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**THE ROLE OF NOSTALGIA IN THE LITERATURE OF THE CARIBBEAN
DIASPORAS – LINKING MEMORY, GLOBALIZATION AND HOMEMAKING**

by

LUKASZ D. PAWELEK

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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MAJOR: MODERN LANGUAGES (Spanish)

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

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2015

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Kasia Pawelek and my mother Alina Pawelek.

Thank you for believing in me, pushing me over the limits, offering me unconditional love, freedom and well-being, and making me the man I am today.

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INTRODUCTION

Goals of My Dissertation

My dissertation topic, “The Role of Nostalgia in the Literature of the Caribbean Diasporas – Linking Memory, Globalization and Homemaking,” emerged from my interest in Hispanic migrant literature and my graduate course work at Wayne State University. I propose an analysis of nostalgia as a metaphor of globalization. Furthermore, I will approach nostalgia as a literary figure to study this phenomenon from a comparative perspective paying special attention to diasporic Caribbean narrative of late 20th and early 21st centuries. The goal of my dissertation is two-fold: 1) to analyze nostalgia as a syndrome of the modern age and as a product of globalization; and 2) to examine its manifestations in the literature of Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican diasporas written by so-called 1.5 generation of Latino/a authors in the United States. The 1.5 generation refers to individuals who are born in one country and relocate to the U.S. as children or before they reach adolescence.

My study offers a comparative analysis of two memoirs and a novel written by Caribbean authors Esmeralda Santiago and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, who emigrated to the U.S. before reaching adolescence in the 1960s similar to Junot Díaz, who came to the U.S. in the early 1970s. My investigation encounters and analyzes common reference points through the varying representations of nostalgia. The literary representation of nostalgia has not been fully explored in the Latin-American context, and studying its social, cultural, political, and national manifestations remains crucial in the age of globalization. Specifically, my approach to the notion of nostalgia as a syndrome of globalization offers a novel contribution to the Caribbean diasporic narrative and by extension to the canon of the U.S. Latino/a Literature. Through the metaphoric analysis of nostalgia in the literary works studied, I will examine the literary representation of the migratory

experience of the Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican Hispanic groups residing within the United States. I will argue that nostalgia can be considered an important aspect of the assimilation process, the formation of Latino/a culture identity, collective memory, and the reconstruction of urban spaces.

Writers who have roots in both the United States and the Caribbean Islands such as Junot Díaz (Dominican Republic), Gustavo Pérez Firmat (Cuba), Esmeralda Santiago (Puerto Rico), and many others, portray stories that are framed projections of nostalgia. In my dissertation, I study their works, including: *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Díaz 2008), *Next Year in Cuba* (Pérez Firmat 1995), *Cuando era puertorriqueña* (Santiago 1994). Their works rest on the premise that immigrants do not leave their history in their homelands, but rather bring them into their new home, where the past turns into a vitality that impacts families for generations. Additionally, immigrants are impacted by loss and displacement, and their stories are among the quintessential narratives of longing because they endure and challenge nostalgia in the adopted homeland. Therefore, I argue that diaspora and nostalgia are phenomena with a common denominator. Diaspora foreshadows displacement; nostalgia embraces it as a prime factor, but after all it is nostalgia that nurtures the memories of dislocated individuals.

I maintain that globalization becomes a transcendent force that affects a wide range of human life. It creates dreams of escape or rebellion against the society of residents equally causing dislocation of masses and producing cultural, national and individual loss. Globalization blurs borders and national distinction just as individuals who transit across borders find themselves in cultural and linguistic transitions or hybridized intersections. Fast-tracked life in a new society of residence, ethnic and cultural tensions, and national self-questioning create a widespread need to

reflect and redefine the self in the light of history, nationality, heritage and ongoing change imposed by progress and globalization.

For example, I argue that during the 1960s, the Caribbean experience is characterized by a massive displacement of people from the Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican islands to the United States. This phenomenon was caused by dictatorships, revolutions and economic instabilities. It will be my task to study how this literal and figurative displacement offer framed projections of longing represented in the literary works written by the 1.5 generation of Hispanic-Americans in the United States. Correspondingly, I propose the notion of nostalgia as a catalyst that will allow observation into how displaced individuals reconstruct homeland, culture, identity, and language during exile and immigration through the adoption of new symbols, reconstructions of spatial landmarks, the practice of tradition, the remembrance of popular culture and the appropriation of public spaces in their adopted homeland.

The study of nostalgia in my work is largely inspired by Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) and in Fred Davis's *Yearning for Yesterday* (1978). *The Future of Nostalgia* provides a useful arena that I adapt throughout my thesis to develop my arguments on how nostalgia becomes an inevitable byproduct of globalization. In this way, I observe nostalgia as a deep social, historical and cultural emotion that is represented at different degrees in the literary works written by the selected 1.5 generation of Latino authors. I build upon Boym's typology to direct my literary discourse on how nostalgia is articulated in the public domain while I explore the implications of longing from both the individual's standpoint and the individual in relation to their settings and a larger collective consensus. In short, Boym's approximation to nostalgia allows me to trace individual and collective realizations of longing. In addition, Boym's volume provides a platform for studying on how nostalgia is accumulated in architecture and civic structures. This

approach allows me to feature the reconstruction of city spaces as a supplementary embodiment of longing.

My literary examination of nostalgia also finds relevant intersections of literature and globalization. In order to explore this conjuncture my dissertation is supported by Suman Gupta's *Globalization and Literature* (2008). Gupta suggests that globalization is perceived as a transcendent entity that impacts a broad range of disciplines and human life, and its junctures have to be conceptualized. Consequently, I examine how globalization is thematized within the discussed literary works. This platform approaches the intertextual features such as themes, characters, images and narrations, and reflects on various social, literary and cultural aspects of globalization. Additionally, the presented dissertation focuses on the meeting and departure points of nostalgia and globalization. Within this context, I explore the changing landscapes of nostalgia as a response to political and historical events and massive movements of individuals from the Caribbean islands to the metropolitan areas of the United States. In this manner, it is crucial to consider the phenomenon of globalization, freedom, modernity and nostalgia as important factors that shape socio-cultural boundaries and impact the formation of Latino/a identity.

Alternatively, nostalgia's power of recall from Davis's perspective emerges as a psychological filter on the individual level. In Davis's main arguments, the notion of longing functions as a cognitive and emotional process that people employ in order to connect the past to the present and to maintain a sense of personal identity with regard to their social and historical experiences. Davis' approach helps me to observe in the novel and in the memoirs the question of dislocation and loss can be bridged by a sentimental recollection.

I organized my dissertation into the following parts: Introduction, Three Chapters: 1) Nostalgia Between Puerto Rico and New York, 2) Nostalgia in the Cuban Exile, 3) Dominican

Nostalgia in the New Jersey Malaise, and Overall Conclusion. The introduction contains the Literature Review section. In this part I provide a brief historical reading on nostalgia starting with early conception and concluding with contemporary theories. I trace pathological, psychological, physical, anatomical manifestations of nostalgia from 17th century to contemporary theories. Here I review social, cognitive, political, national and pan-cultural representations of longing. The Literature Review includes a discussion of the theoretical framework used throughout the dissertation. I provide the theoretical ideas in two parts. The first one explores Davis's (1978) notion on how nostalgia loses its prior pathological connotations and develops into a social and cultural emotion. Additionally, I present Davis's main arguments on nostalgia's function as a complex, cognitive and an emotional process. The second part explores Boym's (2001) theory of modern nostalgia becoming a syndrome of globalization and discusses how longing operates on a collective level as well as on an individual level through Reflexive and Restorative models of nostalgia. The review of literature related to Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican diasporic literature and tradition of self-writing is featured in the corresponding chapters. The Overall Conclusion section explores the results of my investigation and suggests potential ideas for future projects.

In chapter one I examine Santiago's first memoir *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and portray how nostalgia becomes a catalyst guiding Santiago to reconstruct her homeland, culture, *jíbaro* identity, and language. This transformation will largely occur through Santiago's childhood memories, via the author's intimate bond to the island and through the salient process of writing the memoir. Within its context Santiago's work and Boym's theory allow to examine longing for *jíbaro* identity on a collective scale as a means to reconstruct *jíbaro* nationalism and cultural symbols as an outcome not only of migration and dislocation but also as a product of progress and

modernization. I propose a nostalgic association with the independent peasant and the rural landscape of Puerto Rico as a way to chart progress, transformation and transition of the island from rural to industrial during the modernization period. Santiago's trajectory from rural to urban Puerto Rico in the late 1950s timeframe allows me to elaborate on the transformation of city spaces on the margin of modernization. Moreover, I support my analysis with Davis's premise on nostalgia to evaluate nostalgia as a cognitive motor that facilitates Santiago to balance her double identity as an adult.

Chapter two focuses on Boym's distinctions between restorative and reflective nostalgia to examine how Pérez Firmat's memoir, *Next Year in Cuba* represents the nostalgia of exile on the collective and individual level. I analyze the influence of nostalgia of exile on three different generations of Pérez Firmat's family members. I investigate the role of architectural restorations of Old Havana in Miami as nostalgic entities that affected the substantial exiled Cuban enclave agglomerating in Miami, Florida post 1959. I discuss how the Cuban landmarks in Miami develop and fall as an outcome of modernization and globalization. I employ Davis's theory to develop my point that nostalgia becomes a psychological motor for Pérez Firmat and how this memory is capable of bridging the loss and displacement generated by the Cuban exile in Miami. In addition, nostalgia emerges as a malady of globalization in reference to the Mariel Boat Lift which impregnates the mainstream culture with undesired émigrés.

The third chapter moves beyond the memoir and investigates the literary representation of globalization and nostalgia in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz. I utilize Svetlana Boym's (2001) and Suman Gupta's (2009) theories to explore the intersections of globalization and literature as a space from which nostalgia emerges. This notion of nostalgia is fueled by progress, American-Caribbean history, science fiction magazines and Role-Playing

games which play a crucial role in Díaz's exploration of Latino identity, culture and belonging. I address these important themes of nostalgia and globalization within Díaz's novel and argue that nostalgia can be regarded as an important aspect of the assimilation process and the formation of a Latino/a culture and Latino nerd-identity within metropolitan areas.

In my analysis of Díaz's novel, I contextualize the proliferation of art forms from popular culture (including propagation of genres and languages) with respect to the traditional canon of poems and novels in order to explore the themes of globalization in the novel. In addition, I explore the multigenerational portrayal of the Cabral de León family members, mainly U.S. born Oscar and his Dominican-born mother Belicia Cabral, and discuss manifestations of nostalgia from homeland and mainland. I approach nostalgia not only in the traditional retrospective sense, directed toward the past, but I also introduce "Sehnsucht," a utopian and escapist dimensions of yearning.

In section one, the literary analysis is directed to the colonial curse, "fukú americanus," I evaluate how this notion develops into globalization and causes the malaise of the Dominican diaspora. I discuss Yuniors role as the narrator from Bhabha's and Spivak's perspective of the subaltern to demonstrate that he is a medium, speaking in the name of nostalgia of "Other," silenced individuals. In the second section, I study evocations of homeland during Belicia's Cabral coming-of-age in the Dominican Republic of the 1960s under Trujillo's dictatorship. I support the inquiry with Boym's lens on yearning that crafts a mixture of idealized homeland and childhood memories that are overshadowed by the oppression and decline of the Cabral de León family under that dictatorship. In this sense, nostalgia becomes an intense combination of longing, history and politics that recreates monster homelands.

The third section focuses on Oscar's coming-of-age during the late 1980 and early 1990s in New Jersey and his atypical obsession with science fiction magazines and Role-Playing games. I explore literary references from pop culture in order to observe a complementary representation of nerd nostalgia. Lastly, my examination of nostalgia and globalization in Díaz's novel provides a changing ethnographic landscape of nostalgia in response to modernization, freedom, cultural struggles, and concerns that ascended from spatial reconfigurations within metropolitan areas, changing socio and cultural boundaries, and the diasporic movements between the Dominican Republic and the United States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Conception of Nostalgia

When one thinks of nostalgia, the Homeric epic tale of the Trojan War and Odysseus comes to mind. Fated against Gods, Odysseus is unable to return to Ithaca and his beloved wife Penelope for ten years. Instead he must sail seas, confronts monsters and endures the rage of the gods. Despite spending seven years at Ogygia, the Island of divine pleasures, nurtured by the Goddess Calypso, his desire to return remains strong: "I long for my home and to see the day of returning" (Homer, 1921, Book V, pp. 78–79). Homer's epic tale gives birth to pre-modern, ancient homesickness but does not originate in a literary context. The term "nostalgia" was officially coined in the medical field by a young doctoral Swiss student, Johannes Hofer, in his *Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia* 1688 (1934). Hofer used the Greek compound word *-nostos* (return to native land) and *-algos* (grief or suffering), a term equally reflecting the Swiss or German phrase *Heimweh* (home-ache or home-pain), in order to approach an illness observed among displaced Swiss mercenaries and students.

Nonetheless, this powerful human sentiment existed long before it acquired a pseudo Greek name. The connotation was not new and was seen in many European countries and languages. The Spanish had “mal de corazón,” the French “maladie du pays,” the Polish “tesknota,” to name a few. Hofer transported homesickness into the medical arena and maintained that victims of this *new* condition were diagnosed with a “cerebral disease” (*Medical Dissertation* 387). Hoffer considered that this notion was evoked by “vibrations of animal spirits through fibers of the middle brain in which impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling” (*Medical Dissertation* 384). Hofer conceptualized nostalgia as a medical and a neurologic disorder affecting primarily displaced Swiss students and mercenaries. From the outset, nostalgia was closely paired with homesickness, largely due to Hofer’s thesis gaining popularity in the discursive landscapes of the 18th century. Consequently, nostalgia was examined through the lens of medical sickness leading mostly to pathological overview: anatomical, physiological and mental theories.

Surgical Essays of Baron de Larrey (1823) classifies three stages of physiological anomalies caused by homesickness. In short, the first stage impacts mental faculties causing an exaggerated yearning where subjects idealize their homes (despite extremely poor living conditions) resulting in an irregular heartbeat, fever and body pains (158). The second stage harms the brain producing a lesion and stupor¹. Home related obsession was believed to cause an imbalance in both body and spirit. In the final stage, the nostalgic subject refuses the consumption of liquids and solids, groans and moans, and eventually commit suicide². Peters (1863) related homesickness to mental disorders occasionally advancing to minor insanity. Papillon (1874) considered that nostalgia might account for a mental disorder, but he distinguished between nervous disorders and insanity. He surmised that an insane individual may not be cured by simply returning home while a homesick person could.

Karl Jasper's dissertation (1909:1996) frames nostalgia as a sickness rooted in cerebral malfunction capable of causing withdrawal from reality, crisis of identity, and occasionally resulting in stages of violence and suicidal attempts that equally originate from bodily disorders³. Jasper's case study of displaced Swiss women views nostalgia as a catalyst leading to a disturbance in the imaginative capabilities. This anomaly is due to an obsessive notion of retuning to (an idealized) home. The cognitive register and body collapse, and the notion of reality and fantasy are blurred which results in acts of violence to relieve the overburdened psyche. From Hofer's pathological perspective on homesickness, nostalgia moves from the medical field and further develops into a criminalization of the disease as observed in Jasper's case study. Interestingly, in the early decades of the 19th century nostalgia emerges within psychological and physiological contexts.

Conklin (1935) hypothesized that homesickness was linked to the sensitive detachment of the autonomic nervous system. Once it is triggered an individual demonstrates an intensified desire (accompanied by feelings of fear, distress and inferiority) to return home, yet this urge cannot be satisfied. Frost (1938) conducted a case study of forty foreign domestic workers, mainly Australian and German, which in summary labeled nostalgia an "immigrant psychosis" that ranged from mental disorders to a series of acute states of confusion, including a severe schizophrenic condition ("Homesickness" 801). McCann (1940) made a further distinction between psychological and physiological symptoms of homesickness, and found that such symptoms as nausea, loneliness, diarrhea, vomiting and high blood pressure, originate from psychological disturbances and affect physiological faculties. Nonetheless, the proliferation of homesickness forms enters into the spheres of law, anthropology, literature and psychology; all in fact were evident in Jasper's case

study (1909) that are revisited by Bronfen's in *Knotted Subject* (1998) along with works by Sigmund Freud.

Bronfen, in her fifth chapter "Turning of Nostalgia Sigmund Freud, Karl Jaspers, Pierre Janet" interrelates nostalgia with pathology and hysteria in order to draw on the distinction between these stages. The presented cases of Freud, Jasper, and Janet have in common elevated stages of violence caused by prolonged absence outside of one's own geographical or native space. The obvious parallel between Jasper's nostalgia and Freud's hysteria is that both account for a disease of the imagination. From Sigmund Freud's view, the reproduction of past experiences stimulates symptoms of pathological hysteria which can cause semantic pains. While Jasper's theory regards the body as a medium where the physical disease shifts to a psychometric state and results in violent behavior. The main difference between nostalgia and hysteria is that hysterics suffer from a too vivid imagination, as the imagination of a nostalgic is not flexible enough to encompass change (*Knotted Subject* 235). This supposition separates vividly the difference between correlation of hysteria and nostalgia.

On a complementary note, nostalgia and melancholia are oftentimes staged together as parallel concepts, yet they differ to a certain extent. While Hofer in 1678 was defending his doctoral work on nostalgia, Robert Burton wrote another edition of *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which was first published in 1621. In Burton's early editions, melancholy was also perceived as a sickness that can affect an individual's state on a holistic level, but is largely a social-oriented condition. Burton in the first volume, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1932) depicted the kingdom of England as an unhealthy rotting body, a place with: "many discontents, common grievances, complaints, poverty, barbarism, beggary, plagues, wars, rebellions, mutinies, contentions [...] poor towns, villages depopulated, the people ugly uncivil; that kingdom that country must be uncivil,

melancholy, hath a sick body” (88). In this parallel between individual and the state, melancholia is responsible for a collective disorder that disturbs individuals on a wide scale. Burton’s view is that melancholia, by its extension, triggers escapist ambitions. Furthermore, Freud, in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), classified melancholy in a pathological light and also considered escapist functions.

According to Freud, it was

a deeply painful bad mood, [characterized] by a suspension of interest in the outside world, by the loss of ability to love, by the inhibition of any accomplishments, and by the denigration of the feeling of self, which is expressed in self-reproaches and self-insults and increases the delusional expectations of punishment. (254)

Regardless of similar patterns in behavior, the mechanics that generate melancholy and nostalgia operate on separate grounds. While the melancholic wants to withdraw from the surroundings and seeks to escape and find refuge from the state of confusion, conversely, the nostalgic, seeks to find reattachment. Strictly speaking, melancholy is a form of agitation that sends individuals away from the disdain, but nostalgia calls them to return and fears separation or strangeness.

Throughout the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s the ongoing classification of nostalgia was constantly related to the field of medicine, social deviation, compulsive neurological disorder, and a desire to return to native land – authors largely regarded homesickness as an undesirable state. Whether inspired by the observation of displaced French and Swiss soldiers under the service of European monarchs, Swiss students, displaced housemaids, and workers, the pathological view started in the 17th and persisted throughout the 19th century. By the mid the 20th century nostalgia and homesickness finally part ways, and in the 1880s the word disappears as a disease from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Theoretical Framework Part 1: Nostalgia a Social Condition

In the early 20th century, nostalgia was regarded as a form of melancholy or depression and a result of homesickness (McCann 1941, Rosen 1975). Rosen (1975) reports that in the late 19th century nostalgia and homesickness follow separate conceptualization. Fred Davis, in *Yearning for Yesterday* (1978), traces nostalgia from its early medical and pathological references and investigates how nostalgia turns into a social emotion and loses its previous pathological connotations. Davis, drawing on psychological research of the early 20th century, his investigations, and student interviews, he reevaluates how nostalgia loses its prior pathological connotation when it enters the popular culture in the USA in the 1950s. Nostalgia shifts from a medical and pathological perspective and no is longer limited to a military phenomenon. It rather becomes a vivid widespread phenomenon, a social emotion inspired by the modern age. Nostalgia turns into an aspect of normal desire “despite its private, sometimes intensely felt personal character, is a deeply social emotion as well” (vii). A condition that evokes a “bittersweet” blend of longing and joy, “a nice sort of sadness” relating the past to the present that cannot be repeated but remembered (vii). In this sense, nostalgia marks a certain kind of loss of social living and structure of feeling and belonging. But at the same time the socially constructed notion of recollection is linked to some degree of recovery. Besides becoming an enactment of social behavior seen in a positive connotation, in Davis’s arguments nostalgia appears as a complex, cognitive, and emotional process intended to fuse past and present from an individual’s standpoint.

Davis’s approach allows consideration of the role of nostalgia on the individual level as a psychological lens employed to establish and maintain a sense of personal identity towards one’s previous manifestation of self within a particular historical experience of a group. Particularly, Davis’s approach helps observe in the novel and the memoirs if dislocation and loss can be bridged

by nostalgia. Davis proposes three ascending orders of nostalgia. Simple Nostalgia is a largely unexamined state of beliefs about a past where everything was happier, healthier and more civilized. The Second Order takes into account a critical consideration of nostalgic feeling in the light of history; it connects an individual with his or her historical events. The Third Order or Interpreted Nostalgia is a critical account of nostalgic recollection itself with exponential vitality to “cultivate appreciative stances toward former selves” and emphasizes continuity between past and present (35). The ascending orders should be regarded as analytical categories and not as phenomenon closely experienced by the individuals because they translate what the subject feels, does and thinks and how he moves from one order to the other (28).

Davis asserts that nostalgia results in part from a problematic construction and involves a never-ending process of maintaining identity. His account of beneficial cognitive function of nostalgia fusing former stages of an individual’s life, is exemplified in my analysis of studied works of the 1.5 generation Latino writers. Furthermore, Davis upholds association between nostalgia experiences during adolescence and old age, which might reflect that these two life stages are prone to acute identity problems. Nonetheless, young and adolescent age is precisely the locus of nostalgic recollection and forms a constant among the discussed works. The stories of self-writing are articulated from the adult perspective and projected toward a former representation of self that belong to a particular age and historical experience of larger structures. Even though Davis’s research might seem outdated, the above observation and classification of nostalgias as a cognitive tool provides a plausible platform for my contextual analysis of studied works by the 1.5 generation Latino authors: Pérez Firmat, Santiago and Junot Díaz.

Moving above the psychological and individual level, Davis approaches the larger social consequences of nostalgia by treating it as a form of collective quest for identity. His analysis is

directed to his last decade, which Davis believes, was fixed in the social disorders, predominately the dislocation of people within the U.S. during the 1950s and the 1960s. This idea equally can be extended to Cuban, Dominican and Puerto Rican migrations to the United States and their respective collective experience that took place in a similar timeframe. Davis notes a connection between a conservative and unconventional (“antiquarian feeling”) of nostalgia that is defining and shaping the remembrance of generations.

He distinguishes between “antiquarian feeling” – a longing for a pre-autobiographical past that stems from folklore, history, tradition, and books. And a nostalgia – where one cannot feel nostalgic for places and events one has never seen nor been a part of, thus his concept applies only to memories of lived experiences. Even though Davis leaves unchallenged the similarities between these two modulations, Boym’s theory fills this gap and sustains that cultural practices and rituals create powerful collective models that are recreated in the society of residence because they evoke feelings of attachment and maintain continuity with the past (this remark will be discussed in greater detail in part two of the theoretical framework). Davis’s volume concludes with an examination of “contemporary nostalgia,” with a special devotion to its connections to economic institutions, the mass media, TV quasi-documentaries and fake folklore.

Davis’s phenomenological sociology of nostalgia suggests that individuals make selective usage of their past, and nostalgia progresses as a reaction to events and social configurations that prompts a reflection upon an individual’s current and previous identities and stages. As individuals confront the social and psychological modalities of the present, nostalgia unties the dichotomy between an individual and his or hers collective (social) experience. This distinctions are a particularly useful lenses for making visible the conflicted relationship between the Caribbean

immigrant and modern time. Davis' groundbreaking work certainly gives vitality to a number of future and contemporary studies.

Contemporary Research on Nostalgia

Andrea Rítivoí, in *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity* (2002), accommodates nostalgia within the context of the immigrant experience and identity formation. The scholar draws on a variety of disciplines ranging from philosophy, literature (Nabakov, Defoe, and Foucault), rhetoric, epic Homeric literature, sociology (Davis) and memoirs of Vera Calin and Eva Hoffman who emigrated to the U.S. from Romania and Poland. A significant part of her work explores the relation of nostalgia as a response to the experience of loss while factoring the important question faced by all immigrants: how much to change or adapt to new sociocultural settings, and in what manner? In this context, she remarks "homesickness plays a crucial role, by creating and stimulating an awareness of personal history, identity patterns, alternatives, and necessities" (3). By connecting the nostalgia with its openness to change she incorporates Paul Ricoeur's study to build her complex narrative model of identity.

In addition, she follows Davis's threads of "reflective nostalgia." Her self-reflective version expands on logic and incorporates so called "autobiographical memory" in which nostalgia forms an essential part in the formation and maintenance of an individual's identity (32). Davis's Interpreted Nostalgia is extended to "an interpretive stance in which a person is aware of the element of discordance in her life" (*Yesterday's Self* 165). Nonetheless, Rítivoí's investigative methodology is far more complex. To guide her case study of the memoirs of Vera Calin and Eva Hoffman, she adapts Ricoeur's etymological examination of the concept of identity⁴ makes her model of identity very complex and difficult to adapt to literature. Very few articles find her model as a relevant reference point.

Davis's sociology of nostalgia paved the road to study the notion of nostalgia as a positive experience, containing both the sweet and bitter elements that scholars adapt into a widespread array of disciplines. In the U.S. scholars put an emphasis on childhood and adolescent images (Batcho 1995, Holbrook & Schindler 1994). The general findings were not related to gender differences (question posed by Hoolbrook and Schindler) but a difference across age groups, which was suggested two decades earlier by Davis. Holbrook and Schindler (1994) challenge Davis's view that nostalgia can only be evoked from an actual lived experience and conclude that nostalgia evokes a positive attitude toward earlier times in life: "It does seem plausible that one could identify nostalgically with people, places, or things from a bygone era that one has experienced only through books, films, or other narratives" ("Attitude toward the past" 413). Holbrook and Schindler (1989, 1991) follow up with Davis's regard on analysis of media and recognize the importance of nostalgia for consumer research and music. Others focus on relating nostalgia to advertising (Howell 1991, Stern 1992) and communication strategies (Holbrook 1998) as well as its relation to consumer psychology (Holbrook & Schindler 2003).

Furthermore, the more positive approach to nostalgia is influenced by applied and theoretical research. Cognitive research focused on a role of nostalgia in memory and proposed the study of the interaction between cognitive and affective processes (Batcho 1995; Cavanaugh 1989). Cavanaugh offered an empirical study about the relation between memory and emotion and argued that "nostalgia represents a cognitive attempt to recapture when life was good, safe and secure" ("This Feeling" 603). Batcho (1995) used a survey measure of nostalgia in order to define missing aspects of personal past and the relationship between memory and personality. He concluded that nostalgia has the capacity to alter the "negative picture of dependent person dominated many years of nostalgia theory" and "is replaced by a more positive image of an

individual with the capacity to feel intensely and for whom other people are a high priority” (“A Psychological Perspective” 430).

Nostalgia even made a re-appearance in clinical studies. To compliment laboratory research Mills and Coleman (1994) investigated the role of nostalgia as therapeutic strategy among patients suffering from dementia. Their research is oriented in a psychogeriatric setting that concerns the investigation, prevention, and treatment of mental disorders in persons in advanced age. They concluded that nostalgia as a therapeutic strategy may conserve or reinstate a sense of “self-identity” by “reweaving the broken threads of life history” (“Nostalgic Memories and Dementia” 215). Their findings marked a decisive transition of nostalgia, from a medical disease to a therapeutic resource that can enhance the personhood and personality by strengthening the relationship to other individuals in advanced age.

A growing body of research in recent years gathers evidence that nostalgia is an interpersonal relationship and demonstrates a multiplicity of manifestations. Wildschut et al. (2006) views nostalgia as a self-relevant complex social emotion “prevalent and fundamental [to] human experience...that serves a number of key psychological functions” (“Nostalgia: Content, Triggers” 990). Contemporary scholars follow correlational and experimental case studies to elucidate nostalgia as a self-relevant emotion with positive qualities capable of repairing negative moods (Wildschut et al. 2006). Furthermore, nostalgia emerges as self-affirmation and provides self-esteem (Vess et al. 2012; Wildschut et al. 2006). Additionally, it enhances meaning in life and shields existential threats (Juhl et al. 2010; Routledge et al. 2008), and serves as an adaptive psychological function (Sedikides et al. 2008). Batcho (2013) added that “nostalgia’s” relationship to adaptive coping strategies contributes to psychological benefits during difficult times” (“Nostalgia: Support” 365). The widespread approach to nostalgia’s power of recollection

becomes rather a significant factor highly relevant to human experience and equally beneficial on many levels.

Furthermore, scholars have approached a global comparison of nostalgia in cross cultural context. In recent investigations, Hepper (2013) and other scholars conducted nostalgia research on a worldwide scale. They proposed to conceptualize nostalgias as self-relevant, social emotion in pan-cultural context, seeking patterns and universal conceptions. Hepper et al. (2013) combined SAS/STATROC CLUSTER and Ward's method and examined cross-cultural manifestations of nostalgia across eighteen countries and five continents. They rated over thirty features of nostalgia and concluded that despite limitations in a "first cross-cultural" investigation, their "findings indicate for the first time that people across a range of cultures share strikingly similar conceptions of nostalgia and agree that it is a complex emotion, with intriguing subtle differences in perceptions of some features" ("Pancultural Nostalgia" 25). In sum, the consensus is that the experience of longing is truly a universal condition that affects humanity around the globe; and although the manifestations might differ, the concepts and perceptions remain relatively similar.

The phenomenon of nostalgia as generated by myriad diverse sources has been explored from widespread approaches. These sources ranged and included pathological aspects of medicine, a disease of imagination, homesickness and criminalization, sustained melancholic stages, states of hysteria, even penetrating the field of media, music, marketing and consumption, including psychological, cognitive and cross-cultural methodologies. This brief conjecture of definitions favors an omnipresence of nostalgia across disciplines, societies, cultures, languages and time periods. The study despite its penetrating interest in classification, benefits, and outcomes of longing, seems perpetually to omit the very cause of this social condition. This line of thought adheres to my original idea, born more than three years ago, from my immigrant experience and

graduate studies; mainly nostalgia forming an inseparable byproduct of modern age and globalization. Hence, in my doctoral work this idea is framed from Svetlana Boym's groundbreaking work *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). To close with a remark on recent research on nostalgia, the international scholarly attention and multiplicity of approaches of longing can be viewed as an epidemic of nostalgia itself. Nostalgia appears to us now to be a syndrome of the modern age that verifies an ongoing evolution parting from Hofer's disease toward contemporary age that both fascinates scholars from a wide range of disciplines and affects people across the globe.

Theoretical Framework Part 2: Nostalgia a Syndrome of Modern Age

Svetlana Boym (1966-2015), a Russian émigré and an accomplished comparative literature professor at Harvard University articulates in *The Future of Nostalgia* diverse manifestations on the notion of nostalgia in the modern era. I find useful Boym's typology of reflective and restorative nostalgia to direct my literary analysis on how nostalgia is articulated in the public domain while it explores the implications of longing from both the individual's standpoint and the individual in relation to their settings and larger collective consensus. Her study equally provides an interdisciplinary approach on how nostalgia is accumulated and expressed in architecture, art and civic structures, which allows me to feature the reconstruction of city spaces as supplementary material of longing. Particularly relevant to my investigations are her compelling arguments about how nostalgia becomes a syndrome of globalization.

Boym recognizes nostalgia as an inevitable malady of our century, a disease of the modern age caused by globalization that turned into a deep historical, national and cultural emotion. While in the 17th century, nostalgia was considered a curable disease, by the 20th century “[a] provincial ailment, *maladie du pays*, turned into a disease of the modern age, *mal du siècle*” (The Future 7).

This aliment feeds on rapid progress, modernization and substantial change in the history. Boym affirms that nostalgia's secondary port of entry is largely related to "the historical point when the conception of time and history were undergoing radical change" (8). This reasoning is noticeably valuable when I recover the Caribbean diasporic experience from studied works by Díaz, Santiago and Pérez Firmat. These works portray how political upheavals, industrial revolutions, and dictatorships are followed by epidemics of nostalgia rendered in cultural, political, and national collective manifestations of longing. Consequently, history and globalization, longing and estrangement go hand in hand.

On one hand, globalization impacts borders and national-cultural distinctions, the dislocation and change in time and space result in the loss of the individual's cultural identity and ethnicity. On the other hand, it causes stronger local attachments and promotes a sentimental desire for a community with a collective memory. Consequently, this void awakens longing for a continuity in a modern incoherent world, in which technology and corporate powers continue to generate ongoing migrations partially from the Caribbean or Mexico (and many other places around the globe) into industrialized areas such as New Jersey, New York or Miami. Yet, according to Boym, the object of longing is not a virtual space, nor a specific environment, but "rather a social context that one could export into diaspora" (12).

Accordingly Boym's modern nostalgia "was not an expression of local longing, but a result of new understanding of time and space that made the division into 'local' and 'universal' possible" where the nostalgic individual "has internalized this division, but instead of aspiring for the universal and the progressive he looks backward and yearns for the particular" (12). It is to say, a modern nostalgic is always a displaced individual, an exile or immigrant who mediates between these two modalities. Displacement in the modern age engages spatial and temporal

dimension in this process which is regarded as tension between the local and the universal or global. For the displaced individual, leaving local home and needing to acclimatize and adapt to a new home-place or to a universal impersonal sphere where the perception of time and space is felt, resurfaces as a temporal and spatial deficiency for the old place and time.

Consequently, Boym's argument is that nostalgia is not only caused by dislocation in space but is due also to the changing perception of time. Displaced people in general, or immigrants, in particular long to recover not a lost place but rather a lost movement in time as argued by Boym. According to the scholar: "The disease of this millennium will be called chronophobia or speedomania, and its treatment will be embarrassingly old-fashioned [Nostalgia] (8). In this regard, contemporary nostalgia is precisely about vanishing the present that appears as a critical reaction to a rapid scale of modernization and thus sparks reflection.

In this manner, the past borrows vitality from the present and always reemerges in the context of present experience. In a similar way Davis perceived this abnormality, as he puts it "nostalgia uses past, but it is not the product of it" (*Yearning* 11). Boym quotes Henri Bergson about how the past "might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality" (*The Future* 50). Both Boym and Davis perceive the mechanism of nostalgia in similar ways: the past encounters its vitality in the current moment and state, and from the absence, the present is revitalized. The relationship between current and former events and social configurations are conceived due to relocation, but their theories differ largely.

In diaspora, the displacement of people or their ancestors outside of their place of origin is a primordial feature. The rupture with the past is transformed into a desire to recover a lost place, or rather a lost moment in time from the perspective of the homeland (not always coming from an island). Therefore, displacements foreshadow diasporas that create emptiness, which individuals

fill through nostalgia. Longing nurtures memories of homeland and invites subjects to contemplate them through available pictorial symbols, practices and customs on an individual or collective level. It is precisely the heritage of the culture and the conscience for the place of origin and in the place of residence that encourages Latino/a writers to document stories of their homelands (Santos 1991, Butler 2001). In the narratives of Caribbean diasporas, nostalgia manifests itself as a poetic creation, an individual instrument of survival, planning strategy, rebellion, or a countercultural practice. In other words, it is a hybrid creation, a poison and cure because it can be beneficial in the process of migration and assimilation, but once overdosed it may turn into a malady and impede the adaptation into the mainland society. Boym's line of inquiry provides a useful tool for examining the relationship of the (Cuban) exilic experience and its nostalgia because it explores how exilic subjects view present, past, and future, and how they exemplify, face, adjust, or reject (nostalgic) practices with larger governing structures.

Boym does not propose a remedy for nostalgia, but instead she offers a typology to categorize nostalgia according to certain characteristics. At the same time, Boym's modulations "do not explain the nature of longing nor its psychological makeup and unconscious currents" (*The Future* 41). Due to this limitation, I enrich my studies with Davis's method on ascending orders of nostalgia, which I discussed in part one of my theoretical framework. I navigate my research and employ Boym's categorizations of reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia as an approach to evaluate the role of home, homeland, longing and belonging in the studied literary works on both collective and individual levels. Restorative Nostalgia conforms *-nostos*, the return to the original stasis, or state. This typology rebuilds home and homeland in a mimetic⁵ sense. And "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (xviii). It portrays an idealized home before its entry into historical turmoil. Oftentimes, it is seemingly longing for a place, but it is

actually yearning for a different time – a time with slower peace and security, associated with peaceful memories of youth, or childhood. Therefore, in a broader sense, restorative nostalgia is a venture about absolute truth and universal values like family, nature, homeland, and nation.

Furthermore, restorative nostalgia follows two scenarios: the return to the origin and the analysis of conspiracy. The second point manifests the old antagonism between good, evil and the search for a scapegoat (*The Future* 43). The analysis of conspiracy is born due to revolutions or dictatorships and alludes to nostalgia at a national level as it allows for establishing a connection to national memory. The writers are the conspiracy theorists, and they have to defend homelands against those who proscribe the past. Consequently, I will show that the portrayal of homeland through restorative nostalgia invites writers to reconstruct the past or the good old days which are frequently overshadowed by the bitter reign of revolutions, dictatorships and political, economic, or military interventions. In this line of thought Boym's "collective frameworks of memory appear as safeguards in the stream of modernity and mediate between the present and the past between self and other" (53). To a certain point, the *future* of nostalgic's recollection and progressive thinking form an inseparable relationship between the individual and collective memory, which is a pivotal point in Boym's inquiry and equally, in my view, on the functionality of nostalgia in selected texts.

Reflective nostalgia thrives on *-algia* and dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging. It highlights an individual and cultural memory. It echoes the memory of pain or yearning for the return to a lost home long time ago. In this way, *-algia*, or longing, Boym affirms, "is what we share," yet *-nostos*, the return home, is what separates us. Nostalgia, for this reason, "is the promise to rebuild the ideal home that lies at the core of many powerful ideologies of today" (xv-xvi). The dialog with the past oftentimes has romantic dimensions and may lead to renovation

of a phantom homeland, one that ceased to exist or never existed what exemplifies a delusional nature of longing.

Following Boym, the aspect of *-algia* invites individuals to reflect upon the past from many perspectives, and this conversation can be filled with disbelief, pessimism, humor, sarcasm, grief and irony (50). This view mirrors the melancholic view in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917). Freud proposes melancholia in contradistinction to mourning, as supporting of the loss of an object, beloved person, or some abstract concept such as liberty, an ideal or one's country. Mourning employs a labor of grief and is a healthy conscious process that passes over time. Unlike melancholia which is unconscious and leads to the loss of individual's ego and was seen as abnormal and pathological, Boym's "[r]eflective nostalgia has elements of both mourning and melancholia" (55). In addition, it consists of "deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future" (55). In this regard, the loss is never completely recalled but instead is connected to larger structures and to the "loss of collective frameworks of memory" (55). Consequently, reflective nostalgia seeks a pathway between individual and longing for collective consensus of memory and invites individuals to investigate the past from many perspectives. At the same time, it does not propose a cure, but rather sustains the lack of it purposefully. The very nature of reflective nostalgia alludes to the fear of physical homecoming oftentimes leading to divergent practice that prevents individuals from going back.

This type of reasoning Boym labels "off-modern" where "reflection and longing, estrangement and affection go together" and allow for "[a] detour from the deterministic narrative of twentieth century history" (xvii). The term can be functional, Boym claims, to people who come from: "eccentric positions." In particular, she refers to "those often considered marginal or provincial with respect to the cultural mainstream, from Eastern Europe to Latin America" (xvii).

Nostalgia, off-modern thinking and critical reflection provide a crossroad of encounters for the studied works of the 1.5 generation immigrants and allow me to examine how they face, engage and reflect upon dilemmas rooted in both homeland and mainland. Additionally, Boym's off-modern power of recollection gives voice to subjects from marginal positions. In Chapter Three while I discuss Díaz's novel, I enrich the study with Bhabha's notion of "Third Space" from which I observe how those "others" – Dominicans from eccentric positions or "subaltern group" challenge established borders built by history, culture and language homogeneity ("Cultural Diversity" 209). Under the category of reflective nostalgia, Boym remarks that individuals are confronted with the sense of defamiliarization.

Boym explains that what drives the immigrants to tell their story is so called *diasporic intimacy*—strategies of finding a feeling to substitute for *home*. However, diasporic intimacy is not opposed to defamiliarization, or uprootedness, but rather it is comprised of and empowered by them (50). Therefore, the selected works by Díaz, Santiago, and Pérez Firmat will allow me to observe and evaluate the sense of distance and loss as prime features. From these circumstances, a loss of foundation reemerges and implies a heightened sensibility of those who come from marginal or subaltern positions. As a result, I argue that the relationship between past, present and future in the novel and memoir activates a "diasporic intimacy" as a strategy to narrate and produce a substitution for *home* that is proclaimed largely throughout the act of writing, recollection, reflection and reinstating the past into the present. A set of transcribed experiences emerges from personal experiences and from governing larger structures and events.

In addition, I draw upon Suman Gupta's *Globalization and Literature* (2008) to bring forth my discussion on globalization thematized in the discussed literary works. Gupta, in her extraordinary volume, indicates that the intersections within the "ken of literature and

globalization” have to be conceptualized in regard to the pressing subjects (81). In her argument, globalization accounts for a transcendent entity that affects a wide range of human life and its junctures which have to be explored with reference to literary theory and literature. Within this context, I employ Gupta’s line of thought to investigate not only how globalization is represented in the literature, but I also focus on the meeting and departure points of nostalgia and globalization in the literary and theoretical context. In my work, I explore the changing landscapes of nostalgia in a response to political and historical events, modernization, cultural struggles and concerns that arise from civic reconfigurations within urban areas, changing socio-cultural boundaries, and the post 1960s diasporic movements between the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the United States.

Both Boym and Davis introduce nostalgia as a crucial entity employed at different cognitive levels and perspectives. For Boym, nostalgia restores, rebuilds, reflects and fears homecoming. On the other hand, for Davis, nostalgia lingers towards establishing and maintaining a sense of personal identity. Thus, it will account for a crucial catalyst for maintaining and fostering self-continuity over time and in the face of historical change. Both frameworks will be important theoretical vehicles that will guide my analysis of nostalgia in this dissertation. They will aid to observe how displaced individuals from the basin of the Caribbean reconstruct homeland, culture, identity, and language in exile, or immigration through the implementation of new symbols, the practice of customs, the remembrance of popular culture, and the appropriation of public spaces in their new homelands.

CHAPTER ONE: Nostalgia between Puerto Rico and New York

Chapter One is dedicated to Esmeralda Santiago's first memoir *Cuando era puertorriqueña* (1994) that earned the Washington Post Book World award (1993) for its English edition. I examine how Santiago's reminiscence turns into a post-immigration inductive exercise that aims to mold the biography, which unfolds on the island of her youth and the United States, rather than to measure before immigration stage – when she “was” or used to be Puerto Rican. I illustrate how nostalgia becomes a vehicle that encourages Santiago to rebuild homeland, culture and identity largely through childhood memories, via the author's intimate bond to the island, and through the salient process of memoir writing. In addition, I portray how nostalgia becomes a catalyst that guides Santiago to reconstruct homeland, culture, *jíbara* identity, and native language. Furthermore, I evaluate nostalgia as a cognitive motor that helps Santiago to balance her double identity as an adult following Fred Davis's notion of nostalgia.

For this chapter, I have chosen to study Santiago's memoir in Spanish¹ because her native language reflects distinctive lyrical prose and rhythm that convey a vivid picture of the culture that surrounded her childhood. *Cuando era puertorriqueña* expresses a joyful homage to the island of her youth, permeated by its flavors and sounds, and that peculiar bond with Mother Nature that shelters its habitants. Within its context, Santiago's work and Boym's theory allow me to examine longing for *jíbara* identity on a collective level as a means to reconstruct *jíbaro* nationalism and cultural symbols as an outcome not only of migration and dislocation but also as a product of progress and modernization. Many scholars view the *jíbaro* figure as a vehicle by which U.S. Puerto Rican writers measure their cultural and national identity. Nevertheless, I propose a nostalgic association with an independent peasant and rural landscape of Puerto Rico as a way to map the progress, transformation and transition of the island from rural to modern. Thereupon, I

establish a connection through Boym's restorative nostalgia in order to examine nostalgia for the past that evokes the allegory of *jíbaro*, a national and cultural symbol evolving and shifting along with the industrialization and modernization of Puerto Rico.

Additionally, I explore pictorial symbols related to reminiscent of the nostalgic representation of Puerto Rican pre-modern *jíbaro* culture to depict the change encompassed by globalization that offers a new perspective of modernized *jíbaro*. Boym's framework of nostalgia provides a useful approach that accommodates longing in connection to collective memory via individual experience. Through the display of collective memory, the recollection sets the stage for the intimate experience. On an individual level, Santiago's recollection is tailored toward the search of her old Puerto Rican self and discovery of the new urban or modern *jíbara* of New York. However, *Cuando era puertorriqueña* is viewed mainly through the perception of identity loss, nationality and geography. Nonetheless, its deficiency can be perceived as an extension of memory, geography and the quest for the missing elements. For this matter, Santiago's autobiography is a journey, a self-portrait aiming to find a strategy of substitution of home and homeland through cultural and national memory through a *jíbaro* figure that leads to embrace the biography that unfolds in the Puerto Rico and in the United States.

1.0 Chapter One Introduction

Santiago's memoir *Cuando era puertorriqueña* captures her astonishing journey from rural Puerto Rico to Brooklyn, New York, and culminates with her graduation from Harvard University. The adolescent protagonist during her voyage to the United States loses her sense of belonging within culture, identity, nationality and geography that was once so vivid in her homeland. The modulation of nostalgia and alienation, loss of identity and intimate depiction of the island from a female perspective are common threads among the Caribbean literary works written by 1.5

generation and Latina authors: *How the García Sisters Lost their Accent* (Álvarez 1992), *Dreaming in Cuban* (García 1993), *The Agüero Sisters* (García 1997), *Soledad* (Cruz 2001), *Song of the Water Saints* (Rosario 2003), and *Kissing the Mango Tree* (Rivera 2002). A brief tour through the Caribbean novels underlines the persistent presence of the insular space that forms a central reference point within the plot. In other words, the island fortifies the background of the story. In this manner, critics widely tend to read Santiago's autobiographical work as a memoir of loss, alienation and nostalgia caused by dislocation and immigration from her homeland. For example, Puerto Rican identity in Santiago's memoir is recognized as "assimilation" to the mainstream U.S. culture (Szadziuk 111), or as an inability to admit "both sides of hyphenated or hybrid Puerto Rican-American identity (Sprouse 116). Also, the text has been described as "tender and deeply nostalgic" (Torres-Pou 415). Stephens considers Santiago's memoir as borderland narrative and approaches the analysis as *Bildungsroman* (2009). In fact, the feature of crossing borders as a part of development dates back to the genre suggested by Stephens. That scholar suggested the autodidactic character of the text and development of protagonist from pastoral to urban setting as an important characteristic echoing the structure of *Bildungsroman*. In this sense, to approach Santiago's memoir is crucial to contemplating the existing features of novels of formation.

Bildungsroman, or the "novel of formation," derives from the German tradition as the compound noun suggests. The term was coined around 1819 by Professor and Philosopher, Karl Morgenstern during his two lectures on "Essence and History" (Ellis 21). But Twark states that it was first proposed by Friedrich von Blanckenburg in 1774 in his "Essay on the Novel" ("On the Novel" 129). It is also know that Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister Lehjahre* (1795) popularized the genre in Europe with Thomas Carlyle's translation, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1824). The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, in *Das Erlebnis und Die Dichtung* (1913), *Wilhelm Meister's*

Apprenticeship (1824). The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, in *Das Erlebnis und Die Dichtung* (1913), offered the widely read definition and it is he who considers Goethe's work as the prototypical work of its kind. The Bildungsroman genre includes the protagonist double task, gradual development from youth to maturity, a growing awareness of individuality, identity, self-determination, and Bildung- gaining an independence from the powers of nature, society and culture while confronting obstacles created by society (Twark 129).

Since Goethe, this transition has been mapped through a journey from a rural or provincial area to urban spaces. Although Bildungsroman was first popularized by male character and authors, female protagonists and authors found in it, their genre of choice. A widely celebrated work, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Gillbert and Gubar 1979), marks a quest for authentic female self-development. The novel gives a strong voice to female Bildungsroman, and shifts away from the male, the creator and female the object of creation, concentrating on the female's development and her perspective throughout the process of writing. Both migrant literature and Bildungsroman narrate a passage, often of a marginalized character that finds its way to a metropolitan space.

As diasporic literature emerges in the era of globalization, this debate is amplified and achieves a new dimension. It continues between different countries, time frames and languages. The autobiographical works, the writing of self in-between spaces and places inevitably reappears as ambivalence inspired by shifting borders, continuities and discontinuities. The development of the protagonist arises on the verge of interactions, between the protagonist and the world. The mainland society becomes a locus of social and cultural experience, integrating gender, class, race and ethnicity, while homeland becomes an inseparable point of reference. Both geographical areas merge and reemerge as individuals recollect their lives shaped by his/her voyage from tropical island to grand metropolis. During this journey, the 1.5 generation female writers tend to lose their

sense of selfhood, yet they recover what is lost through memory, history, and culture as they rebuild homeland through their writing and retrospective leap toward the past. The post-modern, self-reflexivity and nostalgia meet threads, and they form an intertextual exchange. There is an urge to rewrite the history from a personal point of view. Yet at the same time, displaced subjects factor nostalgic remembrance of the past, a past largely associated with childhood and adolescent memories. This set of experiences redefines the female writer as an architect who turns the collective into private. Once the ends meet some autobiographical works have their personal twist that bridges the gap between genres and between fiction and documentation.

Some critics have even considered Santiago's work as autobiographical fiction. Perhaps that is because *Cuando era puertorriqueña* interlinks her childhood memories with a refined experience that the author communicates in a cohort of nearly magical eloquence toward the island of her youth. For this very reason, Santiago's strong ties to her Puerto Rican roots never diminish in the USA. To the contrary, her sense of identity and culture remains strong, and one can observe its manifestation through the unique perspective of her narration. According to Keith Sprouse: "although she claims to have once wanted to be North American, in the final instance, when she speaks of her island, her people, and her language, she refers only to Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans, and Spanish, finding no place for North America, North Americans, or English" ("Language and the Translation" 115). A peculiar feature of her personal narrative is negotiation between the past – the island of her youth and present – the life in the diaspora of New York. But on the contrary, I argue that she indeed finds a place in the United States and comes to terms with English and Spanish bilingualism, and that this quest is also visible in her later works.

Of the three biographical works, *Cuando era puertorriqueña* remains the most widely read. It begins in rural Puerto Rico and culminates with her graduation from the School of Performing

Arts in New York City, and her going to Harvard. Yet, the author manages to leave a silent leap, which she explores in her sequel. Santiago's second memoir, *Almost a Woman* (1998) details her diasporic adventure after she arrives in New York and studies at the School of Performing Arts in New York, undertaking dramatization of her youth on the threshold of her artistic success. At the same time, Santiago continues her transition while striving to find balance as she negotiates the two sides of her culture and ultimately accepts herself as a young bilingual, bicultural Latina. During this period she meets Ulvi Dogan, a Turkish filmmaker, and engages with him in a seven year-long relationship. She transforms the experience with Dogan into her third work also labeled as a memoir: *The Turkish Lover* (2004).

The third work differs from the previous ones because the reader encounters a different Esmeralda: she rebels from her mother and runs away from home at age twenty-one to live with Dogan. The author details a downhill abusive relationship from which she emerges as an independent and educated Latina with a Ph.D. from Harvard University. The third memoir is realistic and humorous, at times leaps into sensual episodes. This work recreates circumstances and conveys lessons that many young Latina women endure in mainland and homeland due to their vulnerability to the traditional beliefs linked to abusive machismo, and submissiveness toward men. In this manner, according to Santiago, the memoirs *Almost a Woman* and *The Turkish Lover* have helped Latina women with similar experiences feel "not so alone" Thompson (2014). Among the American-born generation of authors, one can distinguish the autobiographical contribution of Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967:1997) that details a coming-of-age on the dangerous streets of Spanish Harlem during the 1950s and 1960s.

Another Puerto Rican-born female author who left Puerto Rico during the 1960s is Judith Ortiz Cofer, a critically acclaimed poet, novelist, and essayist. *Silent Dancing: A Partial*

Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood (1990) is Cofer's intriguing personal narrative, a binary text that bridges the limits between autobiography and fiction, wedged between personal remembrance and social commentary, and between her Puerto-Rican countryside and Patterson New Jersey. Cofer's trajectory mirrors Santiago's, as both authors share similar timeframes regarding their birth and sets of experiences related to living in a countryside that culminates in moving to the metropolis of New York during the Great Migration (1946-1960). The literary production of memoir goes back to the beginnings of the 20th century.

A precursor in the tradition of Puerto Rican memoir is Bernardo Vega. Vega was an educated Puerto Rican cigar maker by profession and socialist activist who migrated from Puerto Rico to New York in 1916 and stayed there over four decades. His work depicted an important period in the settlement and growth of the New York Puerto Rican community during the decades prior to the Great Migration. Vega's *Memorias de Bernardo Vega: Una contribución a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York* was published a decade after his death in 1977, and it was edited by César Andreu. To a certain extent the work has been mediated and manipulated by Andreu. The 2015 LASA rumor has it that the original manuscript has been finally recovered. Nonetheless, Vega's memoir offers a valid testimony of those Puerto Ricans who came to the U.S. during the first migrations.

The first wave in which Vega arrived was considered the Pioneer Migration 1900-1945 (Rodriguez 5). Vega started to write his memoir in the 1940s, placing a historical value into his work. His memoir reaches back to the independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico from colonial oppression, until his diasporic experience during a prolonged stay in New York. Vega portrays a Puerto Rican community that emphasizes the struggle of the working class, their racial and social

marginalization and his solidary fight against the social injustices, and for his economic survival in the United States.

In order to place the Santiago text in context, it is crucial to consider the history of the Puerto Rican diaspora. While the Cuban diaspora is affected by the Cuban Revolution and the voluntary and involuntary waves of migration, the Dominican diaspora is characterized by General Trujillo's dictatorial regime. Yet, Puerto Ricans are lured by economical promise and a surplus of factory jobs under "operation bootstrap" (Rodriguez 3). The period from 1946 through 1964 is known as the Great Migration from Puerto Rico to the United States. In the 1950s-1960s timeframe, an average of 45,000 Puerto Ricans per year left the island and settled mainly in New Jersey, Connecticut, Illinois and Massachusetts (Rodriguez 6). The vast settlement of Puerto Ricans in New York City contributed to the social labeling "Nuyorican." First the brand Nuyorican was mostly an unflattering, degrading term used by island Puerto Ricans to distance themselves from the marginalized lives of those who left the island. The phrase also carried the meaning that U.S. Puerto Ricans were mostly residing and later born in New York, hence the spatial reference. In the 1970s, the term changed its connotation once it was adopted by poets and writers as a means of bringing legitimacy not only to their social space, but also to the modern cultural, and intellectual contributions in art, music and literature that are now recognized as the Nuyorican Movement.

Jesús Colón is known as a father of this movement. Colon came to the U.S. in 1917 during the first wave of Puerto Rican diaspora (1900-1945), and like Vega he was a socialist and tobacco worker. Colón's collection of essays of personal nature and anecdotes *A Puerto Rican in New York and other Sketches* (1962:1982) depicts the hardships of the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. while highlighting the assimilation to the native culture. His work sets a milestone in Puerto Rican

literary work and art and contributes to the Nuyorican Movement. He inspired a generation of writers, such as Esmeralda Santiago, and sets the stage for new followers. The Nuyorican Poets Café, started by Miguel Algarín (Professor of English at Rutgers University) in 1973, and others emerged in the heart of Manhattan and became the birthplace of groundbreaking works in poetry, music and theater. Among flourishing artists and co-founders, one can name Miguel Piñero, Pedro Pietri, Jesús Papoleto Melendez, Ed Morales, and Lucky Cienfuegos (“Awards” 1). The Nuyorican Poets Café sets a landmark of Puerto Rican-American heritage and culture that up until today remains home for contemporary artists: “The Café has emerged as one of the country’s most highly respected arts organizations and has become an acclaimed forum for innovative poetry, music, hip hop, video, visual arts, comedy and theater” (“Awards” n.p). Although the Café accommodates contemporary genres and arts forms, the show “Poetry Slam” since 1989 conserves the spirit of previous era with a modern twist. It became an exciting contest about poetry, poets of variable skills, and the audience that partakes and evaluates the competitors.

During the 1970s, the emerging literary works elucidate the temporal stay and are characterized by an overall negative and critical depiction of life in New York City. Most importantly, these works are impregnated with an apparent degree of nostalgia toward returning to the tropical island. To a certain extent, their works mystified the island. Some authors wrote in Spanish, others in wrote in English, while others combined both languages. Among some significant authors and works, one can distinguish Juan Soto’s *Spiks* (1973), Guillermo Cotto-Thorner’s *Trópico en Manhattan* (1967); Emilio Díaz Valcárcel’s *Harlem todos los días* (1973), and the publication of *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Words and Feelings* (1975), edited by the co-founders of the movement, Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero. These works mark a

significant stage in introducing the Nuyorican experience by giving voice to the marginalized Puerto Rican culture of the barrios.

Nonetheless, memoirs, autobiographies and testimonials are not an abundant genre. For Santiago, Ortiz Cofer, and Vega, these personal narratives are a category of preference. The genre gives them the choice to imprint the stories of their life since they embark on the voyage and are transformed by the experience of diaspora. Santiago told the *Latin Post*, “Latino literacy was born out of poetry,” explaining that while many prose writers were still occupied with questions of relevancy, poets such as Willie Perdomo and other active members in the Nuyorican’s Poets Cafe during the 1990s, had already begun sharing their own stories (Thompson 2014). This collective desire to retell the story, to voice the difficult transitions and obstacles, questions, and reactions to racism, sexism, and machismo was a common thread in the lives among the Latino writers involved with the Nuyorican’s Poet Café. Importantly, this set of experiences is still vivid in Santiago’s and Ortiz Cofer’s works.

In the process of writing, the authors transform their life experience, oftentimes perceived as alienating or isolated, into an exemplary life story. Their works present a wealth of ethnographic and sociological material cross fitted within certain historical and cultural contexts. Both Ortiz Cofer and Santiago depict a changing and evolving Puerto Rican community from rural to modern. The peculiar characteristic of female writers as gendered experience is set by the past and present experiences. For Santiago, the journey to the U.S. becomes a complex set of experiences emerging from the interplay of diasporic dualities, bilingual and bicultural elements, from which appears a newly discovered sense of being and belonging.

1.1 From Rural Puerto Rico to New York

Cuando era puertorriqueña recapitulates Santiago's experiences in two major parts. The first one accounts for her childhood in the Native Island, viewed through a prism of idealization and nostalgia through the eyes of a humble Puerto Rican peasant girl. In the rural countryside of the Caribbean town of Macún, the coming-of-age story of a four-year-old girl unfolds. The protagonist chronicles her voyage from the rural countryside to the suburbs of San Juan. The second part details her move to New York at her mother's side and is also narrated from an adolescent perspective. Santiago is transferred from rustic Puerto Rico to the concrete jungle of Brooklyn at the age of thirteen. Her relocation results in a shift from her native, Spanish-speaking Puerto Rico to primarily Anglophone environment. She is undergoing a substantial change from a pastoral Puerto Rican to a highly urban American setting.

As a young Puerto Rican, she develops an ambivalence about the United States and the American presence within herself, as well as towards the island of her youth. Santiago's struggle with both cultures and languages threads the plot. For example, on the island she confronts her *jíbaro*, identity and in New York she intends to fit into the multicultural immigrant communities of Brooklyn. In Puerto Rico, her family struggles with poverty and moves constantly, while in New York her family deals with fear, alienation, violence and sexual predators. Despite all the dangers of the metropolis, she firmly believes that her life in the United States will improve. Santiago's determination for success leads to her acceptance into the Performing Arts School in Manhattan and culminates in her graduation from Harvard.

Because the story is told in retrospect, the title of this section could be also appear in reverse order: from New York to Puerto Rico. Confusion and alienation are born due to diasporic tensions created by conscience for the place of origin and the conscience in the place of residence and the

movement from and between native and foreign space of residence (*Defining Diaspora* 191). The empirical distinctions are significant. Santiago as an adolescent and an adult must negotiate with varying degrees of social change, new patterns of behavior and speech that are different from her own. This relationship is apparent in the Spanish edition of her memoir.

When I was Puerto Rican is first published in English in 1993. However, the Spanish translation provides additional meaning. In the Spanish edition, the author remarks: “[e]l proceso de traducir del inglés al español me forzó a aprender de nuevo el idioma de mi niñez. Pero también me ha demostrado que el idioma que ahora hablo, el cual yo pensaba era el español, es realmente el espanglés” (*Cuando era* xvii). This sociolinguistic phenomenon underlines a relation of her native language that has existed in contact with the language of her adulthood. The fusion of English and Spanish adheres to two geographical spaces and timeframes. The native tongue that pertains to her childhood imposes its vitality through the process of translation. Spanish forces the author to rediscover, and absorb anew the lingo of her youth.

The language labeled “Spanglish,” in linguistic terms code-switching between Spanish and English, relates to the current form of speech in which she engages in the United States. The clash of languages embodies the different timelines of her life. This line of thought is evident when Santiago admits:

Cuando hablo en español, tengo que traducir del inglés que define mi presente. Y cuando escribo en español, me encuentro en medio de tres idiomas, el español de mi infancia, el inglés de mi adultez, y el espanglés que cruza de un mundo al otro tal como cruzamos nosotros nuestro barrio en Puerto Rico a las barriadas de Brooklyn. (xvii)

In this passage, English noticeably marks Santiago's monolingual present, equating to the language of adulthood. Therefore, in the present a deficiency arises towards the past: her native language partakes in her voyage to childhood, and thusly her nostalgic motor is lubricated. Yet, when she writes in Spanish, she faces a crossroads of idioms: the Spanish of her youth, the English of her adulthood and the Spanglish that embraces both worlds. The division and fusion of these three forms of communication reflect Santiago's identity: a person who apparently lives within and across borders between cultures and countries. This tension is reflected by the protagonist code switching from minority to mainstream language and vice-versa.

Santiago includes in her text a variety of lexical items peculiar to Puerto Rico's culture. Some characteristic words are: *coquí*, *botácina*, *mofongo*, *guagua*, *guayaberas*, *piraguas*, *piraguero*, *jurtungo*, *pocaveguenza*, *bacalao* and naturally *jíbaro/a*. These phrases offer an essential account upon cultural values and portray a vivid picture of what it means to be a 1.5 generation Puerto Rican in the United States. Therefore, by incorporating cultural concepts, Santiago's discourse signals distance from the American culture. The arrival of an adolescent Puerto Rican in the barrios of New York creates a cultural and linguistic pressure. The above quote emphasizes a note of reflection, a dichotomy between a past lived in Spanish in Puerto Rico and a monolingual as well as a bilingual present that corresponds to her life in New York. Globalization blurs social and cultural distinctions and as such it alters the evolving nature of communication.

Santiago, at the moment of retelling the story of her Puerto Rican childhood and adolescence, incorporates lexical items, *dichos* or proverbs typical of the Caribbean and Puerto Rican culture. Proverbs by their nature are constructed and shaped collectively. These verbal expressions are transmitted in a determined social environment, preserved over time and shared from generation to generation. Oftentimes they adhere to the nature, environment, people, daily

life, cultural knowledge, and customs. Santiago, while following threads of Boym's restorative nostalgia, also connects her individual memory to a larger group. By doing this, she renovates cultural roots, traditions, language, heritage and customs from a mainland perspective.

According to Boym, the object of longing is a social context that one could export into diaspora, where local attachments create longing for a community with a collective memory. (*The Future* 12). All these entities transcend national and geographical boundaries that emerge within the dawn of diaspora, New York. Santiago opens each chapter with a saying. These sayings can be divided into two categories. One, for example, accounts for endurance in difficult times: *De Guatamala a guatepeor, Escapé del trueno y di con el Relámpago, Barco que no anda, no llega a Puerto, Ahí fue donde la puerta entochó el robo*. The second category upholds cultural identity: *al jíbaro nunca se le quita la mancha de plátano, con la música por dentro, dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres, te conozco bacalao, el mismo jíbaro con diferente caballo*. The first categorization adheres to Santiago's transition and development from rural country girl in Puerto Rico toward the U.S. where she becomes a bicultural Latina. The second one voices the concept of cultural identity and cultural belonging, which Santiago reaffirms through Puerto Rican heritage, customs, foods, music, and of course native tongue. On one hand, the rupture with the past initially causes confusion and alienation in diaspora. But on the other, it promotes the preservation of these cultural qualities and traditions.

In fact, Santiago's memoir takes the reader to the world seen through the pupils of a humble Puerto Rican child, parting from the first half of the 20th century and culminates, perceived through the eyes of the adult Santiago in the mid-1980s. Boym's reflective nostalgia implements the labor of sorrow, humor and irony and accounts for the misperception caused by alienation. Boym refers to a strain of critical thinking which she calls "off-modern," where "reflection and

longing, estrangement and affection go together” (*The Future* xvii). Furthermore, this term can be functional, Boym claims, to people like Santiago who come from: “eccentric positions, (i.e. those often considered marginal or provincial with respect to the cultural mainstream, from Eastern Europe to Latin America), as well as for many displaced people from all over the world” (xvii). In Santiago’s circumstance, her Puerto Rican barrio equates to the rural and tropical setting of Macún and her family living on the threshold of poverty. On top of that, Santiago is considered a peasant by her classmates in Puerto Rico. But at the same time, she was free and safe in the countryside of Macún. Upon Santiago’s move to Brooklyn, New York, she faces a modern world entirely different from the one she left in Puerto Rico. In her own words: “De todas maneras, no había donde ir. Yo no tenía la menor idea de dónde estaba, sólo que era muy lejos de dónde empecé. Brooklyn, Mami había dicho, no era Nueva York” (*Cuando era* 241).

Santiago’s experience of life in the modern metropolis of New York contrasts with her steady and carefree life in the prevailing rural standards of Macún, Puerto Rico. Her new life is perceived as alienating and limiting. It is also perceived as terrifying: “[v]ivir en Brooklyn quería decir que no salíamos de la casa. Vivíamos enjaulados, porque el vecindario estaba lleno de gente mala [...] En Puerto Rico, los crímenes siempre habían sucedido en otro sitio, en ciudades lejos de Macún” (275). This shift towards a dangerous environment causes a confusing sense of direction, loss of freedom and alienation. She constantly encounters unknown urban experiences between public and private settings. In New York, the family moves five times in one year seeking a warmer, bigger, bug-free place located relatively close to a subway. Esmeralda’s high school setting in Brooklyn provides a complementary image of social order, menace and segregation present in the New York of the mid-1960s.

In high school “los italianos llevaban cuchillas, hasta las chicas” while “morenos llevaban manoplas es sus bolsillos” (249). The hostile environment and imbedded danger echo Piri’s *Down These Mean Streets*, an inescapable fact and grim reality era shared by Santiago’s adolescence experience. In addition, her new school environment indicates an ethnographic profile of a high school student body, mainly consisting of dark-skinned Latinos and Italians (where light-skinned Americans formed an insignificant minority). Both groups were fueled by their mutual hatred: “los dos grupos se odiaban unos a los otros...por lo menos una vez a la semana, se peleaban...cerca de la escuela que dividía sus vecindarios” (49). This escalating image of violent youth asserts to social disorder and hatred among these two ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the stratification reaches deeper in the strata of Puerto Rican ethnic groups. Additionally, Santiago differentiates between those born in the U.S. and those who came off the boat.

In high school, Esmeralda experiences estrangement, and recalls cultural and ethnic segregation: “[h]abía dos clases de puertorriqueños en la escuela: los acabados de llegar como yo, y los nacidos en Brooklyn de padres puertorriqueños” (249). These two groups never hang out, and those born in Brooklyn spoke always English and never Spanish together. Santiago explains that for them, “Puerto Rico era un sitio donde vivían sus abuelos, un sitio que visitaban durante vacaciones...poco desarrollado y lleno de mosquitos” (249). Moreover, the diasporic duality applies to recently arrived Puerto Ricans: “los que no podían aguantar hasta el día que regresaran, y los que lo querían olvidar lo más pronto posible” (249). This excerpt suggests the two-fold reactions of a newcomer, displacement and sense of loss resurfacing as an apparent note of longing. Or, stated otherwise, the newcomer senses an immediate urge to return before suffering the obliterating properties of diaspora. That is to say, these texts suggest the moment that immigrants come to the giant metropolis of New York, the diaspora erases them systematically, gradually but

relentlessly from their very arrival onward. The second type of reasoning equates to what Boym calls counter cultural practice: a means to suppress longing in favor of building belonging. This progression, in fact may result in a shift from traditional cultural and national values and may result in acculturation.

In this manner, Boym's line of thought about "off modern thinking" is very accurate as those individuals who stem from "marginal" positions "estrangement and affection" go head to head. A reaction of this nature, is more transparent when Santiago is trying to identify herself with one of the Puerto Ricans (those who just arrived and those who had been born in Brooklyn).

Ironically, Santiago does not totally fit into either of the categories previously described: "[n]o me sentía cómoda con los puertorriqueños acabados de llegar, quienes se juntaban en grupitos desconfiados criticando a todos los que pasaban, temerosos de todo. Y no era aceptada por los puertorriqueños de Brooklyn [tampoco]" (250). Instead she feels like a "traidora porque querría aprender el inglés, porque me gustaba la pizza, porque estudiaba a las chicas con mucho pelo y probaba sus estilos en la casa" (249). From these dualities, a personal dilemma is born, a fascination with newness, an eagerness to learn the mainland language, or to try a new "look," but at the same time she is reluctant to forget her Puerto Rican background. As a result, she is unable to fit with the Puerto Rican-born group in New York, nor with those Puerto Ricans who arrived recently like her. She seeks to discover her own space. Boym's theory draws on the essence of this unfamiliarity and strangeness as essential factors of the diasporic experience.

From Boym's perspective the geographical and cultural distance, the loss and alienation, and the sense of defamiliarization and disconnection are contributing factors and generate the diasporic intimacy. Boym asserts that "[diasporic intimacy] is rooted in the suspicion of single home, in shared longing," and "[i]t thrives on the hope of the possibilities of human understanding

and survival” (*The Future* xvii). This urge and suspicion drives Santiago to tell her story, and to unveil and then to understand the past and the present. Repeatedly, the heritage of her identity invites Santiago to recover a diverse manifestation of reminiscence that is rooted in two distant times and places: the patrimony of the past and the circumstances of the present.. During an interview with *Latin Post*, Santiago stated, “You grow up to be a person in a place, and once you leave that place, your culture changes and you become a different person” (Thompson 2014).

The allusion regarding two places and two timeframes is strongly reflected in the construction of the memoir. The first and substantially larger part projects Santiago’s trajectory from the countryside of Macún to the metropolitan Puerto Rican setting of Santurce, and concludes with a scene taking place inside of the airplane departing towards New York:

Para mí, la persona que me iba convirtiendo cuando nos fuimos [de Puerto Rico] fue borrada, y otra fue creada en su lugar. La jíbara puertorriqueña quien soñaba con la verde silenciosa de una tarde tropical se convertiría en una híbrida quien nunca perdonaría el desarraigo. (227)

This passage underlines the significant degree of auto reflection between diverse episodes of Santiago’s life, relating to the past, present and a prospective stance towards the future. The day Santiago leaves her homeland is regarded as the pivotal point in her life. Although the person born and molded in Puerto Rico begins to shatter, a new one emerges in her place –a more complex-hybrid person that envisions warm and green tropical days. At the same time she does not forgive uprooting and displacement. From Boym’s perspective these factors contribute to the formation of a diasporic intimacy that guides Santiago to tell her story, to mediate between past and present, and to collect the fragments of her emerging identity. As a consequence, one can read this passage of reflection from a different perspective: born in Puerto Rico but then made in the USA. Thus,

departure from home provides émigrés with an opportunity to create a distanced account of their life, to explain who they become in diaspora.

Santiago in her narrative contemplates her place and identity via past and present, and she tries to find who she became in the diaspora of New York as an adult. Davis views the relation of nostalgia-identity as an optical metaphor: “nostalgia is one of the means-or, better, one of the more readily accessible psychological lenses-we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities” (*Yearning* 31). In a similar manner, Santiago crafts an image of her past –rooted in Puerto Rico, and her present –molded in the diasporic experience in the United States. Davis upholds furthermore, “nostalgia alike daydreaming,” “reminiscence” or “long-term memory” is a way of relating one’s past, to one’s present and the future (31). In other words, Santiago’s literary reconstruction of memory and longing accounts for a cognitive motor that aims to set in question what Davis calls “discontinuities and continuities” that individuals experience as they partake in the formation of self. A similar line of reasoning is evident in Santiago’s recently discussed passage. On the day of her departure from Puerto Rico, the discontinuity as well as continuity is strongly present, one side of self is erased and the new self is born.

This collision paradoxically becomes Santiago’s birth channel, her pathway towards discovering a bicultural, hybridized identity. Although she maintains that she never forgives the uprooting from Puerto Rico, the very dislocation and collision of two distant cultures, languages, and places partake in modeling her new being. Anew her voyage starts in the rural area of Macún and culminates in the intimidating barrios of New York. The modernity and progress in the Big Apple blurs borders, national and cultural distinctions. Similarly, individuals who transit across boundaries find themselves in cultural and linguistic transitions or intersections of cultures and

places. Once they spend more time in the society of residence than in their native land, longing awakens and encourages individuals to tell their stories. At the same time, it accounts for an inductive exercise that aims to fuse experience on both sides of the border.

Consequently, as Boym suggests, nostalgia – a modern condition - appears in the time of accelerated rhythms and transitions. In Santiago’s case all this is apparently linked to the modern metropolis of New York, “...dónde las reglas – y el idioma eran no solo diferentes, sino desconectadas.”² Boym upholds that longing resurfaces as a defense mechanism, a creative way of finding a substitution for a lost home. Boym’s nostalgia mirrors the memory of pain and yearning for the return through *-algia*, and the notion of return to the place home in *-nostos*. Longing conceived as a symptom of globalization, as a lack, provokes its subject to harbor the lost place in time. For Santiago, it is the island of her youth – the tropical paradise that one day was overshadowed by the contrasting life and collage of experiences in the metropolis of New York.

Her first impression upon arrival to the temporary home in Brooklyn is as follows:

El apartamento era sofocante. Dentro de los cuartos cerrados el aire no se movía. No había ni motes ni polvo en los rayos del sol. Fuera de las ventanas, un murmullo continuo era interrumpido por sirenas insistentes o los golpetazos de los basureros, el aullido de motores de carros y el gemido de niños llorando. (240)

In this passage, the description of the apartment is static, gray and gloomy without any sunlight. The outside, on the other hand, portrays a noisy and rapid environment. The enduring symphony of urban cluster of sounds combined with the whining of children that penetrates the thin walls of the apartment, craft uncomfortable spatial and sonic dissonance. In sum, the urban environment is isolating, sad and cold like the apartment walls and crying children. Because of this, the temporal and spatial distance corrupts rather than satisfies, according to Boym. To paraphrase Suman Gupta,

globalization becomes a transcendent vehicle that affects a wide span of human life and has to be analyzed in the light of its meeting and departure points (*Globalization* 71). The shift from a tropical to an urban milieu indicates a transition from disciplinary of globalization and its intersection with ethnicity, culture and language. Subsequently, painful longing as a by-product of globalization responds to the individual's needs of creating dreams of escape. Santiago's escape route lays in bittersweet memories. Her longing is expressed in the pages of her memoir and achieves cultural and national dimensions.

The ache of temporal and geographical displacement becomes an inseparable part of longing that resurfaces in diaspora: "...muchas veces siento el dolor de haber dejado a mi isleta, mi gente, mi idioma. Y a veces ese dolor se convierte en rabia, en resentimiento, porque yo no seleccioné venir a los EEUU. ...esa rabia infantil alimenta mis cuentos" (*Cuando era* xviii). Santiago, having spent more of her life in the United States than in Puerto Rico, looks back at her voyage. In her case, rage (*rabia*) and bitterness (*resentimiento*), estrangement and affection are mutually inclusive. According to Boym, nostalgia turns into "a rebellion against the modern idea of time" or "a romance with one's fantasy" (*The Future* xvi). The dichotomy between past and present produces in her an intimate bond with the island, creating a longing for the time with slower pace, rhythms and in particular security.

Santiago's past in Puerto Rico is perceived through the lens of a humble Puerto Rican girl. She recreates an unspoiled picture of her childhood. In this matter, a place without any signs of time is mirrored through Boym's restorative nostalgia. As Boym underlines, longing in diaspora arouses towards a community with a shared collective reminiscence, ("and fused" ?) to a common past rooted in homeland. Due to the new understanding of time, place, language, and culture, nostalgia resurfaces as "a romance with one's own fantasy," a yearning for connection through

collective memory (*The Future* xvi). Santiago's memoir develops into a gateway to restore the past, joining the individual experience with the collective one.

This project rebuilds her homeland, nation, and culture in a mimetic sense. Santiago excavates memories from two different places and timeframes in order to find her own aesthetics. In this aspect she follows Boym's reasoning. But at the same time, her Spanish version of the memoir recovers a place divided by two different languages. Santiago, also encounters a new challenge. Once the editor Robin Desser offers the opportunity "de traducir mis memorias al español para esta edición, nunca me imaginé que el proceso me haría confrontar cuánto español me había olvidado" (xvi). That is to say, the memoir develops into a vehicle that recovers the language of her youth through childhood memories. In this vein, Davis holds that long-term memory, or reminiscence, is a way of relating the past to the present and the future (*Yearning* 31). Yet, this exercise is not a simple one since she encounters "rabia" towards her native tongue and the language of her adulthood.

In this line of thought, Santiago's sustains:

Es esa rabia la que se engancha en mi alma y que guía mis dedos y enseña sus garras entre sonrisas y las risas que en inglés son tan específicas y en español son dos palabras que necesitan ayuda para expresar, a veces, no [es] el placer, sino el dolor detrás de ellas. Sonrisa dolorida. Risa ahogada. (*Cuando era* xviii)

La rabia can be translated into English as "anger," but the verb *rabiar* also translates as "to long for." However, in the duality of diaspora it can account for both equivalents. In this context, nostalgia is a hybrid creation, and it corresponds to ache and pleasures of temporal and spatial displacement. Recovered memories in Spanish are bitter and sweet, like her sore smile when she writes her memoir confronting words in her bilingual present and translating them to her

monolingual past. Recreating the autobiography in Spanish allows her to reconstruct the world of her childhood. On the other hand, the distance is like a cupid, it seduces rather than satisfies, and it awakens diasporic conscience. From this interplay emerges an identity joined through the relation with the native land and the established connections within the society of residence.

In Santiago's autobiographical work, nostalgia is connected to notions of lack and loss and some degree of recovery. Both Boym and Davis perceive the mechanism of nostalgia in a similar manner: the past encounters its vitality in the current moment, and from absence, the present is reborn. In other words, the awareness of the past resurfaces from individual experiences that are conceived in the present. But at the same time, their views differ in regards to the functionality of longing. For Boym, restorative nostalgia restores old order and rebuilds previous state. It performs a labor of grief and irony and leaves little room for the adjustment of identity. Davis perceives nostalgia as a regulatory motor on an individual level. He draws on nostalgia and identity relation, the critic implies, "[i]n the clash of continuities and discontinuities with which life confronts us, nostalgia clearly attends more to pleas for continuity, to the comfort of sameness..." (*Yearning* 32). As a 1.5 generation immigrant, Santiago demonstrates a heightened sensitivity and sense of awareness to the dilemmas of life, and to the moral autonomy granted by the society of residence. Her memoir is the product of physical and mental trajectory and evolution. This line of reasoning is evident in the closing remarks of Santiago's introductory note:

Y es esa rabia la que me ha hecho posible el perdonar quien soy. Cuando niña yo quise ser una jíbara cuando adolescente quise ser norteamericana. Ya mujer, soy las dos, una jíbara norteamericana, y llevo mi mancha de plátano con orgullo y dignidad. (*Cuando era* xviii)

After all, the anger and longing, both partake in shaping Santiago's awareness of who she was, who she is and who she becomes in the diaspora of New York. The "rabia" emerges as an attractive sort of sadness "bittersweet" evocation, which appeals to "heighten quality of recaptured joy" (Davis 14). The writing of the memoir is an enactment. It conceives her anger and her loss and develops into a pathway of her self-rediscovery, and acceptance. Nostalgia, consequently, plays a role in maintaining and creating the dual or rather hybrid identity in this manner. In the process of memory reconstructing the past helped her to understand and reconfigure and find agreement of who Santiago grows into after having spent more time in the United States than in her Native Island.

Thus, Santiago concludes the section with a peculiar remark. She is embracing a hybrid identity: "Ya mujer, soy las dos, una *jíbara* norteamericana, llevo mi mancha de plátano con orgullo y dignidad." Santiago, a 1.5 generation immigrant, has to negotiate with her conflicting identities and finds herself within the northern American and *jíbaro* concordance. In the long run, the collage of cultural experiences demonstrates healing effects: "[u]na cultura ha enriquecido a la otra, y ambas me han enriquecido a mí" (xviii). The acceptance of the past and present parallels what Davis sustains as "yearning for return, albeit accompanied often by an ambivalent recognition that such [return] is not possible" (*Yearning* 21). Paradoxically, once an individual removes oneself from the longing for days past and embraces the past and present, due to separation a transformation may occur.

In Santiago's situation, the distance is rewarded by recognition and the preservation of cultural qualities and traditions. This occurrence exhibits the challenges of displacement, and proves to be a fundamental tool in Santiago's ability to balance both histories, cultures and languages and achieve a more complete sense of selfhood. "La mancha de plátano" or the stain of

plantain that she wears with honor and dignity adheres to her bittersweet past, to all those joyful moments of discovery, and to the discontents and realization that she carries within her into the diaspora. In other words, 1.5 generation immigrants experience diasporic tensions and undergo repetitively the melancholic maneuvers due to their amplified sensitivity and awareness of who they were, and who they are becoming in the mainland society of residence. Therefore, their past, remembrance or longing, Boym sustains, are usually directed to larger collective consensus.

As a consequence, Santiago as an individual looks for cultural and national connections throughout her childhood experience and memories. For that reason, Santiago's memoir offers an opportunity to salvage the recollections residing alongside national identity, cultural memory, and the events that pertain to mid-20th century in Puerto Rico, while at the same time they allow her to exemplify the signs of globalization. Nevertheless, Boym upholds that on a personal and intimate level, longing depends on the perpetual manifestation of smells, sounds and physical perception. A tropical fruit particular to the Puerto Rican landscape is one of the pictorial symbols that Santiago confronts in her adult world. Her encounter with a guava triggers the recollection of distant memories that pertain to her Puerto Rican past.

1.2 Puerto Rican Jíbara - Longing for Cultural Identity and Homeland

The didactic nature of the prologue, "Cómo Se Come una Guayaba," ("How to Eat a Guava") invites the reader to critically evaluate the sentimental maneuvers that the 1.5 generation immigrants have to endure and negotiate in diaspora. The prologue invites the reader to examine Santiago's voyage from Puerto Rican childhood into womanhood and adulthood through nostalgic sentimentalism initiated by a fragrance of guava. The adult Santiago, captivated by the scent of guava in "Shop & Save" in New York, explains the different techniques on how to pick and consume guavas in their different stages.

She opens the prologue by comparing ripe and unripe guavas. The first one she grabs “no está lo suficiente madura; la cáscara está muy verde. La huelo y me imagino un interior Rosado, pálido, las semillas bien incrustadas en la pulpa” (*Cuando era* 4). On the other hand, ripe guava is yellow, wearing a tint of pink color. The skin is thick, hard and yellow and the interior rich and filled with seeds. Santiago’s comparison of the two guavas symbolizes the experience of being wrapped into two worlds. One world, of her early youth, is sweet and joyful. The other world that of her adolescence and adulthood stays unripe and bittersweet. Her voyage from the world of her childhood into womanhood and adulthood is metaphorically represented by the presence of a common fruit of the Caribbean.

The day of departure from one’s native land proves to never be forgotten by an immigrant. That day, the thirteen year old Santiago consumes her last guava, and her recollection of it is still intense: “Comí mi última guayaba el día que nos fuimos de Puerto Rico. Era una guayaba grande, jugosa, la pulpa casi roja, de olor tan intenso que no me la quería comer por no perder el aroma que quizás jamás volvería capturar” (4). The scent, flavor and texture of the tropical fruit are embedded in her memory, and the day she leaves the homeland, she is afraid its sensation will never resurface within her anew. Although Santiago’s reminiscence is viewed in retrospect, the wistful craving not to lose the perception created by guava, achieves prospective dimensions that create affection and distance between the sweetened time of her childhood and the bittersweet taste of adulthood.

The nostalgic configuration is brought forth once the adult Santiago passes through “Shop and Save” in New York:

Hoy me encuentro parada frente al frente de una torre de guayabas verdes, cada una perfectamente redonda y dura, cada \$1.59. La que tengo en la mano me seduce.

Huele a tardes luminosas de mi niñez, a los largos días de verano antes de que empezaran las clases, a niñas mano a mano cantando “ambos dos martarile rile rile.” Pero es otoño en Nueva York, y hace tiempo dejé de ser niña. Devuelvo la guayaba al abrazo de sus hermanas bajo penetrantes luces fluorescentes del mostrador decorado con frutas exóticas. Empujo mi carrito en la dirección opuesta, hacia las manzanas y peras de mi vida adulta, su previsible madurez olvidable y agridulce.

(4-5)

In this manner, as a 1.5 generation Latino immigrant, Santiago, establishes a distance between the place of origin and the growing up in the diaspora of Brooklyn, New York. On one hand, guava serves as a tool underlining the diasporic tension between the homeland and mainland. Accordingly, the immediacy of nostalgia for the homeland, set in a counterpoint to whom she becomes in the mainland, invites the reader to examine her trajectory and transformation: from an individual who self-identified as culturally belonging to Puerto Rico to an individual who sets in question the diasporic experience and self-identifies as hybridized. On the contrary, the seductive fragrance of guava resurfaces and prompts those passionate memories, of her childhood years growing up in the Caribbean island.

Long summer days and smells of late afternoons evoke to her Santiago’s girlhood. memories that are further evoked by the seductive fragrance of a tropical fruit. These are memories recalled with great eloquence even though decades have passed. Boym argues that longing depends on a lasting manifestation of aromas, sounds and somatic perceptions. The guava in this manner, is one of these pictorial symbols capable of recreating Santiago’s childhood. Thereupon, the exotic fruit turns into a nostalgic catalyst, evoking peaceful memories. The mere scent adheres to those early days of her youth, to a time with slower rhythms. It resurrects a safe domicile where Santiago

used to be surrounded by a comfortable and secure environment, able to play with her peers while singing Boricua songs “rile, rile.” This interplay establishes a plausible practice, a concordance between human solidarity and its culture and environment. In some ways, guava is a gateway to the past, causing yearning for a return to an unspoiled bucolic life in harmony within nature, a life removed from the modern world.

Yet, the adult Santiago resists the sentimental temptation. She withdraws her senses from the sweet fragrance, as if she were mindful of the seductive praxis of nostalgia. At this point, Santiago returns the guava to the exotic fruit section and elaborates: “[e]mpujo mi carrito en la direccion opuesta. Hacia las manzanas y peras de mi vida adulta, su previsible madurez olvidable y agridulce” (5). The choice does not emphasize that Santiago stopped being Puerto Rican, as many critics sustain (Sprouse 2000). But rather, it underlines the great dilemma that 1.5 generation immigrants must withstand and negotiate in diaspora. While Santiago undergoes nostalgic maneuvers repetitively, her gradual approval and acceptance toward the past, proves the consolidation of the hybridized identity. According to Davis, this type of nostalgic feeling is infused “within the imputations of past pleasure, joy, satisfaction” that which accounts for “a nice sort of sadness-bittersweet” (*Yearning* 14). That is to say, the experience of nostalgia encompasses the joyful past and a corresponding ambivalent acceptance that such a return is not achievable (*Yearning* 21).

In the same way, Santiago is capable of returning guava, she acknowledges her past and moves on in her life. Otherwise, she could be stuck in her past. Nostalgia, therefore, is capable of bridging the loss created by the geographical and temporal distance produced by diasporic tensions between the society of residence and the native island. Boym suggests that nostalgia is “...poison, or a cure” (18). Rítivoí follows Boym’s line of thought and calls it *pharmakos*, a term that

encompasses both “poison and cure” (*Yesterdays Self* 39). It is a concept linked to reflexive nostalgia, but viewed from Davis’s perspective since it is tailored toward establishing continuity. In this sense, longing, which is perceived as an empirical catalyst, whose function is to appreciate or value, maintain and establish the dialogue with the present in order to achieve continuity. This viewpoint, equally overlaps with Davis’s functionality of longing. This notion involves logic and autobiographical memory, where nostalgia forms an essential part in the formation and maintaining of personal identity (*Yesterdays Self* 30; *Yearning* 14).

Correspondingly, nostalgia can be viewed on an individual level, as the assistance or treatment that aids in the connection of previous manifestations of self and the establishing of an individual’s identity. To stress the consolidation of diasporic identity, the reader ought to emphasize Santiago’s line of reasoning in the introduction: “[u]na cultura ha enriquecido a la otra, y ambas han enriquecido a mí.” [...] Ya mujer, soy las dos, una jíbara norteamericana, llevo mi mancha de plátano con orgullo y dignidad” (xviii). Anew, Santiago identifies both sides of her development, one in Puerto Rico and the one shaped by her life in New York, and embraces herself at the intersection of both cultures and identities.

At the same time, nostalgia is linked to a collective autobiography. It follows threads of national, historical and cultural dimensions in which an individual is entangled. Boym connects these settings through restorative nostalgia, presenting threads that an individual follows while reconstructing the past. Santiago’s project seen through Boym’s premise on longing becomes a venture about absolute truth and universal values like family, nature, homeland, and nation. Nostalgia as a metaphor of globalization explores these venues. Therefore, the cultural and national manifestations resurface as a substance of recollection. By its extension, the autobiography offers an unofficial material of collective memory via individual experience that account for Puerto

Rico's transformation. Accordingly, Santiago's homage to *jíbaro* is not only a sentimental association with independent peasant and a rural landscape of Puerto Rico but also a vehicle to trace progress and transition in the Puerto Rico of the 1950s. Most importantly Puerto Rico's transformation captured from the lens of a humble and innocent peasant girl offers an unofficial discourse upon such events.

Restorative nostalgia is a power of recollection that "stresses *-nostos* and promotes to rebuild the lost home and patch the gap of memory" (41). In the first chapters of Santiago's memoir, the reader encounters a picturesque celebration of Caribbean Island and Puerto Rican culture. It is a place removed from the necessities dictated by modernization. The natural insular space imprints a strong presence that forms the background of the story. The reader is transported back in time, to the countryside of Macún, Toa Baja in the early 1950s. Santiago reconstructs the story as far back as her memory reaches. The four year old Negi (the eldest of nine soon to be eleven children) offers a first person account of life in the rural area. Therefore, she narrates the story from her own perspective, speaking in the name of nostalgia. She rebuilds her home and homeland with mimetic determination. The reconstruction is achieved through detailed, nearly photographic description, songs of popular culture, and the peculiar form of speech and proverbs typical of Puerto Rican *campesinos* or peasants.

The first chapter opens with a proverb: "Al *jíbaro* nunca se le quita la mancha de plátano" (10). The saying bears a connotation that alludes to one's origin, to identity as an entity that is not detachable. It is a place where *la mancha*, or the stain that adheres to the positive and negative connotations associated with the term *jíbaro*, resides. Additionally, the mark is not erasable even by the progress and transition of the country dweller during her voyage from childhood to adulthood, from Caribbean landscapes to the modern metropolis of San Juan and beyond. Santiago,

a new *jíbara*, wears the stain of plantain with pride and dignity, embedding the allegory of *jíbaro* as a central element of her story. A sentimental association with Puerto Rico's country peasant offers a perspective with which to measure and trace cultural, national and ethnic values that change with the development of the island.

In retrospect, the *jíbaro* character as a mountain dweller and farm worker is generally viewed as a person of peculiar origin. Manuel Alonso, a celebrated Puerto Rican poet and journalist, is the first to canonize the figure of *jíbaro* as a cultural type and prototype. In the collection of vignettes *El jíbaro* (1849), his poem "El Puerto-Riqueño," emblemizes its essence:

Color Moreno, frente despejada,
 Mirar lánguido, altivo y penetrante
 La barba negra, pálido el semblante,
 Rostro enjuto, nariz proporcionada. (Alonso 196-7)

Negi's first-person account of her childhood depicts a life in the poor countryside of Macún in the early 1950s, learning gradually that her family is *jíbara*. Negi's family embodies a wide gamma of colors distanced from Alonso's depiction. Consequently, the reader learns about mestizo of Latin American and African cultures and recognizes how Negi becomes self-conscious about skin colors in her family. "La piel de Delsa era más trigueña que la mía, como una nuez, pero no tan quemada como la de Papi... pero no tan pálida como Mami" (16). Negi acknowledges her siblings' and parents' different skin tones ranging from fairly light to olive, nutty brown and sun ripened. These skin tones parallel children's nicknames: Muñequita, Colorá and Negi. Negi, an abbreviation of "Negrita," resembles her being born olive-skinned, but her mother explains that it is a term of endearment. Although *jíbaro* is oftentimes portrayed as a fair-skinned person similar to the one in Alonso's poetry, in reality the term typically refers to an individual of dark

complexion, worn by the hard labor and the heat of the Caribbean sun. In Macún, Negi always admires Juanita's grandfather, Don Berto. The reader ought to recognize Don Berto as an exemplary *jíbaro* of the 1950s. With this figure, Negi develops a rudimentary connection with the life and culture in the countryside.

Don Berto "...cada vez cuando lo veía, estaba sentado en los escalones al frente amolando su machete. Su piel era tan oscura y arrugada que parecía atraer la luz a sus grietas...Las palmas de sus manos, rosadas como sus encías, estaban saturadas de callos" (54). Although this elderly peasant is worn by hard labor in the tropical sun, he is still holding on to the tool of his labor, his machete. Negi is fascinated by his dark complexion and his wrinkles that are capable of "las sonrisas más gloriosas que [ella] jamás había visto" and his fingertips "manchados con tierra y edad" (54). Moreover, he always entertains Negi and her friend Juanita with the art of traditional storytelling: "Nos sentábamos a sus pies a escuchar sus cuentos *jíbaros* de fantasmas, animales que hablaban y guayabales hechizados" (54). Negi, captivated by his gesticulation including his way with his machete while he talks, learns folkloric stories and develops thereby a deeper bond with the *jíbaro* culture, embracing their values, beliefs, language and lifestyle. This form of sentimental recollection can be viewed from Boym's restorative nostalgia that accounts for positive and pleasant childhood memories and cultural symbols, rooted in rustic landscape and peaceful time of Santiago's youth. Or, as an extension of Davis's "simple nostalgia," they are a sentimental reminiscence, a subjective stance towards the past that an individual recalls as better, healthier and more exciting (*Yearning* 18). Negi's bond to *jíbaro* culture is similarly forged through her connection to the paternal figure.

Negi's father, Pablo (a carpenter by profession) is also associated with freedom, creativity and knowledge that pertain to the outside world. In many instances she joins her father, for example

while he works on the house. She follows his footsteps and his daily routines and learns about labor and country songs that he recites. In this manner, Negi absorbs the tutelage and habits of country dwellers. Her family lives on the threshold of poverty, without running water, in a small rectangular house with tin walls and doors made of zinc that seems like "...una versión enorme de las latas de manteca que Mamí traía agua de la pluma pública. Las ventanas y puertas eran de zinc." Yet she recounts her milieu as both splendid and sad, tracing exactly the smells, sounds, tastes, rituals, concerns and joys of her life in rural Puerto Rico (*Cuando era* 10). The nostalgic modulation infiltrates the background of the story and achieves old-fashioned romantic dimensions. The idyllic life within nature overshadows the materialistic aspects and is removed far away from fascination with urbanization and modernity.

Despite the evident poverty, Negi depicts her family existing in a symbiosis with nature. She recalls her mother dancing and seeming to turn into a garden of flowers "mamí canturreaba un danzón. Las flores amarillas y anaranjadas de su vestido matizaban contra la verdez, hasta que parecía ser un maravilloso jardín con piernas y brazos y una dulce melodía" (11). Mother Nature accounts for a primordial point of reference. The isolated countryside of Macún offers liberty and comfort. It is the place Negi and her siblings spend countless hours playing, walking barefoot, climbing guava trees and enjoying the freedom and safety granted to them by nature. The reader encounters a similar parallel when Negi contemplates an intimate bond to the island through the notion of Boricua.

At school, Negi learns from Miss Jimenez the meaning of Boricua: "que Borinquén era la hija del mar y sol. A mí me gustaba pensar en nuestra isleta como una mujer cuyo cuerpo era un jardín de flores, sus pies acariciados por las olas del mar, sus cielos y nubes" (84). The Caribbean Island, an idyllic space, where nature blossoms with richness and abundance, stands out

emblematic of the presence of a maternal figure. The poetic depiction alludes to an archetype of mother-island, an ancestral home that shelters and protects its inhabitants in its womb. Consequently, the Native Island forms a center of the World, where individuals like Negi, her mother, father and siblings live within its axis, balanced by *locus amoneus* within Mother Nature. Santiago dwells on a romanticized association with the *jíbaro* culture and tropical landscapes, depicting the Caribbean Island-nation as their garden. For this matter, longing is transparently allied to Romanticism and becomes a central trope of romantic nationalism. Although the rural country of Macún is isolated from metropolis, it is not separated from the radio and its folkloric transmissions. From a very young age, Negi is inspired by music and poetry that are broadcasted by the radio station “El club de los madrugadores” or The Day Breaker’s Club.

The traditional beliefs are found within daily routines and customs that are in fact assimilated by the entire family:

Todas la[s] mañanas escuchábamos “El club de los madrugadores,” el cual presentaba música jíbara. Aunque las canciones y la poesía jíbara describían una vida dura y llena de sacrificios, decían que los *jíbaros* eran recompensados con una vida competitiva, independiente, vecina con la naturaleza, respetuosa de sus caprichos, orgullosamente nacionalista. (15)

This passage underlines a cherished testimony toward the authentic and traditional life of *jíbaro*, wherein their bond with nature is depicted by poetic creation and country songs. The *jíbaro* appears as a genuine national Puerto Rican emblem, building a locus for *jíbaro* nationalism. The prominent scholar, Carmern L. Torres Robles notes that “la figura del *jíbaro* representa la esencia de la nacionalidad puertorriqueña” (“La Mitificación” 241). A figure that has gained meaning with the rise of nationalism in Puerto Rico decades after 1898 is precisely the *jíbaro*. Santiago’s recollecting

her past addresses cultural and social entities that shape the *jíbaro* figure, such as mass media, educational system, and family upbringing. Santiago's passage also conveys yearning for its primordial stage. *Jíbaro* as an emblematic figure becomes a marker to trace a tropical landscape of nostalgia. By its virtue, Negi is captivated by *campesino* poetry and music. She develops love and respect that she acquires through the national radio station.

Moreover, her knowledge about both the beauty and the hardship of *jíbaro* is reinforced by the obligatory school curriculum: “[p]oemas y cuentos relatando las privaciones y satisfacciones del *jíbaro* puertorriqueño era lectura obligatoria en cada grado de la escuela” (*Cuando era* 15). Throughout Negi's experience in rural Puerto Rico, and primarily because of her education and her imagination, she develops a deeper sense of her individual and collective recognition of Puerto Rican *jíbaro* as national and cultural symbol. Being *jíbaro* implements in her a notion of pride and dignity. Negi continues in this matter: “Yo quería ser una jíbara más que nada en el mundo, pero Mami me dijo que eso era imposible ya que yo nací en Santurce [...] – ¡No seas tan jíbara! – me regañaba, dándome cocotazos como para despertar la inteligencia” (15). A nostalgic overtone with an independent peasant and a rural landscape of Puerto Rico, is confronted by her mother challenging the diminutive connotation of the term. Pedagogical approximation arouses towards the uneducated Puerto Rican *paisano*. Her mother disassembles the cultural allegory, introducing an incompatibility between the idyllic cultural representations of the peasant, instead of presenting a city dweller as new Puerto Rican.

Due to the above confrontation with her mother, Negi is perplexed and asks herself: “¿[S]í no éramos jíbaros, por qué vivíamos como ellos?” (15). As a young girl she collects the images together and paints a collage of peasant lifestyle:

Nuestra casa un cajón sentado sobre zancos bajos, parecía un bohío. Nuestro programa de radio favorito tocaba la música tradicional del campo y daba información acerca de cosecha, la economía y agrícola y el tiempo. Nuestra vecina Doña Lola era jíbara [...] Mis abuelos... me parecían a mí jíbaros. Pero yo no podía serlo, ni podía llamar a nadie jíbaro, porque se ofenderían. Aún a la edad tierna, cuando todavía no sabía ni mi nombre cristiano, me daba perpleja la hipocresía manera de resolver ese dilema porque en aquellos tiempos, los adultos lo sabían todo. (15-16)

The protagonist's confusion arises due to an evident critique of Puerto Rican society in which the *jíbaro* trope is ambiguous, diminishing and shifting. Santiago first introduces the figure of *jíbaro* as cultural artifact while it undergoes the gradual transformation found within the public sphere. The labor of restorative nostalgia dwells on "the interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance" (*The Future* 41). Santiago's yearning for the primordial image of *jíbaro* parallels the poetic representation and the one rooted in the songs and traditional folk music. Nostalgia, combined with the folkloric depiction of the *jíbaro*, surrounded by the abundant nature of the Caribbean Islands develops into a structure of belonging for little Negi.

The romantic reconstruction of the idyllic past corresponds to Boym's line of thought: "romantics looked for *memorative signs* and correspondences between their inner landscape and the shape of the world" in English. Individuals as Negi, in Spanish "charted an affective geography of the native land that often mirrored the melancholic landscape of their own psyches" (*The Future* 12: with my emphasis). In other words, the romanticized evocation of the past always occurs in the context of the deficient present as discussed in earlier sections, and thus brings forth the "melancholic landscape" of mind or nostalgic countryside with *jíbaro* as "memorative signs." The

problem of such melancholic maneuvers is a potential disenchantment caused by the ambiguity in the structure of national belonging envisioned collectively. The diminutive image of current *jíbaro* contrast with the archetype rooted in poetry.

Santiago as a 1.5 generation who through restorative nostalgia manages the trans-historical reconstruction of her lost home, praising the authentic image Puerto Rican culture by contextualizing primordial images of *jíbaro*. Santiago's testimony portrays longing for this traditional culture of individuals who set aside material goods and lives with ongoing harmony with nature enduring hard labor in the fields. Yet, such a cliché is long faded at that time. The praised *paisano* pertains to a time of agricultural Puerto Rico, one challenged by Rossario Ferré in *Maldito Amor* (1989), a novel that depicts colonial Puerto Rico at the turn of nineteenth and 20th centuries.

Santiago, a 1.5 generation immigrant rebuilding the memories of childhood, produces a partially fictional and an historical account of lost homeland seen through the lens of *jíbaro/a* and of what she remembers and carries in her memory. Therefore, in the first chapter, the modulation of restorative nostalgia produces an idealized homeland that could be perceived as a mixture of fact and fiction acquired through memory and stories of popular culture, poems and songs. After all, nostalgia proves to be a romance with one's fantasy, and it restores a place wrapped in time, without showing the effects of time on the place. For this reason, Negi's home in Macún represents a sanctuary of Caribbean countryside. Thus, it recreates yearning for a rustic lifestyle, for that which was left behind: a special place and time rooted in the memories of Santiago's youth. The perception of such lifestyle is peculiar for those individuals who grow up sheltered by tropical landscapes. Negi paints a vivid account of a typical family that at some point ought to depart toward an urban metropolis.

Boym relates this line of thought, as typical for individuals who come from “eccentric positions,” marginal positions, such as that of provincial country dweller with respect to Santiago’s family. Consequently, such individuals “...follow the course of nostalgia from pastoral scene of romantic nationalism to the urban ruins of modernity” (Boym xviii). Negi, in reconstructing her past, follows a similar transition. At first, she values the bucolic image of Puerto Rico and her wanting to be a *jíbara*, yet as soon as she arrives into the urban area, her perception changes about what it means to be a country dweller. When her mother is unable to bear the poverty and the infidelity of her husband, she takes her children and leaves Macún for Santurce, a barrio of San Juan.

Consequently, the pleasant image of countryside is dominated by a contrasting image of the district of San Juan.

In the third chapter, titled “Te vienen a quitar la falda” Negi recounts the city as follows:

Santurce, un suburbio de San Juan, que para ese tiempo se había convertido en tan grande metrópolis como la capital [...]. Era un centro comercial, con áreas bien marcadas que separaban los ricos de los pobres. Hospitales, escuelas, hogares, bancos, edificios de oficinas, fondas y teatros se encornaban unos contra los otros en un embrollo de colores, arquitectura y ruido. (41)

Negi captures the transformation of Santurce. In particular, the suburbs accumulate a chain of official and cultural institutions portraying a display of power in the public sphere. The district of San Juan acquires through progress and modernization a new urban identity, and transgresses from underdeveloped to urbanized living “áreas bien marcadas que separaban” between the old and new. Within its boundaries, Negi encounters visible segregation between rich and poor areas. According to Boym “[t]he city, then is an ideal crossroad between longing and estrangement, memory and

freedom, nostalgia and modernity” (*The Future* 76). Once Negi enters the urban setting, she is immediately entangled within the new environment. She is both fascinated with its newness and estranged by what she witnesses. Instead of freedom, Negi faces restrictions. For example, she is not allowed to play outside anymore, and she must walk to and from school without straying from the path proscribed by her mother or even looking at the people.

At the same time, her strolls to school offer opportunities to observe the city. She first notices that the tropical fruits and vegetables that she used to pick from the trees are sold at the small shop “un ventorrillo” (*Cuando era* 44). Furthermore, Negi encounters a vivid and intense portrayal of the city life:

Entre los edificios escondidos en las sombras de los callejones y las entradas a los barrios, había ventorrillos donde vendían jugo de parcha y limbel y de piña y de coco. Pregoneros empujaban sus carritos llenos de dulce de coco, caña dulce, tirijala y dulce de papaya. Y en cada esquina se encontraba un piragüero, quien llenaba conos de papel con hielo raspado y le chorreaba siró de cualquier de sus brillantes botellas llenas de dulce de cada color. Me fascinaban las puertas oscuras de las casas privadas anonadas entre las tiendas y las fondas. (43)

This lively depiction of Santurce, captures a wide range of traditional Caribbean goods available at every corner of the city, sold by ambulant street vendors. Negi offers a snapshot of memory that is both fascinating and alienating. The accelerated rhythm of city life and the new environment invites Negi to reflect upon her own transition. By commuting between school and home, she notices gradually that she stands apart from the crowd: “Sabía que los [niños del colegio católico] eran diferentes, o que yo era diferente” (44). She also finds that streets are no longer pleasant and safe places. Instead she follows muddy sidewalks that are filled with garbage. Moreover, she is

surrounded there by traffic and noise, men drinking liquor in bars, and women of questionable occupation.

Negi describes the school as an actual building, made of concrete blocks that feature a playground. Yet, in this institution she stands out from the rest: “Ya me habían apartado de la escuela por mis costumbres rústicas y voz demasiado alta, por los manierismos del campo expansivos” (44). The class environment leaves a lasting impression on young Negi. Furthermore, when Negi is confronted with unknown matters, she is repeatedly labeled as jíbara:

–¡Qué jíbara– me gritaban los niños cuando recitaba un poema en el dialecto de Doña Lola. –¡Qué jíbara– cuando no sabía usar el sacapuntas pegado a la pared del salón. –¡Qué jíbara– cuando llegaron las Navidades y no sabía quién era Santa Clós
–¡Qué jíbara ¡Qué jíbara ¡Qué jíbara! (45).

These explicit expressions exemplify the shifting image of *jíbaro* once idealized by Negi in the rural setting of Macún, yet articulated negatively by the public sphere of Santurce. The figure of the country dweller was first silenced by her mother in Macún, but in the city space is anew voiced negatively. Negi’s customs of speaking louder and her use of exaggerated gestures are perceived as uneducated and shameful.

The changing connotation of country inhabitant appeals to her trajectory from countryside to the city. Negi follows a course similar to that of many peasants who left the countryside for the urban area, but instead is considered as a different and ignorant Puerto Rican inhabitant labeled *jíbaro*. Boym sustains that alienation and reflection go together in an off-modern tradition for those who begin life’s journey from marginal positions (*The Future* xvii). As a consequence, Negi’s transition invites her to mediate between past and present and dwell on the confusing image of *jíbara* between the Santurce and Macún:

En Santurce era lo que no podía ser en Macún. En Santurce nadie quería ser jíbara. Yo iba a la escuela y volvía a casa con mi otra yo, mirando a la jibarita con los humildes mirando al suelo...manierismos exagerados y voz alta, pies desacostumbrados a los zapatos. (45)

Negi's evocation is filled with irony and sorrow. This line of thought is typical for individuals coming from marginal positions as observed by Boym (xvii). Once the protagonist parts ways with the rural countryside, she evaluates the previous manifestations of self and recognizes a countryside image of *jíbara*. Ironically, she could not be *jíbara* in Macún, according to her mother. But in the setting of Santurce, she is perceived as one. In this constellation of events, Negi also follows threads of reflective nostalgia and recognizes the other self as ambivalent.

Negi's strolls to and from school manifest as an intensified degree of observance, leading to critical recollection and to an interpretation initiated by an urban experience:

Dejé que esa niña sumisa caminara a su casa mientras otra parte de mi fijaba el espectáculo de la ciudad en mi mente, el ruido y los colores, la música, el olor mordaz de las fondas y el humo aceitoso de los carros. De noche, en la cama que compartía con Delsa y Norma trataba de distinguir la canción del coquí para que ayudara a dormir, pero solo oía los disparos de los frenos de camiones, los vecinos discutiendo, música trampeando de la vellonera de la esquina. (45)

From the chaos of daily life, Negi tries to distance herself, to salvage an escape route throughout an infantile song "coquí" –a melody that she most likely learned from her mother during her childhood in Macún. Longing for the comfort and security appears as a defense mechanism. It is an outcry provoked by chaos and alienation created by the accelerated rhythm of life in Santurce. Unfortunately, the cherished moment is ruined by the loud, busy and stimulating inner-city

environment. In other words, the new understanding of time and place alludes to nostalgia for the countryside, a life that moves at a slower pace and surrounded by the patina of Mother Nature. Eventually, the family moves back to Macún.

Negi's inverse trip from the city to rural home is perceived with euphoria and craving for the sounds and flavors of the pastoral countryside. Negi, on her way back to Macún, projects longing in the following way: "[q]uería brincar del camión y correr, correr por los montes hasta los patios arenosos en frente de las casas familiares... Quería subir el monte detrás de mi Tío Cándido... Quería morder esa fruta succulenta, olorosa a rosas" (51). Once the family arrives in the rustic home, she finds comfort and fits well: "Estaba en casa. Y no quería nunca dejar este hogar" (51). Although the family returns to the same impoverished house, her longing and alienation are cured by joyful homecoming. After having spent a few months in the busy metropolis, the splendor of Macún is capable of healing the longing in her that is aroused by the onset of modernization. Anew she finds joy and pleasure in the tropical setting and in spending time with her friends exploring new pathways and orchards.

Moreover, Santiago captures a sincere memory of countryside during the monsoon period: "Chillamos y reímos y cantamos bombas hasta que el primer relámpago abrió las nubes y los truenos nos mandaron corriendo dentro de la casa temblando de frío, para ser secados por una Mami sonriente, sus ojos relucientes, su cara enrosada" (65). Although the tropical rains last for months, Negi finds comfort there and fits comfortably into the rural setting. The positive recollection accounts for a pleasant reception of homecoming –an experience rooted in the soil, and in the tropical landscapes that heal Negi's disposition. Boym regards that while in the 17th century, nostalgia was considered a curable disease, by the 20th century it is a "[a] provincial ailment, *maladie du pays*, turned into a disease of the modern age, *mal du siècle*" (Boym 7). In the

17th century, doctors such as Hofer prescribed leeches, intakes of Hyosciamus oil and opium therapy to cure provincial condition, but most effective were naturally trips to one's motherland. At that time, the disease of imagination or nostalgia was considered a curable condition. For Negi, her happy homecoming and the reunion with Mother Nature is her medicine. Santiago's story unfolds in the Puerto Rico of 1950s, and she recalls social, historical and political changes taking place in the countryside as well as in the urbanizing areas on the island.

To a certain extent a sentimental association with independent peasants and the rural landscape of Puerto Rico becomes a lens to perceive the change occurring on the island. Popular perceptions of the nostalgic figure of the *jibaro* is a way to track progress and transition in Puerto Rico. An apparent moment of such change is recorded in the fourth chapter "Los Americanos Invaden Macún." Santiago captures the way Puerto Rico's government presents U.S. officials who come to Macún to educate its residents about nutrition and to modernize healthcare. Santiago recalls that a teacher demanded that parents attend a meeting at el *Centro Comunal* at school because "...los expertos de San Juan y de los Yunaited Esteits les enseñarían lo que era la nutrición e higiene apropiada, para que todos creceríamos tan gorditos, altos y fuertes como Dick, Jane, y Sally, los americansito en nuestros libros" (70). Since all men are working, and food and hygiene belong to the realm of women's chores, only females attend the meeting.

The American experts first detail how to correctly use the toothbrush on a dental model. Later they display colorful charts with the fundamental nutrition pyramid which depict primordial benefits for children. A man uttered – "en castellano, con acento Americano, describió las necesidades de ingerir porciones de cada una de las comidas en su cartel" (72). The chart includes: carrots, broccoli, iceberg lettuce, apples, pears, peaches; the bread is sliced into a perfect squares and differs from the long loaves that her father brings from a bakery. Negi noticed that there is no

rice, beans or codfish, coffee, local cheese wrapped in banana leaves and other vegetables. Negi's neighbor from Macún responded “–Dijo Doña Lola desde el fondo del salón, ninguna de esas frutas o vegetales crecen en Puerto Rico” and asked if they could substitute some foods for others (72). To this inquiry, the expert of San Juan responded “creo que sí –dijo-, pero es mejor no sustituir los alimentos recomendados. Eso sería sabotaje contra ustedes mismas, ya no resultaría en los mismos beneficios” (72). The peasant community questions the “proper nutrition” and shows a note of resistance resulting from the confrontation. Boym's restorative nostalgia follows two plots: the reconstruction of the original stage through the restoration of the past and the analysis of conspiracy. By extension, Santiago rebuilds the past, explores consent knowledge, and offers an unofficial account of the modernization of Puerto Rico's molding *campesino* resistance.

Modernization, it is seen here, changes the order of the old world, and as the old order slowly drifts away leaving behind bittersweet memories. Accordingly, nostalgia for the past evokes the allegory of *jíbaro*, a national and cultural symbol that evolves along with the industrialization and modernization of Puerto Rico. Nostalgia as a metaphor of globalization explores these venues. And it is within this context that cultural and national manifestation resurface as a substance of recollection. In this regard, Santiago's memoir offers an unofficial material of recollection that accounts for Puerto Rico's transformation seen from the lens of the humble peasant girl.

Negi takes the reader to a typical English class where Miss Jiménez, an Americanized instructor, teaches patriotic American songs such as “American the Beautiful” and encourages students to learn the language of the mainland. She documents how children at the school eat free American breakfast and receive polio injections, but her friend Ignacio Sepúlveda explains that all of this occurs because it is an election year in Puerto Rico: “...pa' que cuando vengan las

elecciones nuestros padres voten por ellos [...] To'el mundo sabe que es Don Luis Muñoz Marín” (78). Luis Muñoz Marín, the founder of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) since his candidacy in the 1940s chose the *jíbaro* straw hat, popularly worn by the Puerto Rican peasants, as the party's national symbol. This ordinary emblem grows into a national Puerto Rican *jíbaro* symbol connecting him with nation and its culture on collective scale. Ironically, a cultural artifact is disfigured by this political agenda once it enters a national project. Anew, a sentimental association with the country dweller as national and cultural symbol evolves along with the industrialization of the island, imposing a new function of *jíbaro*.

Luis Muñoz Marín, in 1951, gives a speech to the nation underlining the qualities and mobilization of *jíbaro* from rural to urban settings:

Is not this the jíbaro transformed by production, education and justice? Let's give a tribute by helping the jíbaro grow, and not to decrease, his virtues and hope that they reach beyond the Puerto Rico rural areas. The educated jíbaro, the jíbaro trained in his education but not diminished in his wisdom, in the countryside and beyond countryside, in Puerto Rico and *elsewhere*. (“Mensajes” 71: with my emphasis)

The Puerto Rican peasant is focalized and he appears as a political tool and motor capable of economic growth of the island. The displacement of population from countryside to urban cities such as San Juan and elsewhere (the United States) are necessary milestones toward Puerto Rico's modernization. And by its extension is considered a pathway to secure relations with the United States. Muñoz Marín utilizes the *jíbaro* figure and its wisdom as a purely practical approach of cultural and national meaning, rather than political. Ironically, the *jíbaro*'s straw hat is a symbol of the PPD. Similarly, Santiago first depicted Macun's rural path as a tropical landscape of

nostalgia, but in fact the idealization of countryside and romanticized association with the *jíbaro* is equally empowered by modernization. As a consequence, the *jíbaro* symbolism and its arbitrary connotations, impose an economic and cultural subjectivity of globalization. In this vein, Muñoz's speech widely presented through media on a national scale implicates the *jíbaro's* direction (modernization) of life beyond the countryside, to urban Puerto Rico and elsewhere (read: United States). In the age of production, growth and modernization, the reader encounters an appeal directed to the *jíbaro's* progress, deliberating impetus given by North America's neocolonial ambitions. The far reaching homogenizing process of modernization is perceived as permanent.

Santiago's coming-of-age story unfolds in the Puerto Rico of the 1950s. It is a moment of change and transformation. The island is fast-tracked by modernization that overshadows the pre-established life style in the idyllic countryside that Negi remembers so vividly as a child. The protagonist transits between Macún and San Juan, witnessing the development of economic and governmental institutions in the capital. The transformation first occurs in the major cities, such as San Juan. Nonetheless, the modernization also reaches the rural areas of Macún. For this reason, Santiago describes the initial changes taking place in the public sphere, such as the modernization of healthcare and nutrition. But at the same time changes take place on a national scale. Negi records that after they return from Santurce to Macún, her mother works in a garment factory in a neighboring city near home. This event reflects an accomplishment initiated by "Operation Bootstrap." Between 1947 and 1951, economic developments strategies converted Puerto Rico's economy from an agricultural to a fast growing industrial economy (textile, clothing, including other factories) by luring mainly American companies to the island with the promise of low wages and tax incentives (Rodríguez 3). Negi's mother undergoes the cultural transition, highlighted in Muñoz's speech. She moves from rural countryside to the urban areas in Puerto Rico, where

Negi's mother endures hard labor in factories while breaking the pre-established clichés of a stay-at-home mother.

Consequently, Negi also depicts the shifting image of women within the Puerto Rican *machista* structure toward becoming independent. Furthermore, Negi's mother, Monín, due to her circumstances, departs with her children for the mainland where Negi's grandmother had settled sometime during the mid-1940s. On a collective level, Santiago's memoir mirrors the voyage of those country dwellers who left Puerto Rico between the 1940s and 1960s for the mainland, in particular it chronicles the experiences of those who left, like Santiago's mother and grandmother, in order to find a better life, but who instead ended up working for subsistence wages in New York sweat shops. The 1946–1964 wave is known as the “Great Migration,” “[d]uring this period the already-established Puerto Rican communities of East Harlem, the South Bronx and the Lower East Side increased their numbers and expanded their borders” (Rodriguez 3).

In a similar manner, Negi's grandmother helps her daughter and grandchildren to settle in the U.S. in the early 1960s. “Operation Bootstrap” extends beyond the island, supplying a labor force to satisfy the emerging American industrial economy's demand for workers. Rodriguez underlines that between the 1950 and 1960 when the factory jobs were abundant in the U.S., on average 45,000 Puerto Ricans left the island each year to live and work on the mainland (6). Negi's mother becomes one of the textile factory workers in New York. While she endures the hardship of diaspora working long hours, Negi withstands its loneliness, which was examined in the first section of this chapter. The gradual relocation of Puerto Ricans across decades highlights an irreversible process of modernization related to advantages created by North American capitalism.

Santiago takes the reader to the world seen through the pupils of a humble Puerto Rican child parting from the first half of the 20th century and culminates, perceived through the eyes of

the adult ready to graduate from Harvard. The memoir is a testimony of who she was, is, and of who she becomes in the Puerto Rican diaspora of New York. The silent leap between Santiago entering The Performing Arts School in New York and her forthcoming graduation from Harvard accounts for fifteen years of life that are silent in the discussed work, yet are voiced in her sequel *Casi una mujer* (1999). For this reason, the opening scene mirrors the book's end. Santiago, captivated by the fragrance of guava in *Shop and Save*, recalls her childhood memories, yet returns the guava and moves on. The final scene depicts her visiting The Performing Arts School in New York and praising the walls that changed her life, given that she anticipates graduating from Harvard. Therefore, she recognizes that such return is not possible and is obliged to move on in her life. Yet, Santiago never erases her childhood unfolded on the island. She is paying homage to *jíbaro* wisdom while embracing *la mancha de plátano* with pride and dignity as anew modern North-American-*jíbara*.

1.3 Chapter One Conclusions

Throughout the memoir, Santiago paints a vivid portrayal of Puerto Rico on the verge of transformation. The nostalgic association with *jíbaro* and the rural landscapes of countryside develops as a means to map change and modernization in the island during 1950s-1960s. The bucolic area of Macún appears as a cherished sanctuary of countryside and country dweller in its center. It reminds the contemporary reader that urbanization, globalization and progress shatters the idyllic, coherent, steady lifestyle sheltered by the tropical landscapes, yet they come to light in the diaspora. At the same time, the trajectory of country dweller becomes increasingly urban. The *jíbaro* transits from rural setting to urban spaces within Puerto Rico, and eventually leads beyond the island, as Luis Muñoz Marín projected. In retrospect, the autobiography focalizes the transition

and metamorphosis of *jíbaro* from his rural origins to urban city dweller who is gradually inhabiting the metropolis of the United States.

Santiago, as a 1.5 generation member, mediates with the past, honors her transition from the rural site of Macún to the highly developed setting of New York while she remains impregnated with the *jíbaro* wisdom and heritage, which she carries with her into diaspora. The autobiography is a colorful account of the past rooted in Puerto Rico at the verge of modernization. Santiago follows the threads of sentimental recollection in favor of connecting the past, present and future and to understand who she became in diaspora after having spent more time in the U.S. than on the island. For this very reason, a 1.5 generation immigrant experiences this transition, undergoes a venture of relocation, and in the process excavates the truth and universal values like family, nature, homeland, and nation. A reconstruction of the past begins in an idealized rural setting and ends in the labyrinth created by progress and modernization of a grand metropolis. In this manner, the past always encounters vigor in the present from which it borrows vitality.

Through a sentimental association with *jíbaro*, and longing for tropical landscapes, Santiago mediates between individual and collective memory, evoking cultural and national manifestations associated with Puerto Rican pre-modern origins. After all, nostalgia as a modern condition is an ache of temporal displacement and irreversibility of time. Consequently, Santiago, by rebuilding her homeland, home and nation through childhood memories, negotiates with the past, and bridges the spatial and temporal distance and loss. Additionally, she fills this gap of memory created by displacement, progress, modernization and globalization. In this vein, the author recaptures the past, but ironically, the idealization of the Puerto Rican countryside and romanticized association with the *jíbaro* are empowered by modernization.

Nostalgia appears as an inseparable byproduct of globalization, leading individuals to encounter escape routes and dreams of substitution. Globalization blurs borders and national distinctions, similar to what occurs with individuals who transit across borders find themselves in cultural and linguistic transitions or intersections once they have spent more time in the society of residence than in their Native Land. At the same time, Santiago during her voyage, implies the transformation of *jíbaro* identity, to a modern, *North American-jíbaro* who wears the stain of plantain with pride and dignity. As a consequence, longing is related to some sense of recovery, and in this way it aids in consolidation of bicultural identity. Santiago's success lies in her transcendental experience, in the way she minimizes the sense of loss through the act of writing the memoir and through connecting the threads of her Puerto Rican past and her present life in the United States.

In addition to issues of language and race, Santiago's account of her experience of migration and nostalgia brings up concerns related to gender. As a female narrator, Santiago in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* challenges socially constructed issues of class, male and female roles, submissiveness and conformity. The paternal figures (Santiago's father and Don Berto) shared images and stories of the island that reinforced Santiago's *jíbaro* identity, culture, and nationality. They also made visible a distinction between household –woman domain – and the outside –male universe. Mother figures controlled the daughter's sexuality, implemented values, traditions and beliefs in order to prepare their daughters to be good wives and mothers. Santiago's first memoir recreates circumstances and conveys lessons that many young Puerto Rican women endured in the Puerto Rican countryside. On the other hand in some circumstances traditional feminine roles may be more empowering.

Santiago's mother was the first one to rebel against the established roles by the Puerto Rican society and gender distinctions. She became independent from her unfaithful partner, found employment and moved away to urban areas in Puerto Rico. Finally, she managed to take all of her children to the United States. The Santiago trajectory in the U.S. mirrors her mother's stage of rebellion. On the contrary, in the third memoir, *Turkish Lover*, Santiago rebels against her mother, runs away from home, and finds herself in a love-failed relationship where she faces machismo, submissiveness and conformity. However, her vulnerability to traditional beliefs transforms into her strength. At the end, she is a man-free, educated and empowered female who is capable of taking care of herself. She confronted the pre-established gender roles of Puerto Rican women in the United States and a transformation within a social field occurred. She broke free from the entitled submission and conformity to rules and codes of behavior on both frontiers.

Although the memoir provides a partially historical and a partly fictional account of *jíbaro* culture and national dimensions, the author finds new ways of confronting the racial baggage, linguistic differences, and gender stereotypes that she encountered in her childhood. The self-writing from the contemporary perspective turns into a pluralized version of self; an individual is built across a span of life looking for building blocks to fill the missing gaps, aiming to form a coherent whole in the modern world. Within the life-narrative, an individual strives to encounter an active process of reconstruction, trying to find plural successive selves across time and space, which partially depend on the past, but are conceived from the present experience. *Cuando era puertorriqueña* can be viewed as an extension of memory, and a journey of self-discovery. The memoir serves as a self-portrait that aims to find a strategy of substitution of home and homeland through rebuilding cultural and national manifestations of memory, all of which leads Santiago to her acceptance of the autobiography that unfolded in Puerto Rico and the United States.

CHAPTER TWO: Nostalgia in the Cuban Exile

This chapter draws on Svetlana Boym's distinctions between restorative and reflective nostalgia to examine how Pérez Firmat's memoir, *Next Year in Cuba*, factors nostalgia of exile on the collective and individual level. This chapter is organized in three sections. In the first section, I analyze the impact of nostalgia in exile on three different generations of Pérez Firmat's family members. I reference to Boym's theory and evaluate the role of longing on an individual level as an enabling force, personal tragedy, and rebellion. Within this perspective, Cuban nostalgia becomes an intoxicating drive that feeds on the impossibility of homecoming, and the fears that return with the same desire.

In the second section, I investigate the role of architectural reconstructions of Old Havana in Miami as nostalgic entities that affect the exiled Cuban enclave residing in Miami, Florida. I illustrate how the Cuban landmarks in Miami emerge and fall as an outcome of modernization and globalization, fostering nostalgia for Little Havana of 60s and 70s as a byproduct. Within the civic context, Cuban nostalgia resurfaces as a marketable entity in relation to the *Calle Ocho* festival. The yearly festival brings forth my debate on transition of Cuban ethnicity into the Latino community.

In the third section, I employ Davis's theory to develop my argument that longing emerges as a psychological motor for Pérez Firmat and aids him to bridge loss and displacement generated by the Cuban exile in Miami, the reconstruction of Old Havana in Miami and dislocation from Miami to other parts of the United States.

Cuban nostalgia progresses as an outcome of historical migration waves¹ occurring after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Since Castro's regime has prevailed for decades, the neighborhoods of Miami have embraced streams of Cuban exiles. The influx of Cuban refugees

plays a major role in transforming the mediocre city of Miami into an ethnic Cuban network creating Little Havana. Over the course of decades, this exile community has been built on Cuban business, food, coffee and music. Furthermore, it is a place, that has been raised and nurtured by the lingering dream of “regreso” (the return) to old Havana, and “[T]he dream of revenge, the dream of settling scores and turning back the clock” (Falkoff 13). Therefore, the shared consensus of memory of homeland, inextinguishable longing, and freedom nurtured the growing Cuban population in Miami, Florida. On the collective level, Pérez Firmat’s memoir can be viewed as a testimony and a subtle reading on how nostalgia in exile sustains the Cuban enclave residing in Miami and that progresses as the consequence of historical migration waves occurring after the historical events of 1959. From the individual standpoint, Pérez Firmat’s memoir ponders on the customs of nostalgia as a means to map his Cuban diasporic experience as a member of the 1.5 generation who navigates through life with a Cuban compass aiming to come to terms with the Cuban and American parts of his life: of what he remembers of his homeland and what he endures on the mainland.

2.0 Chapter Two Introduction

Departing from the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the relation nostalgia-Cuba is fundamentally connected to territorial Cuba, as well as to Miami where the majority of Cuban émigrés settled. By its virtue, the diasporic body of literature emerges as an outcome of historical migration waves post 1959. Writers, who pertain to diverse migration waves, offer personal accounts on what they remembered and endured in their homeland and on their mainland. The early 1959 migration brings a group of educated Cuban writers who reached maturity in their homeland and wrote primarily in Spanish for the Cuban audience. Their texts are filled with loss and nostalgia for homeland. A few of these authors are Lino Novás Calvo, Eugenio Florit, Lydia

Cabrera, and Hilda Perera (“Cuban-American” 81). Those who left Cuba as children or before reaching adolescence in the 1960s and 1970s are defined as Cuban-American writers. To this group belong: Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Pablo Medina, Ricardo Pau-Llosa, Roberto Fernández and Cristina García. Their narrative reflects on identity issues, adaptation to mainstream culture and engages in bicultural, historical, and linguist matters. This group writes in English, translates their works to Spanish, and also writes in a combination of both languages.

A peculiar exile group of writers emerged from the Mariel Boatlift in the 1980s, Reinaldo Arenas and Guillermo Rosales came-of-age in Cuba and write primarily in Spanish. Their work is filled with anguish toward the persecution and deception of what they endured and suffered after the Cuban Revolution. In addition, their texts deal with sexual and political conflicts, loss of homeland, and the difficulties of exile and adjustment to the host country. Lastly, the American born writers of Cuban decent who are oftentimes labeled as “ethnic writers,” include Oscar Hijuelos, Richard Blanco and Rafael Campo. These writers also contribute largely to the canon of Cuban-American literature. They mainly produce texts in English. Cuban exilic literature is marked by binary powers, loss and nostalgia, longing and belonging, and a presence of two languages drifting in the margins of both Cuban and mainstream culture whose roots are shaped by the post 1960 exodus.

The theoretical contribution about Cuban exilic literature has been vividly discussed by Hoffman, (1999), Rivero (2005), Pérez Firmat (2013), Luis (1997), Alvarez-Borland (1998, 2009), and Quiroga (2005). A peculiar constant of these texts is formulation of discourses of nostalgia regarding Cuba in response to Cuban historical migration waves and diasporic experience on the mainland. In addition the above authors classify the recent mentioned Cuban exilic writers according to their generation as “one and-a-half-generation,” “ethnic writer,” “Cuban exilic

writers” or “second generation,” to name some labels. Nostalgia does not fit any philosophy, yet it penetrates in varying degrees the texts produced by the above-mentioned writers.

The relationship exile-nostalgia is fundamental to how displaced individuals perceive their past, present and future. Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* reflects its function: “exiles often become artists in life who remake themselves and their second homes with great ingenuity. Inability to return home is both a personal tragedy and enabling force” (16). In short, exile is both about suffering in a host land and adjustment into new life. It is about the recollection of what was lost and what could be found in the adopted country. It is about becoming in-between the origins and destinations. And above all the Cuban exile for the one and 1.5 generation is about homemaking and imaginary homecoming, rather than returning home. Therefore, the diasporic experience creates a tension between the society of residents and the one left behind; the cultural, historical and ideological baggage is factored into the narrative of Cuban exiles as well as the personal one. By its extension, the geographies, histories and cultures are clashing and create intersections, which offers a fundamental point of reference for a displaced individual.

According to Pérez Firmat: “Cuban American writing begins at the place where memory and invention meet, where history, identities, and languages encounter one another” (“Cuban-American” 81). Although roughly two-hundred miles of coastal waters divide Havana Cuba and Miami, the sea of memories divides the émigrés from their homeland as the Berlin Wall divided East and West Germany from 1931 until 1989. The wall fell down, the Cold War ended, Germany was unified. Such political upheavals give birth to nostalgic remembrances, which manifest themselves in East German memoirs of the Wall. On the other hand, the embargo on Cuba remains, but not on Cuban memory. Thereupon, Cuban writers pertaining to different generations take the responsibility for their nostalgia and chronicle what they witnessed and withstood. The most

captivating form of literature that details events of such caliber stems from a personal account. In particular, during the 1980s and 1990s the genre of memoir and autobiography became a salient arena for 1.5 generation Cuban émigrés who fled the Cuban Revolution and left their homeland as children or adolescence during 1960s.

The Cuban memoir becomes a significant document reflecting a peculiar segment of Cuban-American history and culture in North America that at the same time differs from the canon of exilic or diasporic literature produced by Puerto Rican, Dominican or Mexican writers who also left their homelands in a similar time frame and age. Considering the separate histories and much more diverse experiences of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, it is not surprising to find that they display different characteristics in Latino/a memoir. The distinct feature of 1.5 generation Cuban writers is naturally the intensified degree of nostalgia toward homeland as a shared experience on a collective level. Additionally, they share political events of 1959 as their point of departure and assertion to their Cuban roots as a central reference point in regards to their Cuban experience in the United States. The works of Díaz's *Drown* (1996), Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992), and García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) expand the boundaries of autobiography and produce semi-fictional accounts, or autobiographical fiction. These authors use their stories of migration and incorporate historical events while infusing into their works a fading tone of nostalgia for a homeland. The historical aspect of the Hispanic memoir dates back to the mid-19th century and can be traced to the 5th century, to the widely read clerical works of St. Augustine titled "Confession" (Alvarez Borland 1998). Yet the intensified migration patterns in the 1960s from the Caribbean and Mexico contribute to the appearance of autobiographies and memoirs in the early 1980s and 1990s. The genres of autobiography and memoir share common characteristics.

Zinsser underlines the difference between the two genres as follows:

Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens, focusing on a time in the writer's life that was unusually vivid, such as childhood or adolescence, or that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance. (*Inventing the Truth* 15)

The Cuban-American first person account of 1.5 generation writers delivers significant material about a peculiar historical timeframe for Cubans settling, adapting and living in the United States. Pérez Firmat memoirs: *Next year in Cuba* (1995), *Life on The Hyphen* (1994), Pablo Medina's *Exiled Memories* (1990) and Eliana Rivero's autobiographical essays "(Re) Writing Sugar Cane Memories: Cuban Americans and Exile" factor historical events of 1959, and offer a personal scope regarding childhood and adolescent memories.

Alvarez-Borland in *Cuban-American Literature of Exile From Person to Persona* (1998) remarks that Cuban-American writers of the 1.5 generation such as Pérez Firmat and Median look at their childhood in Cuba from an adolescent perspective. According to Alvarez Borland they "seek to give homogeneity to a social group's awareness of itself socially and culturally" (62). While female writers such as Rivero emphasize issues of definition and affirmation of identity through the relation to native language, culture and origins. Ironically, while Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* chronicles how the Dominican sisters lost their accent once they are assimilated to the U.S. mainstream culture, Rivero shows in her autobiographical essays how she retains it. According to Pavlenko's article on "Language Learning" (2001), the choice of language plays a fundamental role in the process of the writing and rewriting of a memoir. Writers such as Pérez Firmat, Pablo Medina, Reinaldo Arenas, or Julia Alvarez to name a few, compose their works in Spanish and translate them into English. In sum, their autobiographical works factor

socio-cultural or socio-historic events that are labeled by Pavlenko as “cross-cultural life writing” (23). This scholar investigates sixteen memoirs, discusses the role of gender in language learning, and views language choice in memoirs a potential gendered reading. Pavlenko concludes the differences between female and male authors are as follows:

[T]he female narrators draw on discourse of gender significantly more than male authors...The disparity is explained by the sociohistoric and sociocultural shaping of the autobiography genre, where performance of contemporary femininity-but not masculinity-is perceived upon explicit questioning of ideologies and selfhood. (23)

Pavlenko does not factor nostalgia into her reading. Yet Rivero is one of the first to formulate the differences between Cuban American ethnic writers and Cuban immigrant writers with respect to their portrayal of nostalgia.

According to Rivero: “In the nostalgic discourse of Cuban writers the presence of palm trees and sugar cane is a constant...the words sugar and sugar cane, and the images created by them, are metaphors for the essence of what it means to be Cuban” (*Discursos* 175). This perspective of nostalgia shifts when she defines the other group “A Cuban American writer would be the younger, more easily adapted individual, who immigrating as a child or young adolescent, is only part time practitioner – if at all – of the Cuban nostalgia discourse” (169). This is to say, those who emigrated as children and adolescents as Pérez Firmat or Medina exclude the reference to sugar cane – the building pillar of Cuban country, economy, later communism and by its virtue, a nostalgic marker of Cuban essence. Instead, they engage partially in the discourse on nostalgia of homeland, fostering a partially fictional dialogue of homeland and nostalgia for what they remembered as children, as observed by Rivero in *Discurso desde la Díaspora* (169). On the other hand, the Cuban American writer holds an advantage. One who is more easily adaptable to socio

historic circumstances becomes a medium capable of voicing the mnemonic observance on both sides of the border and between older and younger generations. The terminology of “ethnic” writer evolves over the course of time and gives shape to new labels such as one-and-half generation, or hyphenated writers.² The portrayal of nostalgia of 1.5 generation writers differs in comparison to those who come-of-age in Cuba and arrive as adults to the United States. For instance, Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990) comes to age during the Cuban Revolution.

Arenas is first in favor of the Revolution but later rebels against it, and must endure imprisonment among notorious criminals in the infamous El Morro Castle. In 1980 he declares himself gay and manages to flee to the U.S. on the Mariel Boatlift. His outstanding memoir, *Before Night Falls: A Memoir* (1994), captures this painful trajectory. His works were converted into a powerful movie of the same name that was directed by Julian Schnabel. Although he suffered in Cuba, the exile endures even greater loss. He lived in poverty finding salvation in writing. Torn by nostalgia for Cuba and a disease of the modern age, AIDS, he committed suicide in the 1990s in New York. He remarks in *Before Night Falls*: “In exile one is nothing but a ghost, the shadow of someone who never achieves full reality. I ceased to exist when I went into exile” (293). Arenas came as an adult to the U.S. and never felt at home in exile, experiencing instead the growing void and loss of home, identity and existence. For him exile was a personal tragedy in both a metaphoric and literal sense. Those who come as adults demonstrate a tighter bond to the motherland.

In his brief essay “Discourses of/on Nostalgia” (2006), Raúl Rubio examines *Next Year in Cuba* along with *Agüero Sisters* and proposes the association of nostalgia and exilic experience of Cuban émigrés as a means to feature the local geography as a narrative device. My work takes this idea to the next level. I offer to examine the reconstruction of Old Havana in Miami as an outcry of nostalgia and as a symptom of globalization. I evaluate nostalgia in *Next Year in Cuba* in the

positive as well as the negative sense as I examine the emerging and declining Cuban landmarks in Miami. Thus, I not only approach the nostalgic inclination towards the city spaces that emerge in the 1960s and 1970s. I also trace how the city spaces are diminishing in an increasingly fractured Miamian Cuban milieu as an outcome of progress and globalization. Thereupon, I uphold that a new level of longing is forged – yearning for the golden age of Little Havana of the 1960s and 1970s – projected from a mainland perspective.

Further, Pérez Firmat's narrative of the exile is a lens that the author employs to voice the issue of crossing borders and thresholds, of what one endures in the early stages in Miami as a Cuban exile. He comes from a well-established, upper class family that immigrates during the first waves in 1960 unlike Medina or Arenas whose parents stem from the lowest class. Thus, Pérez Firmat's transition to the U.S. is relatively smooth since he is withdrawn from the hardship and dreads of Castro's regime. The new adopted home resurfaces as perspective from which the author perceives the reality while he addresses the rewards and shortcomings of being both American and Cuban. Although his early work *Idle Fictions* (1982) concentrates on a vanguard peninsular novel of the 1920s and 1930s, with the publication of *The Cuban Condition* (1989), the reader encounters a shift toward exploring the notion of crossing borders as a vantage point that shapes the Cuban exilic culture. Crossing boundaries results in dislocation, integration, usage of two languages, adaptation and transculturation within and toward the adopted homeland and fascination with what is new and, what is viewed as foreign.

Life on the Hyphen (1994) is in sum the author's venture of self-discovery observed mainly through the adoption of perspectives of both the American and Cuban culture. Pérez Firmat makes his own life a narrative and embraces symbols and images from both sides of the cultures that he analyzes as a member of a Cuban community in the United States. Yet, he finds himself on

the crossroad of cultures and languages and prescribes his own label a “one-and-half generation” or “hyphenated.” His search for balance between mainland culture and his Cuban roots continues in *Next Year in Cuba: A Cubano’s Coming-Of-Age in America* (1995).

As the memoir’s subtitle proclaims, the autobiographical performance implies an act of auto-reflection born from personal experience and negotiation with larger structures. It is a place between individual and public spheres, between the private and collective, and naturally between Cuba and Miami. The author’s childhood in Cuba is perceived through an elite identity, that contrasts to the author’s adolescent experiences in Miami, where the Pérez Firmat family no longer bears wealth and status but experiences relative hardship in the early 1960s in Miami. The prologue opens with events in July, 1991. Every generation of Cuban exiles in Miami celebrates the collapse of the Soviet Union during a concert that features the Cuban-born artist Willy Chirino. The crowds are impregnated with a vivid hope of return, “[a]s Chirino calls out the name of each liberated country” the masses scream “¡¡Libre!! – Free” (xvii). In this way Pérez Firmat uses a strategy to distance himself from Cuba, while he engages in the discourse as a member of a 1.5 generation, and as both Cuban and American detailing the story of his life. Pérez Firmat narrates in three chapters his trajectory from his childhood in Havana, Cuba, his adolescence in Miami, Florida and his adulthood in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The memoir is written from an adult perspective and oftentimes shifts between the author’s present in the U.S. and past in Cuba, between his childhood and adolescence. Although the author uses his Cuban roots as an anchor to come in terms with his experience in the United States, he constantly encounters crossroads and intersections of culture, memory and history.

Pérez Firmat underlines in his collection of essays:

Cuban American writing begins at the place where memory and invention meet, where history, identities, and languages encounter one another. The writer who attempts to define his starting point as well as the place where he now finds himself is also defining himself, even reinventing himself. (“Cuban American” 81)

In particular the author focuses on the lingering effect of his migration and seeks to battle the merging nostalgia for Cuba and Miami of the 1960s and 1970s while retrospectively looking at his life. The autobiographical work, the memoir, is a writing of self in-between spaces and places that inevitably reappears as an ambivalence inspired by shifting geographies, languages, and histories. Therefore, the loss of foundation and dialogue with larger social structures as well as the restoration of past becomes an exercise of writing and reordering and reshaping his life. An urge to rewrite the history from personal account factors nostalgic remembrance of the past, and redefines the writer as an architect who turns the collective into the private and the private into the collective.

These implications give ground to Boym’s and Davis’s notion of longing which offer a valuable insight on how nostalgia shapes the life, identity, culture and nationality. Pérez Firmat’s engagement towards exile and nostalgia offers insight on how he and his family confront past and present and their desire to return to Cuba through adoption of symbols and reconstruction of traditions and customs. The next section elaborates on these matters and deals with themes that pertain to displacement to Miami and diverse manifestations of nostalgia that emerge in the mainland in response to the Cuban political and historical events.

2.1 Three Generations of Longing and Belonging

Pérez Firmat’s memoir is a testimony of migration, assimilation and thirty years of life among the first wave of Cuban refugees who come to Miami, Florida, after the triumph of Fidel

Castro's revolution. Pérez Firmat's family belongs to the privileged group of Cuban émigrés, to those who freely left Cuba after their business and assets were "nationalized," or rather confiscated by the emerging socialistic government. Pérez Firmat's father, like thousands of other individuals, choose to relocate to the United States while embracing the idea that Castro's Regime would not last long, thus, allowing his family to soon return and reclaim their seized properties. Correspondingly, the early wave of refugees tends to perceive Cuba through the lens of loss and the possibility of return.

To highlight the impact of Cuban longing and belonging, one has to factor exile into the equation. The relationship exile-nostalgia is fundamental to how Pérez Firmat and his father respond to their past, present and their future. Its function is reflected by Boym: "...exiles often become artists in life who remake themselves and their second homes with great ingenuity. Inability to return home is both a personal tragedy and enabling force" (*The Future* 16). Oftentimes, this gap of what is lost is unbridgeable. Nevertheless, only some individuals manage to turn exile into an enabling force. In summary, there is a strong contrast between Pérez Firmat and his father with respect to how they embody and react to exilic experiences over an extensive course of time. It turns out that time spent in exile has little impact on the life of Pérez Firmat senior³.

[He] is now in his seventies, has no choice but to be Cuban. The thirty years of living and working in the United States seem to have little impact in his Cuban ways. [...] He will never be Americano, either legally or in spirit. [...] He remains as unassimilated today as he was on the day in October 1960 when he got of the ferry at Key West. (xix)

Pérez Firmat senior arrived in Key West as a mature forty year old man. The departure results in parting with his warehouse, and his luxury life in a mansion with maids and Cadillacs and, most importantly, in his being disconnected from his homeland. He constantly perceives withdrawal from Cuba through a loss of wealth and status, and the lingering desire of return. Over the course of three decades, homecoming is repeatedly deferred due to Castro's prevailing regime. In consequence, the inability of *regreso* or return plays a substantial role in his life as an exile. The thought of "next year in Cuba" sustains him; it is his desire to turn the clock back and settle the score with the past. After over thirty years of false hopes and unfulfilled promises, the dream of *regreso*, remains his firm belief. Unable to change the past, Pérez Firmat senior remains the unchanged Cuban owner of a warehouse. For him time never moves.

To emphasize this line of reasoning Pérez Firmat admits: "[f]or the exile, every day is a delay, every day is deferral. [My father] may hear the seconds ticking on Reloj Radio, that Miami radio station ticked off time minute by minute, but the time inside his head never moves" (47). Reloj Radio counts time minute by minute and meanwhile summarizes the recent news from Cuba. Like many émigrés, Pérez Firmat follows the auditions to keep up with the reports, songs, nostalgia auditions and "bolas" (false news or practical jokes) from Cuba. Reloj Radio becomes his primary habit, his daily routine and a counter cultural practice that gives essence to his existence. He wakes up to the sound of Reloj Radio and goes to sleep every night in the same manner. Consequently, Pérez Firmat senior lives in a suspended animation feeding on the impossibility of homecoming. After all he has endured, he turns into a modern romantic, for whom longing becomes the core of his survival. As Boym remarks "I long, therefore I am." His choice to remain an unchanged and unassimilated Cuban befits his way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming, paraphrasing Boym. Nostalgia is his labyrinth without an exit. This desire feeds on nostalgia and

transfers itself into rebellion, a counter cultural practice, and a poison. Yearning for next year in Cuba transforms the lifestyle of Pérez Firmat's father. The estrangement and loss are his art of surviving the exile. The day since he left Cuba, he remains an unassimilated Cuban owner of his *almacén* (warehouse) claiming ownership of what he no longer possesses or inhabits.

In this manner, Pérez Firmat's father like other early émigrés relocate to the U.S. believing that Castro's regime is only temporary and that after his fall, they will be able to return and reclaim their lost properties. But the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, strengthens Castro's position, and Cuba is on a full run towards socialism. Boym underlines that nostalgia's secondary port of entry is largely related to "the historical point when the conception of time and history were undergoing radical change" (*The Future* 8). Similarly, the Cuban Revolution is followed by the military and political failure (Bay of Pigs invasion) to recover Cuba from Castro's ruling, which sparks waves of longing. Thus, events such as revolutions and political turmoil are oftentimes followed by epidemics of nostalgia that are complemented by political, national and cultural projections of longing. Arguably, the Cuban Revolution (1959), failed Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961) and Castro's prevailing regime nurture longing in the exiled Cubans which gives shape to Cuban cultural customs and traditions in post 1961.

Pérez Firmat's parents, like those of many other exiles, decide to recreate the habits and routines of their former life in Havana. This recommends the incorporation of customs and routines into their daily life, their holidays, and their various other annual celebrations. Such sets of practices account for the restoration of the past under Boym's restorative nostalgia which aim to maintain continuity with the past and to strengthen identity.

Most significant among the Cuban customs are certainly Nochebuenas. Pérez Firmat is fond of his cultural heritage. In his proper words: "During those very good nights in 1960s, 1970s,

and 1980s, everything harked back to Cuba—the celebrants, the food, the music, and the customs” (*Next Year* 164). In the long run, Miamian Nochebuenas became a means to hold on to Cuba and Cuban ways. It is not only about the traditional foods (roast pig with yucca and *congrí*) or beverages (*Sidra*); it is mainly about familiar unity and relatives who gather to reminisce, to celebrate and to throw the *brindí*, the toast for “next year in Cuba.” Torres points out that Cuban cultural traditions served as a tool that “turned inward to define their identity. Cultural practices were *ferociously defended*” (“Ethnicity, Ethics” 45: with my emphasis). Boym’s restorative nostalgia takes into account restoration of the past as a means to govern tactically and accept rules and rituals of a symbolic nature of behavior as individuals “seek to incorporate values and norms of behavior which imply automatically continuation with the past” (42). Modernity and fast paced life are directly proportional to restoration of customs. According to Boym, “the more rapid pace and sweeping pace and scale of modernization...the higher degree of symbolic ritualization and formalization... the stronger is the rhetoric of continuity with historical past and traditional values” (42). Pérez Firmat’s family followed these traditions rigorously. His description of Nochebuenas is vivid, long and detailed.

Furthermore, the neighborhood of Little Havana offered every single nostalgic product needed for revival of conservative Nochebuenas. At the same time, the life and revival of Pérez Firmat’s family traditions were blemished by overwhelming nostalgia, a device for constructing community, resisting the official Cuban position, time and progress. In fact, once years turn into decades, the toast for next year in Cuba depicts a bitter and mournful reminder of Cuba and the time spent in the American soil.

For Pérez Firmat Senior time stops when he arrives in October, 1960 in Key West. Nevertheless, this event has a contrary effect on his son. Pérez Firmat offers a completely different

view of this experience, “[n]ow I’m struck by how much more clearly I remember people and events with October 24, 1960. Sometimes it has seemed to me that I was born on that day” (17). The day an immigrant leaves his homeland, is never to be forgotten. Although Pérez Firmat is an eleven year-old boy at that time, he is old enough to detail some of the moments of his family life in Havana, Cuba. Yet, he is still young enough to not be able to understand why his family leaves their fatherland and move to the United States. Most importantly for him, the clock starts ticking that day. His journey to adolescence begins there and Key West inclines his birth passage.

Pérez Firmat comes to the U.S. as an eleven-year-old boy and he is more flexible about adapting to change than his father, for whom longing for the homeland is an ongoing fixation with the past. According to Rubio, “[f]or those that physically left the island they are perpetually dealing with that closure and adjusting to the new home, while fixated on their original homeland” (*Discourses* 16). However, in the case of Pérez Firmat, Senior adjustment is out of the question. The gap between Cuba and Miami is simply unbridgeable, and longing is his lure and comfort. On the contrary, for Pérez Firmat exile is tailored towards contemplation and alteration, and it burns within him as an enabling force.

After having spent over thirty years of his life in the U.S., becoming an American citizen, and a professor of comparative literature, and remarrying to an American, Pérez Firmat recollects his life in Havana as the Cuban boy that he is no longer, but instead as the adolescent and adult who grows up in Miami and who embraces both Cuban and American ways of life. For this reason, the title of the prologue “Born in Cuba, made in U.S.A.,” alludes to the story of his life. This interplay moves from distant origins to his current place of residence; both places have shaped his senses of being and belonging. Similar to previously discussed narratives of displacement, this work also rests on the principle that the heritage of the culture and the histories of dislocation come

to life in the diaspora. The Cuban identity, his Cuba-ness, is embedded into the memoir as a central element. Or rather, to be precise, the writing of self details his quest. Consequently, the recollection of the past is more than just a coming-of-age story that dialogues between Cuba and mainly Miami, Florida. It is a mental and inductive exercise with liberating dimensions. The memoir becomes a journey tailored towards self-rediscovery.

Pérez Firmat justifies his autobiographical writing as follows:

[M]y purpose is not simply to recall the past but also, and primarily, to weave together the different strands of my life as an exile into a design for the present and the future. I write to collect myself, to shape disparate fragments into a portrait that I can recognize and embody. (xx)

This urge to explore who he was, who he is, and who he is becoming after having spent more time in the United States than in Cuba is precisely what Boym labels as “diasporic intimacy.” This gap between two cultures, languages, and geographical spaces gives Pérez Firmat grounds to recollect and to mediate between different periods of his life. This intimacy is haunted by the images of home and homeland rooted within his birthplace while connected to the Cuban community in Miami where the author comes of age. Pérez Firmat exhibits a significant degree of reflection upon his own past and his life that unfolds in Miami as one of the first wave of Cuban refugees. Boym’s theory accounts for this type of reasoning as a critical means for recollection: “[r]eflective nostalgics are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance. [...] This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between their past, present, and future” (50). It is to say, the duality of origins, cultures and identities is cultivated and reinforced through repetitive contemplating of his past and is finally imprinted in the memoir. It gives Pérez Firmat the ability to harvest the past from different perspectives, as he is able to view

himself as a subject of his own study. He becomes an architect who reshapes his life in the light of clashing dualities.

To highlight this line of reasoning, Pérez Firmat underlines, “I write to become who I am, even if I’m more than one, even if I’m *yo* and you *tú* and two” (xvii). The present borrows the vitality from past and invites its subject to reflection. It is to say, as a reflective nostalgic, “[he] has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness” (Boym 50). This retrospective exercise aims to frame two images of homeland and home into a single picture that Pérez Firmat can “recognize and embody.” His line of reasoning also overlaps with Davis’s view on nostalgia as a complex activity that leads to comprehension of an individual in relation to his own past. Davis holds, “nostalgia is one of the means-or, better, one of the more readily accessible psychological lenses-we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities” (31). In this way, reminiscence turns into an emotional and psychological process. The purpose of recognition and acceptance of the past in its true form, may equate in recognition of oneself as subject study. Davis argues that an individual reassembles himself within the context of particular social and historical events, making nostalgia a socially derived emotion. By its extension, Pérez Firmat’s memoir is a tool with which the author aims to contemplate the loss of homeland, and the rupture between various episodes of his life in order to assemble himself. Equally, nostalgia may appear as a regulatory mechanism. However, Boym sustains that the distance between cultures, geographies and languages, confuses and seduces, more than satisfies. Therefore, there is always a gap between identity and resemblance. Within this constellation of events, the reflective nostalgic finds a disfigured image of himself, and Pérez Firmat is not entirely Cuban or American.

He underlines “[a]s a one-and-a-halfer, I’m too old to be entirely American, but too young to be anything else” (xi). Clearly, the Cuban-born writer finds himself at an intersection of two countries, two languages and two cultures, and is seeking to find his balance between Cuba and America within himself. According to André Aciman, “the one thing exiles do almost as a matter of instinct is ‘compulsive retrospection’. With their memories perpetually on overload, exiles see double, feel double, are double” (13). Therefore, the goal of this reflection is to assemble the shuttered fragments of memory and paste the rich dual experience into a single image. His memoir is a voyage. His recollection of the past is a rendezvous with himself, as a young boy, an adolescent and then as an adult.

For Pérez Firmat, unlike for his father, longing in the exile appears as an amplifier that allows him to revisit with great creativity the times of his childhood, youth and adulthood. He becomes an observer, an architect in life who remakes himself and his second homes with great creativity. He contemplates the story of his life after having lived more time in the United States than in Cuba. Yet territorial Cuba is without doubt his central reference point, and the anchor of his Cubanity. It is his navigation device throughout his life in the United States. The recollection of his home and homeland is achieved mostly through the imaginary lens of longing. Still, not belonging fully to Cuba or America, imposes a dilemma because Pérez Firmat, as a 1.5 generation immigrant and an adolescent, quickly outgrows the child within himself. At first, he withdraws from the life that unfolded in Cuba by putting “mental embargo” on his recollection. It is partially due to what he constantly endures in his temporary home: “[a]s I grew up [in Miami], I also grew up tired – tired of hearing about our maids, our Cadillacs, the pricey restaurants and fashion hotels. [...] Since Cuba wasn’t where I was, I began to put it out of my mind. [...] I sliced my life in halves and threw away the bitter half” (25). In this excerpt, the rebellion against reminiscence

results in his loss of the memory of his homeland and his childhood. Due to mental separation, as an adult, he faces the difficult task of connecting the threads of past and present. Longing and estrangement invites him to restore the faded memories. Paradoxically, these growing tensions between parents and children give birth to new perspectives about native land and the Cuban-American community. Restorative nostalgia welcomes Pérez Firmat to reinstate his idea of home and his family life in Havana, Cuba.

As an adult, he remarks: “I grope for names and incidents; I dig for images to feed my nostalgia. [...] I have a whole childhood inside my head, yet I can’t seem to get much of it out” (18). To patch this gap of memory he does not visit Cuba physically as many 1.5 generation immigrants do, but rather prefers a mental restoration of the place. Once he puts effort into remembrance, he provides a detailed description of his home in Cuba that he recalls as a “masonry structure with a modernist Art Deco look.” Then he takes the reader inside describing with great detail the corridors, dining rooms, pantry, terrace, greenery, patio, adornments even silverware, as well as the servants and cooks, and even songs and TV shows that were played on a particular day. The description of family routines at the mansion, and of the building and grounds themselves, extends for a number of pages and culminates with Pérez Firmat admitting, “I’m surprised by how much I can recollect of our life on Cuba, once I put my mind into it. Perhaps, unlike my brother Pepe, I don’t need to travel to Havana to visit the house” (24). As Pérez Firmat “digs for images to feed his nostalgia,” he restores the past without any signs of aging, without decadence, nurturing the unblemished memories of the child within himself. Instead of returning physically to Havana, his trip is an imaginary and restorative exercise.

Subsequently, the dilemma for the restorative nostalgic is his expectation, which implies that he looks to go back to a place, but without that place showing any effects of time. The past

remains young, unspoiled, and untouched by time. Restorative nostalgia, rebuilds and restores the original stasis, and exemplifies that an individual fears homecoming in the same way. In fact, Pérez Firmat refuses to come back physically, and prefers to maintain the unchanged image of his life in Havana. Boym draws on such affection in the following way: “[h]omecoming—return to the imagined community—is a way of patching up the gap of alienation, turning intimate longing into belonging” (15). On one hand, it is longing for a home that no longer exists. Yet, this captivating exercise asserts to belonging: the recall of home fills the gap created by loss and estrangement in Miami. On the other hand, it proves that nostalgics fear homecoming with the same devotion.

Unlike Pérez Firmat, Junior, his older brother Pepe is more sympathetic towards the revolution. He traveled to Cuba on three different occasions. Pepe tends to confront him with current endeavors: “Pepe gave my parents copies of the photographs that he had taken of the house and *almacén*. Lovely heartbreaking photographs that I refused to look at. [...] I told him that I wanted to keep intact my memories” (130-131). Clearly, Pérez Firmat abstains from looking at the current images of their house and *almacén* as he fears the change over time would spoil the images captivated in his memory. This arcane nostalgia is a sign of resistance, an unwelcome desire to visit Cuba. Pérez-Torres remarks that “return to the homeland... became an act of otherness, an act of betrayal” (“Ethnicity, Ethics” 46). This new perspective is created by a diasporic tension between what Pérez Firmat preserves in his memory without any signs of aging and an anxiety of what could be forgotten. For this reason, he withdraws the idea of physical homecoming. The restoration of *home* and homeland takes place not physically but mentally. This implies a potential problem arising from restorative nostalgia, as a drive toward something that no longer exists.

Pérez Firmat, on a different occasion, dictates “[w]edged between the first and second generation, the one-and-a-halfer shares nostalgia of his parents and forgetfulness of his children.

For me, homecoming would feel like a departure” (xx). Consequently, homecoming is a longing for a homeland that no longer exists. For Pérez Firmat it equates to a visit for a first time, or to a second exile. As a “one-and-a-halfer” he does not belong either to Cuba or to the U.S. but rather he embodies both. Paradoxically, he would encounter a nation, he never visited. Approaching this leap, one has to respect the perspective from which the author writes the text. In the first regard, *Next Year in Cuba* is saturated with an apparent presence of longing and belonging governed by nostalgia. However, its author opines that his memoir is “not written from nostalgia,” but is a response to an exile’s “forgetfulness” or what is too painful to be remembered and what cannot be forgotten. Therefore, Pérez Firmat is a vessel, whose task is not only to record family history, but also to build a link between generations. Yet, there are parallels between father and son and their respective levels of homesickness.

While Pérez Firmat Senior mourns for next year in Cuba, his son longs for the old Cuba. The prominent scholar Ricardo Ortiz observes “Cubans exiled since 1959, mourn yesterday’s Cuba, la Cuba de ayer, which has become an increasingly abstract concept” (74). Over the course of nearly four decades the gap between Cuba and Miami grows substantially, next year in Cuba turns from a distant, fictional idea, into the Cuba of yesterday. Both are embodiments of nostalgia, viewed as an imaginary community by those émigrés who left Cuba in the early waves, but identify themselves with the Cuba they left behind decades ago. Although the physical homecoming remains unbridgeable for Pérez Firmat Senior and his son, nostalgia in exile remains a hybrid creation, an enabling force and a personal tragedy. Ironically, the title of the memoir implies the thought of return to homeland but in fact mourns the old Cuba of the author’s childhood and his father’s adulthood. While Pérez Firmat senior is unable to outgrow the past within himself, he remains an unchanged Cuban forever. Nonetheless, his son, the 1.5 generation immigrant, manages

to turn longing in into an enabling fiction to emphasize Boym's view on the binary nostalgia-enabling force (*The Future* 256).

Pérez Firmat symbolizes a linkage between generations. He portrays varying perceptions and relationships regarding homeland: "if for my father Cuba is a burdensome fact, and for my children an enduring fiction, for one-and-a-halfers like me, the country of my birth is a blend of both fact and fiction. [...] My memories merge with other's dreams" (xx). This passage emphasizes the relation with Cuba and memory of Cuba in regards to three different generations of the Cuban diaspora. The "burdensome fact" alludes to Pérez Firmat, Senior's inability to make adjustments and shake his fixation with the past, to his loss of wealth and status as an outcome of historical displacement and political upheavals that give him hope for return. In fact, he never has left the island as he remains an unassimilated Cuban who never will outgrow the exile within himself.

Pérez Firmat, the 1.5 generation immigrant, is more flexible to encompass change. In his mind Cuba turns into a mixture of fact and fiction. The homeland is what he endured, remembered and witnessed while growing up among Miami exiles and embracing both the Cuban and American culture. Pérez Firmat becomes a vessel standing between the first generation and the younger generation. He engages in a discourse on nostalgia, critically evaluating longing in exile. Although, Pérez Firmat never goes back to the island of his youth, he fills the void of memory through the exchange between real and fictional and moves forward in his life. Unexpectedly, in this manner, he is capable of patching the gap of memory through reflection while never setting a foot in his homeland. Davis states "nostalgia like long-term-memory, like reminisce, like daydreaming, is deeply implicated in the sense who we are, what we are about, and whiter we go" (31). Accordingly, Pérez Firmat's home, Cuba is both a blend of fact and fiction of what he has heard,

learned, and recaptured in his memory. Cuba being the place where he was born and Miami becoming his adopted home where he comes of age, comprise two places that create junctions of him becoming a 1.5 generation Cuban-American, which he achieved through a sentimental recollection and rational evaluation of different stages of his life.

In regard to the second generation, in particular, Pérez Firmat refers to his children, Miriam and David. For them Cuba becomes an imaginary tale. The Cuban born fathers label them as ABC's (American-Born Cubans). The child of an exile is no longer an exile, but an American, who carries the last name of their forefathers. They are defined by their destination, not by the distance from the land of their fathers and its history. Having been raised mainly outside of Miami, they speak English more fluently than Spanish and only on a rare occasions they resort to their Cuban roots, however not in Spanish but in English. Overall, for the ABC's, Cuba becomes a fading metaphor. Conversely, a visit to Cuban Miami of the 1960s would reawake their Cuban roots.

2.2 Yearning for the Island(s)

Cuban exiles came to the United States in vast numbers as a result of The Cuban Revolution and various political upheavals dating back to the mid-19th century (Jordan 1993; Masud-Piloto 1996). The failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 is a decisive event. The exiled Cuban community already residing in Miami realizes thereafter that Cuba will not soon be liberated and that their stay in the U.S. will be extended. In addition, the failed operation of 1961 encouraged more Cubans to flee their homeland. In 1961, 135,000 Cubans came to Miami. By the mid-60s there were 210,000 Cubans in Miami, and by the 1980s that number reached two-thirds of a million (*Next Year* 58). Dade County, which contains Miami, lists the population of Cubans as 564,000 by 1990, which accounts for 53 percent of the total U.S Cuban population at that time (*Demographic Profile*,

14). Miami embraces a vast population of 700,000 Cubans who have arrived since 1959 (*From Welcomed to Exiles* 1996). Consequently, the Cuban ethnic enclave has been gradually built due to persistent flow of information and people from Cuba towards mainly Miami, Florida and elsewhere in the United States.

Pérez Firmat has lived through a massive displacement of Cuban exile to chronicle not only the historical event in which he is tangled, but also the mnemonic observance that the displaced must endure and negotiate as the city space of Miami is gradually built on the flow of information and people, and is converted into Little Havana. For this reason, the author as 1.5 generation immigrant grasps that “reflexive nostalgia remains an intermediary between collective and individual memory” (Boym 54). For Boym, reflexive nostalgia is a venture of heightened awareness of what one remembers about homeland and carries to the mainland. Although for Pérez Firmat homeland is a blend of both real and fictional, Cuba will forever remain his “patria” (motherland). The author in question comes of age in Miami. The coastal city becomes also his new country, or what he calls “páís” (210). For this reason, the author offers a reading on how the Cuban émigrés from the mediocre city spaces of Miami, forge a Cuban capital shaped by their collective remembrances of homeland in the exile and their venture into the American Dream. Over four decades the city itself turns into a site of memory of real exiles. Their collective memory reflected in places and objects turns Miamian landmarks into a crossroad of memory and culture.

Globalization becomes a supplementary force behind the development of the urban areas in Miami into becoming a Little Havana. In her investigation of nostalgia, Boym states that:

[G]lobalization encouraged stronger local attachments. [It produced] an affective yearning for community with collective memory, a longing for continuity in a

fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. (*The Future* xiv)

The quotation above exemplifies that globalization impacts borders and national-cultural distinctions. The dislocation to a new unfamiliar environment implies change in time and space and may result in the loss of the individual's cultural identity, nationality and ethnicity. At the same time, in Cuban diaspora it causes stronger local attachments and promotes a sentimental desire for a community with a collective memory. Since Cuban émigrés come and settle as a homogenous group, their shared consensus of the lost home in exile reemerges in diaspora, in their host nation. Suman Gupta in her extraordinary work, *Globalization and Literature*, indicates that the intersections within the ken of literature and globalization have to be conceptualized with respect to pressing issues (81). In regard to the Cuban exodus, longing as a byproduct of dislocation, responds to collective and individual needs thus, creating dreams of escape, or rather dreams of substitution. New revolutions and political turmoil spark epidemics of nostalgia that are reflected in political, national, and cultural projections of longing. As discussed in the previous section, the Cuban Revolution (1959), failed Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961), and Castro's enduring regime cultivate longing that gives shape to Little Havana post 1959. Over the course of four decades, this exile community is built on the Cuban businesses of food, coffee and music and naturally on a lingering dream of *regreso* to Old Havana.

Therefore, the emerging urban areas are based on both the memory of homeland and the reality of the new host country. In reconstructing its story Pérez Firmat binds an individual memory and a collective one into a literary discourse. On one hand, the dislocation of Cuban masses produces cultural, national and individual loss. But on the other hand, it creates dreams of escape and thoughts of rebellion against the society of residents. The dream of *regreso*, discussed on the

individual level in the previous section, is naturally one of them. On the collective level, the Cuban exilic community lacks a tangible home. In order to endure the deferred return, the Cuban population recreate their version of Old Havana in the vicinities of Miami.

According to Rubio, “[A]pproximation to a nostalgia for Cuba and Cuban ways, is inherently connected to territorial Cuba, but can interpreted to be symbolic of a transnational Cuba” (13). The connection of nostalgia to Cuba is fundamentally related to territorial Cuba since it offers a mixture of patriotic, historical and geographical longing rooted in the homeland. Boym points out that events such as (Cuban) Revolutions and political upheavals (Bay of Pigs invasion) are oftentimes followed by an epidemic of nostalgia that are accompanied by political and cultural manifestations of longing (*The Future* xvi). In a sense, the revolution and political events give shape to Little Havana.

The emerging city spaces of Little Havana offer an alternative home as a way to map a cross-cultural encounter within the new physical space of Miami. This sentimental community is identified with one nation, one soil, and especially with the series of historical events that unfolded in Cuba. These emotions transcend homeland and resurface in the host nation, anchoring their existence in the Miamian urban setting. Consequently, exiled Cubans forge a new urban identity in Miami. This singularity appeals to common memory and past, but not to the soil, because they rebuilt Cuban city structures that are after all just man made places distanced from their homeland. Pérez Firmat offers a reading on the developing civic spaces of Miami, as an embodiment of nostalgic material describing how the community embraces transcendent geography and its history within the coastal city.

Boym, challenging the city spaces, uses the spatial metaphor of porosity to validate how time and history in the city are embedded in the urban space. Porosity from geology is a gap

measured in material. This void over time might collect debris. The city structures in a similar manner accumulate layers of time and history. Porosity is predominantly evident in cities in transition. It turns an entire urban area into a theatrical exhibit of space over time unveiling cultural, social, political and historical material embodied within its landmarks and monuments. According to Boym, “[t]he city, then is an ideal crossroad between longing and estrangement, memory and freedom, nostalgia and modernity” (76). In this manner, Little Havana over the course of decades turns into a collage of places, objects, and memories of exile granted by freedom, which Cuba lacked. Porosity in space is also used to refer to the gaps between identity and resemblance that the exile feels and experiences. Pérez Firmat’s reflective nostalgia develops the ability to see himself and Miami from a distant standpoint. For this reason, he is driven to evaluate how the histories and practices arise from the community members around him as a separate part of a whole.

Furthermore, Boym draws on metaphors of architecture to describe the essence of a reflective nostalgic, one, who is open to contradictions and influences. This line of reasoning is evident when Pérez Firmat offers a figurative account of the coastal city, “Miami is a city of mirrors and mirages. [...] Barely touching the earth, the city floats of images, a swelter illusions” (50). This quotation exemplifies that Cuban exiles are surrounded by reflection, and at times are unable to distinguish the genuine representation from an illusion. They conceal estrangement, but at the same time, Cuban exiles can live by substitution and imagination. If they couldn’t find it in Havana, they would make it in Miami, paraphrasing Pérez Firmat (54). The configuration of monuments and city landmarks in shaping the cities offers an interaction between the real and the imagined, proposing a replacement home.

In this way, nostalgia arises due to new understanding of space and time and proves to be a modern condition. The hazard of this mood is that, it tends to confuse the actual homeland with the established temporary home in the heart of Miami. As a consequence, the reconstruction process of Cuban Havana in Miami constitutes a transitional version of old Havana, an extension of the original. This idea is more transparent, as Pérez Firmat observes on a collective level:

Miami Cubans have never thought it crazy to recreate Havana at the age of a swamp. We thought nothing of opening a store in the United States and putting up the sign “The same one from Cuba” or “Here since 1935.” We take it as a matter of course that distance is not destiny, that our ways of life transcend geography.
(*Next Year* 54)

The City of Miami offers a civic alternative, a geographical extension of Old Havana – reproduced in the image of fatherland. This sentimental imagined community is identified with the nation and its biography, but the soil is no longer the same. Within the metropolitan area of Miami the émigrés construct a vital body, an urban identity. It appeals to common memory and past, as the slogan reads “Here since 1935” or “The same one from Cuba.” In this sense, the transcendent geography implies that Havana is a detachable body, defined by its distance, not by its destiny. As a consequence, the reconstruction of businesses and establishments in Miami rooted in Havana, offer spatial embodiments of longing for analysis.

Eighth Street before the Cuban exodus began, was a calm street between Coral Gables and downtown Miami. But once the Cuban settlement set in in the 1960s, the neighborhood was turned into a vivid Cuban exilic community. The rapid growth of Cuban demographics altered the former image of the city. The development of Cuban infrastructure diminished the former porosity of the

city. But at the same time, the progression of the area added new layers of porosity, a cultural and social presence that is not so easily erasable.

Pérez Firmat distinguishes between two substantial stages of Miami, the 1960s and the 1970s – the golden age of Miami (the predominantly Cuban Miami) and the multicultural Hispanic Miami post 1980s. Pérez Firmat summarizes the first period in the following way:

The 1960's and 1970's Calle Ocho, or Eight Street, was a busy, bustling one-way thoroughfare lined with restaurants, supermarkets, gas stations, bakeries, florists, fruit stands, barbershops, car dealerships, furniture showrooms, [...] Anything one needed could be found on the Calle Ocho, which was located in the heart of Little Havana. As sociologists puts it, the community that sprang up around this street was institutionally complete. An individual who lived there could be delivered by a Cuban obstetrician, buried by Cuban undertaker, and in between birth and death lead perfectly satisfactory life without needing extramural contacts. Little Havana was a golden cage, an artificial paradise. (54-55)

The self-sufficient neighborhood of the 1970s shelters about a quarter-million of exiled Cubans and accounts for the second largest Cuban capital in the world after Havana, Cuba. As the population grows, they take possession of the city, enhancing their status. During the 1960s and 1970s Calle Ocho undergoes substantial transformation and develops into an epicenter of the Cuban exile community forming an ethnic archipelago, a self-sufficient microcosm of Havana Cuba. Globalization becomes a transcendent force that affects a wide range of Cuban life. Cultural, national, and individual loss generates dreams of escape or, more precisely, dreams of substitution. A physical representation of Havana, Cuba, is recreated through a collective notion of memory of

home – a byproduct of dislocation and a coproduct of longing. The dream of return is deferred due to political upheavals, and relives within the Cuban-Miamian Oasis.

The Cuban enclave fosters their lost paradise, crafting a tangible domicile – a place that offers comfort in the foreign soil. Many of these established businesses have roots in Cuba. At the time, they resurface in the foreign soil and they represent cultural, social, and political landmarks. Among the most famous recreation of Havana in Miami, is *Colegio Belén* – a prestigious private school that reappears at the end of Eighth Street. Other significant remakes included the Rivero Funeral Parol, the Centro Vasco, the Cassablanca restaurant, and the Radio Progreso (Radio Station) (55). In turn, Miami mirrors the original; it redefines the new city walls by its distance, rather than by destiny. At the same rate, the City of Miami gradually transforms itself into a peculiar self-sufficient area.

While Havana achieves transcended properties and finds its topographical reproductions in Miami, Havana loses its former vigor after the triumph of The Cuban Revolution. The deterioration in Havana begins with the replacement of the city's street names and buildings: "Carlos III became Salvador Allende Avenue, the Havana Hilton became the Habana Libre; the Casino Deportivo was renamed Sierra Maestra" (57). Moreover, the author regards the famous song by a Cuban peasant *gujira*, as a means of portraying the island's loss of its charm and in turn, its becoming an empty place. The famous boardwalk, *Malecón* is deserted. No one sings *son* as if the musical soul had left the island. In fact, where the Cuban history *discontinues*, it picks up in Miami, Florida, creating an extension of culture and history. Nurtured by the American Dream and the desire of return, Miami becomes a new transitional Cuba.

Accordingly, the Eighth Street neighborhood acquires a new urban image. The Hispanicized name, Calle Ocho, imprints its manifestation on the cultural milieu. Soon streets,

buildings, and places acquire Cuban distinctiveness. For example, Southwest becomes *sagüesera*, northwest –*norgüesera*, the beach - *la playa*, Dade County is called *el cayo*, and Maximo Gomez Park becomes *el parque de dominio* (Domino Park). Over decades, the Eighth Street supplements its own porosity, and civic areas establish cultural, political and social layers of space and meaning. The city, therefore, exhibits a site of power within its space, offering an urban experience of dominance. Consequently, Little Havana, “[t]he city, then is an ideal crossroad between longing and estrangement, memory and freedom, nostalgia and modernity” (Boym 76). Those who see themselves as exiled, make Little Havana their new Garden of Eden. At the same time, they face a theatrical display of estrangement and nostalgia, freedom, and modernity. Located between the Eighth Street and the Fifteenth Street, Domino Park⁴, is an example supporting Boym’s claim.

From early on, the park serves as a meeting point of the elderly who gather to sustain the Cuban male tradition of the domino game, and especially to discuss politics. The meeting point acquires social, cultural and political value. Over time, Domino Park accumulates meaning, labeled with memorial plaques and patriotic names. By the 1990s, it grows into a historical landmark to which only the Domino members can gain access (*Next Year* 93). As a consequence, Domino Park also becomes a quintessential space of nostalgia that is symbolic of early Little Havana. It is a place where men continue the praxis of Cuban traditions. In this way, the regular gatherings in this urban space account for solidarity and memory of Cuba before and after the Revolution. The old timers are sustained and entertained by thoughts of return, estrangement, freedom and nostalgia for homeland. This is simply to say, that the Cuban exiles are stranded in a new environment, an environment that causes their mourning for displacement. This yearning is also directed towards the Eighth Street, a place founded on imagination, common memory, and reflection with the new state and affection for the memories of the old, now distanced island.

Numerous crossroads and buildings emulate homeland, thus creating empathetic emotional attachment. In this fashion, nostalgia is fostered by a new comprehension of space and time, born on the edge of modernity. The danger of this mood tends to confuse the actual homeland with the established home in the heart of Miami. Therefore, the remake of old Havana in the City of Miami makes a strong ethical promise: it might be interpreted as a substitution for homeland. On a different occasion, Pérez Firmat accounts towards this matter:

Little Havana was much more than a substitute city. Our neighborhoods didn't just emulate Havana, they completed it. Engendered by the coupling of memory and imagination, Little Havana was not only a copy but an alternative. Things that Havana lacked –food and freedom– Miami had in abundance. (*Next Year* 56)

Most importantly, Little Havana is constructed on the virtue of the American Dream that grants what Cuba could not give, all kinds of freedoms granted by The U.S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights. In other words, Little Havana is assembled on both the adoption of the American Dream and the collective memories of the exiled. The Cuban archipelago is founded on a constant flow of information, goods, services, and people who share a collective consensus of memory of homeland, mainly patriotic, historical, and geographical longing. The new city of the 1960s and 1970s encompasses both Havana, Cuba and Little Havana, forming an extension of memory, geography and history.

Globalization, by its virtue, is a transcendent force that affects a wide range of social and public life. Ironically, it sometimes also helps to create a new form of belonging. For example, a tangible home is born through the experience of longing and displacement and through the dream of escape from political upheavals and thoughts of rebellion against time and space. The Eighth Street district of Miami, once a refuge for Cuban exiles who recreated the flavors, customs, and

sounds of their lost homeland, evolves into an iconic Cuban self-built haven. The improved copy of the original, although reduced to the geographical space of Miami, equates to an acceptable alternative. In Pérez Firmat's words, "Havana became the greater Havana. [...] In some way Miami was closer to the heart of Havana than Havana itself (58). Therefore, the little Cuba, indeed, makes a moral promise, and those who adopt it as their new Garden of Eden, are vulnerable to the seductive mechanism of nostalgia. The self-proclaimed oasis of Cubanity during the 1960s and 1970s accounts for the golden age of Havana.

During the 1980s, largely due to modernization, the landmarks of Little Havana experienced dynamic changes. Its Cuban city spaces rose and fell. Since globalization is unstoppable and nostalgia accounts for its byproduct, longing always prevails. A contrast of such nature is strongly visible during the 1990s. In this timeframe Pérez Firmat visits the Eighth Street area and encounters what Boym refers to as changes in porosity, finding a crossroad of nostalgia and modernity. To quote the author, "The monument to the Bay of Pigs veterans shares a block with McDonald's, and my favorite Pekín restaurant has mutated into a Pizza Hut" (61). As the years pass, the city progresses, and the corporate powers of fast food chains impose their presence that could be perceived as corrupting to Cuban culture and tradition. In this case, a chain of American pizzerias symbolizes the unwanted change widespread across the borders of culture and tradition. Similarly, McDonalds overshadow the cherished monument to the Bay of Pigs veterans. As a result, globalization reshapes the public space, diminishing former porosity, and reshaping the Cuban civic sites.

Thereupon, over time urban structures turn into a crossroad of nostalgia and modernity. Rapid modernization destroys the accumulated values in the urban sites, yet nostalgia has the potential to recover that feeling. According to Boym, "modernity is contradictory, critical,

ambivalent and reflective on the nature of time; it combines fascination for the present with longing for another time” (*The Future* 22). Pérez Firmat, critically evaluating the progression of the city, strives not so much to regain the former period in the present, but simply to reveal its fragility. His conversation with the past is filled with irony, sarcasm, humor and accounts for Boym’s reflexive nostalgia that dwells on the ambivalences of longing and belonging and emphasizes the link between individual and cultural memory (50). This idea of reflexive nostalgia and its linkage towards cultural memory is more transparent when the Cuban author assesses how the Eighth Street area becomes a tourist destination:

With its boarded-up storefronts and faded signs Calle Ocho has become little more than a promotional gimmick for European tourists, who are invariably disappointed with what they find. You see them wandering up and down the streets, [...] looking for something to photograph. Half of the places on their tourist guide don’t exist anymore. Casablanca is boarded up and La Lechonera is falling apart. (*Next Year* 60-61)

The shifting image of Little Havana, clearly displays signs of aging. The formerly established places during Little Havana’s golden age are decaying. One can assume that many of them went bankrupt or ceased to exist once Cubans started moving out to the suburbs and Little Havana became a “Cuban ghost town” (61). Nostalgia, as a metaphor of globalization, validates a sentimental and bitter approach toward the previous era. First, the Cuban landmarks emerge, but are destined to diminish, yet longing prevails and achieves magnified dimensions. At the same rate, the above passage accounts for Little Havana as a semi-exotic tourist destination while half of the places on the tourist map do not exist or are decaying. Yet they remain a magnet to travelers.

For visitors Calle Ocho seems to reside in a time warp as if it existed in another reality. It attracts visitors from all over the world, who wish to experience the Cuban nostalgia and culture that in fact has become a Miamian extension of Cuban-American culture. Interestingly, the Cuban culture, once self-centered and local, transforms into global, connected by the flux of visitors who swarm to experience the Cuban nostalgia as if it were a commercialized entity. To a certain extent, nostalgia develops into a marketable commodity that is aimed at tourist consumption and entertainment. After all, the prevalent Cuban landscapes of Calle Ocho add peculiar flavor to the City of Miami. By its virtue, Little Havana transforms into a promotional feat for tourism, but during the 1990s is no longer the same robust community it was in the 1970s and 1980s.

As Pérez Firmat points out, “but these days [Little Havana] is a Cuban ghost town. Despite the best efforts of the local Chamber of Commerce, about the only time Calle Ocho comes alive is for the annual carnival, a multicultural extravaganza for tourist consumption” (61). The yearly festival accounts for two substantial points: for the establishment of a multicultural Hispanic presence that dates back to the 1980s, and for the evolution of Cubans from exile to a Latino community. After the triumph of the Sandinistas⁵ in 1979, the Nicaraguans become the second largest group. Among the remaining significant concentration in Miami are Dominicans and Colombians (Pérez Firmat 59). This interplay of Hispanic masses illustrates the flow of new city dwellers into the civic space of the Eighth Street and by extension to Miami. As a consequence, the neighborhoods of the Eighth Street area embrace the newcomers, while distant parts of Miami undergo further transitions. In this way, some Cuban residents of Calle Ocho relocate from Dade County to the suburbs of Kendall and Hialeah while “more recent arrivals from Cuba moved in. Some were the so-called *marielitos*” (*Next Year* 59: without my emphasis).

On a complementary note, Pérez Firmat does not touch upon the *Marielitos* wave. It is not the intention to sidetrack from the memoir. Nevertheless, the *Marielitos* wave accounts for the quintessential space of Cuban nostalgia, mutating into a social disease that contaminates Miami society with criminals, the insane, and other undesirable people, who spread equally throughout the United States. In fact, it is essential to consider how Cuban nostalgia progresses into a disease of globalization. Pérez Firmat did not arrive to the U.S. during the described wave. Thereupon, he simply does not identify himself with the precarious portrayal of the 1980 Boatlift émigrés that parted from the Cuban port Mariel. A massive public gathering that started in Plaza Central, Cuba lead Fidel Castro to allowing an “exodus of 125,262 Cubans to the United States, including ill and infirm and hardened *criminals*” (Leonard 254: with my emphasis).

Furthermore, María Cristina García, in her work *Havana USA* (1996), dedicates the second chapter to an investigation of the origins and causes of the Mariel Boatlift. García traces the criminal records in both Havana and Miami and concludes that the true percentage of criminals in the Mariel Boatlift is unknown. However, in Castro’s uptake anyone who stands against revolutionary beliefs is considered a criminal. This group by Castro’s definition included homosexuals, lesbians, alcoholics, drug junkies, and practitioners of splinter religions such as The Jehovah’s Witnesses (64).

What made the case thought-provoking, was the necessity of a forced confession – a declaration of criminal status. Consequently, many civilians went to police stations and admitted to prostitution or delinquent activity and accepted the criminal label in favor of leaving Cuba for the United States. García adds, at the first glance, “U.S. government officials and media editorials welcomed the Cubans as political refugees” fostering a positive image of *Marielitos* (321). This optimistic portrayal was short-lived. In the age of media and communication, the U.S. Government

paired with media shifting their perception to subsequently link the *Marielitos* with criminality. Evidence of this change can be found in mass media. According to García, “Few journalists ever mentioned the fact that up to 80 percent of the Mariel Cubans had no criminal history... Instead, they focused on the disturbing details of Castro’s plan to rid the island of undesirables” (65).

The Miami Herald newspaper, for example, quickly focused on the criminal activity, surging (“running”?) a series of articles over the summer and fall “of 1980” blaming the *Marielitos* for a local youth crime wave, gang violence, and other random acts of street violence” (quoted in Martinez et al. 38). Martinez in his article “Scarface Legacy” (2001), declares that the Cuban and the U.S. officials contributed to this labeling while the analyzed data proves that “*investigated and closed cases of homicides* are in lesser numbers among Cuban *Marielitos* than Haitian Latinos or non-Latino Whites” (40: with my emphasis). This social phenomenon quickly paves a way to mass media production, shifting the image of Cuban nostalgia from intoxicating to toxifying.

This turn of events gives birth to a mass media creation that relates Cuban presence with drug trafficking and criminality. For instance, *Scarface* (1983) and the extensive five season *Miami Vice* TV series (1984-1989) both exemplify and feed largely on cultural productivity, stereotyping and sparked an immense interest of the general public. Although Martinez’s data analysis provides purifying news for Cubans from the Mariel Boatlift, the Miami Vice series was based on a real police corruption ring and drug trafficking, involving Colombians and Cubans.

Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the fact, that in the year of the Mariel Boatlift, Miami saw 571 murders, where in previous years their average was about one hundred. By the end of 1981, the numbers climbed to 621. The Summer of 1981 was named by *The Miami News Times* “Miami Deadliest Summer,” for a particular reason: “Miami’s ignominious distinction as the nation’s murder capital, largely as a result of shootouts among cocaine cowboy and violent crime

committed by Marielitos” (“Miami Deadliest Summer” n.p). Arguably, Cuban nostalgia, beginning with the 1980, Mariel Boatlift is no more an intoxicating force, but rather a sobering and devastating social phenomena. Since the newcomers integrated into the Miamian landscapes as well as into American mainstream society, their turbulent relationship accounts for a social disorder. Their drug involvement and criminality becomes an inspiration that is further spread with haste by mass media production and national news broadcasting. By all means, this meeting point of globalization, mass media and nostalgia is mostly disturbing. It brings forth even a greater desire to go back to the Miami of the 1970s and 1980s. Keeping this intersection in mind, let us return to Pérez Firmat’s portrayal of Little Havana during the 1980s, where longing for Cuban Miami is fading due to the growing number of different Hispanic groups relocating there.

The increasing Hispanic diversity diminishes the established monolithic Cuban town in the 1980s. The allocation of Nicaraguans and Dominicans and others, in fact, alters Miami in a positive way, adding Latino essence to Little Havana and making it a culturally diverse place (*Next Year* 58). Therefore, Pérez Firmat remarks that the Calle Ocho festival cultivates the Latino existence in Miami. Despite its self-promotion as a cultural venue, it turns into a commercial carnival targeted at tourist consumption. Significantly, the festival is more than just a marketable event for this occurrence. It denotes a communal milestone that exhibits the shifting phenomenon of Cuban exile.

Over the course of two decades, the Cuban enclave, is gradually migrating from the Eighth Street district towards the suburbs. Meanwhile the old-timers are perishing and new generations are born. Therefore, the Cuban exile body shifts increasingly from exile into ethnic. In the same vein, Pérez Firmat points out: “We’re making the difficult transition from exile to ethnic. As an exile, I’m not sure I like it. Because I already lost Havana once, I don’t want to lose my city again”

(59). Within this cultural phenomenon Cubans become a part of larger Hispanic body, labeled under the umbrella term as Latino. Pérez Firmat does not consider himself Latino but rather: “cubano, cubishe, cubanzo, criollo” (59). As a 1.5 generation immigrant he develops an emotional bonding within the Cuban oasis. Living and growing up in Miami as an exile gives him identity. The urban identity he acquires in Little Havana accounts for his new home. For this reason, the disfiguration of public space creates a tension. At the same time, it generates a fear of losing anew the Cuban ethnic archipelago. The loss of the Cuban public space of streets, squares, parks, and cafes is gradually occurring. Once again, the longing is reborn. But this time, nostalgia is the byproduct of a double estrangement from Havana, Cuba and Little Havana, Miami. Globalization manifests itself in a wide range of social and cultural topics. The connection of ethnic groups and identities becomes a part of the larger Hispanic body, which pertains to political or sociological phenomena.

According to Archer, “Calle Ocho has evolved from its inception in 1978 as a venue for introducing non-Hispanic Miamians to their Cuban neighbors, to the city’s showcase celebration of its diverse Latino cultures” (*Cultures of Globalization* 82). The exiled Cubans lived for nearly two decades within their self-made and self-sufficient little haven, operating within the boundaries of their own culture, sustained by a monolithic, Cuban image. At the same time, they coexisted only with the Anglophone majority. The hegemonic image of Cuban Miami used to exist in disconnection with the remaining Hispanics. But cultural tensions arose once other Hispanics came to share the same physical space.

Due to growing pressures among different Miamian ethnic groups, Willy Bermello, a member of the Cuban-American Kiwanis, or Little Havana group, comes up with a concept similar to a block party. From this concept the Calle Ocho carnival originates in 1977 (*Calle Ocho Festival*

n.p). The Eighth Street festival emerges also as an emblematic event, as the city's cultural heritage celebration of Latinos that cherishes their diversity and mutual coexistence. It is a widely known fact that during the annual celebration the streets are opened only to pedestrians. Over 24 city blocks, food and drinks stretch along with 30 different stages of live music. Arguably, the change in cultural milieu is followed by "[a] shift in faces, food, souvenirs and sound – reflecting Miami's evolving community" (*Cultures of Globalization* 82). The festivity mirrors the essence of the Hispanic cultures while it allows for dynamic promotion of this peculiar community as a whole indulging their culinary products and ethnic music.

On a holistic level, the exposition of goods and music of the annual festival invites spectators to experience the flavors and sounds of the diverse Latino culture. Both the Anglophone and Latino cultures participate in the event. The monetary exchange allows for the enjoyment of goods, music, and cultural interactions with merchants. In this manner, the reconfiguration of cultures agrees to maintain a balance between ethnic groups. At the same time, the festivities showcase the evolving Latino community in the heart of Miami. Music and foods are an inseparable part of a culture, and they evolve along with the community.

In the following culinary experience, Pérez Firmat encounters the progressive nature of the Cuban community. While dining with a fellow Cuban writer in restaurant at Calle Ocho, he reads the menu that seemingly has not changed much over the past decade. To the contrary, the Cuban sandwich does not taste the same, to Pérez Firmat's observation "Roberto said because the Cuban sandwich had become the Latino Sandwich" (60). This allusion depicts how the flavor of Little Havana still exists in Miami, yet it is being reduced to a less vibrant community that is quickly shifting from exilic to ethnic into Latino, as a Cuban sandwich loses its original taste. Additionally, Pérez Firmat provides a music reference that illustrates a similar phenomenon,

[n]ow on a given Friday night you can choose from the Colombian discotheque that plays *cumbia*, Dominican one that plays *merengue*, and the Cuban one that plays *sol* and *guaracha*. But I must confess that I miss the old Miami of the sixties and seventies, which wasn't as Hispanic as it is now. (59)

Although Little Havana becomes a diverse and perhaps more stimulating place for tourist consumption or ethnic entertainment, the new establishments alter the former porosity of the primarily Cuban image of the city. Due to the powers of globalization and the influx of other Hispanic groups, the city's progress is fast-tracked. The rapid transition obstructs the former establishment of Cuban landmarks and monuments as well as cultural traditions. The shifting phenomenon of exile equally affects the Cuban-Miamian urban identity. Correspondingly, it disrupts the pre-established Cuban simulacra of Little Havana forging a new level of longing. From the new understanding of time and space emerges longing for the Little Havana of the 1960s and 1970s.

An ethnic archipelago once built on Cuban food, coffee and music, and on the impossibility of return, evolves into a multicultural Hispanic metropolitan area. Globalization is perceived through the recess and influx of information, services, goods, and especially people. The intense influx of other Hispanic immigrants' booms in the late 1970s gradually overshadows Cuban Miami. It progressively disconnects the Cuban from their local population, making the city multicultural and global, connected through a flow of the above entities. The Calle Ocho festival and Little Havana itself serve as a venue to promote the multiethnic Latino culture. In sum, the cultural representations of globalization are exposed through the evolving nature of the Latino community with respect to worldwide attention and recognition that it receives through the mass media during the annual celebrations. This exposition makes the City of Miami multicultural and

global. City spaces rise and fall. Cuban traditions reemerge and merge. Yet nostalgia always prevails.

In short, nostalgia for the Little Havana of the 1960s and 1970s is a product of double estrangement for the 1.5 generation represented by Pérez Firmat and for the exiled Cubans alike. Little Havana offered a temporary replacement home, an extension of history, geography, and culture. A tangible domicile, built on yearning and the impossibility of return. Indeed Little Havana offered a strong moral promise and those who are not prone to embracing change were shown to be also irresistible to homesickness. Consequently, once Pérez Firmat parts from Miami in favor of pursuing graduate school, a substantial longing for Miami awakens and becomes his burden. Yet one question remains to be answered: how does the Cuban-American writer overcome the redundant and seductive mechanics of nostalgia? The next section approaches this dilemma.

2.3. Language of Nostalgia - From Venom to Cure

The previous section described the 1960s and 1970s as the Golden Age of Little Havana through the adoption of cultural embodiments of longing such as city landmarks, monuments, traditions, and urban identity. This is the historical period during which Pérez Firmat comes of age in Miami. While growing up, he constantly navigates throughout his life with a Cuban compass, embracing both his biography that unfolded in Cuba and the one he forged in the United States. The first section of this chapter investigates the role of longing in the exile as a catalyst that encourages Pérez Firmat to rebuild his imaginary homeland. Additionally, longing turns into an enabling force that is a powerful weapon in his battle of nostalgia. For this reason, the 1.5 generation immigrant is more flexible to embrace change. He is even capable of turning imaginary longing for Cuba into belonging.

In other words, the Miamian oasis becomes his new home, but not only that, to paraphrase Pérez Firmat, it turns into his golden cage. The danger of such geographical dependence is a suitable material for *el mal de corazón*, or the old-fashioned homesickness. This malady manifests once the subject experiences prolonged relocation from home. In fact, Pérez Firmat repositions to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he spends over four years at graduate school. Afterwards, he obtains a tenure track position at Duke University and settles in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In sum, his life no longer evolves around the cozy Cuban-Miamian environment. During the prolonged period of relocation, he is vulnerable to the addictive mechanism of longing. Nostalgia, once awakened, has its symptoms gradually manifested and affects Pérez Firmat's well-being.

The opening chapter, titled "Discovering America," portrays the author's sobering impression of relocation from Florida to Michigan:

When I left Miami in 1973 to attend graduate school, I felt that I was both entering and escaping exile. Growing up in Little Havana, I had learned that home was elsewhere, and I took this lesson with me to Ann Arbor. The moment I moved away, I began to long for Miami much as my father, living in Miami, had always longed for Cuba. (*Next Year* 145)

The binary perception of exile ponders on a habit of longing and belonging directed to a peculiar area of Miami that Pérez Firmat labels as home. In fact, longing arises as a product of affection and double estrangement from Cuba and later Cuban Miami. The geographical displacement, enhanced through the experience of yearning, is mirrored by a powerful comparison of Miami to Cuba as a means to underline the penetrating influence of displacement and loss. These emotions are parallel to the experience of the father of Pérez Firmat. In this manner, Pérez Firmat regards Miami as his new home, nearly equating to his homeland, Cuba. Once more, the relocation to an

unfamiliar surroundings creates a void, loss and desire of *regreso*. The dream of return to his sheltered ethnic enclave is similar to his father's intense yearning for the next year in Cuba. On the other hand, his father's loss of wealth and status parallels in geographical and cultural deficiency his son's experiences. Longing manifests itself as a craving for the comfortable environment that Miami used to offer. Ultimately, growing up in Little Havana gives him identity, comfort, and justifies his sense of being an exile and initially not belonging anywhere. Yet, once he embraces Miami as his new home, the detachment from it has an unexpected outcome.

The author explains thusly this dilemma: "For many years after I left Miami in 1973, I suffered from unexplained dizzy spells, ranging from a fuzzy feeling of disorientation that sometimes lasted for weeks to sudden bouts of vertigo where I would lose my balance and the room would spin" (191). Prolonged displacement from the social and geographical area of Miami impacts Pérez Firmat's well-being. His symptoms correlate with the early studies of nostalgia observed by Johannes Hofer (1688), Baron de Larrey (1823), and Jaspers (1909), where the doctors observe similar signs among displaced students, soldiers, and housemaids during extended time on foreign soil. Since the doctors are unable to diagnose their source, they attribute the inexplicable mental and physical changes to the disease of imagination caused by homesickness. In a similar manner, Dr. López Gómez, unable to find a basis for Pérez Firmat's odd discomfort, concludes that his patient suffers from "bilateral positional vertigo of undetermined etiology" (191). In other words, the twofold displacement results in disorientation and lack of equilibrium that are rooted in the experience of unfamiliar surroundings.

The dislodgment from Miami converts into Pérez Firmat's motion sickness, affecting his well-being. Hereafter, when he enters graduate school, in Ann Arbor, Michigan he perceives this step as entering an unstable and "threatening world" (192). On a different occasion, he refers to the

five long years of graduate school as “enduring the frigid cold”, and a “dark and dreary” Michigan environment, which contrast with sunny Little Havana (145). In light of that, the opposing surroundings project alienating effects. Pérez Firmat self-defines this stage “[a]s a victim of cultural vertigo, I longed for stasis. I craved stillness” (192). In fact, immobility seems to work as a remedy impeding his symptoms only temporally. Nonetheless, the cultural level of longing is tailored toward craving for the comfortable Cuban community of Little Havana.

For this reason, Pérez Firmat carries his discontent to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where the new surroundings are then again alienating.

When I moved from Miami in 1973, I convinced myself I that I was going into exile a second time, since now I lived far from both Havana and Little Havana [...] When my son was born in Chapel Hill in 1981, I felt more estranged than ever. [...] What did North Carolina have to do with me? I hated autumn –all these red and ocher leaves. What did those colors have to do with me? I wanted to go back to Miami, my cozy, green exilic Cocoon. Now I realize that the roots of these feelings go all way back to Miami of the sixties. (87)

This quotation emphasizes estrangement not only as a geographical distance from Little Havana, but also as cultural dimension. The longing caused by separation is so strong that even the birth of his son does not animate him. The relocation to new surroundings, including having to withstand the four seasons and particularly the annoying colors of Autumn, contrast starkly with the blue skies and the evergreen setting of Miami, Florida. This geographical and cultural gap generates a void and desire for the return to the green exilic Cocoon, to his sheltered ethnic enclave that gives him identity and a feeling of belonging to a community. Furthermore, Pérez Firmat, as a 1.5 generation immigrant, recognizes that the origin of his longing is anchored in the Little Havana of

the 1960s. As a consequence, the author is perplexed by the fear of loss since in exile he faces the double estrangement of his affection from Havana, Cuba and Miamian Cuba, respectively. To cure his cultural vertigo Firmat continuously returns to Miami while still living in Chapel Hill.

Accordingly, “During that period when I escaped to Miami at every opportunity, I often felt that living in Chapel Hill was like holding my breath; I went to Miami to breathe, to inhale my Cuban oxygen, to let off steam. Miami nourished my nostalgia and healed my loneliness” (194). Pérez Firmat testifies that while living in North Carolina between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, he returns to Miami four times per year. Little Havana possesses miraculous properties, fosters nostalgia, and diminishes his illness of cultural and geographical dislocation. Boym’s points are compelling to this matter, “nostalgia depends on materiality of the place, sensual perception, smells and sounds” (*The Future* 358). Indeed, Pérez Firmat returns repetitively to Miami to build his dose of Cubanity, to heal what ails him, “[a] week or two enveloped in the sounds and sights and smells of Little Havana gave you immunity from American culture” (194). His yearning is directed towards a community with collective memory. He craves physical manifestation, crossroads, the smells and sounds, and the urban identity, embedded in Little Havana. By this account, nostalgia arises as something experimental. Boym states that longing is directly linked to physical experience and perception of sounds. It is smells such as that of Cuban coffee, or the taste of a Cuban sandwich. By its virtue, this approximation to nostalgia is capable of healing longing although its effects may wear off. Consequently, ethnic Cubans continuously return to Miami to rebuild their immunity against the American culture and their geographical detachment. Nostalgia is Pérez Firmat’s nourishment and narcotic. It is his poison and its cure.

Yet, there is a turning point in Pérez Firmat’s life when longing achieves its climax. This peak of homesickness manifests itself in the late 1980s. One day he cannot bear further separation

from the children of his first Cuban wife, Rosa, and simply departs for Miami. His family members, including uncles, parents, children, and Rosa welcome him warmly. They bring joy and unity to family as if he had never departed Miami. Abruptly, he soon faces the ghosts of his past, such as the same daily routines of his old exilic life, and the pictures that depict the past thirty years of his family life. The objects from his first communion that stretch around the cramped house on the Eighth Street create his enclosure and a sentimental recollection for a peculiar place and time with the exile community. The delusion of thirty years of life as an exile comes crushing in on Pérez Firmat. The author's following reaction accounts for a turning point in his exile life:

Although, I cling for exile life, it wasn't my life anymore. The exile life didn't fit my body or my soul, and I was terrified by the prospect of spending the next thirty years the way I had spent the last thirty years, in a cozy, cramped Cuban cocoon. [...] I wanted a new deal, a different compact with history, a life after exile. Most of all, I wanted Marry Anne. I couldn't bear the thought of never again waking up beside her. (169)

Paradoxically, returning home for Pérez Firmat does not simply compare to the recovery of his identity, but rather all previous visits sustain and magnify the exiled Cuban within him. He faces what Boym labels a form of a modern nostalgia, where "homecoming does not signify the recovery of identity, it does not end the journey in the virtual space of imagination," but instead starts a new journey (50). In such a manner, nostalgia emerges as a *rendez vous* with oneself. Once he returns home like the exiled Ulysses to Ithaca, he looks back at his previous voyages. As soon as Pérez Firmat digests how he has spent the past thirty years of life in his enclosed Cuban oasis that maintained an exile within himself, he realizes that he wants a life after exile. He wants a new adventure of his own. And, above all, he wants a life alongside his American wife, who completes

the American part of his identity. In retrospect, his experiences of return to Miami conclude with his breaking with the habit of the past, him confronting his longing for Miami, and his indulging in the present.

Davis indicates that rupture with one's own past and the present is inevitable. In fact, it is necessary for nostalgia to become an analytical catalyst (*Yearning* 24). Pérez Firmat remarks on a different occasion: “[a]lthough it took me years to notice, once I moved away from Miami I began to become a different man from what I had been up to then. Whenever I knew it or not, I was embarking on a protracted but irreversible voyage of discovery, and of self-rediscovery” (146). For Pérez Firmat this process of self-exploration is gradual, unconscious, and conscious. Once he departs from Miami, he repetitively goes back. Not until years later does he finally find himself as an exile, but as a different man from what he used to be while residing in Little Havana.

Since Boym's nostalgia is not flexible, it does not allow room for adjustment. On the other hand, the second order of Davis's nostalgia interconnects logic and “autobiographical censorship” (24). Pérez Firmat recognizes and learns from his exilic experience. Both emotionally and cognitively he evaluates his achievements and failures that transit the psychological lenses activated by reminiscence. To paraphrase Davis, nostalgia accounts for a complex human exercise from which individuals can better understand themselves and their past in relation to their shared social experiences (24). In retrospect, Pérez Firmat's biography in Miami is censored. The past gives vitality to the present. Both periods are fortifying the formation of his new self within the Cuban exilic milieu. Viewed over time, Pérez Firmat's longing first bridges the geographical displacement and estrangement from Cuba, then it surpasses the one reproduced by dislocation from Little Havana to Michigan and to North Carolina. In consequence, nostalgia is a wistful mechanism transitioning from poison to medicine and from medicine to venom. Yet, once

overdosed, it regains healing prosperity. Yearning partakes in overcoming binary estrangement by building continuity between previous manifestations of oneself towards a new self.

By accepting the exile, or rather overcoming it, Pérez Firmat rediscovers himself as both Cuban and American. Remarrying to an American woman instead of stepping backwards from his culture and identity is a step forward to embracing the dichotomy. In his own words, he highlights “ [a] gratifying paradox of my marriage to Mary Anne is that, while it has made me feel more rooted in this county, it has not diminished my ties to Cuba” (171). That is also to say, dealing with his American stepchildren, and conversing with Mary Anne and her family about who he is and where he originates from, has allowed Pérez Firmat to understand more vividly the important things about himself and his nationality (171). The antidote for overcoming longing is stepping outside of one’s comfort zone, to convey the biography verbally, or in script, and reflect upon the dilemmas with others are beneficial retrospective exercises. Pérez Firmat finds comfort “in company of Mary Anne, [his] trips to Miami have become not just a retreat, but an adventure” (172). Instead of viewing himself as an exile, he gradually starts to encounter a tourist in himself. But not only his American wife helps him to rediscover himself, but also his children.

David and Miriam, the children from his first Cuban wife, offer him the opportunity to mold his new self in retrospect:

Being American is for me a reverse inheritance, one that flows from the younger to the older generation, from children to parents. I gave Cuba to my kids, and they have reciprocated by giving me America [...] I haven’t raised my kids—we have risen each other. The ABC child is the father of the Cuban American. (196)

The experience of outgrowing the exile is captivating. The 1.5 generation immigrant, is indeed a linking vessel, and capable of adaptation. Pérez Firmat connects not only memory, but also his

own identity, like an architect who reconfigures both sides of his cultures through his relationship with the younger generation. Since Cuban-American children cannot be raised as an exiles, the author matures the Cuban exile within himself by bridging the gap between the exiled and American-born generation. As a result, he also accepts his Cuban-American heritage. This powerful exercise of recollection mirrors Davis's position of nostalgia as an optical metaphor that is capable of fusing different strands of one's life.

For Davis, nostalgia, memory and reminiscence are deeply involved in the sense of self-assessment that ultimately determines who an individual becomes across his stages of life. In Davis' view, this process of recall forms "a cognitive lens employed to construct, maintain and reconstruct identity" (*Yearning* 31). In the case of Pérez Firmat, his identity is born from the chaos of yearning and a desire to fit into the exilic Cuban and ethnic Cuban-American cultures, and from his negotiations with the mainstream American culture. As Davis observes, the evocation of the past always occurs in the context of threats of discontinuity, fears and discontents, anxieties and uncertainties (35). The nostalgia-memory born dialectics apprehends and deflects the past. The continuity is salvaged from discontinuity. In retrospect, the clash of memories from different geographical spaces, from life among Cubans in Miami and Americans in North Carolina and Michigan, derives from analyzing the broken threads and images rooted in Pérez Firmat's trajectory.

To reemphasize, the author transcribes the memories to assemble himself:

[M]y purpose is not simply to recall the past but also, and primarily, to weave together the different strands of my life as an exile into a design for the present and the future. I write to collect myself, to shape disparate fragments into a portrait that I can recognize and embody. (*Next Year* xx)

Pérez Firmat retrospectively reevaluates the mnemonic observations that he as an exiled Cuban and as an ethnic Cuban-American must negotiate and endure while being entangled within the first immigration wave from Cuba to the United States. He progresses from Cuban exile to ethnic, and becomes then a Cuban American for whom Cuba is his *patria* or fatherland and the United States is his *país* or country (210). His Cuban family is the cherished treasure of Cuban memory, tradition and customs that remind him of his Cuban roots, while his American family forms an extension of Cuban American heritage and culture. His American wife, family and their children are a vessel that aid him in transgressing his exilic past. As a result, the family enables him to find the delicate balance between his Cuban and American identities and their respective ways of life. Little Havana, although reshaped by modernization and the influx of other Hispanic immigrants, constitutes home to Cuban exiles. This home is reproduced in the Cuban image of longing and memory, and freedom and modernity. To some exiled Cubans it remains closer to Cuba than Cuba itself.

2.4. Chapter Two Conclusions

Pérez Firmat's memoir, *Next Year in Cuba*, questions traditions, institutions, structures and identifications that are conceived and originate from the Cuban exilic experience in Miami, Florida. Pérez Firmat's narrative of exile and nostalgia is a useful tool in making apparent dilemmas that originate from the Cuban contact with the mainstream American culture. His anecdote summarizes this supposition: "For Americans Cuba Libre, may be no more than a name of a cocktail, but for Cuban exiles it is a dream too long deferred, the story of our lives" (*Next Year* xi). In this way, nostalgia of exile sets a vantage point and perspective from which the author chronicles the uneasiness and imitations that defined the center where he comes of age.

By its virtue, the loss of foundation that the author experiences in exile, equates in recognizing himself as an object of observation. Pérez Firmat, as a 1.5 generation exile, constantly undergoes melancholic maneuvers. At the same rate, he becomes a subject of the study. As a writer and an architect, he is defining and reinventing himself. He mediates between himself and a larger governing structures and turns the collective experience into a private one. He does so by reconstructing his sense of being and belonging. He explores social, cultural, and public norms of existence that derive from intersections of memories, cultures, geographies, and urban spaces. The self-reflexivity and nostalgia meet ends creating a subtle interplay. The exilic experience accounts for a series of encounters and crossroads of the self within the greater social structure and allows one to observe how exiled individuals exemplify, face, adjust, or reject (nostalgic) practices with larger predominating frames. Additionally, the social structures constructed by exodus of the Mariel boat lift offer a disfigured image of nostalgia. The substantial growth of Hispanic criminal activity in the 1980s followed by the Mariel boat lift gives shape to several cult TV series and movies with Cuban drug lords. In this way, the media shifts the image of Cuban nostalgia from beautiful and intoxicating to disturbing and toxifying. Thereupon, Cuban nostalgia transgresses different stages and reappears as a side effect of globalization.

CHAPTER THREE: Dominican Nostalgia in the New Jersey Malaise

In this chapter, I examine Junot Díaz's widely celebrated novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008), winner of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize (2008) and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction (2008). The previous chapters analyzed nostalgia within the canon of self-writing within Puerto Rican and Cuban American contexts. In those texts, the rewriting of self emerges in-between spaces, cultures, and places. These memoirs are inspired by changeable geographical settings, historical and political events, and by the self's peculiar connection to globalization, which fosters nostalgia as its byproduct. While Pérez Firmat and Esmeralda Santiago clearly announce their autobiographical project through their singular first person narrations, Junot Díaz's novel, which uses several narrators, is not *per se* autobiographical.

However, there are certainly autobiographical elements to Díaz's novel, which address the important themes of nostalgia and globalization within the context of the Dominican diaspora in the United States. As a result, in the review of Díaz' writing, I include interviews with the author that link Díaz's immigrant experience and his literary vocation in order to approach the gap between the novel and the memoir. Unexpectedly, science fiction references from popular culture play a substantial role in Díaz's exploration of identity, culture, and nostalgia. From this standpoint, I contextualize the proliferation of art forms from popular culture and the traditional canon, along with the propagation of genres to bring forth my literary discussion of globalization.

In my analysis of Díaz's novel, I follow up with Pérez Firmat's question about the American Born Generation (of Dominicans, in this case), and their search for Dominican roots. These problems can be most clearly observed in the novel's protagonist, Oscar. While Esmeralda Santiago dwelled on the notion of the *jíbaro* to excavate national and cultural memory, Díaz gives voice to political, national and cultural representation of collective memory through his characters.

This chapter examines the multigenerational portrayal of the Cabral de León family members, mainly American-born Oscar and his Dominican-born mother Belicia Cabral, in order to discuss manifestations of nostalgia from homeland and mainland. I approach nostalgia not only in the traditional retrospective sense, directed toward the past, but I also consider utopian and escapist dimensions of yearning pointed to the future in Oscar and Belicia's analyses.

Section one traces the literary representation of globalization of the colonial curse, known as *fukú americanus*, and follows its evolution toward globalization and the malady of diaspora. I discuss Yunió's role as the narrator, as a medium – speaking in the name of the nostalgia experienced by others who are unable to speak. I frame this notion from Bhabha and Spivak's perspective of the subalternity. The second section focuses on Belicia Cabral's coming-of-age in the Dominican Republic of the 1960s under Trujillo's dictatorship. Boym's theory of restorative nostalgia provides an explosive mixture of an idealized and fictionalized childhood memories and homeland. However, it may be seen from other perspective. As I feature the oppression and decline of Cabral de León family under the dictatorship, nostalgia becomes an intense fusion of longing, history, and politics that creates a disfigured homeland, which is stained by the brutality and tyranny of a dictatorial regime. Furthermore, I discuss how Belicia develops a *Sehnsucht*, a German concept describing a divergent form of longing for an imagined place that becomes a metaphor of collective longing for freedom and mobility outside of her homeland.

The third section explores Oscar's coming-of-age during the 1980-1990s. I explore a complementary representation of (nerd) nostalgia through popular culture references from science fiction magazines and *Dungeon and Dragons* game that in my argument lead to Oscar's development of counter identity and his yearning for a utopian universe. Furthermore, I observe how Oscar intends to awaken his Dominican roots through repetitive visits to fatherland that lead

to a consolidation of his complex identity. Oscar's trajectory from the U.S. to the Dominican Republic benefits the literary discussion of modernization and progress. In order to thematize globalization and nostalgia, I exemplify the reconstruction of city spaces in his homeland over the course of three decades, which I then compare to Belicia's adolescent period.

3.0 Chapter Three Introduction

Junot Díaz (1968-present), born in Villa Juana, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, came to the U.S. at the age of six. He immigrated with his family to New Jersey in 1974, where he grew up and attended school ("Echoing between" 2D). In 1987 he received his Bachelor's Degree in History and Literature from Rutgers University. In 1992 he earned a Master of Fine Arts from Cornell University, and currently he teaches Literature and Creative Writing courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Like Pérez Firmat and Esmeralda Santiago, he is a 1.5 generation immigrant who equally deals with English immersion programs, which he refers to as "total hell" ("Echoing between" 2D). In a similar manner, he survives the isolation of the diaspora and perceives "past" and the "immigration experience" as a "pressure that passes down the past the parents and [is put forth] into the children" (2D). To a large extent, the displacement imprinted a lasting impression on the author and the life of the people he knows, as he states: "The sacrifices of immigration really disfigured all of the families that I knew" (2D).

Díaz's current literary production – *Drown* (1997), *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and *This is how You Lose Her* (2012) – molds the contemporary reading which factors biography, fiction and postmodern nostalgia into the contexts of return. In addition, the narrative incorporates a yearning for an idealized and fictionalized past, and longing for the lost and the unknown. In short, all three works incorporate autobiographical elements molded after the author's migratory experience in New Jersey and the Dominican Republic. More interestingly, the three

works are linked by Yunió de las Casas, the narrator. He leads the reader through different episodes of his own life and the lives of other displaced individuals. In *Drown*, Yunió retells stories of migration from the island to the ghettos of New Jersey. In *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, he reconstructs the entire story of the Cabral de León Family, and in *This is how You Lose Her*, he looks back at the previous ten years of his life to lament a series of failed romantic relationships only to find himself consumed by memories and solitude. Yunió speaks in the name of the nostalgia of others and his own. His role as a narrator in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is analyzed in section 3.1 of this chapter.

After the publication of *Drown* in 1997, Díaz is endowed with a PEN/Malamud Award for Short Fiction. *Drown* incorporates a wide variety of topics, ranging from classic fiction to pop culture, drugs, and machismo. This work also incorporates the cost of immigration, the cultural and racial prejudices, and economic exploitation, all of which are factored into diaspora. In an interview with magazine “All American,” Díaz asserts: “I’ve travelled far from where I grew up, but I’m still stubbornly attached to it [Dominican Republic].” In the same interview, he recalls: “Migration was so hard for me; I felt I’d lost so many worlds that I didn’t want to lose another.” Therefore, *Drown* is modeled after Díaz’s own immigrant experience. His keen eye captures observations and the inherent risks of these immigrant settings. Thereby, he introduces a wide gamut of cultural representations, which he transplants into a collection of vignettes that recapture, in neoliberal spirit, the shifting worlds between the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, between the margins of barrios and ghettos, and between the tropical and the urban settings.

In his brief essay, Paravisini-Gebet suggests that “Díaz’s narrative space...is not dominated by nostalgic recreations of idealized childhood landscapes, but by the bleak, barren, and decayed margins of New Jersey’s inner cities” (“Revisiting” 164). It is true that the reader will

not encounter an apparent nostalgic recollection of Dominican landscapes, similar to an idealized and sentimental reminiscence as discussed in Santiago's, and Pérez Firmat's memoirs. Since nostalgia in Díaz's work remains a less apparent feature in both the short stories and the novel, it has to be conceptualized and uncovered, thus making the contextual analysis even more attractive. In this sense, the Dominican diaspora, led by the desire for a better life in the U.S. and refuge from an underdeveloped country or political change, finds its point of reference in the urban ghetto. Nostalgia appears within the margins of city spaces. *Drown* is dominated by decaying rural boundaries in Boca Chica and the barrios of Santo Domingo as well as in the hostile slums of New Jersey – the path followed by Díaz himself.

Instead of creating a memoir with a singular voice, Díaz's narrative point of view in *Drown* establishes a blurry distance between its innovative author, the text, the characters, and their experiences. The narrative articulates a wide array of people's experiences, proffering a figurative truth about the urban authenticity of New Jersey's inner spaces. In some ways, it mirrors the Nuyorican literature of the 1960s – in particular, Thomas Piri's *Down Those Mean Streets* (1967) – reminding the modern reader of themes and motifs in *Drown*, as suggested by Paravinsini-Gebert. Furthermore, these features are apparent in the novel. Díaz retrofits the despair and anguish of Dominican culture into the American experience in a similar fashion that Piri factored the deprivations of Puerto Rican culture into the community of Spanish Harlem during the 1960s. *Drown*, linked by a teenage narrator, Yunió de las Casa in "Aguantando," "Negocios" and "Fiesta 1980" depicts the trajectory of characters that stems from the author's childhood experience. The constant absence of a father figure, his infidelity, and machismo attitude are some known autobiographical elements, yet the use of drugs, sexual endeavors, and the harshness of diaspora form part of the American ghetto experience.

Díaz lived in a poor neighborhood in New Jersey that was populated largely by Dominicans, where he witnessed the crude and evolving nature of those dangerous streets. As an observer, he progressed into a street-smart and university-educated person. The places where he grew up became building blocks of his narrative, while his Higher Education and his vocation as writer became his arena. Díaz funnels these issues through the voice of Dominican-American youth. He is transmitting political agendas, not solely interrupting the colonial oppression. Instead, he promotes decolonialization while maintaining a cohort of brilliant stories. In particular, the theme of nostalgia appears in the center of globalized metropolitan cities, as well as in the Dominican barrios.

Since Díaz's debut of his short stories in *Drown* (1997), the audience waited over ten years for his first novel. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) won the Sargent First Novel Prize, the National Book Critics Award, and the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 2008. This novel sets a milestone in the author's career and within the canon of (Diaspora) Latino Literature. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* approaches topics already introduced in *Drown*, such as diasporic intimacy, decolonialization, oppression, and neoliberalism. Like many novels of the Latin American Dictator, this work attributes a new level to the dangers of far-reaching dictatorship, which are magnified by references to science fiction literature from the 1970s through 1990s.

One of the elements that makes *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) fascinating is that it uses many of the formal features of master narratives and metanarratives. By virtue, it reminds the modern reader of historiographic metafiction by Carlo Fuentes (*La Muerte de Artemio Cruz* 1962) that include a mixture of genres and an undercurrent of magical realism of García Marquez's *Cien Años de Soledad* (1967), in which all people are predetermined by their past to endure misfortune. Díaz's novel follows a multigenerational storyline that stretches across

decades of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901) and Alejo Carpentier's soul searching voyage back to the source of colonization in *Viaje a la semilla* (1944:2003). Accordingly, Díaz's first novel has been approached from a variety of subjects and disciplines, ranging from: gender and sexuality studies (Villaes 2009), masculinity and sexuality (Sáez 2011), marginalization and intertextuality (O'Brien 2012), conditionality and hospitality (Manning 2015). Other scholars investigated: transnational studies (Flores 2008; Mermann-Jozowiak 2014), transnationality and magical realism (López-Calvo 2009), nation and (trans)nationality (Maeseneer 2010), discourse of science fiction (Miller 2011), and historical reading of Dominican history and diaspora (Hannah 2010). Other critics viewed Díaz's novel as an intertextual reading of Trujillo's dictatorial power in *La fiesta del chivo* (Figuroa 2014) and to radical bilingualism (Casielles-Suárez 2013; Dumistrescu 2014; Derrick 2015). Nonetheless, the theme of nostalgia remains relatively unexplored.

The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao incorporates, in postmodern spirit, the dislocation of perspective and discourses, a collage of genres, and a variety of non-linear structures in favor of bringing forth the history, culture, identity and nationality of a particular community. The novel portrays the culturally specific communities of Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, and Paterson, New Jersey, while simultaneously transitioning between the island and mainland. The reader encounters in the text increasingly broader popular culture references. Díaz's novel progresses via its incorporations of science fiction, fantasy, Role-Playing games, and diverse manifestations of styles and genres through which I detect the changing Latino identity and culture.

A.O Scott in his article, "Dreaming in Spanglish," states, that Díaz's work ranges from story-telling and adult melodrama to magical realism, multiculturalism, and from Punk-Goth feminism to Hip-Hop machismo (2008 n.p). Thus, the fragmented narrative, diverse Spanish

annotations, sci-fi references, footnotes, *páginas en blanco* (blank pages) and changes in narrative styles echo the globalized world with boundaries that are progressively blurred and increasingly more connected. It is undeniable that the old world with clear-cut borders has ceased to exist and consists now of mixed cultures, sub-cultures, hybridized identities, and bilingual Latino speakers residing in this case within the metropolitan neighborhoods of the Big Apple. Strictly speaking, new immigration experience calls for a new Latino literature.

Díaz goes well beyond the world of the traditional canon of immigrant novels. He pays tribute to *Dune*, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Dr. Who*, Marvel Comics, *Dungeon and Dragons* Role-Playing games, Japanese Anime, and *Star Wars* among others. This cohort of references dates back precisely to the 1970s through 1990s, a timeframe of nearly universal popularity. These works account for a contextual reference and mark a strong and gradual appearance of science fiction into popular culture during that period. It brings forth a nostalgic evocation of a nerd era with a modern twist that appears in the mid-1980s.

Nowadays, very few nerd communities dwell on the old-fashioned tabletop Role-Playing games, but still many of them have vintage collections of Marvel Comics, or at least are familiar with Marvel's heroes and villains, or with Tolkien's fantasy world. Díaz pays homage to this rich past. The author crafts a revitalized picture for modern readers who may have grown up in different parts of the world, but are familiar with movies and books that are incorporated into the novel. Díaz awakens a sort of consumer nostalgia. He steps into the realm of popular culture, which predates the time of graphically enhanced games, the era of touch screen phones, Nintendo, and X-box. This nerdy nostalgia sets the stage in virtually every chapter of the novel. For this reason, a major part of Oscar's storyline unfolds during the late 1980s and the mid-1990s.

In this way the novel praises the growing sci-fi community, which marks its entry into popular culture during this timeframe and sets a metaphor of longing for days past. In addition to science fiction references, Díaz fuses Spanish and (Afro-American) English and Dominican Spanish, without quotation marks or italics. In sum, Díaz presents an innovative literature that ranges from inter-textual references to the nostalgic nerd culture while it combines popular culture references and utilizes radical form of bilingualism (Casielles-Suárez 2013).

Thus, the constellation of pluralities of science fiction references and languages all penetrate Díaz's first novel with great eloquence. The flow of these elements echoes the forces of globalization which offer material for analysis. By extension, the reader encounters intersections of spaces, whether they appear in bilingualism, multicultural settings, or by the fusion of genres. By its virtue, Díaz's works are a cross-cultural product. The universe of the novel demonstrates a fluid multiplicity of coexisting spaces that form a complex literary representation of the novel as a whole. In this context, Annesley James notes, in *The Fiction of Globalization* (2006), that "fictions of globalization"...can only be grasped through its realization in a variety of narrative forms...literature no doubt has a role to play in how we produce these often contradictory narratives about globalization" (604). Arguably, the reader encounters in the first novel of Díaz the junctures of "high art" – the novel, which includes references to other novels of the dictator and poetry, as well as forms of "low art" – a diminutive term used in reference to art production of popular culture. This interplay of clashing literary genres produces a literary dialogue about globalization.

Although the adjectives "high" and "low" are read as binary oppositions, they should not be viewed as absolute distinctions between "good" and "bad." Rather, they serve as forms framing modern development, social changes, and cultural distinctions that are leading not only to

proliferation of art forms, but they also highlight a postmodern way to map societal and cultural transitions within their settings. Consequently, both the unquoted employment of bilingualism and literary representations of “contradictory” genres in Díaz’s first novel, offer the embodiment of material for analysis. This is where the reader encounters *bricolages*, merging forms of high and low art as well as speech (not italicized references from Spanish and Dominican Spanish and African-American English). From these elusive interchanges emerges new hybridized cultures and languages. This compilation of elements offers a mere reflection of the globalized world. Thus, “high” and “low” are rendered inoperative terms. The hegemonic Western culture intersects with those of eccentric or marginalized positions, labeled as “Other”, or “Minority”, such as the Dominican-New Yorker, and sci-fi nerd figure (Oscar) in this case. Such interchange creates a postmodern reading.

In a postmodern logic, history and national identity typically find their place in contemporary master narratives. Like progress and goal-oriented history, myths of national and ethnic identities intersect and partake in the formation of unity from the chaos. In this manner, by incorporating these proliferations of art forms, Díaz brings forth a debate on the relationship of mainstream culture through the use of genre as a metaphor. In this regard, the author incorporates a double narrative. The main or the higher narrative (the text), is where the reader finds entire phrases in Spanish without italics, or quotation marks. And the minor text, or the footnotes that aim to challenge and complement the main storyline.

Díaz explains in the “Slate” magazine interview (2007), “The footnotes are like the voice of the jester, contesting the proclamation of the king. In a book that’s all about the dangers of dictatorship, the dangers of the single voice – felt like a smart move to me” (O’Rourke n.p). Footnotes offer supplementary information about the plot and the storyline. In addition, they factor

in greater historical events that shaped the past of the Dominican Republic and the lives of its people, specifically the solitary discourse of dictatorship. According to Sheri Benstock, footnotes in fictional writing “openly point to authorial errors and narrational gaps, thus simultaneously extending and undermining the text” (“Fictional Text” 220). These gaps, as both Díaz and Benstock emphasize, complete the historical positions, including the greater events in which the narrative operates. At the same time, footnotes move back and forth between the boundaries of the Dominican Republic and American mainstream discourse. The footnotes provide a simultaneous extension of the text and the history that underline the process of assembling the nation and its people into a larger context. Moreover, footnoting accounts for a disfigured image of a silenced history between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic that calls into doubt its accomplishments and failures. On the other hand, the author’s voice is silenced or hidden. Yet, he is the one who speaks in the name of memory, homeland, and adopted mainland through a plurality of expressions and voices.

Díaz takes responsibility for his nostalgia and reassembles the home that has been renovated beyond recognition to remind the readers that before the fused Dominican diaspora, there were bittersweet memories and harsh Trujillo days. As a result, the complex past of his country of origin gave fruit to his diasporic experience in the Big Apple. In Boym’s terms, the author in question is driven by “the project of restoration of the past” (*The Future* 11). However, restorative nostalgia is not always about nostalgic recollection, but rather it is about conserving the truth and the past. From the restorative standpoint individuals explore “homeland, tradition, culture” as well as “national past and future” (*The Future* 11). In an interview Díaz states, “I’ve travelled (sic) far from where I grew up, but I’m still stubbornly attached to it [Dominican Republic],” and he stresses: “Migration was so hard for me; I felt I’d lost so many worlds that I

didn't want to lose another" ("All American" n.p). The legacy of Díaz is to fill the gap and to portray the hardship of urban immigration while digging up the bias created by an untold history between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic.

According to Boym, "The nostalgic is never a native but a displaced person who mediates between the local and the universal" (*The Future* 12). From Boym's perspective, restorative nostalgia invites Díaz to mediate between history, fact, and fiction. The author repays his debt to the Dominican diaspora as he "engages in the anti-modern myth making of history by means of return to national symbols and myths, occasionally swapping conspiracy theories" (41). Consequently, the author's voice appears from the margins of the text, and within the interplay of footnotes and the main text. This is where one can find his local – homeland – which Díaz allocates within larger, universal events that involve the intervention of the United States. To this point, in an interview with "Molossus", Díaz asserts his perspective on history and relation with the United States. In the following passage he complements the Dominican diasporic experience:

If you think about it, the shadow of history doesn't go away. It just doesn't. You pretend that it's your shadow, but it's actually a shadow from a past that's very old and very long. And so what I think about is that is the same way the Dominican community has all these shadows of history upon it—families within that have their own—but I think about the way the Dominican Republic casts a shadow onto the United States. Its involvement, which is completely forgotten, has shaped the entire destiny of this one country. ("In Darkness" n.p)

In other words, Díaz does not restore a simple past or history, but calls it into question. He intends to fill some of the erasures created by the history between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic, unthreading what Boym calls "the conspiracy theories." This void is partially filled through the

recently described function of footnoting. To complete this picture, Boym provides a useful platform, in which restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt. The second viewpoint offers a “mediation on history and the passage of time” (*The Future* 11). Arguably, Díaz applies reverse dynamics of memory, molding the novel from inside out. He subverts the marginality of the Dominican Republic within mainstream Western discourse. Consequently, the nostalgic perspective depicted in the novel does not account for an intoxicating interpretation of longing, but rather a sobering one.

From a clash of cultural, historical, and political boundaries, appears new planes of interpretation. In this manner, Homi Bhabha, in “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences,” draws attention to contemporary cultural critics, as “they all recognize that the problem of the cultural [notions] emerges only at the signficatory boundaries of cultures, where means and values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated” (206). In short, when addressing cultural issues of “difference” and “diversity,” we must look at the meeting points of two (or more) cultures and places to read their values or means. Yet we must not disregard its points of departure. Bhabha states that “the production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space” (208). Within this process, the structure of meaning and reference stands as an “ambivalent process” and “challenges our sense of historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past” (208). From such intervention a “Third Space” emerges, from which one can observe “Others” and “Ourselves” (209). Disputably, one is able to step outside of the established borders and challenge the imposed norms, which have been established by the homogeneity of culture and language. Consequently, Díaz writes from inside out, presenting Dominicans as subaltern social groups that are contrasted with the mainstream group. Nonetheless, he proposes a reverse mechanic, and thinks about “the way

the Dominican Republic casts a shadow onto the United States” (“In Darkness” n.p). As a writer, he is in a position to subvert the authority of a minority social group and to challenge the position of the hegemonic power.

In a similar manner, the novel as a metanarrative, offers an interaction between the footnotes and main text that mediates between itself and the reader. Within this context a “third space” is created, where “Self” and “Other” interact. By challenging the fictional representation and history, this contact draws the reader’s attention. The majority of the footnotes are filled with doubt, irony and reflection; thus they follow the threads of reflective nostalgia. The first one reads “[f]or those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican History: Trujillo, one of the twentieth century’s most infamous dictators” (2). The extensive footnote elaborates on Trujillo’s “*outstanding accomplishments: the 1937 genocide against Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community which was one of the longest most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere*” (3: with my emphasis). The reader’s active engagement in the text is his task to complete the narrative, to fill existing erasures that are created by “neglected” history and the amplified relation between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic. In this sense, sarcasm and irony are rendering tools and structures of reflective nostalgia that allow the reader to digest the dilemma created by the history.

Consequently, the footnoting performs a creative task, it involves the reader in the process of narrating and reflecting upon provided historical and political occurrences. In this way, the reader becomes an active participant and an observer in the social, and political processes within the text and outside of it. Thus, the political and historical points of reference included in the footnotes take the reader outside of the writing itself. While reviewing O’Brien’s and Szeman’s works, Suman Gupta (2010) comments: “where globalization is tamed for the approach of

literature ...where literature institutionally speaks itself and perpetuates and reproduces itself even while addressing things outside” (*Literature and Globalization* 11). Consequently, Díaz’s footnoting can be viewed as both a meeting point and a departure, or “Third Space” that entangles the literary representation of globalization seen as performance within literature. But as much it is largely dedicated and open to the audience’s interpretation. Whether Latino or non-Latino, the reader’s active participation is required to *fill the blank pages*. It is the reader’s task to comprehend the political, economic, and cultural impact of globalization on the Dominican Republic. This dynamic dialogue is a constant apparatus in the novel.

Globalization exists in plural forms, and so does this narrative. The intersections of longing, belonging, and globalization carve a unified, yet disfigured image of the Dominican diaspora, affected by both the cruel dictatorship and crafted by forces of modernity. Within this diversity, the reader encounters a hybrid creation that is full of binary oppositions, skeptical truths, underdevelopment and progress, as well as cultural discontinuity and heterogeneity. The fictional account of Díaz’s novel offers a snapshot of life in New Jersey during the 1980s and early 1990s, where Dominican immigrants struggle to cope with their life. Concurrently, the dreams of escape and rebellion against the norms that are imposed by the mainland society and culture emerge in the metropolis. Marginalization and dislocation affect different generations of immigrants that fled the dictatorship of Trujillo and found their way to the United States.

A description of the marginalization, as well as an intertextual reading of the first novel of Díaz is well elaborated by O’Brien (2012). To follow his thought, Díaz’s novel stretches the limits of comfortable expressions by incorporating historical massacres and injustice. The recounting of the hardships of migration, displacement and marginalization fuel the story. These elements give shape to the Dominican Republic, a world that is increasingly more globalized, yet progressively

unequal in the phase of progress and modernity. For instance, Díaz in sections “Oscar Takes Vacation” and “The Condensed Notebook of a Return to a Nativeland,” depicts the impact of a massive reverse migration of Dominican New Yorkers to the Dominican Republic. These sections provide a picture of the island fast-tracked by progress during the mid-1990s. Within this context, in Section Three of this chapter, I analyze how new urban spaces emerge due to modernization on top of the ruins of the old Dominican world of the 1960s. I detail this clash of old and new urban spaces that generates a subtle interplay between literature and globalization.

Díaz creates a new punch-line in the canon of the Latino Diaspora and Immigrant Literature. Here Suman Gupta (2010) upholds that “discursive constructions, the amenities and discomforts [are] involved in examining literature and globalization in relation to each other” (*Literature and Globalization* 12). Consequently, the reoccurring discomfort and hardship present in the discursive construction of the text, expresses this uncomfortable relation crafted by the progress and globalization that provide the undercurrent flow of Díaz’s narrative. While *Drown* moves from the *campo* of the Dominican Republic towards the ghettos of North Jersey, in the novel, the trajectory wavers between the two places, and moves back to Santo Domingo. According to Kavene (2003), “Díaz is the most radical and most critical of the role the United States has played in creating a gap,” a gap between the “official story” (created by media, politicians), the “real story” and the one “he witnessed as a child as an activist” (*Latino Literature* 72). Díaz’s first novel offers a new dimension to the Dominican Diaspora. His novel intends to fill those erasures or blank pages created by the Dominican-American history and politics.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao brings to light a dark chapter of the Dominican Republic’s history. The novel retrofits an inescapable history on a grand scale – the era of Trujillo’s Dictatorship (1931-1961) as one of the cruelest tyrannies that evolve around the experience of the

Cabral de León family across three generations. The aftermath of dictatorship affects even those who immigrated to North American soil. In his review of Díaz's first novel, Gioia (2009) elaborates on his success on multiple levels: "[Díaz] has done much more than tell the story of Oscar Wao. He has artfully captured the history of a country, a family, and the immigrant experience of Dominican-Americans" ("The New Canon" n.p). The political upheavals account for the main reasons of massive relocations of Dominicans to the United States during the decline of Trujillo's dictatorship. In the storyline, the 1960s is a port of entry, and the 1980s and 1990s form an active background for the American account of the story. Accordingly, a supplementary note on the Dominican immigration to the U.S. is required.

The majority of Dominicans arrived to the United States after 1960. According to the 1980 U.S. census, 6.1 percent of 169,147 Dominican-born citizens came to the U.S. before 1960 ("Dominican Americans" n.p). During the decade of political instability in the Dominican Republic, those who were fleeing the violence throughout the 1960s, arrived in vast numbers, while the remaining 56 percent came in the 1970s ("Dominican Americans" n.p). During the 1980s, 250,000 immigrants entered legally sanctioned by the United States Government. The 1990s census reported 506,000 persons of Dominican descent residing in the U.S., with 86.3 percent centered in the Northeast (390,000 in New Jersey) and 36,000 in Florida.

The multigenerational history of the Cabral Family serves as a microcosm of the 20th century Dominican diasporic experience and history. The Cabral Family saga is stained by both the corporeal violence and the abuse of human rights by the regime of Trujillo, which is also marked by the mental stigma of the diaspora in New Jersey beginning post 1960. Nevertheless, a major part of the storyline unfolds in the 1980s and 1990s in New Jersey, when Dominicans were the second largest Hispanic group after Puerto Ricans⁰.

In fact, Díaz creates a multigenerational and transnational diasporic narrative. The non-linear, flashbacks-rich construction of the story focuses on the early life and the premature death of Oscar, the story's main character who lives with his mother Belicia and sister Lola in Patterson, New Jersey. He is a triple marginalized figure: an extremely overweight person of Afro-Dominican decent, born in America, growing up in a primary Latino district of New Jersey during the Ronald Regan imperial period in United States history. Oscar is obsessed with his counter-stereotypical nerdiness – endless fascination with *Dungeon and Dragons* games, *The Lord of the Rings* and Japanese Anime, as well his persistent quest to develop relationships with women. Additionally, he is desperately seeking to awaken his Dominican roots. Oscar's story culminates with a trip to the Dominican Republic and a relationship with a former prostitute, which results in his death from the hands of her Dominican boyfriend. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns the story of his maternal grandfather, Abelard Cabral, that of Abelard's daughter, Hypatía Belicia de León Cabral (Oscar's mother), and the story of Lola (Oscar's sister). The entire family history stretches over half a century, dating back to the glorious past of the Cabral de León family (1944-1946) during the Trujillo Era (1930-1961), which still affects those who moved to the U.S. and lived there during the 1980s and early 1990s.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, despite its penetrating emphasis on Leonidas Trujillo's dictatorship, is a novel of assimilation, a fragmented narrative of unavoidable displacement of children of immigrants toward the American lower and middle class. Belicia Cabral brings her cultural and historical baggage into the adopted homeland. This burden is passed down to her children Lola and Oscar. In a modern, globalized, multicultural and oftentimes dangerous society, both Lola and Oscar confront cultural struggles and seek new forms of belonging and ways of co-existing with their Dominican roots, their freedom, and the mobility

granted by the society of residence. The narrative exposes Oscar the primary figure who holds the novel together. In order to recognize and embrace his complex heritage, he excavates the past and his roots through the connection to a maternal figure and his trips to the Dominican Republic. Oscar's story is told from Yuniór's perspective, and for this matter, it is crucial to underline Yuniór's function since he is the one who breaks the silence of the diaspora.

3.1 Breaking the Silence of Diaspora

The reader gradually learns Yuniór's identity and his involvement in the story. He remains a hidden and nameless narrator, who reconstructs the Cabral de León family saga. He introduces himself in "Sentimental Education" (168-201) as Lola's boyfriend and Oscar's college roommate. Yuniór is oftentimes considered the alter ego of Díaz. In the vignettes, *Drown* "The narrative voice and 'diaspora consciousness' of Yuniór and his experiences of immigration, colonization and decolonization are semi-autobiographical and share a transformative identity with the author" ("Drowning in Diaspora" n.p). In fact, Díaz gives the narrative voice to Yuniór who sets the multiple stages. Consequently, the novel starts where the short stories in *Drown* end. From the vignettes in *Drown* to the novel, Yuniór plays a substantial role in shaping both longing and belonging within the diaspora. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the reader is led by Yuniór, Oscar's friend and college roommate, Lola's ex-boyfriend and family friend. Yuniór witnesses the turn of events in New Jersey, thereafter crafts the story. He is the one who speaks in the name of nostalgia, longing, and belonging of those who are unwilling to speak or choose to remain silent in the diaspora: Lola and Belicia, naturally on behalf of the title protagonist Oscar.

Driven by the silence of his mother's history in the Dominican Republic, Oscar excavates the family story by revisiting the Dominican Republic. Before his death he manages to mail two packages, but only one reaches Yuniór. It contains cards and Oscar's unfinished manuscripts.

Yunior undertakes a task of a writer-historian. He uses Oscar's materials as basis to recreate the Oscar family's history story. Once Yunior appears as a character, he places the construction of the book at the forefront by making the reader aware of how he consults sources and investigates the history of the Cabral de León family. Yunior's voice is self-reflexive, occasionally judgmental. As a struggling writer he offers an alternative interpretation of the perspective of others and of those who cannot speak or those who choose to remain silent. Although Yunior's recollection is primarily centered on the Cabral de León family, it is also linked to a larger collective consensus, the nation, nationalism and its silenced history.

To retell the history Yunior adopts a multiplicity of perspectives in order to frame the narrative and historiographic stance. In his work, he is unearthing and reconstructing history that is otherwise unrecoverable due to the official History. Boym's notion of nostalgia provides a fertile ground because its power of recollection combines cultural, national, and experimental memory. Therefore, it allows us to explore the relation of individuals in their public spheres and within larger structural memorials. Reflective nostalgia connects a way of critical thinking called "off-modern" that allows people from marginalized positions such as a diasporic subject – Yunior "to uptake [a]detour from the deterministic narrative of twentieth century history" (*The Future* xvii). Yunior's voice is filled with reflection, irony, humor, grotesque and a wide representation of others' perspectives, as well as national and historical events. On the other hand, this expression shifts sideways, verbalizing the author's voice that calls official history into question.

For this reason, Boym's reflective nostalgia is "an intermediary between collective and individual memory" (54). As a 1.5 generation immigrant, Yunior, demonstrates a higher degree of understanding and consciousness of what he remembers and endures within the diaspora. He depicts his uphill trajectory from the island to Edison, New Jersey in *Drown*: "[I] moved here

when I was a little boy” (137). Furthermore, his quest as a story teller is challenged in the novel. His trajectory from the island and relation to the mainland, homeland and Cabral Family makes him a legitimate subject, who is capable of voicing the margins of Dominican-American diaspora. Individuals of Afro-Caribbean descent such as Belicia and her children, come from eccentric positions and are considered voiceless.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994) offers a useful framework for understanding Yuniors’ articulation of the main characters who are considered marginalized or “Other” and voiceless. Spivak’s essay poses the problem of the representation of a class that is “unable to speak for itself,” which is often regarded as a form of advocacy. Arguably, this lays the foundation for Yuniors’ standpoint in the novel. However, as Spivak points out, such advocacy or “speaking for” subaltern subjects often leads to the silencing and even erasure of precisely those subjects.

Yunior, speaking on *behalf of* the “Other” as an enactment, shields this type of speaking. From Spivak’s viewpoint, the subaltern is always perceived in the light of unsuccessful revolution. The subaltern becomes a focus of cultural authenticity charged with what Spivak calls the “monolithic and anonymous subject-in-revolution” (272). Although Spivak maintains that the space occupied by the Western language cannot be a space where the subaltern subject is allowed to speak, I maintain that Bhabha’s “Third Space” allows Yunior to voice both sides of diasporic perspectives. The support that can be given is not a transformation, but works towards a gradual appropriating of the hegemonic ideology. Yunior, by calling himself “The watcher,” a character from *The Fantastic Four* by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, chronicles the historical events of the universe proclaiming objective truth.

As a result, Díaz enriches his voice by adding complementary footnotes that articulate historical contexts through Yunior. The voice of Yunior crosses borders, as well as national and historical distinctions. In sum, his role in rethreading the past in cohort plays a substantial role. The memory of others and his own recollection aid in the meditation between the experiential form of nostalgia, which is proclaimed by political propaganda and larger collective consensus. In this regard, diaspora perspective and belonging are shaped by a historiographic reconstruction of the past and his own voice as a medium. Arguably, the singularity of his voice accounts for a form of dictatorship. On the contrary, Yunior mediates with the past. As an objective Watcher, he excavates the infamous segments of the Dominican and Caribbean past while voicing an explosive mixture of nostalgia and politics, history, myth, and popular culture. In fact, in the very first pages, one encounters such interplay. By its virtue, reflective nostalgia lingers on the ruins of history, reaching far back in time and place.

On the first page, the two epigraphs to the novel link the above ideas and provide fundamental information about subjects in the colonial period, the Dominican people under the Dominican dictatorship, their relation to the nation and to the Dominican diaspora. The first one stems from popular culture – the *Fantastic Four* comic series, “Of what importance are brief, nameless lives to... Galactus??” (Vol. 1, No.49, 1966). The sci-fi reference embodies the cruelty of Trujillo’s dictatorship, which was as powerful as cosmos or Galactus from *Fantastic Four*. In this sense, Trujillo’s absolute power is beyond comprehension and requires a science fiction locus to describe its reach. After all, Caribbean literature has been seen many times through the lens of magical realism and there is nothing more sci-fi than Santo Domingo, to paraphrase the author.

The second epigraph is an excerpt from “The Shoener Flight” by Derek Walcott.

I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,

a rusty sailor with sea-green eyes
 that they nickname Shabine, the patios for
 any red nigger, and I, Sabine saw
 when these slums of empire was paradise,
 I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
 I had a sound of colonial education,
 I have Dutch, nigger, and English
 and either I'm nobody or I'm a nation

In this manner, one observes the dialectics of the migratory experience of the Caribbean through the figure of Shabine, “a rusty sailor with sea-green eyes,” who arrives to the port and exhibits a nostalgic evocation towards the past. Shabine’s reflective view alludes to colonial nostalgia – juxtaposed with an imperial counterpart – destroys the paradise. The first leap approaches the period predating the European colonization, while progressively viewing the abrupt unwelcomed change. Like Odysseus, he is a nomad or nobody without a proper name. By the same token, his voyage begins once he reflects on his life in retrospect only to find the old paradise lying in the ruins of the emerging empire. Yuniors articulation of Shabine’s discourse can be regarded as an extension of Spivak’s thought – nostalgia for the lost origins is unfavorable to greater events – while it is directed to the critique of imperialism. This is where one finds a subaltern subject inhabiting the twilight, or the in-between zone. Additionally, Walcott’s epigraph establishes a connection between the migratory experience of the Caribbean national within the context of cultural *mestizaje*, or hybridity.

The poem ends with Sailor’s powerful and critical view of the clash of the Caribbean immigrant with the European Colonialist, and the enslaved African population. This phenomenon

is regarded as an outcome of European colonization by the Dutch, French, and English, the enslavement of Africans, and the extinguishing of the indigenous Tainos. At the same time, labeling of people in terms of their cultural *mestizaje* is a feature linked to the beginnings of modernity.

The final words of the poem address the character in diaspora as “nobody” or “a nation.” The binary creates opposite forces between diaspora and the nation. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* embodies oppression of institutional violence and ideology of dictatorship, exclusion and inclusion of subjects in these communities. The novel is clearly a transnational text that factors these variables into the storyline of the protagonist Oscar. He emerges as a diasporic figure, which in neocolonial spirit embodies the burden passed down by Shabine. Shabine is a product of complex history and *mestizaje*. He carries the weight given by the past and leaves something for the future generation. In contemporary times, Oscar inherits Shabine’s quest for longing and belonging.

The interplay of references from the *Fantastic Four* (popular culture) of low art with the conjunction of art in “Shooner Flight,” sets in question an ancient antagonism, a fight between good and evil, between the colonizers and the New World. In this regard, Boym remarks: “[r]estorative nostalgia knows two main narrative plots—restoration of the origins and the conspiracy theory, characterizes the most extreme cases of contemporary nationalism fed on right wing popular culture” (*The Future* 43). Boym explains that those who restore the past are not necessarily nostalgic, but rather seek the truth. Yuniors is one of them. Díaz models intertextual references from popular culture (fantasy and fiction) and TV shows to frame his discourse on Dominican history and dictatorship.

All references form the big picture of the Dominican diaspora that is voiced by Yunió. Indeed, he breaks the silence of diaspora and provides expertise on both fronts. Yunió articulates the diasporic perspective through references to U.S. popular culture. He recreates an isolated version of Trujillo's "Plátano Curtain²" and his "escape-proof. Alcatraz of Antilles" made by the so-called "Dictator who ever ruled" (80). Such an unconventional mixture, craving for past and restoration through popular culture, science fiction and classic literary canon can breed monster homelands that are overshadowed by dictatorship and a desire to escape. In fact, the novel is reaching far back into the backbone of history offering an account of fact and fiction, myth, truth, and history. One could name the novel *Un monstró* (Díaz's forthcoming book) to honor the trajectory that frames the disfigured image of the diaspora, homeland, colonial past, and neocolonial present.

Nevertheless, the truth is buried deep and it has to be excavated through the lens of reflective or restorative nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia is a search for the truth, where the second scenario is based precisely on the fight between good and evil, heroes and villains, and a pursuit for the scapegoat. The novel's preface draws on a Caribbean crossroads of myth, culture, and history, offering valuable insight about scapegoating. The blame that gave birth to eternal suffering, diaspora and the malady of the modern age, all reside in a primordial curse. This remark brings us to discuss "Fukú" – the curse of globalization and the Dominican diaspora.

The novel, in fact, does not begin with Oscar, the title character, but with an ancient curse. Besides the Cabral de León family saga and Trujillo dictatorship, the novel incorporates events of a superior historical process, reaching back to the colonization and corruption of the New World. It all began with the "Admiral's" (read: Christopher Columbus's) arrival to the New World, which unleashed an ancient curse. The arrival of Europeans to Hispaniola caused "*Fukú americanus*" or

“the curse of and Doom of the New World” (*Wondrous* 1). In this sort of event, the Dominican Republic stands as “Ground Zero” of the entire continent’s history of violence, abuse, and authoritarianism – all conceived in the colonial past (1). The fukú causes the indigenous condition and the annihilation of Tainos; the curse itself was “carried in the screams of the enslaved” –born possibly from the early African diaspora (1). In fact, Taíno, the Arawak people resided not only in the Dominican Republic, but also in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica and the Bahamas, but the contact in late 15th century leads to their annihilation, from which the colonial evil was unleashed. Presumably, fukú is responsible for a supernatural course of events: the disappearance of people and the rise of dictators of Latin America. The curse is a result of colonization, migration, and diaspora. Its pandemic can never be repressed and may be viewed as the creation of modernity and globalization.

The Spaniards opened a crack in the Antilles and brought a curse, which transfigures the Caribbean into an Imperial frontier. The object of study in Juan Bosh’s *El Caribe: Frontera Imperial* (1970) is precisely Caribbean: the frontier of the empires of Spain, England, France, and the United States. One of the objectives of Bosh’s historical reading is to find out the primordial reason that the United States is the last of the empires to arrive in the Caribbean to establish its frontiers. More specifically, the (military) occupation of the Dominican Republic is being challenged. Although Díaz does not make direct reference to Bosh in a footnote (p. 19 in the text), he references the military occupation by the U.S. from 1916-1924. In effect, the *fukú americanus* offers a supplementary reading on the flow of power resulting in a shift from European Colonial to intervention of the United States in the contemporary period.

According to José Saldívar,

[Díaz's framing of] the *fukú americanus* as an alternative unit of analysis beyond the unit of the nation-state further allows him to think through the U.S. and Eurocentric structures of hegemonic thought and representation that continue to dominate the globe today. ("Americanity" 134).

In other words, the conceptualization of the *fukú americanus* implicates the linkage, a planetary system that evolves over centuries and leads eventually to capitalism, modernity, and global systems of powers. The Eurocentric emphasis shifts from the Classical Greeks and Romans towards the age of discovery of the New World, as noted by Saldívar (135). In Díaz's novel, *fukú americanus* marks a pivotal point, altering the course of human history and identifies an ongoing process, embedded in the contemporary age. In this sense, "Santo Domingo might be the *fukú's* Kilometer Zero, its port of entry, but all of us are its children, whether we know it or not" (*Wondrous* 2). Within this setting, the Admiral's curse planted the seed that spread across the Dominican Republic, the entire American continent, and the world. The novel is not telling a sole story of Santo Domingo. The narrator informs us that Puerto Rico has *fufu* and Haiti has its own unnamed spell while even Cuba and Mexico find historical and political reference in footnotes and text³. To a certain extent, Díaz's metanarrative aims to frame a story of the entire continent, hybridizing the union of *fukú americanus*.

Since the Dominican Republic is considered a site of original sin "Everybody in Santo Domingo has a *fukú* story" (5). This malady evolves and stains the lives of those who not only lived through colonization, but also the generations who faced the diaspora and decolonization. Consequently, the reader encounters a collective reference: "the doom affects us all" referring to both Latinos/as and people in general (5). The metaphorical representations of the illness, although operating in the realm of the fictional representation of the novel, exists beyond the reality of the

literary world. It is a notion that affects the lives of some Dominicans even today. In fact, during my recent visit to the Dominican Republic, I interviewed two individuals in their mid-thirties and asked them about fukú in the current age. Rivera Medina claimed that people will not elect or vote for anyone who was born in San Cristóbal, the birthplace of Trujillo, “creyendo que era el sirviente de malvada maldición” (“Medina personal interview”). Diego Medina agreed that her mother believed that the curse had implied stratification of the society and as a result, it was impossible for her siblings and her family to achieve social mobility until the turn of the 21st century (“Medina personal interview”). Perhaps, the relevant question resides outside of the story: does fukú indeed impact our lives today?

When being asked about the permanence of fukú, Díaz in his interview with “Mollossus” (2008) responds that:

The curse of the New World is still upon us. Everything that we did in the Caribbean and the New World has had repercussions on the whole planet, and no matter how much it changes—how much the technology creates these new paradigms, how much hegemony alters itself and mutates to deal with a more dispersed capillary, a flow of power—the very brutal, racialized, hierarchical, Neolithic inhumanity of the “conquest” of the New World, that moment we’ve not escaped from. We’re still there, we’re still in it. (“In darkness” 2008)

Both Díaz (2008) and Saldívar (2011) sustain that fukú exists in a plural form, stringing the constellations of events, leadership, and structures while the world and technologies evolve. Therefore, fukú, ever since its origin, is allied with “a flow of power,” an entity so colossal it affects a wide spectrum of life across the board. In a way, this doom unleashed by the Admiral, progresses and mutates over the course of time, giving birth to modernity and globalization. With this being

said, both globalization and nostalgia account for incurable diseases. One is borrowing the vitality from the other, and both are mutually fortifying their strains while spreading across the Caribbean and the world. In sum, *fukú americanus* captures a widespread transformation of flow and power, creating new economic, political, cultural, and social circumstances, transforming rules and the context in which they operate.

The novel provides a glimpse into Trujillo's dictatorship, violence, and trauma as an inherent part of the Admiral's colonial curse from which the flow of power emanates. Trujillo is described as "Curse's servant, its agents or its master" and it is believed that "even in educated circles, that anyone one who plotted against Trujillo would incur a fukú most powerful, down to seventh generation" (*Wondrous* 2-3). Trujillo's far-reaching extension of powers affects individuals on both a national and an individual scale. To the dictator's "outstanding accomplishments" on a national level belong: the genocide against "Haitians and Haitian-Dominican community" in 1937, renaming all national monuments and landmarks to honor his God-like figure and "the forging of the Dominican people into a *modern* state" (3: with my emphasis). In addition, the reader finds out "Who killed JFK?" – "It was Trujillo; it was the fukú" (4). Consequently, from Trujillo's imperial curse to America and the JFK assassination, the doom exerted itself on Trujillo himself and his enemies, including Oscar's grandfather and those who left the island, and finally the protagonist Oscar. Thus, fukú reaches all the way to North America.

Coming back to Boym's search for a scapegoat, one can clearly nominate Trujillo as the villain, or in the realm of literary representation provided by the novel – the servant of the curse who holds the ring of power as Sauron from the *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. On the other hand, the heroes consist of "the four main characters who fit into the paradigm of the Fantastic Four:

Abelard is Mr. Fantastic, Belicia is the Invisible Woman, Lola is the Human Torch, Oscar is the Thing. Yunior is the Watcher, and Trujillo is their enemy Galactus” (“Gradesaver” n.p).

Fukú americanus, or “the Curse and the Doom of the New World” plots the story transpassing the imperial frontiers, reaching and acting upon its subjects even in the United States. In this vein, Yunior affirms “that Diaspora was a payback by Trujillo’s betrayal of his pueblo” (5). However, there exists a counter spell to fúku. Yunior by crafting Cabral de León’s history fights the evil curse: “as I write these words I wonder if this book ain’t a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell” (*Wondrous* 7). The writing of the book becomes a critical means of recollection, the restoration of the past stands as the antidote, or zafa. In Dominican culture, one learns that the narrator’s uncle “tío Miguel...zafas everything” (7). Zafa is considered a hybrid creation capable of countering the evil charm that appears as a pivotal element in the discussed novel. At the same time, zafa indicates that the act of writing the novel imposes purging properties. Transcribed words have the power to manipulate the reality, history, and oppression, but the pen serves as a counterspell to the long-lasting force of fukú. While tyrants write history as a means of legitimizing their regimes, the act of writing gives shape to multiple forms of reality. It can also liberate the oppression, history, silence, and ignorance.

At the same rate, Yunior refuses to believe in the curse, answering to Oscar repetitively “it’s your parent’s shit,” yet years after Oscar’s death, his ghost reappears in Yunior’s dreams:

About five years after he died I started having another kind of dream. About him or someone who looks like him [...] I want to run from him, and for a long time that’s what I do. It takes me a while before I notice that Oscar’s hands are seamless and the book’s pages are blank. And that behind his mask his eyes are smiling.

Zafa. Sometimes, though, I look at him he has no face and I wake up screaming.
(325)

Yunior reads Oscar's ghost as the will to fill the blank pages, to restore the past of the Cabral de León family. Instead, he continuously encounters erasures. In other words, Yunior, haunted by Oscar and his past, seeks redemption and purges to free his spirit. Yunior's guilt resides partially in failed "Project Oscar," where he tries to reeducate and reshape a Dominican man out of his oversized body by challenging his masculinity, but at the end Yunior gives up (176). Nevertheless, remorse and failed accomplishment haunt Yunior, long after his friend's death.

This sense of loss and failure are transparent in a very brief section of "The Dreams": "[It] [t]ook [me] ten years to the day, went through more lousy shit than you could imagine, was lost for good long while-no Lola, no me, no nothing-until finally I woke up next to somebody I didn't give two shits about...and I said, Ok, Wao, Ok, You win." (325). Once Yunior's life goes downhill, he realizes his failures, such as not being able to find true love and the fear of the curse. Thus, he realized the existence of the curse and Oscar's ghost.

To liberate Oscar's spirit, Yunior feels obliged to document the history and the story. He investigates origins and causes, finding configurations of events that seem like *fatum*, stories that one can never escape retelling, the stories of Oscar, Lola, Beli and Abelard (Oscar's grandfather). By its virtue, Boym's notion of restorative nostalgia accounts for Yunior breaking the silence of diaspora and does not necessarily imply nostalgic recollection, but is a search for the hidden truth. Yunior calls himself the "watcher" and seems to reconstruct past events while he seeks the truth. In this way, he excavates the battle between good and evil, and addressing the "scapegoating," or voicing the historic amnesia both in the main narrative and the footnotes. The blame that gave birth to eternal suffering, diaspora and malady of modern age, reside in the primordial curse – fukú.

“The only way out is in,” said Lola to Yuniór after Oscar’s death. In other words, one has to retell the story and fill the empty spaces to complete the blank volume that Oscar holds in Yuniór’s dream.

The image of blank pages is a leitmotiv in the novel. In similar manner, it haunts Oscar in a reoccurring dream that always ends in the same way “[t]he book was blank” (302). Yuniór, Oscar and his grandfather, Abelard, share a common vocation as writers, which is manifested through the exercise of rewriting the memory and history, the direct and indirect confrontation with the Trujillo regime and dictatorship. As such they are engaged in rewriting memory and history, and in chronicling the direct and indirect confrontations with Dominican dictatorship and the Trujillo regime. Abelard’s work, which most likely concerned Trujillo’s despotism, was destroyed after his death. Oscar’s recurring dream invites him to investigate the legacy of his grandfather and to fill the blank pages. Before Oscar’s death, he catalogues *páginas en blanco* (or empty pages), announcing “the cure to what ails us” – fukú (333). Nonetheless, his manuscript never arrives. Instead, Oscar’s ghost for ten years encourages Yuniór to document the unwritten history. In this sense, writing is a type of confinement of the cherished fragments of memory that are manifested through the act of investigation and processing of information. Yuniór speaks in the name of untold histories, the diaspora, a nation, and those who perished by the direct and indirect influence of the curse and the regime.

In their work, *The Imagine Past* (1989) Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw provide a perspective on the role of nostalgia and history: “Of all the ways of using history, nostalgia is the most general, looks the most innocent, and is perhaps the most dangerous” (*The Imagined Past* 1). Yuniór is obliged to take responsibility for his nostalgia and the nostalgia of those surrounding him. Once one factors history and nostalgia into the plot, the discourse gives birth to monstrous

homelands and disfigured stories of displacement. Although Yuniór retells the story in the singular voice of a dictator, at the same time it also accounts for the plurality of stories. It includes the Cabral de León family saga and “nameless lives” of those who perished – all are honored in the blank pages of the volume. In this manner, Yuniór mediates between individual and collective memory following Boym’s line of thought. As a mediator, he harbors the past events and connects the individual stories and histories of larger structures. The novel, a product of Yuniór’s craftsmanship, is precisely an homage to the past and an unofficial history.

In this way, longing, history, memory, fukú, and zafa configure the life and foretold fate of the characters in the novel. All of the Cabral de León family members suffer from fukú and from Trujillo’s regime both directly and indirectly. Nevertheless, fukú having originated in colonialism persists in the Dominican diaspora. Fukú transgresses the borders and impregnates the lives of diasporic subjects, Oscar, Lola and in particular their mother Belicia Cabral, who was born and raised in the Dominican Republic. The island, therefore, is where the Cabral de León story begins. It may seem like it is a place cursed and haunted by fukú, but it is also a charming home where even bitter memories seem tempered by nostalgia.

3.2 Nostalgic Trujillo Days

Before there was the American Dream, before Paterson, New Jersey, before Oscar and Lola were born, there was Hypatía Belicia Cabral (Beli), “[s]he lived in those days in Baní. Not the frenzied Baní of right now, supported by an endless supply of DoYos who’ve laid claim to most of Boston, Providence, New Hampshire. This was the Baní of time past, beautiful, and respectful” (*Wondrous* 77-78). In this passage, one encounters a subjective, unexamined state, a “simple nostalgia,” in Davis’s view it denotes a state of “healthier, more civilized, more exciting [past]” (*Yearning* 18). Indeed, the old Baní of 1951, was a humble and peaceful place. This transparent

note of nostalgia establishes distance and dialogues between the present, the unattractive Baní and one of those beautiful days. In this manner, Díaz, foreshadows the diasporic distance and temporal displacement. Davis observes that nostalgia is brought forth by transitions in continuity and discontinuity (*Yearning* 49). Rapid shifts and changes that take place in modern cities intensify the degree of sentimental recollection. The longing is brought forth from the present perspective, but alludes to the beautiful past.

In those old days, the city followed a different pace. It was removed from the frenzied Baní of today, supported by an endless supply of DoYos². These are Dominicans who had moved out to New York or were born in New York, but tended to revisit the island. A complementary scene of this nature is discussed in Section Three of this chapter, which compares the Dominican Republic of Belicia's childhood in the 1960s with the one Belicia and Oscar encounter during their visit in the 1990s. Nevertheless, during those early days, pre-dating the supply of Dominican New Yorkers, Belicia's childhood follows a peaceful time filled with relative tranquility, schoolwork, daily routine, and love under the protective wing of her aunt.

La Inca during that time was persistently recounting the Cabral family's glorious past:

These were the Beautiful Days. When La Inca would recount for Beli her family's illustrious history while they pounded and wrung dough with bare hands (Your father! Your mother! Your sisters! Your house!) or when the only talk between them was the voices of Carlos Moya's radio and the sound of the butter being applied to Beli's ruined back [...] Church twice a week, and on Fridays a stroll through Baní's parque central, where in those nostalgic Trujillo days stickup kids were nowhere to be seen and beautiful bands did play. (*Wondrous* 78)

Beforehand, Belicia suffered cruelty from her foster family. The burned marks on her back serve as a reminder of the brutality. Yet, Beli never speaks about those nine years of her life. This time seems forgotten and softened by the nostalgic elicitation of Beli's childhood alongside her protective aunt. Those beautiful days are removed from violence. Instead, they follow charming music of those long ago days while they engage in daily activities. La Inca repetitively praises the memories of her family's "illustrious history" emphasizing their wealth, status, and unconditional love. Beli born into the wealthy, upper class and well-respected Cabral de León family in the mid-1940s Dominican Republic, was the youngest of three daughters born to Dr. Abelard Luis and Socorro Cabral. By virtue of her birth, she was destined to join upper class society and appreciate all of its advantages. Consequently, the reader learns as the story unfolds that the family's stories reach even deeper back in time:

In those long-ago-days—before delicuena and bank failures, before Diaspora—the Cabal were numbered among the High of the Land...In La Vega, where the family lived since 1791, they were practically royalty, as much a landmark as La Casa Amarilla and the Río Camú [...]. (212)

La Inca's oral stories form nostalgic markers that evoke sweet and valuable memories of an idealized, but not easily forgotten past. This description stretches for two pages and details the Cabral's estate: the modern mansion, gardens, stables, servants including the Italian culinary customs. Unfortunately, the beautiful past is followed by the bitter decline of the Cabral family under Trujillo's regime, which La Inca does not mention during Beli's childhood. For this reason, the inspiring memories overshadow the harsh reign of Trujillo's dictatorship. Anew, Belicia Cabral remains the sole survivor of the de Cabral family, while the bitter half of the family's past remains

buried. Instead, La Inca plants cherished memories and expects Beli to be the uplifting hope and to play a key role in restoring the family's forgotten name.

In addition, Beli's aunt showcases remaining family pictures and with them recaps the vocation of her parents, with the aim to inspire Beli's upper class consciousness. La Inca constantly repeated over the course of her upbringing "Your father was a doctor ... your mother was a nurse. They owned the biggest house in la Vega. But Beli did not listen [...]" (82). In a sense, La Inca borrows the vitality from the past and implements it in the deficient present, evoking those faded nostalgic memories. Her hope was to influence Beli's future. As a result, nostalgia resurfaces as a rhetorical tool aiming to awake Beli's deeper consciousness, her royal heritage, status, and former wealth. Yet, young Belicia did not listen.

Beli did not care for the past, she fostered her own sense of direction "[h]er feet pointed forward, she reminded La Inca over and over. Pointed to the future" (81). Sadly, the downfall of the Cabral de León family is directly caused by the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. The political and historical baggage is shared by earlier generations of her family. Instead of coping with the past and identifying the source of her difficulties and strengths, which Beli embodies as the sole survivor of the Cabral family, she moves away from the past. Subsequently, she suppresses the history and memory as she yearns for the future. Drawing on Davis's theory, nostalgia cannot function as a psychological filter if an individual refuses to digest the impact that the past has on an individual's present and future experience. Consequently, Beli is unable to combine the dispersed fragments of her memory and history to form a meaningful present.

Beli did not dwell on the past. Her longing was not directed towards the royal family or lofty mansions and her upper class background, but rather it has always been directed elsewhere. As noted in the text:

Everything about her present life irked her; she wanted, with all her heart, something *else*. When her dissatisfaction enters her heart she could not recall, would later tell her daughter it had been with her *all her life*, but who knows if this is true? What exactly it was what she wanted [...]. (79: without my emphasis)

This discontent clearly perpetuates Beli's life and forms an inseparable part of her existence, *fatum* or *fukú*, her own disease, an entity that remains under the narrator's question mark. This rhetoric, however, requires the interpretations of its readers. In this manner Boym's *Future of Nostalgia* provides a convenient field, an innovative insight regarding the forthcoming nature of longing. Boym notes, "[n]ostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future" (xvi). This remark is functional in regard to Belicia's life longings for somewhere or something *else*.

For teenage Beli, this potent wish for something *else* bares rendering consequences. In a postmodern sense, the choice of anticipated directions is not necessarily guided toward the past, but on the contrary, to the future. This condition can be classified as the divergent from of nostalgia, known as *Sehnsucht*. This German notion describes the emotionally intense state of "craving" that etymologically derives from two nouns: *das Sehnen* "yearning" and *die Sucht*, "addiction." This term denotes a broad spectrum of thoughts regarding all aspects of life viewed as uncompleted or imperfect. This deep feeling can be equally accompanied by negative and positive emotional states or feelings. In this regard, *Sehnsucht* denotes an off-modern version of nostalgia, a divergent mirror image of longing for the future. Scheibe et al. (2007) explores the psychology of *Sehnsucht*, or life longings and identifies six main characteristics among which "utopian conceptions of ideal development," "sense of incompleteness and imperfection of life" and "conjoint time focus on the

past, present, and future” are equally relevant to Beli’s experience (“Psychology of Sehnsucht” 780). In this vein, key features of *Sehnsucht* may validate Beli’s unsatisfactory state and her escapist ambitions.

It is not clear what Beli always wanted to achieve through her lost childhood, but surely she was looking for a way out – an escape from Baní, school, work at the bakery and La Inca’s household, or from the island itself. Henceforth, the deterministic aspect of displacement is an inseparable feature of this trend. The center where she used to live, evolves between school and La Inca’s home. Beli wishes to surpass these established and impenetrable boundaries: “She endured school, the bakery, and La Inca’s suffocating solicitude with a furious jaw. She watched hungrily for visitors from out of town, threw open her arms at the slightest hint of a wind...” (88-89). This solitude leads Beli to “[remind] La Inca over and over” that “her feet [are] pointing to the future” (81). Her longing for a different place and time gradually becomes her obsession. Eventually, this leads to a negative conceptualization and a cycle of sorrow, cruelty, abuse, and loneliness. Young Beli growing up under La Inca’s roof grows into a striking beauty gifted with a voluptuous body, which becomes her blessing and her curse. As a consequence, the rupture with the cycle of solitude occurs through the desire and involvement of her physical attributes.

Beli’s unconditional love affair with the Gangster, or more precisely the husband of Trujillo’s sister, ends with Beli becoming pregnant and barely surviving the outrage of the Gangster’s wife. Michel Foucault’s *Power and Sexuality* (1976) comes to mind, when stumbling upon this insight. The social theorist indicates a bond between punishment and the body. The body is being brought to justice and is publically punished for its misconduct of authority. After all, the Gangster was Trujillo’s extension of power, and his wife felt as if their marriage was put into jeopardy. In a similar way, Belicia’s sexuality is repressed, controlled, and physically punished. In

the 19th century, people used to hang or drown zesty courtesans and display them publicly. Belicia's body sustains grave brutality, violence and abuse, yet she miraculously survives this turmoil. Thanks to La Inca's unconditional care and protection, Beli is saved. In short, Beli's romance with the Gangster concludes with her obligatory departure from her homeland.

Stained by the violence of Trujillo's regime, Beli refuses to speak of her scarred past. Ironically, she was happily in love with the Gangster. After all, he exposed her to a world, beyond Bani, to jewelry, to famous celebrities, to life and love. Most importantly, by his side she felt loved. This short period of joy accounts for her nostalgic days, of which she never speaks in the diaspora. Trujillo's system manipulated Dominican history to silence its rebellious voices. For Beli, like for many Dominicans, the effects are not so easily eradicated, but infatuation is not easily forgotten either. The love of her youth underscores anew the nostalgic marker that measured her happiness and malady. The prospective dimensions of longing for something *else* follows her in life and also inclines her towards misfortunes.

From the very beginning, it seems that Beli has been destined for the departure from her homeland. A key reference is captured in the opening of chapter three, in the initial description:

[T]here was their mother Hypatía Belicia Cabral a girl so tall your leg bones ached looking at her so dark it was as if the Creatrix had, in her making, blinked, who liked her yet-to-be-born daughter, would come to exhibit Jersey malaise—the inextinguishable longing for *elsewheres*. (77: with my emphasis)

This quotation accounts for two substantial points: nostalgia achieving a postmodern dimension, and defying anew her homeland as the center and inevitable departure point. Moreover, the aspiration for *elsewhere* dialogues with larger structures and yields a double meaning. It was a

potent wish, but unachievable for Dominicans living under Trujillo's dictatorship, because his impenetrable *Plátano Curtain* sheltered the world from the outside in and from the inside out.

Consequently, “longing for elsewhere” becomes a metaphor of collective yearning for freedom, or a “wishful thinking,” a desire to escape the island that stands as “Alcatraz of the Antilles” under “the ruling of Leonidas Trujillo Molina” (80). Another strong metaphor refers to Beli's group, “the generation reaching consciousness in a society that lacked any” (81). This reference is amplified by a plurality of voices crushed under the regime, “[t]he generation that despite the consensus declared change impossible *hankered* for change all the same” (81: without my emphasis). After all, longing is interrelated to a larger structure and collective memory. In Boym's view, “nostalgia is about the relationship between biography of the individual and the biography of groups and nations, between personal and collective memory” (*The Future* xvi). The notion of collective longing always exists in an inseparable relationship across individual and communal spaces of memory. In particular, longing in the Dominican Republic is directed towards freedom and social mobility on a domestic and global scales. Yet, such desire was not achievable under Trujillo's ruling. Similarly, a dissatisfaction enters Beli's heart early on. This desire to escape the islands fuels teenage Belicia, who “[h]ad the inchoate longings of nearly every adolescent escapist, of an entire generation” (80). She exhibits collective malaise growing up under *Plátano Curtain*.

On a different occasion, she searches for the cause of this problem and affirms: “At the end of her life, when she was being eaten alive by cancer, Beli would talk about how trapped they felt. It was like being at the bottom of an ocean, she said” (81). The metaphor of a sinking ship indicates anticipation, an escapist urge, an outcry for breaking the *Plátano Curtain* and setting sail. Yet the

flight from the sinking ship is not to home, but away from it. It is instead a search for a place removed from the island.

On an individual basis, Belicia's wishful thinking for somewhere "else" turns into a leitmotiv, her curse, and a disease that surpasses borders and finds its way into in the diaspora. However, the inextinguishable ailment is inherited by her yet-to-be-born children Oscar and Lola, who grew up without a father in New Jersey. Thus, this "inextinguishable longing for elsewhere," or the earlier discussed *Sehnsucht* is exported to the U.S. and turns into Jersey malaise, where Beli experiences the solitude of diaspora. This void grows in her heart, leaving the bittersweet memory of homeland in oblivion.

Nevertheless, Belicia on her deathbed breaks the silence and utters "to Lola in her Last Days: All I wanted was to dance. What I got was *esto*, she said, opening her arms to encompass the hospital, her children, her cancer, America" (*Wondrous* 113: without my emphasis). The failed love affair with a man who turns out to be the husband of Trujillo's sister, migration and hard labor take a toll on her body. Besides being physically and emotionally punished, she embraces the disease of globalization. Breast cancer eats her alive. After all, she moves from a less industrialized country and migrates to the most fast-growing economically institutionalized society. She settles in New Jersey in the late 1960s, a place where all her dreams dissolve. On one hand, Beli takes advantage of the socio-economic opportunities by working two and three jobs at a time as a way to maintain a household and ensure a proper education for her children. On the other hand, it seems that the stress, the labor, the loneliness, and the embargo on her adolescent memory, all have taken its toll on her body. These factors seem to contribute to the environment that makes one prone to developing a breast cancer.

Moreover, her homeland is a place very different from the U.S, where she is destined to embrace “the cold, the backbreaking drudgery of the factorías, the loneliness of Diaspora, that she will never live in Santo Domingo, her own heart” (*Wondrous* 164). Once she must leave the island, Beli departs with more questions than solutions. Her arrival in the United States heats up this quarrel. In fact, it escalades her confusion and frustration. She leaves the Dominican Republic, a domicile where she has been entangled in nothing but trouble and misfortune. Finally, she settles in the United States, a place that never feels quite like a true home as her Santo Domingo.

In a short, the Dominican Republic stands as a symbolic representation of an idealized, but lost homeland paired with a sentimental remembrance of suppressed love. Beli’s existence plays on the margins of two societies. She continuously embraces loneliness even more intensified in the diaspora where she is unable to fill the void in her heart. This condition partially initiates her decision to obliterate the first nine years of her life from her own memory, and therefore from her family’s history. Repression of memory becomes a way of coping with the past, her way of resisting longing first in the Dominican Republic and later in exile. After all, nostalgia is a byproduct of globalization. During the 19th century, the binary nostalgia-disease came to be considered a debilitating disorder among soldiers, but then also for immigrant workers, factory laborers, and other rural subjects who experienced dislocation and malady caused by immigration, industrialization, and modernization. In a similar sense, Beli’s shift from primarily rural and undeveloped Baní to the metropolitan New Jersey results in labor in factories and her loneliness. Despite efforts of silencing her memory and history, Belicia is unable to hide her past forever. The burden that Beli suppresses has a direct impact on the next generation. Oscar inherits his mother’s solitude of the diaspora and yearning for something else. In his coming-of-age story, Oscar attempts to investigate his family’s downfall and legacy, which takes us to the next section.

3.3 Longing in New Jersey Malaise

Oscar de León serves as the primary protagonist, a non-typical Latino character in a modernistic sense. His coming-of-age story unfolds in the 1970s in Washington Heights, New Jersey. Childhood “was truly a Golden Age for Oscar” because as a young Casanova had “his first and only ménage a trios” (13). His luck with women is brief and short like the story of his life, hence, the allusion to “The Short, Happy life of Francis Macomber” by Ernest Hemingway. Once he gets dumped by his girlfriend, Martiza, his life goes downhill. In fact, the reader finds Oscar converted into a hardcore sci-fi nerd who weighed 245 to 260 pounds when he was depressed as a high school sophomore (19). Thus, Oscar’s burden is his inability to stand up to Dominican cultural expectations. In short, he inherits this malady from his mother. While Beli was hypersexual with her 35 DDD, Oscar lacks “the Atomic level G[ame]” and is unable to pick up girls like a “typical Dominican Cat” (20). His curse is embodied in his corporal deficiencies and his inability to pass as a Dominican in both the diaspora and the Dominican Republic.

The described lavishing force persists in the U.S. and drowns Oscar in the loneliness of diaspora. This discomfort and anguish was brought by his mother. Beli’s children, Oscar and Lola, inherit the same stigma, “the inextinguishable longing for elsewhere” (81). These desires reemerge in diaspora and bring aspiration, disobedience, danger, and destruction. This prospective dimension of longing drives Lola to run away from home at age fifteen and leads her explore a counter identity as a Punk-Goth girl and world outside of New Jersey. After her teen rebellion years, she constantly yearns to leave the U.S. For a time she goes to teach in Japan, and eventually moves to Miami where she marries. The one thing she knows for sure is she wants to live somewhere other than in New Jersey. This prospective form of nostalgia, or *Sehnsucht* is a fundamental feature in Oscar’s coming-of-age.

The protagonist is a marginalized figure on many levels. He is an obese and nerdy male of Afro-Dominican decent, born in New Jersey, who is unable to counter the machismo that is expected in the Latino stereotypical environment. Oscar is marginalized as a nerd and not fully Dominican. Additionally, according to his nickname, "Oscar Wao," which he acquired at school alludes to homosexual novelist of the 19th century, Oscar Wilde. Thus, not only is his identity challenged, but more importantly, his masculinity is the subject of a further challenge. Oscar recaps on various occasions the same line "Dominicano soy, Dominicano soy" or "I am Dominican, I am Dominican" to emphasize his ethnicity and heritage. He is clearly a trans-national subject, challenged by geographical borders and cultural distinctions. At the same time, he breaks the traditional views of nationality in the process of becoming within and across national and cultural boundaries. Along this line, Díaz's novel challenges the dominate position of subjects in their land of origin and in their country of residence. Oscar navigates the multiethnic setting of Northern Jersey while he is being challenged by his Dominican ethnicity, Spanish language, and forms of unwelcomed hospitality. In this process, he is striving to redefine his personal space by adopting a counter identity.

Globalization plays a fundamental role in this process. References to popular culture form a complementary currency of globalization. As both a structure of feeling and a form of enactment, nostalgia incriminates a critique of modernity, extending beyond the imaginary. In other words, a structure of feeling grows into the realm of practice and action. His woeful inability to meet the cultural expectations of both Dominican and American cultures makes him an outsider to both cultures. Consequently, Oscar adopts an escape route and awakens an alternative identity via his exploration of science fiction literature and American pop culture.

Oscar's coming-of-age starts in the 1970s. His teenage years take place in New Jersey of the 1980s. Both decades account see the emergence of the nerd era, followed by explosions of Atari computer games, comics, sci-fi novels, and pre-digital Role-Playing games (commonly referred to as RPG). Accordingly, Oscar spends time hiding in the library and contemplating works ranging from Chinese science-fiction to works by Tolkien, Margaret Weis, and Tracy Hickman. He encounters a profound comfort in the parallel universe of *Dungeon and Dragons* and Atari Games along with sci-fi literature: “[n]o apocalyptic movie or book or game existed that he had not seen or read or played” (23). Moreover, Oscar could “write in Elvish,” and he could speak the invented language from Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) – “Chakobsa [and] could differentiate between a Slan, a Dorsai, and Lensman in acute detail, knew more about the Marvel Universe than Stan Lee, and was a role-playing game fanatic” (21). His extensive knowledge and experience account for a peculiar talent; “Oscar showed the genius his grandfather insisted was part of the family patrimony” – his blessing and failure to attract women (21). Oscar's acute nerdiness is accompanied by his eternal quest – an adolescent desire to find love, but he simply does not possess the necessary qualities expected of a stereotypical Dominican.

In a postmodern sense, Oscar's desire for the unknown puts his mind elsewhere. This yearning sidetracks him from reality. Instead, he finds refuge, a comfort zone that he lacked in New Jersey. Boym draws on the relation of nostalgia as a defense mechanism. In an off-modern spirit, this urge of defense becomes Oscar's escape path, giving him freedom through the lens of the imaginary. Geoffrey Lord evaluates the role of history and culture in shaping the belonging in *Postmodernism and Notions of National Difference* (1995). In this critical work he upholds: “American culture, persistently present minded, remains future-oriented and markedly obsessed with the idea of breaking with the past to found something new” (102). This line of thought, in a

postmodern sense, articulates Oscar's desire to voice his difference and empathizes with the process of becoming a geek.

To escape from his failures and his platonic crushes, he pictures a futuristic utopia, where nerds like him are protagonists with supernatural powers who save the world and attract the attentions of his imaginary girls.

In his [day]dreams he was either saving them [girls] from aliens or he was returning to the neighborhood, rich and famous –It's him! The Dominican Stephen King! ... In these apocalyptic daydreams he was always some kind of plátano Doc Savage, a supergenius who combined world-class martial artistry with deadly firearms proficiency. (27)

The science-fiction references to a non-human world, account for Oscar's countercultural practice, where he crafts a comfortable universe and fits in, but in the real life. However, in the real life his nerdiness cannot be hidden. To accomplish this line of thought, Yuniór provides a footnote directed at the reader to voice Oscar's otherness: "You really want to know what being a X-Man feels like? Just be a smart bookish boy of color in a contemporary U.S. ghetto. Mamma mía! Like having bat wings or pair of tentacles growing out your chest" (22). Díaz employs Yuniór's voice to criticize the stereotyping and cultural discrimination that perpetuates a negative attitude toward people of color. In this manner, the author is also underlining the acculturation of Latino/a.

On the other hand, Yuniór's voice proves that Oscar's identity is fluid, mixed, or in short, transnational⁴. The diaspora reflects Oscar's identity in correlation to others and his otherness. Yuniór, the narrator, supplies a nearly endless list of titles, genres and authors, all of which nerdy Oscar adores and embodies. This accumulation shapes Oscar's cultural context and becomes a constant which alludes to his diasporic experience, and by extension to his family story and the

Dominican history. Oscar's enjoyment of these works moves beyond him being a nerd. These genres allow him to escape into a completely different domain, one where outsiders are true heroes. Each time he moves back to reality, he encounters doubt, vagueness, and insecurity.

This ambiguity falls within the category, which Boym labels as "diasporic intimacy" – a rhetoric that challenges individuals with defamiliarization and uprootedness. This state accounts for Oscar's recurring malaise in the metropolis of New Jersey. Diasporic intimacy derives from dubbing an inseparable component of polarities, referring to geographic locations, ideologies, or an identity delivered in the urge of discontinuities. In its essence, one searches for the unfamiliar, the notion of return, and desires to make the unknown familiar. Stuart Hall provides a complementary concept, "diasporic identity" as function, and a way of positioning the past with the contrast inherited by the presence. As a result, the process of being and becoming transcends place, time, history and culture ("Cultural Identity" 225). In this equation, "[d]iaspora identities are those which are constantly reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (235). The notion of being and becoming stems from the plurality of the above concepts. This task is far more complex for the American-born generation, especially if one considers Belicia's silence about her past and her lack of a paternal figure. Thus, Oscar as a diasporic subject is not simply here and there but also across different spaces.

According to Guarnizo, Dominicans born in the U.S. "have become a group whose territory is a borderless, transnational space. They are here and there and in between... they are perceived as foreigners in both locations" ("Binational Society" 166). In a similar manner, Oscar's life chronically navigates between the Dominican Republic and the United States, placing the protagonist's trajectory and development as a framing device in the novel as a whole. Yet, he is not firmly rooted in either place. After all, although he was born in the U.S., the footnote of the

text indicates that he was “living in DR [Dominican Republic] for the first couple years of his life and then abruptly wrenchingly relocating to New Jersey” (19). Due to Oscar’s diasporic experience, he is located here and elsewhere, existing across and in-between spaces, not fully American nor Dominican. Most importantly, he realizes that he does not fit in either place.

Up-rootedness and in-betweenness seem to be elaborated terms, but if one were to introduce an idea of continuum as identity, it might be valid to consider Oscar moving from one end to the other in order to achieve his form of a cultural belonging and balance. On the other hand, he would not be fully merged in either extreme. One may ask the question: What does nostalgia have to do with any of this? Davis suggests that nostalgia is “the search for continuity amidst heats of discontinuity” (*Yearning* 35). The sociologist perceives the disconnecting elements as building blocks that an individual needs to reassemble and accept oneself on the verge of change. Davis adds that longing accounts for an inspirational part of our inner self, a psychological lens that individuals employ in their never-ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities (*Yearning* 31). Accordingly, in evaluating the use of nostalgia, one cannot ignore the setting or context in which it operates and liberates itself.

Unable to fit within in his primarily Dominican High School setting in Paterson, New Jersey, and abandoned by his only friends Al and Miggs (who find girlfriends in their senior year), Oscar is challenged by his queerness and inauthenticity. Oscar intends to polish up “what remained of his Dominicaness” via changing his attitude, personal appearance and progressive visits to the Dominican Republic. In other words, this is his attempt to publicly acknowledge his Dominican heritage and establish his future. As a result, this constellation of events prompts a summer visit to Baní. This trip marked his turning point, besides being reminded by La Inca about the family curse, Oscar awakens his vocation as a writer.

This journey gives him purpose in documenting his sci-fi stories. The concept of nostalgia is relevant to the agglomeration of ideas in Oscar's case study: tradition, identity, authenticity, culture, and heritage. While in a traditional sense of 17th to 19th century rhetoric, nostalgia was a pathological discourse associated with homesickness, yearning for home and past, as noted in Hoffer (1688) and Baron de Larrey (1823). Oscar, in this case a diasporic subject living in a contemporary period, suffers from prospective dimension-homesickness. His yearning is directed at the lack of a tangible home where he would feel and fit comfortably. In an off-modern sense, this desire is focused sideways as maintained by Boym (2001). This condition can be again classified as *Sehnsucht*. Scheibe et al. (2007) affirms the psychology of *Sehnsucht* as life longings directed to the multiple facets of human life, and the scholars classify it as: "utopian conceptions of ideal development," and the "sense of incompleteness and imperfection of life" ("Psychology of *Sehnsucht*" 780). In a similar way, these factors parallel to Oscar's life-longings and condition: his escapism toward utopian universes where the "other" is a hero.

Oscar repeatedly finds refuge within the realm of Western Popular Culture (Role-Playing games, sci-fi comic books and TV-series of the 1970s, and 1980s). He develops a counter identity during his high school and college years while living in a shared dorm room with Yuniior. Upon his graduation from college, he moves back home where he left off and manages to find work at his old high school, Don Bosco Tech. He develops the same routine once a week, driving to Woodbridge Mall and to eyeball the latest RPGs at the Game Room, and goes on long rides "as far as Amish country" (269). His comic books and voyages do not bring him enjoyment and comfort. Ironically, three years of work at Don Bosco are a metaphor for Oscar's lack of growth and his underdevelopment, as well as the ongoing search he pursues for the place where he belongs. One day he envisions his distant future and "[s]aw himself at the Game Room, picking through

the miniatures for the rest of his life. He didn't want this future but couldn't see how it could be avoided, couldn't figure out his way out. Fukú. Darkness" (268). This passage marks a decisive moment in his life, a rupture with his own way of perceiving his existence. Instead of sidetracking from the reality, the narrator depicts Oscar as the object of his own observation. His fate seems predetermined by powers of fukú or darkness, liberating his pursuit to reconcile for a productive change. A transformation takes place once the new generation of games and gamers emerges in the mid-1980s.

As the reader observes in the text, Oscar one day, "walked into the Game Room and was surprised to discover that overnight the new generation of nerds weren't buying role-playing games anymore. They were obsessed with *Magic Cards!* No more characters or campaigns" (269). The popular culture products of the 1970s and 1980s form a complementary feature of globalization. In this passage, an abrupt change occurs in the gamer world, advancing from "campaigns and characters [to] endless battles between decks" (269). The majority of these Role-Playing games of the 1970s and 1980s actually required intellectual applications, such as logic, supportive guidance from the game master, involved sitting around a table talking to each other using math skills when rolling the dice – a sentimental object of recollection. Oscar "tried to put together a decent deck, but it just wasn't his thing. Lost everything to an eleven-year-old punk...First sign that his Age was coming to a close" (270). As a result, Oscar finds himself removed from the charm and his comfort zone once the old vibe disappears within the new nerd era.

The lack of fascination with a *Magic* cards leaves Oscar on the verge of longing, frustration, and hopelessness. This is when he realizes that "his Age was coming to a close. When the latest nerdery was no longer compelling, when you preferred the old to new" (270). The new nerd milieu demonstrates a note of longing for the past highlighting both Oscar's and his fidelity and allure to

the old genre of games. In addition, it highlights a breakthrough moment sparked by a shift in continuity, as suggested by Davis. For a reader removed from Role-Play Games, it may not seem significant, yet for the nerd generation, the disappearance of cultural artifacts parallels to “ground zero.” Instead of lamenting the nostalgic fixation with the past, the rupture precludes a creative change, “for the first time in years Oscar said, My elder spirits have been talking to me, Ma. I think I might accompany you [to Santo Domingo]” (272). Oscar follows his inner voice and decides to spend the summer in the Dominican Republic.

Every summer Santo Domingo slaps the Diaspora engine into reverse, yanks back as many of its expelled children as it can; airports choke with overdressed; necks and luggage carousels groan under the accumulated weight...pilots fear for the planes—overburden beyond belief—and for themselves; restaurants, bars, clubs theaters, malecones, beaches, resorts, hoteles...Like someone had sounded a general reverse evacuation: Back home, everybody! Back home! (*Wondrous* 271)

This quotation exhibits a flow of people, goods, products, and a massive consumption proclaimed through the notion of return to the homeland. Annesley in *Fictions of Globalization* (2006) argues that globalization disputes befit “the connections of that tie ethnicity and consumption together” (8). Diaspora and globalization factor nostalgia into the contexts of return, yearning for the place, and a desire to articulate the wealth of Dominican Yorkers upon their repetitive returns to their fatherland. Annesley’s globalization debate follows further consideration: “dreams of escape from, and rebellion against, consumer society and the forces of globalization; and the impact and consequences of tourism and migration” (8).

In this vein, the aviation contributes as a means to action, transporting the children of the diaspora, their excess of goods and capital that will be spent in bars, clubs, restaurants and hotels

providing satisfactory exchange to economic development of their Dominican Republic. Díaz's quote articulates a substantial overflow of masses and capital directed from the mainland towards their country of origin. This course of events is predetermined primarily for a purpose of extensive tourists' consumption supporting the economic engine of the Dominican Republic with a regular return of Dominican Yorkers. This notion ties into the argument presented in the section, which focuses on the rural Baní of Belicia's childhood.

In Belicia's coming-of-age, the reader encounters the Dominican Republic of the mid-1950s and 1960s: "[N]ot the frenzied Baní of right now, supported by an endless supply of DoYos who've laid claim to most Boston, Providence, New Hampshire. This was the Baní of time past, beautiful, and respectful. A city famed for its resistance to blackness" (77-78). The old image of Baní delivers a country removed from the progress and massive return of Dominican Yorkers and underlines nonexistent Haitian presence via its resistance to blackness. The previous quote alludes to the change over the course of approximately three decades.

This group of DoYos or Dominican Yorkers arriving from all over the state of New York had witnessed the ache of temporal displacement, the diaspora, progress, and globalization. To implement Annesley's line of thought, the massive numbers of DoYos increasingly have "impact and consequences of tourism and migration" as they fulfill their "dream of escape from, and rebellion, against the consumer society" (*Fictions of Globalization* 8). If one ought to extend the reasoning to longing. Boym's nostalgia is a deep societal and cultural condition, a syndrome caused by accelerated times, in which the subjects tend to revisit their native land and hope to find a temporal relief from fast-track life abroad. In this sense, nostalgia for old Baní is a retrospective force. Boym affirms that restorative nostalgia rebuilds the homeland in mimetic sense before its entry into the turmoil of rapid scale of globalization (*The Future* xvii). Modernity, creates lament

and concerns. The loss of a better past, the memory resides in a circumscribed place and time: “Baní of time past beautiful and respectful” (77). The narrator invokes a rhetorical question passed as a critique of the present. This interplay alludes to a mournful actual state or urban reality that exports Dominicans back to their homeland every year.

A constructive picture of an idealized past resurfaces in the light of present. The Dominican Republic of Belicia’s childhood during the mid-1950s differs from the one she and Oscar encounter in the 1990s. Ironically, they stand out as Dominican Yorkers emphasizing their apparent difference. Upon his return to Santo Domingo, Oscar is “looking so dolled-up and elegante” while his mother “got done like she was having an audience with King Juan Carlos of Spain himself...to communicate how much distance she’d traveled, to emphasize not like the rest of these dominicanos she was” (272). Again, diasporic experience factors nostalgia into the contexts of homecoming. In this view, Guarnizo claims that “Dominican migrants are a heterogeneous social group...whose behaviors reflect both U.S. and Dominican cultural influences, elements of which are selectively navigated” (*Binational Society* 169). Accordingly, return to the homeland illustrates their desire to articulate their metamorphosis and to underline their Dominican-American identity, and both Oscar and Belicia do it vividly. Their arrival is depicted as follows:

The beat-you-down heat was the same and so was the fecund tropical smell...likewise the air pollution and thousands of motos and cars and dilapidated trucks on the roads and the clusters of peddlers at every traffic light (so dark, he [Oscar] noticed and his mother said, dismissively, Maldito haitianos)...the buses that charged with nothing past so overflowing with passengers that from the outside they looked like they were making a rush delivery of spare limbs. (273)

Accelerated rhythm of life, temporal agitation and a note of euphoria resurface as a consecutive two-fold reaction. First, an emotional arousal awakens by the lush tropical scent, heat and humidity that Belica and Oscar have never forgotten. The connection to the past occurs through sharpened perpetual senses as they reconcile with what was remembered and fixed in the memory of their homeland. A sensual impression is preceded by a disdain, “Maldito haitianos.” This prejudice and reflection is sparked by the presence of the dark skinned Haitian minority that disturbs both Oscar and his mother upon their arrival. Additionally, an overflow of the human presence, a substantial increase in unsafe public transportation rushing its travelers toward their work and destinations, reflect a busy, fast-tracked pace of life followed by elevated pollution. All of the above factors inaugurate temporal agitation and craft a stark contrast with the tranquility and beauty of previously described Belicia’s childhood “days of time past, beautiful, and respectful” in a “city famed for its resistance to blackness” (78).

The following picture of the capital stems from the lasting note of hate and prejudice toward those with dark skin complexions. The setting becomes even more abrupt indulging progress and globalization:

Santo Domingo was the place that crumbled with crippled concrete shells come to die-and the hunger on some of the kids’ faces, can’t forget that-but also it seemed in many places like a whole new country was materializing atop of ruins of the old one: there were now better roads and nicer vehicles and brand new luxury air-conditioned buses playing the longer routes to the Cibao and beyond and U.S. fast-food restaurants (Dunkin Donuts and Burger King) and local ones [...]. (273)

The reconstruction of Santo Domingo brings forth a disfigured image of the capital by reflecting both the urban broken facet and paved expression of poverty on the faces of starving children. An

image followed by what Boym calls changes in “porosity,” which manifest themselves in cities in transition (*The Future* 76). Consequently, the paragraph bestows “a whole new country was materializing atop of ruins of the old one.” From Davis’s perspective, nostalgia shifts between stability and discontinuity giving a fertile ground for longing to flourish (*Yearning* 19). In this way, a new urban space emerges on the ruins of an old post-colonial world, both merging and reemerging generate a juxtaposed collection of space, time and memory embedded in place and time, and molded by modernity. To paraphrase Boym, the city becomes the ideal crossroad between freedom and modernity, nostalgia and innovation (*The Future* 76). A quintessential space of cultural memory appears in eyesight, old ruins erased, fast tracked by modernity, form a crossroad between time and overtaken space. Once more, the inevitable flipside of the coin of modernity captures spaces in transition, the passing of time as a response to a loss of spatial boundaries and social borders.

In this sense, nostalgia is a response to social and cultural phenomena. Global forces such as capitalist reconstructions, including the influence of imperialism imposed by the United States, reshape the old Dominican Republic. Thus, from a neo-colonial nostalgia appears a world born from the aches of modernity and progress. Instead of the world immigrating to the United States, America has immigrated to the Dominican Republic. The U.S. marks its existence within the monuments: Dunkin Donuts and Burger King. Progress fosters a bricolage of two spaces, a new and modern one emerges on top of the colonial ruins of the Dominican Republic, which includes the culturally diverse Haitian world. By extension, the agglomeration of the American consumer’s products and spread of restaurants creates junctures of both old and new. Within the margins of the city one encounters poverty and chains of fast foods restaurants, and products perhaps undesired by most Dominicans. Instead, they target American or Dominican-American consumers.

As a result, restaurant chains and American products exist as a perk for tourists like DoYos, and as a sign of globalization which shows the expanding power of the U.S. It is a sign of far-reaching global landscapes that bring to light North America's flow of power that exerts cultural influence gradually dominating and positioning over a Third World country. This contemporary image of the Dominican Republic contrasts with what Belicia experiences during her childhood. For this reason, the novel retrofits the old Baní of the mid-1950s in the earlier chapter of Belicia's coming-of-age story, while the third chapter offers a contrasting snapshot of the Dominican Republic undergoing institutional and cultural transformation of the 1990s. The divergent picture of the current country responds to the yearning for a time with a slower pace, with less cultural diversity in Santo Domingo. But instead, the reader encounters gradual transformation, which brings the reading to Oscar's viewpoint on this matter.

The poverty is observed vividly from Oscar's perspective once his view shifts from the city center to its outskirts, as noted in the text:

[I]n La Capital –the guaguas, the cops, *the mind-boggling poverty*, the Dunkin Donuts, the beggars, the Haitian selling roasted peanuts...the afternoon walks on the Conde, *the mind-blowing poverty*, the snarls of streets and rusting zinc shacks that were there the barrios populares, the masses of niggers he waded through every day...the new tunnels driving into bauxite earth, the signs that banned donkey carts from the same tunnels" (277: with my emphasis)

A mixture of American imperialism abruptly shifts to the outskirts of Santo Domingo, the old fashioned shack-houses with zinc roofs, noise, streets packed with busses, abandoned donkey carts, the mind blowing poverty, and the dark skinned Haitians are a constant in these shantytowns. In fact, there are many similarities between Dominicans and Haitians as Hispaniola is by American

standards 95% black. The old ruins intercept the image of time and history embodying a primordial space of nostalgia. The porosity holds its value in accumulated space over time and those who visited the Dominican Republic at least twice in the past decade, like myself, are made aware of how this new space materializes on top of the old ruins.

In Díaz's novel, the margins of both the old and new world are crushed and redefined by an urban image of the city and its barrios. This changing ethnographic landscape of nostalgia is shaped by cultural struggles and concerns that arise from spatial context and social boundaries linked to commonality and continuity. At the same time, this perplexing image emphasizes distance and disjuncture leading to a critique of modernity as a way to frame the unattractive present. The reader encounters a parallel image in Derek Walcott's "Shooner Flight," where the sailor, Shabine encounters an old paradise lying in the ruins of the emerging empire. In a similar fashion, Oscar inherits Shabine's legacy. The sailor is also a product of history and colonization and passes the weight of the past onto the future generation. Centuries later Oscar, confronts the old world under the new neo-imperial powers of modern age, facing contemporary slums and neo-colonial nostalgia. Since the arrival of Columbus to the present times, colonialism and imperialism paved the violent and uneven social, cultural as well as economic systems.

Díaz's novel does not present a simple interpretation of history, nationality and culture. Instead all the events funnel toward and end with Oscar. His repetitive trips to the Dominican Republic play a fundamental role in his becoming and belonging. After all, as an infant he spent the early years of his life on the island, and then moves to New Jersey. But the question is: Is he capable of reconnecting with his roots? The highlighted changes imposed by globalization within Santo Domingo and the island itself, prove no longer to be the same old place of Belicia's childhood, yet still are a charming place capable of miracles, as well as misfortunes.

Regarding wonder, the section “Oscar Goes Native” depicts his venture within the main cities of the island Cibao, Boca Chica, Baní, La Vega, Samaná and Santo Domingo. Oscar enjoys life from the perspective of a local, hanging out with his friends and family, eyeballing girls, overeating chicharones, drinking mamajuana, and el presidente. He moves a step closer to merging with his native country. Besides being perplexed by the fascination with what the island has to offer, after a few weeks of vacation, he even overcomes prerogative stereotypes: “he stopped being dismayed that everyone had called him gordo (and, worse, gringo)” (278). In a sense, a voyage through urban city spaces brings Oscar a step closer to the fatherland. Yet, he remains an outsider from the perspective of native Dominicans.

On the contrary, the downfall of his trajectory is due to his falling in love with a “semirated puta,” Ybón Pimentel, a fresh settler from Amsterdam, who “Oscar considered her the start of his *real life*” (279: emphasis in original). And this is the for a good and predictable reason “[Oscar] refused to succumb to what whisper that all long-term-immigrants carry inside, the whisper that says *You do not belong*” (276: emphasis in original). The title protagonist, a diasporic subject who exists in-between or across spaces of *here* and *elsewhere* aims to make the coherent whole of disjointed fragments of his life. The productivity of the diaspora follows the modes of reproduction of the past within the present. In the same context, Oscar’s identity is a byproduct of longing for elsewhere that he inherits from his mother, labeled “the Queen of Diaspora,” making Oscar her offspring (261). His quest for authenticity mirrors the pathway undertaken by his mother that incorporates an unhealthy love-hate relationship. Although the powers of diasporic intimacy account for the driving force in his process of becoming, love – like nostalgia – is both poison and a cure. In peculiar, one should consider the fact that Oscar ignores the Capitán, Ybón’s boyfriend

and chief of police, and continues to visit her despite his warnings and a harsh beating. Oscar's trajectory mirrors the failures of his mother.

In both nearly fatal narratives, Beli and Oscar survive miraculously, while the fundamental theme follows a similar pattern. Neither of them talks about their beatings in the cane fields, and each keeps blindly believing in love. More significantly, the spatial pattern takes place between homelands toward elsewhere and from the adopted homeland to the ancestral home for Beli and Oscar, respectively. In this constellation of events, the pivotal point articulates a reversed flow of the diaspora. Oscar's longing for elsewhere reemerges in Santo Domingo as his desire, disobedience that eventually brings misfortune. After Oscar's nearly fatal beating, and numerous protests from family members, he goes back to the U.S. and from there embarks upon a "Final Voyage" to the Dominican Republic.

The shift between spaces reflects Oscar's fractured identity and longing to be a member of specified place, which originates from the diasporic interplay between past and present, here and elsewhere. Stuart Hall provides a complementary concept, "diasporic identity" a way of positioning the past with the contrast inherited by presence, for this matter the process of being and becoming is transcending, place, time, history and culture (*Cultural Identity* 225). In a similar way, Oscar's identity follows an assemblage of these entities, which stem from diasporic dualities. In the "Final Voyage," Ybón and Oscar interchange thoughts: "I don't want you to end up dead. Go Home. But beautiful girl...This is my home" referring to Santo Domingo as his home (318). Ybón emphasizes "Your real home, mi amor" while Oscar responds: "A person can't have two?" (218). This conversation underscores the elicited rhetoric of diaspora and notion of duality. Oscar's acceptance of binaries places him as having a diasporic experience which gives him two homes, cultures, nations and even languages. In regards to language, before Oscar's execution "[t]he

words coming out like they belonged to someone else, his Spanish was good for once” (321). Seemingly, he subconsciously resorts to his Dominican identity through the fluent articulation of Spanish language, which implies coming to terms with his roots.

Oscar’s assimilation emerges through progressively transcending the diasporic dualities: cultures, nationalities, places, languages, and his desire for true love. Oscar instructs the Capitán and his killers about the transformational power of Ybón’s love, “it was only because of her love that he’d been able to do the *thing* that he had done, the *thing* they could no longer stop” (321: with my emphasis). In other words, his process of becoming has been completed with the *thing*, his unbound quest, and a meaningful relationship with a woman – long awaited coitus – this enactment refers to his final stage of becoming an authentic Dominican male.

Oscar’s judgment following his return to the United States gestures a significant argument in light of the history of the Cabral de León family. Unlike his mother, Oscar does not deny or try to forget the horrifying events. Instead he faces them and in so doing, he forges his own destiny. By going back to the island and staying, he confronts both cultures. Along those lines, Yuniór admits “Something had changed. He had gotten some power of his own” (319). Whether he interacts with his family or with Ybón, this power of his own accounts for his self-awareness. As a diasporic subject marked by the plurality of histories, cultures, stereotypes and the curse, he understands that he embodies them but at the same time has the freedom to be different. This freedom is brought forth by love, perhaps the most powerful ingredient, but it ultimately carries with it a great cost. In sum, the novel’s beginning echoes its end. Oscar’s trip to the Dominican Republic parallels in returning to “The Ground Zero” of “the New World,” where the colonial sin was born. In a similar way, Oscar upholds the reason for his return: “It’s the Ancient Powers, Oscar said grimly. They won’t leave me alone” (316). Oscar is destined to return, as if all roads lead him

to the Dominican Republic, to the place of original sin and the colonial history that, ironically, made everything possible.

In fact, neither Oscar nor Yuniór are true protagonists of the story. The colonial curse plays that role here. As has been already established, *fukú* originated in the Dominican Republic. So the Dominican Republic is “The Ground Zero.” Thusly was the stage set for the primordial site of the original sin that was initiated by Columbus’s voyage and discovery of America, and marked by his arrival in 1493 to what becomes the Dominican Republic. The novel’s beginning mirrors its end: Oscar dies in the Dominican Republic at the hands of a nameless Capitán, or rather the reincarnation of both Cristóbal Columbus and Trujillo who violated the earth and stained it with wickedness. In a similar way, Oscar’s desire and lust is repressed at the end. Ironically, a powerful comparison referring to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki denotes a turn of historical and personal events. Ground Zero, a term equally, associated with earthquakes, epidemics and severe disasters, marks the geographical conceptual epicenter that bridges the gap between the colonial annihilation rooted in the past and neocolonial liberalism tempered by the hands of a nameless sailor. *Fukú americanus*, the principal catalyst, drives the tale, operating on a small scale, or individual level foreshadows Oscar’s future. But at the end, the destruction is productive, because Oscar might have broken the spell, yet his fate was predetermined by the course of his actions.

In addition, during his final days, Oscar focuses on understanding his peculiar existence through the act of writing, sight-seeing, and investigating places directly linked to the Cabral de León family and their fallout. His documentation of past covers over three hundred pages according to Oscar’s “Final Letter,” which contains “the cure to what ails us” (333). His literary vocation becomes the means to cope with his past, present, and future, his own answer to the lasting curse – *fukú*. Perhaps it is Oscar’s micro-narrative that projects his work in a perpetually

reflective stance that changes the landscape of longing and belonging. A possible key to the puzzle could be the recording of the origins of all troubling causes, the rewriting of history, and closing of the gap to what was lost or forgotten. Nonetheless, the lost manuscript explains that the untold history is like Oscar's inner life, unrecoverable. But then, at the end, his life remains something of a blank page that the struggling narrator fills with an unconventional model of the immigrant transnational experience.

3.4 Chapter Three Conclusions

The immigrant experience is no longer what it used to be. In the 18th and 19th centuries those immigrants who came to the U.S. rarely visited or went back to their homelands. At that time, immigration was a permanent thread. In the era of aviation and ongoing modernity, the pathway of immigration is no longer a one way street. The Dominican diaspora, like the Cuban and Puerto Rican one, is a two-way fast-tracked highway. Some individuals may remain suspended within the diasporic binary, created by dual geographies, languages, cultures, heritages and histories. But other Dominican-Americans are transcultural subjects whose territory is a borderless transnational space navigated by elements from both cultures. Yet some long to go back and exhibit their difference – an ultimate dream – working on the mainland and spending vacations in their native land. But what if an individual side-tracks and finds an alternative to distinguish the existence of displacement – along these lines literature that focuses on more contemporary immigration experiences calls for new scholarship and different types of analyses.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao does not present a simple interpretation of history, nationality, and culture. Instead, all events channel towards and end with the fictional character, Oscar, who embodies poli-culture, plurality of history and nationalities. The prevailing sci-fi lens of the story pays homage to nerd nostalgia, allocating Oscar the American-born generation in the

modern and progressively unequal world on both sides of the American and Dominican border. The protagonist as a diasporic subject, in neocolonial spirit, embodies the burden passed by Shabine. His voyage on the verge of modernity parallels a superhero quest also associated with Oscar's outsider status as a nerd and Shabine as an outcast. For this reason, a major part of the storyline unfolds under the Ronald Reagan era, placing a value not only to the traditional canon of literature, but also to the old-fashioned sci-fi and Role-Playing Game community of the 1980s and 1990s. Díaz's popular culture references set a metaphor of longing for days past with a modern twist, a Latino ghetto nerd.

In sum, Díaz connects the themes of nostalgia, utopia and escapism through Oscar and to a certain extent, Beli. These themes are interlinked through intense yearning and dissatisfaction with the present and place, yet they differ. In Beli's story, one encounters a nostalgia, directed towards an idealized and fictionalized past, and *Sehnsucht* – escapism working in terms of space, rather than time. Oscar's longing is going somewhere else, toward an imagined and utopian future, and this escapism is found in his fictionalized universe. Within the universe of the novel, *fukú americanus* provides the undercurrent for the entire narrative, leading its readers to wonder if all the events are all a consequence of fukú, and if Oscar will ever leave the island. On the contrary, Oscar, like Neo from "The Matrix" was "the chosen one" who took the red pill and entered the matrix (the island) and eventually died fulfilling his superhero quest – unearthing the curse. Ultimately, it is reader's choice to fill the missing page, and I filled mine.

Although nostalgia made its debut in Romanticism, with the temporal emotion to grasp fleeing human life, love and lost objects; in a modern fast-progressing world, it forms an inseparable chunk of human existence. Nostalgia forms a part of "social theatricality that turned everyday life into art, even if it wasn't a masterpiece" (*The Future* 16). In the same fashion, Díaz's

novel can be read as an extension of days passed. The novel is instilled with a diversity of supernatural features, originating from a wide range of science fiction film, comic books, and novels that creates a nostalgic universe of its own – mapped after sci-fi and fantasy worlds, calling on the memory of the 1980s and 1990s generations. This uptake on nostalgia predates the era of digital evolution and its attendant massive outburst of computer gaming. This longing speaks to those individuals who can identify with vintage Marvel Comics and with the enigmatic secret society of Role-Playing games.

But if one were to factor into the main narrative the complementary gratification of Spanish unquoted references, the Anglophone reader remains simply uncomfortable and in many instances hopeless, since some expressions cannot be found in the dictionary and one can perceive them as radical bilingualism, as it has been noted by Derrick (2014). Perhaps, the only person who is fully able to comprehend the novel's universe is the explicit author himself or another Latino nerd. The literary discourse negotiates the distance that mirrors the dualities of the diaspora where its author intends to resist the change imposed by time and modernization. The shifting setting of both New Jersey and the Dominican Republic are amplified by the correlation of its lasting history. The novel, through the usage of sci-fi references from comic books and movies, attempts to instill the history of the Dominican diaspora within both national histories (in the U.S. and in the Dominican Republic), while it factors the civic experience of national subjects into the story.

That is to say the world, Díaz is writing about the people like himself who move between the island and mainland and confront the diaspora and the world of those who read science fiction. In this manner, Díaz's novel crafts a unique space of its own that exists in the realm of comic books and science fiction, popular culture, Spanish, Dominican Spanish, and African-American English, modernity, and a fascination with the old urban spaces and traditions. Lastly, from this

collage of genres and references emerges the author's voice that articulates reminiscence that is not intoxicating, but rather sobering.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Deriving from the ancient Greece, the tale of voyage progresses into a constant and continues to inspire human curiosity in the present day. In the contemporary period it accompanies those who cross the Caribbean Sea (and others across the world) and start the episode of traversing metropolitan areas of the United States far away from familiar homeland. Inspired by displacement and tradition of self-writing, the histories left by those individuals allow contemporary readers to rediscover their new Ithaca(s). The immigration experience noted in both memoir and novel factor a significant degree of nostalgia into the narrative on both personal and collective levels. The tradition of self-writing appears in-between and across spaces. The displaced authors are motivated by changeable boundaries and inevitable shifts in continuities and discontinuities, historical and political circumstances that factor nostalgia as an inseparable byproduct in the society of residence.

In the 20th century, nostalgia resurfaces as an inevitable condition of our time, a socially constructed and actually man-made syndrome, produced by modernity and progress. At the same rate, nostalgia is growing stronger as the world becomes increasingly more diverse, modernized, but at the same time progressively smaller and a less familiar place. Nostalgia, a flipside coin of globalization, penetrates in the same manner the Caribbean immigrant experience with great ingenuity and admittedly can be extended to Latin American and global contexts. On one hand, nostalgia borrows vitality from historical, national, and political events which occurred in in the Caribbean homelands. On the other end, yearning enhanced through modernization frequently transforms into a deep national, social, and cultural phenomenon. Nostalgia repetitively feeds on spatial and temporal separation and the lingering notion of (im)possibility of return. Once fast-

tracked by progress, nostalgia reappears and invites individuals to look for memorable signs and landscapes of memory, lamenting the irreversibility of time. In the discussed works nostalgia stands out as a catalyst in migratory experience. It allows the reader to observe how displaced individuals from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic reconstructed their homeland, culture, identity, and language in exile, or immigration through the adaptation of symbols, practice of tradition, remembrance of popular culture, and appropriation of public spaces in their new homes.

My approach to the notion of nostalgia as a syndrome of globalization offered a novel perspective on the Caribbean diasporic narrative written by 1.5 generation writers and by extension to the canon of the U.S. Latino/a Literature. My approximation of nostalgia brought forth the changing landscape of yearning in response to modernization, freedom, cultural struggles and concerns that arise from spatial reconfigurations within metropolitan areas, changing socio-cultural boundaries, American-Caribbean history and the diasporic movements between the Caribbean and the United States. My work enriched the field of Caribbean/ Latin American literature and culture because the phenomenology of nostalgia expands critical and analytical frontiers of understanding 1.5 generation Latino/a immigration experience and the formation of Latino identity.

The 1.5 generation Latino writers call into question landscapes of memory, the experience in mainland and past predating the diaspora – they explore spatial landmarks, national and cultural symbols, customs and personal memories. All the search for dispraised fragments of what they left behind and who they became after having spent more time in the society of residence. The rewriting of the self proves a useful tool in making apparent what is presumed by the American mainstream society. Nostalgia connects Caribbean émigrés through the

dreams of escape from political systems and the tender loneliness of diaspora, but divides them by the notion of homeland and homecoming. Despite thematic differences and approaches to the subject in the works of Pérez Firmat, Santiago and Díaz, nostalgia remains a curious phenomenon that feeds on modernization, spatial and temporal distance and connects people across historical, national, social and personal boundaries. The diasporic experience of Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans displays common threads despite apparent disparity.

Firstly, the works of 1.5 generation Latino writers helped to comprehend factors that determine the experience of (in)voluntary displacement and a manner in which the Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans confront longing and rebuild their native lands and culture traditions through adoption of symbols, practices and customs in the society of residence. Although nostalgia may at times pose a threat of a disparity between past and present, for a modern nostalgic the contemplation is a crucial catalyst for maintaining and nurturing of self-continuity and identity. Over the course of time, the mental luggage brought into diaspora invites individuals to recollect what was lost and what could be found in the face of change dictated by modernization. Nostalgia lubricates the communicative lanes within self and between selves and others, between individual and memory of larger social and national structures.

In the modern age individuals who came as children or adolescents transit across borders and find themselves in cultural and linguistic transitions or intersection as hyphenated, bi-cultural, or hybrid. In other words, the 1.5 generation immigrants such as Santiago, Pérez Firmat and Junot Díaz have a swift ability to encompass change over time and adapt to uneasiness created by cultural, national, and linguistic intersections. Those who came as adults, Pérez Firmat's father or Belicia Cabral (the fictional character) are more rigid and firmly connected to their past, for them

nostalgia accounts for a countercultural practice rather than a healthy resource leading to self-evaluation.

On the other hand, the American-born children face difficulty at the time of rediscovering their roots and have to overcome tensions with both sides of their cultures, languages, and forms of belonging. The fictional protagonist Oscar, challenged the heritage and was driven by a prospective notion of nostalgia, *Sehnsucht*. In his adventures he confronted an intense yearning for uncompleted and imperfect forms of life. In a sense, *Sehnsucht* mirrors image of nostalgia for the future, which resurfaces in our lives with an equal power.

Boym and Davis provided a fertile ground to classify and discuss diversified manifestation on nostalgia. Davis's nostalgia accounts for a creative form of recollection and a regulatory mechanism with therapeutic properties capable of healing old wounds, and closing the gap between past and present, between former and current selves. Nostalgia in Davis's view may facilitate the usage of positive reception of the past and mold a sense of continuity and meaning in an individual's life. On the other hand, Boym's nostalgia possesses a power to recall and facilitates reconstruction of cultural and experimental memory. Her theory helped to identify how nostalgia is expressed in the public sphere and what implications it bears on living nostalgically from the immigrant and exile perspective, as well as individual in relation within their evolving social milieus.

Most importantly, Boym's theory helped to distinguish social, historical, and national factors that trigger nostalgia in the age of modernization and historical upheavals parting from 1960s in the basin of Caribbean. In short, during the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Castro's prevailing regime failed the Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961, which in turn produced consecutive waves of migration followed by an outburst of nostalgia. Unexpected and delayed return to Cuba along with

longing helped to rebuild Miami in the Cuban image. Collective consent of memory of lost home and freedom granted by the society of residence gave form to Cuban Miami of the 1960s and beyond. Operation Bootstrap (1946-1964) supplied an equally massive immigration of Puerto Ricans to the Big Apple, where individuals from rural settings embraced rapidity of change that fostered empathic bonding for the past with slower pace and longing for tropical landscapes of their insular past. The Dominican migration to the Big Apple in the post 1960s period was a result of political instability and violence related to the downfall of Trujillo's regime, where a blend of fact, fiction, and politicized nostalgia created disfigured homelands in the literary representation of Díaz's novel. The image of tropical landscapes and nostalgic association appeared with variable strength among the discussed works.

Santiago's elucidation of an idyllic past is mostly intense in her revival of the island's insular landscapes and the association with the trope of jíbaro. Seemingly it is due to the fact that her first memoir focuses on the earliest stages of her life and her finding comfort in pre-modern appraisal of jíbaro culture. Díaz's insular space captured bitter-sweet memories predating the modernization period. Within the island inhabitants emerged a collective longing for elsewhere, an amplified desire to escape Trujillo's ruling. This potent wish depicted the island as an antagonistic zone that drowns individuals rather than satisfying them. The fictional account of the novel offered rich references to globalization thematized and also globalization intersected with popular culture, and diverse manifestations of nerd nostalgia. For Pérez Firmat, Cuba seemed like a distant dream that nurtured the unspoiled memories of Havana, Cuba viewed through the upper class consciousness. Instead, the Cuban-American author created a peculiar form of empathetic bonding in the society of residence directed to Little Havana of the 1960s and 1970s. On a collective level the mixture of exile and Cuban nostalgia was an intensified case due to its

homogeneity and spatial accommodation of émigrés in the area of Miami. Let us start by reviewing the approximation of longing and globalization per chapter.

Chapter one focused on Santiago's *Cuando era Puertorriqueña* and discussed the sentimental connection with jíbaro and the rural landscapes of countryside as a way to map change and modernization in Puerto Rico during 1950s-1960s. Santiago showcased a picturesque depiction of Mother Nature hosting its inhabitants in the tropical paradise. The rustic area of Macún appeared as a cherished sanctuary of countryside and country dweller, jíbaro in its periphery. The trajectory of the Puerto Rican peasant becomes increasingly more urban. The jíbaro transits from locale or rural to urban spaces within Puerto Rico, and eventually leads beyond the island, to global peripheries, as Luis Muñoz Marín projected.

The autobiography emphasized the transition and metamorphosis of *jíbaro* from a tropical country setting to the metropolis of the United States. Santiago as a 1.5 generation mediated with the past, between the island and mainland. Her pathway from the rural site of Macún to the highly developed setting of New York reminds the contemporary reader that urbanization, globalization and progress shatter the idyllic, coherent, steady lifestyle sheltered by the tropical landscapes of one's insular past. Those images resurface in the diaspora. The metropolitan environment of the Big Apple of the 1960s and the unwelcoming nature of these malicious streets sparked sentimental recollections of Puerto Rican rural landscapes. The trope of *jíbaro* emerged as a means to record the country's progress and modernization as well as a way to trace Santiago's retrospective trajectory from a modern metropolis back to rural. In addition, it marked her forthcoming and transition to a modern *jíbara*.

Through the sentimental contextualization of *jíbaro* and longing for tropical landscapes I observed how Santiago mediated between individual and collective memory, evoking cultural and

national manifestations associated with Puerto Rican pre-modern origins. After all, nostalgia as a modern condition is an ache of temporal displacement and irreversibility of time. It calls into question symbols, traditions, and national events. Consequently, Santiago by rebuilding her homeland, home, and nation through childhood memories negotiated with the past. In this way, she created a bridge between the spatial and temporal distance and loss. She filled this memory gap created by displacement, progress and globalization. At the end, the author recaptured the fleeting past, but ironically, the idealization of Puerto Rican countryside and romanticized association with the *jíbaro* are vested by modernization. A reconstruction of the past initiates in an idealized rural setting and ends in the metropolitan labyrinth of New York empowered by progress and modernization. In this manner past always encounters vigor in the presence from which it borrows vitality. The ability to preserve, digest, and contemplate these cherished memories sets a pivotal point in Santiago's migratory experience and paves a way to balance both histories into singular notion of selfhood.

Nostalgic evocation and restoration of past in homeland is embedded as primordial feature in her writing. Diasporic intimacy and the act of writing incorporated the role of language and translation into balancing the odds of her dual or hybrid identity which was viewed through Davis's approach on nostalgia. Santiago's socio-cultural encounters shaped her writing and led to questioning of her selfhood and femininity which is featured in her memoir, *Almost a Woman*, which offers possibility for further analysis.

Santiago's trajectory in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* was followed by a transformation of *jíbaro* identity, towards a modern, *American-jíbara* who wears the stain of plantain with pride and dignity. Santiago's ability lays in her transcendental experience, in a way she minimized the sense of loss through an act of self-writing and through connecting the threads of her past and present,

between Puerto Rico and the United States. The memoir provided in part a historical and fictionalized account of *jíbaro* culture and national dimensions. The author found new ways of confronting the racial baggage, linguistic differences, and gender stereotypes that she encountered in her coming-of-age story. From the contemporary perspective, the self-writing turns into a multiple version of the self, an individual is built across a span of life seeking building blocks to fill the missing gaps, aiming to form a coherent picture from fragmented selves. Within the life-narrative an individual strives to encounter an active course of reconstruction, trying to discover successive selves across times and places, which partially depends on past, but is conceived from the present experience. *Cuando era puertorriqueña* may be perceived as a reproduction of memory, a journey of self-discovery and a self-portrait aiming to find a strategy of replacement of home and homeland. The reconstruction of cultural and national manifestations of memory, is an exercise that concludes in the author embracing both the biography unfolded in Puerto Rico and the United States.

In addition to issues of language and race, Santiago's account of her experience of migration and nostalgia brought forth the concerns related to gender distinctions. As a woman narrator, Santiago in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* challenges socially constructed issues of class, male and female roles, submissiveness and conformity. Santiago's first memoir recreated circumstances and confirmed life lessons that many young Puerto Rican women endured in the Puerto Rican countryside and mainland. To the contrary, in certain circumstances the traditional feminine roles may be more empowering in the mainland. This thought can be extended to her third memoir *Turkish Lover*. Santiago rebels against her mother, runs away from home and finds herself in a love-failed relationship, in which she confronts submissiveness, machismo, and conformity. However, her vulnerability to traditional beliefs converts into her strength, from which

she emerged as an independent, educated and empowered female who transformed her weakness into her asset. This prominent characteristic of Santiago's writing is that she draws much more on a gendered discourse in order to redefine herself in comparison to the 1.5 generation male authors.

In Chapter Two Boym's interpretation of exile and nostalgia was a fundamental approach to how the Cuban-American writer perceived the exilic experience pertaining to the first Cuban exodus wave and his transgression within the society of the United States. Pérez Firmat's memoir *Next Year in Cuba* questions traditions, institutions, structures, and identifications that originated from the Cuban exilic experience post 1960. Pérez Firmat's reading of nostalgia exemplified dilemmas born within the Cuban and mainstream American cultures. His allusion is recapitulated in this remark: "For Americans Cuba Libre, may be no more than a name of a cocktail, but for Cuban exiles it's a dream too long deferred, the story of our lives" (*Next Year* xi). In this manner, nostalgia of exile sets a viewpoint from which the author recounted discomforts and limitations about what defines the center where he came of age. The loss of foundation that he experienced growing up in Miami, helped him in recognizing himself as an object of reflection, which allowed him to discuss social, cultural, and civic norms that stemmed from the exilic experience, longing, and freedom granted by the American Dream.

The self-reflexivity and nostalgia of exile created an elusive interchange. The urge to rewrite the history from personal account incorporated commemoration of the past and redefined the writer as builder who turns the collective into private. The exilic experience accounted for a sequence of encounters and crossroads of the self within the greater social structure and allowed one to observe how exiled individuals: illustrate, embody, confront, adjust, or reject (nostalgic) practices with larger leading structures. Pérez Firmat, the 1.5 generation immigrant proved to be more flexible to encompass change over time. For him, Cuba constituted a mixture of fact and

fiction. The homeland is what he endured, remembered, and witnessed while growing up in Miami, embracing both the Cuban and American cultures and ways of life.

Pérez Firmat became a vessel standing between the first generation and the younger generation. He engaged in a discourse on nostalgia and assessed longing in exile from a Cuban and American perspectives. Although, he never went back to the Cuba, he managed to fill the void of memory through the exchange between real and fictional. Through a sentimental recollection, he reconstructed an idealized account of the Cuba of his youth and moved forward in his life. In this manner, he was capable of patching the gap of memory through reflection, while never setting foot on Cuba. For that reason, his native home is both a blend of fact and fiction, what he has heard, learned and captured in his memory.

The most captivating aspect of nostalgic recollection was the emerging Cuban civic landscapes of Miami. Pérez Firmat, rebuilding the spatial landmark of Little Havana, molded individual memory and a collective one into literary discourse. Boym's typology proved that Castro's Revolution, the Failed Bay of Pigs Invasion, and Castro's prevailing regime nurtured Cuban nostalgia in Miami and gave shape to the Little Havana of the 1960s, 1970s and beyond. The emerging urban landscape of Little Havana offered an alternative home as a vehicle to trace a cross-cultural encounter within a new setting of Miami. A physical representation of Havana, Cuba was reconstructed through a collective concept of memory of home – a result of dislocation and a coproduct of longing. The empathic bonding to past events surpassed homeland and resurfaced in the host nation. It paved a milestone in the Cuban existence in the Miami metropolitan setting beyond the island. The reconfiguration of monuments and city landmarks offered an interaction between the real and the imagined fatherland, from which a replacement home was conceived. Within decades the city area of Miami constructed a vital body. Cuban exile community shaped

an ethnic archipelago, a self-sufficient microcosm of Havana Cuba in the heart of Miami that remained primarily Cuban for until the end of 1970s. Parting from the 1980s, the ongoing influx of Hispanic groups made this place a more globalized, modern, and diverse Latino environment. At the same time, it marked a transition of Cuban community into Latino.

The supplementary note on the Mariel Boat Lift offered a bitter taste of Cuban nostalgia and depicted an unhealthy relationship to newly arrived Cubans that were stained with criminal records. In particular, a significant increase in the crime rate captured media and social attention. These events had equally led to a boom of the mid 1980s TV series and movie production that were inspired by Cuban subjects and drug trafficking. The celebrated movie, *Scarface* and the Miami Vice television series offer a complementary venue for future analysis. A representation of nostalgia in media is an equally fertile field that potentially aims to set into question stereotyping of Cubans by mainstream culture while critically engaging in the shifting image of Cubans from ethnic to Latino.

The third chapter progressed beyond the memoir and investigated the literary representation of globalization and nostalgia in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz. I incorporated the author's autobiographical elements to demonstrate that the novel was encouraged by its author's immigration experiences. Within this context, I investigated the vital themes of nostalgia and globalization of the Dominican diaspora in the United States.

In my examination of Díaz's novel, I contextualized the propagation of genres ranging from science fiction references from popular culture to the traditional canon. In this way I executed my approximation on globalization within the novel. Additionally, I employed Díaz's popular culture references from science fiction and Role-Playing games as a metaphor of longing which created a modern twist, a Latino ghetto nerd. In my analysis of Oscar and his mother Belicia

Cabral, I approached nostalgia not only in the traditional retrospective sense, directed toward the past, but I also introduced utopian and escapist dimensions of an intensified yearning via *Sehnsucht*.

I examined the manifestations of longing in Belicia's Cabral coming-of-age in Dominican Republic under Trujillo's dictatorship. Boym's frame provided an explosive combination of longing, history, and politics that recreated the brutality of a regime in a homeland that was tempered by a nostalgic recollection of the glorious past of the Cabral de León family. Furthermore, I investigated, Oscar's coming-of-age during the 1980-1990s in New Jersey. I placed my focus on his obsession with science fiction and Role-Playing games. From this viewpoint, I explored popular culture references from science fiction magazines and Role-Playing games and exposed a complementary representation of nerd nostalgia which in turn pinpointed escapist dimensions of longing.

In summary, Díaz interlinked the subject of nostalgia, utopia, and escapism through the main character; Oscar, and partially Belicia. In both cases, the themes had a strong connection to their intense yearning and dissatisfaction with the present moment and place, yet they differed. In Belicia's case, nostalgia was directed toward an idealized and fictionalized past, and to the future through *Sehnsucht* – a form of escapism working in terms of space, rather than time. Oscar's longing was shifting somewhere else, toward an imagined future or utopian universe. This usage of escapism clearly echoed his fictionalized universe created by Role-Playing games and science fiction literature, where he found comfort, and did not feel as outsider.

Díaz's novel did not offer a simple view of history, nationality and culture, instead presented a poli-vocal history that Díaz articulated through his main characters. All the events in the novel were linked with the fictional character, Oscar, who embodied poli-culture, plurality of

history and nationalities. Boym's perspective on reflective nostalgia provided a ground on which modern writers bridged the gap between identity and resemblance and took responsibility for their own manifestations of longing. The literary discourse of the novel mirrors the dualities of diaspora. The shifting setting of both New Jersey and the Dominican Republic were amplified by correlation of its lasting history and U.S. relations. From this clash of events and margins of both cultural and social boundaries, emerged a new character: an urban Latino ghetto nerd. Beyond the individual level, the novel through the sci-fi references from comic books and movies attempted to instill the history of Dominican diaspora within both national histories in the U.S. and the Dominican Republic. All the while, it factored the civic experience of national subjects into the story.

Additionally, I discussed the predominant sci-fi lens of the story as a way to pay homage to nerd nostalgia. Díaz's popular culture references set a metaphor of longing with a contemporary twist. A nerd nostalgia represented by a Latino ghetto nerd. In sum, Díaz instilled his volume with a diversity of supernatural features borrowed from science fiction film, comic books, and novels. Consequently, the novel itself crafted a transcendental universe of its own, retrofitted after sci-fi and phantasy world that calls upon the memory of the 1980s and 1990s generations while directing attention to literary majors and critics.

Furthermore, I factored the complementary gratification of Spanish, Dominican-Spanish unquoted references and Afro-American slang. Via this interplay I depicted a cross cultural encounter of languages which borrows vitality from urban ghettos. By its extension, globalization is reflected in the diverse linguistic, popular culture, and literary representations, the volume itself being a mere reflection of globalization. This cluster of representation made a significant impact in the Canon of Latino literature. As Boym remarks, nostalgia in the modern age is a part of "social theatricality that turned everyday life into art, even if it wasn't a masterpiece" (*The Future* 16).

Certainly, in my humble opinion, Díaz's first novel is a masterpiece. Indeed, it depicts a theatrical display of social, cultural and pop culture representations that provide a disfigured but true image about the world in which we live.

Finally, Díaz reflected on the world surrounding him, which depicted the people who move between the island and mainland and confront the diaspora like Díaz. He further, explored the world of those who read science fiction and use Spanish and English within the same discourse. Díaz's novel created a unique space of its own that exists in the realm of science fiction, popular culture, and operates within hybrid languages – all inspired by modernity, history, and the fascination with the old and new. Lastly, from these margins and collage of genres and references emerges author's voice articulating sobering stories across about both sides of the Dominican-American diaspora.

FINAL NOTE ON NOSTALGIA

In the contemporary period nostalgia's port of entry is closely related with modernization, technological advances, media, art, spatial and temporal deficiency, as well as cultural production. Nostalgia ranges from a simple familiar everyday experience to a complex critical and analytical points of study. Increased globalization, ethnic and cultural tension, and national self-questioning create a widespread need to redefine the self in the face of change. Latino/a literature offers one field of entry. Nonetheless, the literary representation of nostalgia can be extended and cross listed with other genres and neighboring disciplines. Nostalgia like globalization exists in plural forms and delivers a wide spectrum of material for exploration. I incorporated into my analysis the feature of local geography and city spaces as a way to trace change, progress of urban identity embedded in civic developments and collective memory. Furthermore, nostalgia appeared largely as social phenomenon in response to modernization, on collective level, while on individual level it acted as

personal navigation device. The idea of local geography can be extended to visual representations through the area of photography and literary examination.

Additionally, the streets and civic scenarios form an inseparable part of literary discourse and represent the margins of society, their constellations can be extended to representation found in street poetry: Radical Anarchistic Poetry or RAP production of the 1980s and 1990s decades. I am not referring to a modern version of commercial RAP, where a scene lasts less than one second, and shows nothing but lack of garments and excess of jewelry, but I adhere to the former representation of street poetry of Latino artists who recorded before or in similar timeframe when the memoir and self-writing of 1.5 generation immigrants came to fashion. For instance, the production of the early 1990s New York artists of Puerto Rican origin such as Big Pun, Fat Joe, or Cuban-Cuban Links among many. These artists articulate stories of “those mean streets,” where Piri’s memoir ended, their history started. Migration, class struggle, and adaption as Latino to mainstream society are common themes with literature and music, and their meeting points offer additional material for a future analysis.

The combination of street poetry, literature, art and visual components factor a multiplicity of pathways to connect critical perspective on the social phenomena of yearning. Consequently, nostalgia in modern age will be a predominant phenomenon in years to come. In a sense, nostalgia is an unpreventable disease, an inseparable syndrome of our existence that evolves as the world and societies embrace widespread change over time. Nostalgia constantly adapts to new conditions and emerges where spatial and temporal or outdated technological configurations are deficient or out of fashion. Nostalgia continuously awakens the past only to conceal its fleeting essence from our grasp. The moment we think to have encountered the lingering experience, it shatters into fragments that we need to collect in order to embrace ourselves on the verge of an enduring change.

FOOTNOTES:**Introduction Footnotes**

1. Baron de Larrey performed a necropsy of young individual who suffered from paralysis and amnesia due to his wound in a head (160). This young man after receiving a letter from his soon to be wed fiancé that acquired his dispatch home, suddenly recovers only to die after having read the letter. The necropsy reveals already healed lesion on the surface of peripheries that caused paralysis and amnesia, at the end doctor encloses nostalgia as primordial cause of his death (160).
2. Baron de Larrey noted a case where a homesick soldier stabs himself with a dull knife until he cuts a vital organ and dies (159).
3. Karl Jaspers in his dissertation *Heimweh und Verbrechen* draws on medical sources and presents and analyzes a case study of famous murder and arson case. In which girls from poor villages in Switzerland are sent to distant households and work as household maids and servants. The homesickness originates in psychological illness, but first is gradually transmitted by body its medium that from physical disease shift to psychometric state and results in outburst of violence. to displacement of aliment in which body suffocates and
4. For Ricoeur's etymological investigation of the concept of identity see chapter three of Rítivoís work.
5. Mimetic - denotes a deliberate reconstruction of home to its original stasis, without any signs of decay caused by time and history.

Chapter One footnotes

1. The Spanish edition was written a year after the publication of the English version, and it

offers a supplementary information on Santiago's coming-of-age while it exposes the role, her native language plays in the process of translation.

2. See interview in *Latin Post* by Nicole Akoukou Thompson 2014.
3. Found on back cover of Spanish edition.

Chapter Two footnotes

- 1 After Fidel Castro's revolution in 1959 a steady influx of Cubans has occurred in four significant waves: 1959-1962; 1965-1974; 1980; and in the early to mid-1990s. Each wave penetrated deeper the Cuban society. The earliest in the 1960s consisted of the privileged group (aristocrats, merchants, professionals), the last wave consists of uneducated city dwellers of Havana in the 1990s.
- 2 Pérez Firmat in *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*, coins the term “hyphenated” in order to embrace Cuban-America Culture as a interstation and product Cuban and American world cultures within the Cuban community
- 3 Gustavo Pérez Firmat are the full names of both the father and the son. I also refer to them as Pérez Firmat senior or junior to avoid the confusion and repetition.
- 4 The official name of The Domino Park is Máximo Gómez Park, named after a Dominican Major General and Cuba's military commander. Gómez fought during Cuban War of Independence.
- 5 Sandinistas were the leftist rebels who overthrew the long-time right-wing Somoza regime in Nicaragua in 1979.

Chapter Three footnotes

0. See Introduction to Chapter Two for the numerical data regarding Puerto Ricans in the New York area.

1. If one were to apply the same paradigm of fukú to the history of Mexico and Cuba, one will find Hernán Cortes (and la Malinche), and in Cuba, Diego Velazquez while their nineteenth century reincarnation can be perceived as Porfiro Díaz and Fidel Castro, respectively.
2. “Plátano Curtain” refers to the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti “that exists beyond maps, that is carved directly into the histories and imaginaries of the people” (*Wondrous* 224-225). This ideology refers mostly to racial discrimination against blackness, mostly targeting Haitian citizens in the Dominican Republic, but also includes Afro-Dominicans that are particularly dark-skinned. The secondary connotation implies the impossibility of leaving the island unnoted by the Trujillo system.
3. The term that came to my attention during my two visits to the Dominican Republic, differs. The people native to the island would use the term “Do-Yo” rather than “DoYos” when referring to Dominicans from New York.
4. Bourne (1916) coined the expression “Trans-national America” which refers to newcomers to the U.S. who simply did not get rid of their roots in the melting pot. For more scholarship work that examines the transnationalism of ethnic authors see the anthology by Lewis and Warren (1973) and for the transnationality in the Caribbean basin see Liliana (1995), and for transnationalism in Latino/a literature, Concannon (2009).

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ABSTRACT**THE ROLE OF NOSTALGIA IN THE LITERATURE OF THE CARIBBEAN
DIASPORAS – LINKING MEMORY, GLOBALIZATION AND HOMEMAKING**

by

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My dissertation, *The Role of Nostalgia in the Literature of the Caribbean Diasporas – Linking Memory, Globalization and Homemaking*, investigates diverse manifestations of nostalgia in the literature of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican diasporas. My study offers a comparative analysis of Esmeralda Santiago's *Cuando era puertorriqueña* (1994), Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Next Year in Cuba* (1995), and Junot Díaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008).

My approach to the notion of nostalgia as a syndrome of globalization offers a valuable contribution to the Caribbean diasporic narrative and by extension to the canon of the U.S. Latino/a Literature. The literary representation of nostalgia has not been fully explored in the Latin-American context, and studying its social, cultural, political, and national manifestations opens new venues of interpretation of migratory experience in the age of globalization. Through the literary analysis I examine diverse representation of the migratory experience of the Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican Hispanic groups residing within the United States. Furthermore, I propose nostalgia as a catalyst that allows observation how displaced individuals from the Caribbean reconstruct homeland, culture, identity, and language in exile or immigration through adoption of

new symbols, practice of tradition, remembrance of popular culture, and appropriation of civic spaces.

In my analyses, I consider the phenomenon of nostalgia as a crucial aspect of the assimilation process and formation of Latino/a culture identity as a means to explore collective memory. This frame allows me to investigate the evolving urban spaces where the Caribbean immigrants settle. Within this contextual map, my dissertation rests theoretically in the works of Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Suman Gupta's *Globalization and Literature* (2009), Fred Davis's *Yearning for Yesterday* (1978) to explore the intersections of globalization, literature, and collective memory as a space from which nostalgia emerges. My examination brings forth the changing landscape of nostalgia in response to modernization, cultural struggles and concerns that arouse from spatial reconfigurations within urban areas, changing socio-cultural boundaries, American-Caribbean history and the diasporic movements between the Caribbean and the United States.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I was born and raised in a cosmopolitan city Wroclaw, Poland. From an early age, exploring foreign languages has always been my passion. My parents put forth great effort to instill in me the affection for different languages and cultures. When I was eight years old, I was already able to speak German. In high school, I started learning English and I quickly excelled in the foreign language classes. My diverse experience in living, learning, working, and traveling in Europe has provided a great opportunity for me to expand my cultural and language horizons.

In 2006, I began my studies at the Wayne State University and in May 2010 I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish, German and a minor in Polish. During my undergraduate studies I realized that my talents and interests were best combined with Spanish. My plan to move directly from undergraduate work towards my Master Degree in Spanish arose from these new perspectives and from my passionate interest in learning this language as well as my travel experience. By traveling through Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Latin-American countries, I have experienced their rich culture and encountered the splendor of Spanish language that has only increased my interest in graduate studies. In 2010 I participated in a study abroad program at the University of Veracruz in Mexico. In August 2011 I obtained the Masters of Arts in Romance Languages (Spanish).

In 2012, I was rewarded a Graduate Teaching Assistantship that was beneficial to my graduate studies at Wayne State University, and my development as a scholar and educator. Furthermore, I learned the methodology in Higher Education thanks to classes with Professor Catherine Barrette. Besides my teaching experience at the Wayne State University, I have also taught Spanish at the Macomb Community College.

The Graduate Teaching Assistantship has provided me with an opportunity to take a wide array of courses. During this intellectual journey, the contact with the inspiring faculty members has guided me through the graduate studies and nurtured my literary vocation. My interest in the Caribbean and U.S. *Latino* Literature of Caribbean authors was born from my trajectory at Wayne State University. In 2008, I took my first courses on the Caribbean novel, taught by Professor Figueroa, which introduced me to many socio-historic and political factors that shaped the basin of the Caribbean. Dr. García, my advisor, has introduced me to the theoretical frameworks on the phenomenology of nostalgia. From the contact with the inspirational professors and my coursework emerged my interest in studying the notion of nostalgia as a literary figure in the Caribbean and U.S. Latino Literature.

In 2014, I was rewarded the Rumble Research Fellowship and I worked under Professor Garcia's supervision. I presented my research at the University of Georgia Southern and I submitted an article to the conference proceedings at a peer-review journal. In 2015, I was rewarded LASA travel grant and I gave an invited talk at the 49th international Latin American Studies Association Congress in Puerto Rico. Moreover, during my graduate school I have been an active member of the Graduate Forum. At the University of South Carolina Beaufort I carry on this legacy and I am a co-founder of the annual Gateway to Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies Conference. In 2013, I was appointed a full time instructor of Spanish at the University of South Carolina Beaufort, but I aspire to become a full professor at the University.