she is trying to make a statement as a bi-cultural individual by

deliberately refusing to rely on the dominant language for the reader. Ferré, on the other hand, seems purposefully to ignore a Spanish-speaking audience that she knows might accuse her "of betraying Puerto Rican values" because it identifies language as "the basis of nationalism." (Obejas) As she said in an interview, her purpose is to market her novel in a more profitable way:

I won't always write in English[...] But I wanted to jump the fence out of Puerto Rico--if you write in Spanish and publish there, there's no way to get out. There's no distribution. (Obejas)

Ferré's efforts may be seen as exhibiting the mentality of the colonized which assumes that English is better than Spanish and a key to success. Nevertheless, it could also be argued that trying to market her novel in the United States reverses the United States' marketing efforts in Puerto Rico. Instead of having Puerto Ricans buying U.S. products, here is a Puerto Rican selling her goods in the United States. Clearly, this does not mean that Ferré attempts a colonization of the United States, but The House on the Lagoon and Alvarez' work ultimately point to a tension between authenticity and a desire to communicate. That is to say, the authors' desire to communicate causes them to write in a language that makes their writing accessible to the "Other". Yet writing in Spanish--even if translated--and using its syntax give the works a sense of authenticity.

By writing in English, Ferré also reveals to the English-speaker of the dominant North American culture in the United States the myth-like nature of the paternalistic and benevolent attitude of the United States towards Puerto Rico. Her novel shows colonial conditions of dependency and injustice, like those during the times of the Spanish colony, still prevailing today under United States rule. To name one example, Ferré's description of the living conditions of the black servants in the house on the lagoon and in "the stinking quagmire of Las Minas" (HOL 239) is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's description of the colonial city:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. (Qtd. in Said 49)

Like Fanon's description of the colonizer's town, which is filled with luxury and superfluous, decorative elements, Ferré's description of the first house on the lagoon also reeks of exclusivity:

At the front entrance, the one which opened onto Ponce de León Avenue, there was to be a magnificent mosaic rainbow [...] and an elegant open pavilion would connect that wing to the dining and living rooms, which would face the lagoon. As the terrain sloped gradually toward the back of the house, one could drive under the open pavilion, which would serve as a carport and at the same time add a colorful accent because of its mosaic decorations [...] The ceilings were to be twice as high as

those of Wright's houses, and the edge of the gabled roofs would be decorated with a glittering mosaic of olive boughs [...] The house would be surrounded by a garden, and the glassware used at table would repeat the motifs of the flora: the water goblets would be lotus-shaped, the wine goblets would resemble hyacinths, and the champagne flutes water lilies.

Pavel designed a beautiful golden terrace at the back of the house, floating over the lagoon. (HOL 48)

The luxury and excess of the house on the lagoon is contrasted with the living quarters of the servants which echoes Fanon's picture of darkness, dispossession and misery in "the town belonging to the colonized people":

The area under the terrace was used as a common room by the servants, and it was here that they ate, smoked, and sat talking and relaxing after work. The dirt floor was hardly noticeable; the servants sprinkled it with water and swept it carefully every day [...] At the center of the common room, a door had been cut into the dirt wall [...] It led to a dark tunnel into which twenty cells opened. The cells had earthen floors and no windows; they were ventilated by grilles imbedded into the top of each end wall. Originally, the rooms had been intended for storage: for wine, codfish, or Buenaventura's precious imported hams. When Buenaventura moved his merchandise to his warehouse on La Puntilla, however, the storage rooms had been turned into servants' quarters. (HOL 235-236)

Similar contrasts are present between the living area of the privileged in Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic in Vega's "El baúl de Ms. Florence", in Ferré's La batalla de las vírgenes, in Alvarez' In the Time of the Butterflies, and her How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. The narratives I am

discussing here also point to the fact that the tensions and abusive behavior between the colonizer and the colonized as they relate to divisions of classes are not necessarily the direct result of United States intervention in these countries. These narratives make clear that some of the colonial paradigms and structures existent in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico were put in place earlier and form integral parts of these nation's cultures. The traditional division of classes and races, as institutionalized by Spanish ancestors, persists to this day. It is the basis of a nostalgia that even discourses of nationalism try to mythify. These narratives then, place in evidence a significant aspect of nationalist discourse: the unexamined nature of national cultures with their dominant cultures and the imagined Others within the different national groups.

Appropriating language with its various registers of standard expression, slang, vulgarity, aphorisms, etc. subverts and undermines traditional value systems by combining different elements as a way to "ensanchar el espacio de la forma y la expresión propiamente individual." This growth at the formal level gives more room to the writer, and is the factor which will allow Puerto Rican writers to "write better, to unintentionally reaffirm their

culture and in some sense, save their nation.” (Loló 89-90, my translation) Yet, saving one’s nation means capturing its essence by exploring and seeing it for what it is. Despite the nostalgic gaze and the appeal of mythification, Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega investigate the contradictory, negative, and problematic aspects of their cultural heritage, for as Mariana says in La batalla de las vírgenes, “[hay] que atreverse a ser lo que se [es], lo que uno nunca [ha] dejado de ser” (16) Only from this acceptance is it possible to achieve understanding and to begin attempting any kind of change.

In How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, for instance, Alvarez resorts to a discourse of displacement which brings Yolanda into the cultural space of the Dominican Republic both by her physical journey to the Island and by an introspective revisiting of the past. Her mixture of the present and the past as she weaves and folds present experiences with past memories and perceptions gives her a spatial juncture where both temporal planes intersect and co-exist. The reader sees a whole rather than fragments. This is a displacement in search of the nature of the nation and culture in which the García girls have rooted their identities and is characterized by Yoyo’s narration in the

perfect English she has struggled so hard to attain. Her uncertain steps into a language and culture, which after years of suppression have become almost alien to her, are marked by her apprehension about Spanish and her equivocal perception of the people she meets along the road in the Dominican Republic. Through her re-acquaintance with the language and the culture, Yolanda engages in an effort to disrobe the cultural infrastructure beneath her memories and upbringing, in an effort to build a whole from her divided selves. The division has been created by her experiences as a woman in two different cultural contexts. Thus, Alvarez' narrative generates a discourse that exposes, through the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, the sense of not belonging that characterizes the Garcia girls' life in the United States. The novel's backward gaze into the lives of the girls captures the loss of a context which was an integral part of their identities and which included factors of class, race, and economic solvency within a bourgeois family in the Dominican Republic. Once in the United States, language becomes a mark of 'otherness.' They are left with the knowledge that they are Dominicans by birth, and are reminded of their Dominican roots by their parents. Because of their skin color and their Spanish accents, the other children label them with the racist epithet, "spic".

From the onset of their arrival in the United States the Spanish language is used as anchorage but the unavoidable clash of North American and Dominican values gives the García girls a sense of chaos and insecurity. Despite the father's efforts to tie identity with language by asking that their mother speak only Spanish to them so they won't forget their culture, the girls' sense of identity is now based on confusion, fear, and shame. On one hand, they can count on their parents only partially as a source of safety and recognition because as the parents begin to mix values of the two cultures and expose the girls to their cultural maroonage, the parents no longer offer a straight and unequivocal path to follow. Soon they begin to express ambivalence towards Spanish and to display contradictory attitudes towards the Dominican Republic and its culture. The father's political experience in their country of origin has scarred him for life. He is beset by a constant state of apprehension and mistrust. He worries about saying the wrong thing and being overheard by authorities or spies. His fear upon seeing a Volkswagen, is a recurrent reminder of the terrors associated with the Dominican Republic. On the other hand, he constantly reminds them of how certain things worked much better in the Island and continues to attempt to impose his authoritarian, repressive role of Dominican 'father of

the family' as he understands it. His authoritarian behavior combined with his paranoid mistrust of anything he interprets as challenging authority clashes, violently at times, with the girls' personalities as they change and grow, now influenced by the culture of the United States. Thus, Yoyo's mastery of English becomes threatening to her father, not only for the freedom it gives her in her new cultural context, but because he has no equivalent command of this language. His ignorance of English renders him powerless and Yoyo's fluency in it allows her to express herself and to assert herself before a figure of authority creating the traumatic confrontation in which he rips up her speech and is identified by her as "Chapita", the tyrant they had just fled.

The girls' mother exposes them to a cultural maroonage for she masters the rules of the new culture and bends them to suit her needs without abandoning Dominican cultural values. She thus offers the girls a mixed appreciation and understanding of their Dominican roots and of both languages, English and Spanish. Like her husband, the Garcías' mother continues to uphold traditional women's behavior as observed in the Dominican Republic, but she begins to reject some of the traditional expectations both her husband and children

have of her. Once in the context of U.S. culture, she becomes aware of a higher degree of independence and assertiveness allowed to women in the United States.

The confusion and uncertainty the García girls experience because of the alien nature of their new society and language is further deepened by the occasional reversal and mixing of sex and power roles experienced by the parents. Being in a country whose language he does not speak and having lost the economic and class status he enjoyed in the Dominican Republic inflicts a great deal of damage on their father's independence and dignity. He becomes dependent on his wife for translations, on the paternalistic kindness of his American friend who knows his former status in the Island and who is helping him get a job in the United States. And aware, yet threatened, by the different dynamics of interaction between men and women in this country, the father shows his discomfort and awkwardness as described by Sandi: "Sandi had noticed before that around American women he was not himself. He rounded his shoulders and was stiffly well-mannered, like a servant." (GG 180)

The mother's role also is reversed thanks to the powerful position that her knowledge of English gives her in

relationship to her husband. She uses this alien language as a weapon of power, control, and to get some room and respect for herself. She identifies English with authority: "Mami was the leader now that they lived in the States. She had gone to school in the States. She spoke English without a heavy accent." (GG 176) The newly found sense of independence that she gains through language, is constantly being tested and explored by her to the point that she, like her husband because of his own struggles, ceases to be the guiding source of strength and order that her daughters expect. They resent their mother's assertion of herself and her needs and interests and her disinclination to make herself the self-effacing martyr of the household whose sole purpose is to serve and help her family.

They resented her spending time on those dumb inventions. Here they were trying to fit in America among Americans; they needed help figuring out who they were, why the Irish kids whose grandparents had been micks were calling them spics. Why had they come to this country in the first place? Important, crucial, final things, and here was their own mother, who didn't have a second to help them puzzle any of this out, inventing gadgets to make life easier for the American Moms. (GG 138)

The loss of their previous identity which makes them wonder "who they were" is further problematized by the renegotiation and marooning of gender roles and cultural expectations between their parents. As mentioned above, their mother hung on to English as a way to antagonize her husband, and escape

from the controls he still wants to exert over her. Her linguistic fluency consolidates her sense of worth and independence from her husband. Thus, contradicting his request that "she speak in Spanish to the girls so they wouldn't forget their native tongue" (GG 135), she "spoke in English when she argued with them." (GG 135) and answered her husband with a subversive and hilarious misquotation of English: "When in Rome, do unto the Romans." (GG 135) The symbolic character of this quote ought to be noted because it embraces the subversive and unsettling capabilities of the Maroon with its power--often humorous--to make a statement, transform and force new meanings out of old concepts.

Besides exploring the dynamics of identity change, choice, and negotiation of parents and children, the narrative develops a discourse of generational conflict. Such discourse maps out the expectations the parents have of the girls which include a maroonage of traditional Dominican and North American values. It explores the girls' efforts to adhere at times and reject at other times, to subvert and modify those molds and thus develop identities which make them similar to and at the same time different from their parents and from their American peers. The García girls use language as a way of establishing boundaries between the two cultures, but also as a way to subvert and to rebel, at times

by mixing the two, at others, by using them to alienate monolingual listeners. Their experiences as immigrants growing up in a different culture and exposed to two sets of cultural norms to follow, which at times overlap and at others contradict each other, allow them to develop multiple identities which are situational and contextual.<sup>29</sup> The García girls identify with different images of themselves depending on the cultural context and the social situation they face at any given moment. Among parents and relatives, they use Spanish and identify themselves with Dominican customs and practices; among Americans, they speak American English without accents, and behave according to what they consider 'American' models. Identities, then, are negotiable, flexible and thus may be manipulated to their advantage.<sup>30</sup>

Notwithstanding the identity options available to them, or perhaps precisely because of this multiplicity of identities, the García girls seem maladjusted, as evidenced in their divorces, mental breakdowns, and their desire to "patch up" with their parents as they attempt to bridge the

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The behavior of the García girls is similar to that documented by several sociologists. See, for instance, articles in Culture, Identity and Politics: Ethnic Minorities in Britain. Terence Ranger, et al., eds. Brookfield: Avebury, 1996.

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These ideas have been documented by sociologists' studies of ethnic minorities in England. See articles by Eade, Drury, Werbner, and Vertovec in Culture, Identity and Politics: Ethnic Minorities in Britain. Terence Ranger, et al., eds. Brookfield: Avebury, 1996.

different identities. The fact is, that they do not belong to a Dominican community whose identity has been negatively reinforced by "feelings of rejection brought about through experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination" (Ranger et al. 110). The contradictory and ambivalent behavior of their parents, the confrontation with new cultural values, their experience of rejection and racism—all of these elements deform the García girls' sense of identity. Now thoroughly deracinated, they can only perceive their "Dominicaness" through the perspective of English and the culture of the United States. Through this lens, their self-image becomes incomprehensible. It makes no more sense to them than North American culture did when they first viewed it from a Dominican perspective.

Thus, in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents the fragmentation and amalgamation of elements is the structural basis of the novel. The girls' sketchy, fragmentary identities are represented by the fragmentary nature of the narrative with its use of Spanish here and there, the individualized visions of each girl's experiences, the non-linear development of the plot and the heterogeneity of form with its sketches presented by a third person narrator at times and a first person narrator at others. This narrative

strategy presents fragmented views of servants, guards, an American spy, the different selves of the girls at different stages of their lives, and the parents. The narrative thus mimics on the formal level the concoction of memories, experiences, traumas, rationalizations, prejudices, and fears that shape an individual's character. Even a man like Carlos, a prestigious, powerful doctor who has a privileged position as a successful male in the Dominican Republic and appears self-assured and whole, experiences self-doubt and realizes that his self is not uniquely and genuinely his but the result or the composite of other people's input chiseling his character, his past and memories into shape:

...memories which are mostly other's stories about his past [...]he has no past of his own [...]Those tenuous, tentative first life-impressions have scattered like reflections in a pond under the swirling hand of an older brother or sister saying, I remember the day you ate the rat poison, Carlos, or, I remember the day you fell down the stairs... (GG 216)

The fragmentary accumulation of versions of the same experiences as they mirror different aspects as perceived by different lenses, gives rise, then, to questions about truth. Whose version is more truthful? Are they all valid? Is fiction more truthful than history, sometimes? And by extension, is anyone's character, life and experiences real or are they the "scattered reflections" of the stories told

by others? Sophia wonders about this after hearing so many versions of her union with Otto:

"I've heard so many versions of that story," Sandi says, "I don't know which one is true anymore."  
"Otto says we probably met in New Jersey Greyhound Station, but we've heard all these exciting stories about how we met in Brazil or Colombia or Perú that we got to believing them." (62-63)

The fact that the novel begins in the present and travels back in time while documenting the girls' journey through language, shows how language becomes for them the thread that holds together their sense of self. Thus, as their original language changes, mixes with English to take its characteristic form, so do their personalities and identities as they are exposed to the culture of the United States. The backwards journey through language, echoes Yoyo's search of her identity by digging into her past. Her displacement into the Dominican Republic is in essence a metaphorical displacement into the past that the Dominican Republic symbolizes for her. Through a discourse of displacement, she attempts to put together the pieces in order to accomplish a sense of wholeness which she has lost through years of denial of her roots. She has repressed her own selfhood, partially due to her desire to escape the qualitative 'otherness' which identifies her as different. As pointed out by Gikandi in reference to Marshall's Brown Girl,

Brownstones, "connections to the past are at best tenuous; instead of functioning as a source of certainty and true understanding, the past often generates fear and shame." (Gikandi 172) Similarly, the García girls feel embarrassed about their language which causes an accent when they speak English, of their customs which don't include skiing trips to Colorado, weekly allowances:

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

The girls' parents represent yet another source of shame rather than one of understanding for their appearance and accent in English and their behavior links them to a past and a culture the young women have grown to feel ashamed of and want to deny:

My own old world parents were still an embarrassment at parents' weekend, my father with his thick mustache and three-piece suit and fedora hat, my mother in one of her outfits she bought especially to visit us at school, everything overly matched, patent leather purse and pumps [...] I marveled at [Rudy's] youthful parents. No wonder Rudy didn't have hangups, no wonder his high school acne hadn't left him riddled with self-doubt, his name hadn't cowed him. (GG 98)

The structure of the novel emphasizes Yolanda's journey back in time and space in search of a meaning now lost through years of denial of her roots. Though the rejection of her culture and assimilation of the dominant culture in the United States could presumably have ended her feeling of not-belonging, her exile from mainstream society, in burying a part of herself, she had also blurred and impeded a whole vision of the self. Her journey to the Island and to its language is an attempt to change the optic so as to be able to see her roots through the culture's own lenses, its perspective, and the language she has grown insecure of in order to define and finally be able to reclaim her lost, forgotten half. It cannot be said that her exploration of Dominican culture and language is a search for her long forgotten self because she is no longer only Dominican. She cannot change her past nor the influence and effect that her experiences within the United States have had in shaping who she is now. From her perspective as an adult, and the wisdom gained through schooling, divorces, breakdowns, and isolation, she is trying to ascertain what her other half consists of so that she may begin to attempt to see herself as whole, without going to the extreme of denying her experience as an immigrant. Needless to say, her case is much like that of a nation that cannot deny its colonial past but

seeks to reclaim itself as it was in a pre-colonial state. The effort to claim roots, rewrite identities, and challenge colonial codes inevitably uncovers a plurality of voices and identities at both the national and individual level.

In sum, the mixing of Spanish and English in these narratives is used as a subversive tool in order to challenge expectations and patterns of traditional literary precepts in both languages. It signals postures by the colonial subject in which s/he views English as a superior and more sophisticated language than Spanish. In other instances, such mixture of languages brings into evidence how a society and language change as they create new visions, practices, and epistemologies. Aspects of the two languages and the two cultures join and are transformed until they are no longer one or the other, but a new perspective and approach to reality. Maroonage for Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega becomes a deconstructive tool that mirrors and reveals. It also creates a narrative of liberation as they resist and deform a potentially prescriptive and authoritarian concept of language with narratological techniques which involve a maroonage of registers that denote *jouissance*, ease, and joy.

Among the characters, marooning cultures and languages

may mean a way to claim a private space where they can temporarily hide from the dominant culture and language in order to be themselves. It may also be, nevertheless, a source of confusion and chaos as they try to grapple with reality from the mixed and radically different perspectives of two languages and cultures. Ultimately, however, through the connection they make between language and culture, the narratives yield meaning as they reflect part of the multiphrenic personalities of the characters and the multiplicity of identities and roots that are the basis of the complex realities of their nations.

## CONCLUSION

Julia Alvarez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega depict decolonizing tendencies that include the mirroring of Latin American societies which for one reason or another stand in a colonial position. Their colonial status may be the result of economic, political, cultural, or historical dependency on the United States and Spain. The works studied portray social groups and people that interact and understand reality from the perspective of a colonial system of domination. The hierarchies of power and privilege of the system are positional and contextual: pyramids of power intermingle in complex ways for reasons of race, ethnicity, gender, economic solvency, and sexual orientation. The works of the three authors reveal how such pyramidal hierarchies of power, inherited from colonial hierarchies, apply not only to relationships based on race and class, but on gender as well.

In their complex examination of class, race, and gender, the three writers reveal the mechanisms by which power, oppression, and abuse trickle down to the very foundations of society and influence every human interaction. Their texts constitute an anticolonial discourse which demythifies traditional historiography, and repudiates conventional views

of culture, tradition, family, and love. The narratives touch as well on theories of the oppressor and the oppressed in dissecting the hierarchical structures that mold a colonial subject's identity and self-image. The traditional concept of self, reinforced and instilled by colonial institutions, ensures that the subjugated will fail to unite in a gesture of solidarity against the system that oppresses them. They do not perceive that the very existence of the colony depends on the cooperation of the oppressed subjects. Instead--as these narratives show--colonial subjects envy each other's access to the masters. Those who enjoy such access are primarily concerned with guarding their privileges and their position. The subjected thus end up attacking each other and protecting a colonial masculinist system. It should be the other way around.

The subversive element present in all the works studied is one of the main links between the authors as they explore dichotomies of power and oppression in their societies. Such subversion extends itself into the craft of writing and the traditional, canonical, and prescriptive norms of good writing and good literature. All three authors' works share an element of 'maroonage' which manifests itself in a variety of mixtures including a mixture of genres which defy cataloging and pigeonholing. Works that have the appearance

of belonging to the historical novel defy expectations by offering the perspective of the conquered or oppressed. The works also contest the homogenizing efforts of genre studies by sliding across different genres. As we have seen, the narratives combine elements of memoir with those of epistolary narratives, cheap love novels, chronicles, journalism, and social satire.

The irreverence of 'marronage' towards masculinist literary prescriptiveness means in many cases a *jouissance* of language. The works mix languages, primordially English and Spanish, or reverse syntax or use Spanglish or mix orality with traditional historiography and literary techniques. Different linguistic registers and discourses intermingle and coalesce at times in the narratives in a subversive gesture that enriches the possibilities of language. I hope to have shown how these techniques celebrate difference and heterogeneity and reject the homogenizing efforts of colonial practices. Alvarez, Ferré, and Vega write from the perspective and the episteme of the oppressed. They are aware of who lives at the bottom of society's pyramid: those of African descent, mulattos, and the poor in general, especially poor women. They regard alternative modes of knowledge (African medicine, voodoo, spiritism, witchcraft)

with the dignity traditionally reserved for Western rational scientific paradigms. At times they disobey rules of appropriateness by including many forms of idiomatic language, including the obscene. Women's domestic lives, their perspective of history, society, men, themselves, and their families are central to their narratives.

## APPENDIX

**Julia Alvarez**, born in 1950, was raised in the Dominican Republic until the age of ten when her family had to emigrate to the United States to flee political persecution by the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. She and her family's experience as immigrants and the difficulties, confusion, and transformation they experienced given a new language, cultural codes, prejudice, and discrimination mark and offer thematic inspiration to much of her literary production.

In 1971 she graduated *summa cum laude* from Middlebury College, in 1975 she received an MA in Creative Writing from Syracuse University and is currently a tenured professor at Middlebury College.

Her literary works include *Homecoming*, a book of poems published in 1984, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, a novel published in 1990. This is her most famous novel for which she received the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Award. In 1994 she published another novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies* which was an American Library Association Notable Book and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle

Award. In 1995 she published another collection of poems, *The Other Side: El otro lado*. Her most recent work *¡Yo!* was published in 1997.

Besides her writing career, Julia Alvarez has served as Kentucky's poet in the schools for two years, she has conducted creative writing workshops for bilingual students in Delaware and for senior citizens in North Carolina. She has taught English and Creative Writing at California State College, College of the Sequoias, Phillips Andover Academy, the University of Vermont, and the University of Illinois. In 1984-85, she held the Jenny McKean Moore Writing Fellowship at the George Washington University.

**Rosario Ferré** was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, in 1938. She received her B.A. from Manhattanville College in New York, her M.A., from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, and her Ph.D. in Latin American Literature from the University of Maryland, College Park.

She comes from a well-known and influential family in Puerto Rico. Her father, Luis Ferré was a pro-statehood governor of the commonwealth from 1968-1972. Her brother is the owner and publisher of Puerto Rico's largest daily

newspaper, *El nuevo día*.

Despite the fact that her family name is synonymous with Puerto Rico's statehood movement, throughout most of her career, Rosario Ferré has embraced independence ideas. Her anticonformist social and political ideas are the themes of her first collection of short stories, *Papeles de Pandora*, which was published in 1976. These stories had previously appeared in the literary journal *Zona carga y descarga*, an important journal devoted to new Puerto Rican literature and which she had co-founded in 1972. In 1977 she published her first collection of children's stories, *El medio pollito*. In 1981 she published more children's stories, *Los cuentos de Juan Bobo* and *La mona que le pisaron la cola*. She eventually combined these three collections in her anthology of children's stories, *Sonatinas*, published in 1989. Her children's literature focuses on the same themes of social and political reform that readers find in her collection of adult short fiction. Rosario Ferré also publishes essays on social and literary criticism. Her best known collection of essays is *Sitio a Eros*, published in 1980. Ferré's other collections of literary essays include *El coloquio de las perras*, 1990; *Las dos Venecias*, 1990; and *El árbol y sus sombras*, 1989. Additionally, she published her Master's

thesis as *el acomodador: una lectura fantástica de Felisberto Hernández*, 1986, and her doctoral dissertation as *Cortázar, el romántico en su observatorio*, published in 1990.

Ferré has also published poetry and biography: *Fábulas de la garza desangrada* in 1982, *Antología personal*, in 1994. In 1992 she published the biography of her father, *Luis A. Ferré: Memorias de Ponce*.

Despite the fact that all her books have been well received, she is best known for her prose. Her first novel was *Maldito amor*, published in 1987. In 1993 she published *La batalla de las vírgenes*, and in 1995, her first novel written in English, *The House on the Lagoon* for which she was nominated for the prestigious National Book Award. In 1998 she published *Eccentric Neighborhoods*, the complete manuscript in English of short stories published in the early 1990's in *El nuevo día*."

During her career as a professor of Latin American literature, Ferré has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, Rutgers University, Harvard University, The Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. She was a finalist for the National Book Award in

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Her publications include several educational books: *Cahier de rédaction* and *Cahier de grammaire* which she co-authored with Ada Vilas and *Quelques difficultés de traduction*. With Lydia Milagros González and Guillermo Baralt, she also published a book about slavery in Puerto Rico entitled, *El machete de Ogún*. With the collaboration of Marcos Zurinaga, she recently published a film script, *La gran fiesta*, a historic film about the 1940's.

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