

The Exile in Literature:
Remembering What Has Been Lost and Finding the Courage to Move Forward

by

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Cultural displacement and exile are major topics that are portrayed in Caribbean literature and in this Master's thesis, I analyze the exilic experience as depicted in texts written by Julia Alvarez, Cristina García, and Ana Menéndez. By using various texts that focus on the Dominican and Cuban exilic experience, I depict how many fictional characters have had to or have chosen to leave their homes behind. In some instances, characters are described as being forced to flee to a surrounding country because they fear that they will be assassinated if they stay in their home country. In other circumstances, characters decide to leave their home country behind in order to gain political, social, and economic freedoms in a new country. By discussing various works by and about Dominicans and Cubans that have created new homes in the United States, I ultimately examine how exiles react when they are treated as the "Others" in a strange new land and are faced with questions of belonging.

By using Edward Said's essay "Reflections on Exile" throughout this thesis, I expand upon his theories on the exilic experience and show how exiles struggle to fit in in America and how they have a hard time assimilating to American customs and traditions. Furthermore, many exiles are described as being overwhelmed because of language barriers and are also seen to experience feelings of loss and nostalgia. Some

exiles long to go back to their home country, but other characters are seen to thrive in the United States because they embrace their new surroundings and take advantage of the opportunities that the U.S. has provided them with. Ultimately, no matter where the exile comes from, the emotions that are associated with the exilic experience are cross-cultural; the exile faces feelings of loss, nostalgia, alienation, despair, and loneliness and they struggle to understand who they are and where they belong.

The Exile in Literature:
Remembering What Has Been Lost and Finding the Courage to Move Forward

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Introduction:
Caribbean Literature and the Exilic Experience

Edward Said has written a plethora of texts about the exilic experience from his own perspective as a displaced Middle Easterner and he is widely known for his theories on Orientalism. Born in the city of Jerusalem in 1935, a time when Palestine was under control of the British administration, Said and his family were continually relocated due to his father's involvement in the U.S. Army's Allied Expeditionary Force. Said was only twelve-years-old when he was uprooted from his home in Jerusalem to live in Cairo because of the impending outbreak of the Palestinian-Israeli war of 1947. Living in Cairo, Said suffered from intense feelings of nostalgia and he believed that he did not belong in his new "home" because others did not make him feel welcomed and they treated him as an outcast. When he moved to Cairo, he felt trapped and confused because he had a predominantly British first name and an Arabic last name, which made him feel as if he was caught between two cultures. Since he transferred schools often, he found that he struggled with learning new languages and he caught himself constantly reverting to Arabic, his dominant language, when others around him solely spoke English. In his 1998 essay entitled "Between Worlds," Said describes his experiences of displacement as an adolescent by saying, "To make matters worse, Arabic, my native language, and English, my school language, were inextricably mixed: I have never known which was my first language, and have felt fully at home in neither, although I dream in both. Every time I speak an English sentence, I find myself echoing it in Arabic, and vice versa" (4). Said suffered greatly because he was stuck between two worlds and two cultures; he wanted to feel at home in one particular place and to feel a sense of belonging to one country.

As a teenager, Said's family sent him to a U.S. boarding school by himself to finish his studies; being alone and afraid in a strange new country, he suffered from cultural displacement caused by exile. In his famous essay, "Reflections on Exile," Said describes his personal experiences as an exile and goes on to discuss how exiles tackle questions of belonging and how they struggle to construct a new home in an unfamiliar environment. When closely analyzed, it becomes obvious that many of Said's ideas found in "Reflections on Exile" are present in Caribbean literature, specifically works by and about Cubans and Dominicans. Thus, in this thesis I have chosen to incorporate Said's theories on exile into my own discussion of texts by Julia Alvarez, Cristina García, and Ana Menéndez because these female authors vividly describe the various emotions that the exiles, both female and male, from the Dominican Republic and Cuba undergo. The characters in the works that I have chosen incorporate what the exilic experience is like, but the authors also expand upon issues of assimilation, nationalism, and understanding where one's "home" is—all issues that Said discusses in "Reflections on Exile." I also specifically chose works written by women to highlight how female authors describe the exilic experience. Even though Said does not speak directly about the Caribbean exilic experience, I believe that his ideas and reflections on the exilic experience are cross-cultural; many people have to leave their home country for various reasons and many exiles undergo the same or similar emotions as a result of leaving one's home behind.

It should also be noted that even though Said's essay is somewhat dated, I believe his essay is crucial to my discussion on cultural displacement because he speaks from an exile's point-of-view and readers gain a sense of knowledge about how and why people leave their home country behind and go on to establish a new "home" in a foreign

country. By using “Reflections on Exile” throughout this thesis, I will ultimately show how exile is portrayed in literature, how subjects struggle to understand where “home” is, and how families are torn apart because they left their home behind. Said states that exiles are in a "perilous territory of not-belonging" and in many pieces of Caribbean literature that discuss exile, the subjects are shown to be somewhat traumatized by various incidents that have occurred during the process of leaving their country behind and/or finding a place where they belong. This trauma caused by cultural displacement follows the characters into their adulthood and leads them to continually feel self-conscious and/or unwelcomed in their new environment. In other circumstances, characters are seen to feel a strong sense of nostalgia towards their home country and they are seen to yearn for what they know they cannot have—their old home.

When I use the term “exile” in this thesis, I refer to a person who has left their home and family behind for various social, political, and economic reasons. “Exile” is a complex term because the definition of “immigrant” is very similar and the terms can sometimes overlap; however, the differences between “immigrant” and “exile” are major. For example, some define “exile” as an involuntary banishment, but in my discussion of the exilic experience, I use the term to mean anyone that is forced to or has chosen to leave their country behind in order to establish a new “home” in a foreign country. A person can also leave their country as an exile, but they are depicted as being more like an immigrant when they arrive in the U.S. because they take advantages of the many opportunities that surround them and make the U.S. their permanent home. Similar to immigrants, when exiles come to the United States, they grapple with the language barrier and are sometimes cast as the “Other” because they are not accustomed to

American culture and do not have a full comprehension of the English language. Exiles also experience specific emotions, such as despair, loneliness, oppression, alienation, and nostalgia because they long to return to their native country, but for various reasons, they cannot. I believe that an immigrant would have the same sort of feelings, but the exilic experience as depicted in the works that I discuss make readers understand that the exilic experience is different than the immigrant's.

In Chapter 1, I will use Julia Alvarez's novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, to discuss the exilic experience as portrayed by the fictional character, Yolanda García. Yolanda is seen to struggle as an exile living in the United States because she does not know how to define herself; Yolanda does not truly understand who she is as a Dominican living in the U.S. Yo battles with questions such as: *Am I Dominican? Am I American? Or, am I Dominican-American?* Furthermore, as an exile Yo does not feel as if she belongs in the United States and she feels as if she must travel back to her home country, the Dominican Republic, to visit family and to establish a new life away from those that have harmed her in the U.S. Yo, like many other exiles, ultimately yearns to feel a sense of nationalism and to belong to *one* place that she can truly call her "home," however, she soon discovers that she doesn't belong anywhere.

In Chapter 2, I focus on Cristina García's novel, *Dreaming in Cuban* to discuss how the del Pino family is seen to deteriorate due to various characters' choices to exile. The del Pino's used to be a close-knit family and at one point they all lived together in Cuba; however, family members are seen to gradually disperse across the globe, leaving Celia, the matriarch of the family, alone on the Island. The Cuban Revolution pushed

many Cubans away, but others like Celia, were determined to stay on the Island and support Castro and his revolution. Because many family members continually leave their mother(land) behind, Celia is seen to become sad and lonely. Overall, I analyze how the exilic experience can be both detrimental *and* beneficial to the family unit, in general.

In Chapter 3, I use Ana Menéndez’s short story “In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd” and Julia Alvarez’s poem “Exile” to discuss the exile and the lack of belonging in the United States. Both Menéndez and Alvarez portray how emotional exile can be and readers are able to get a glimpse of how an exile feels when s/he lives among strangers in a foreign land. I deliberately pair Menéndez’s story with Alvarez’s poem in the same chapter to show how even though the characters come from two different islands, the characters have the same emotions and struggle with the same, or similar, kind of feelings that are associated with the exilic experience. I go on to demonstrate that regardless of age and gender, both exiles in the short story and poem undergo the same emotions and feelings that only the exile can truly understand—loneliness, despair, sadness, nostalgia, fear.

Chapter 1:

Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and Yolanda's Search for Home

In the United States, the President can be impeached for committing a crime; however, there are many countries around the world that are ruled by dictators, such as the Dominican Republic, that do not have regular elections. When Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his assassination in 1961, he made sure that all people under his authority understood that he controlled the Island and that no one should disobey his commands. Trujillo invoked fear in the Dominicans in order to make sure they did not rebel against his rule and he is also responsible for tens of thousands of deaths of Dominicans and Haitians; because the Dominican Republic does not have a democracy, Trujillo could not be impeached and even though people tried to take him out of office, Trujillo would usually kill the “traitors” before they even had a chance at coming close to him. Thus, during the Trujillo Era, many Dominicans have sought exile in the United States in all efforts to seek safety; many Dominicans were forced into exile during the Trujillo regime, yet others had chosen to leave their native country with their families in hopes to live a life in a democratic nation with many more freedoms than they had back home in the Dominican Republic.

In this chapter, I use Julia Alvarez's novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* to highlight the various haunting events that characters undergo when they experience cultural displacement as a result of exile. When people go through exile, they go through one of the most horrific experiences because they must leave behind the one place that they once felt safe and secure—home. In Edward Said's “Reflections on Exile,” he states that “[Exile] is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be

surmounted” (173). When people are ultimately forced to leave their home, they also leave behind a part of who they are and they are taken away from the people and places that have shaped and molded their identities. When someone does not have a home or does not belong to a specific place, they will become traumatized because they feel vulnerable, frightened, and insecure with themselves and their surroundings. Ultimately, an exile undergoes a unique experience when they are forced to or choose to leave their home behind and through textual evidence, it becomes apparent that Alvarez created the García girls in order to give readers an insight into the lives of exiles. I also highlight the various issues that the fictional characters undergo as exiles, such as longing for a sense of *nationalism*, tackling the language barrier, and finding where one’s home is. Said describes nationalism and the human’s natural desire to belong by saying, “Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (176). In other words, exiles long to belong to a single place and they want to feel as if they belong to one particular group and community. The characters in Alvarez’s novel desperately want to belong to one place, but they struggle to understand *where* they belong; as exiles, the characters in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* do not know whether they should stay in the United States or if they should go back to their native country where their extended family members live. Finally, I demonstrate that in order for particular characters to heal from their past experiences as exiles, they must muster the courage to move forward and they cannot be afraid to let go of the past even though they may have been psychologically and emotionally scarred from past events.

By focusing on exile in novels such as *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, readers will notice that there are many recurring themes about belonging and assimilation because characters are constantly questioning where they belong and who they are. In numerous instances, the exiles are seen as outcasts in the U.S. because of a language barrier and due to a lack of understanding of American customs; in some cases, the exiles are no longer welcome in their native country because they left their previous lives behind, yet they also feel as if they do not belong in America because others treat them as outcasts or “Others.” When a Dominican leaves their native country in search of new opportunities or because they want to live in a different nation that has a solid and stable government, those they left behind may consider them to be “traitors” or not “true” Dominicans. In some novels, if characters return to their native country, they do not fit in because they have forgotten the native language or because they have become too “Americanized.” In Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, the main character, Yolanda García, is terrified and traumatized by cultural displacement and she feels a plethora of overwhelming emotions because her family uprooted themselves in order to escape the Trujillo dictatorship in order to start a new life in the United States. Yolanda is seen to struggle with her identity and she, like other exiles, begin to ask herself questions such as: *Am I Dominican? Am I American? Or, am I both?* These sort of questions that encompass an exile’s mind also makes them question their loyalties to various nations. Some may think: *Do I stay loyal to the Dominican Republic? Or do I support the United States now that I live here?* By focusing on Yolanda’s experience, Yo realizes that she does not belong in the U.S. where she has family, friends, and a job, yet she also does not feel at home when she returns to visit family members in the Dominican

Republic. When Yo discovers that she does not have one place that she can truly call her home, she feels as if she is a stranger in the U.S. and in the Dominican Republic, she then struggles to define who she is. Thus, the theme of home is significant and prevalent in works about exile because there is a constant struggle for characters to understand where they belong to ultimately develop a full sense of oneself. Yo has faced so many hardships and setbacks in the U.S. and the Dominican Republic that she feels as if she needs to recreate herself in order to develop a new identity since she yearns to belong to one place and one group of people.

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents tells the story of Carlos García and his wife Laura, along with their four daughters Carla, Sandra, Yolanda (Yo/Yoyo), and Sofia. The García family quickly left their home in the Dominican Republic in 1960 when they were forced into exile due to their father's involvement in a plan to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship. The beginning of Alvarez's novel starts in 1989 and readers are gradually taken back in time to 1956 to ultimately show us how difficult it is for a family to uproot themselves from their home where they made memories in to live in a new country where they know no one and struggle to make ends meet. By beginning the novel in 1989, we meet Yolanda who is in her thirties and she has returned to the Island by herself in search of a place that she can call her home. She feels as if she cannot continue living in the U.S. and she wants to start a new chapter of her life away from those that have harmed her; after she has had many failed relationships with men, has been divorced once, and struggles to make ends meet as a poet in New York, Yo believes that her only chance at recovering from her past is to move back to the place of her childhood—the Dominican Republic. As Yo looks around the Island, she is amazed by the beauty of the

palm trees and loves feeling the cool breeze on her skin. The scenery around Yo on the Island is comparable to a beautiful paradise:

All around her are the foothills, a dark enormous green, the sky more a brightness than color. A breeze blows through the palms below, rustling their branches, so they whisper like voices... This is what she has been missing all these years without really knowing that she has been missing it. Standing here in the quiet, she believes she has never felt at home in the States, never. (12)

Yo looks all around her and cannot imagine traveling back to New York City where she is surrounded by people that treat her as if she does not belong in the U.S. even though she is an American citizen. To readers, it seems as if Yo is trying to run away from her failures in order start a new life in the Dominican Republic where her extended family members do not know of her faults and failures. Helen Atawube Yitah, author of “‘Inhabited by Un Santo’: The ‘Antojo’ and Yolanda’s Search for the ‘Missing’ Self in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*,” states that Yolanda “is trying to recover her past and revise it to suit her purpose of inventing a cultural space from which to speak” (235). Yo also believes that moving to a different country will allow her to escape her past traumas and she will be able to move forward and being to heal from her emotional wounds. Ultimately, Yo has made too quick of a decision and without considerable thought, she left the U.S. because even though she is surrounded by the beautiful vegetation in the Dominican Republic, further textual evidence suggests that she still does not feel a sense of familiarity and security on the Island.

One of the very first things that Yo wishes to do when she first arrives in the Dominican Republic is to bite into a juicy guava. With the assistance from a young Dominican boy, Yo travels through the dense forest area in search of guavas to settle her craving for the exotic fruit, however, she does not pay attention to the direction she

wandered off in and she soon begins to worry that she is lost. She thinks, “The rustling leaves of the guava trees echo the warnings of her old aunts: you will get lost, you will get kidnapped, you will get raped, you will get killed” (Alvarez 17). Yo has made it clear that she wants to make the Dominican Republic her home again, yet she doesn’t feel comfortable and safe walking around the Island by herself. Alvarez depicts Yo as a nervous and anxious young woman that is trying to take on the world by herself; however, she continually worries that people are going to harm her or take advantage of her since. After gathering a basket full of guavas, Yo heads back to her car and finds that she is stranded on a back road with a flat tire. Looking towards the horizon, she notices that the sun is beginning to set and she begins to panic when she notices that two men are traveling towards her. Fear overcomes Yo and she is soon too scared to speak. Alvarez describes the men by saying, “Two men, one short and dark, and the other slender and light-skinned, emerge. They wear ragged work clothes stained with patches of sweat; their faces are drawn. Machetes hang from their belts” (19). The men scare her and she instantly worries that her aunts are right; Yo thinks they are out to hurt her and no one is near that would be able to hear her screams for help. Alvarez continues to describe Yo’s escalating fear:

The taller one is looking her up and down with interest. They are now both in front of her on the road, blocking any escape. Both—she sized them up as well—are strong and quite capable of catching her if she makes a run for it. Not that she can move, for her legs seem suddenly to have been hammered into the ground beneath her...But her tongue feels as if it has been stuffed in her mouth like a rag to keep her quite. (19-20)

Yo is so overcome with fear that she doesn’t know how to respond to the men, yet they assume that since she doesn’t answer their questions that she must be an American that doesn’t speak or understand Spanish. Ricardo Castells, author of “The Silence of Exile in

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, writes, “The lack of communication with the two *campesinos* confirms Yolanda’s dominant cultural identity” (37). Even though Yo may think she belongs in the Dominican Republic, the fact that she finds herself alone and scared with these men and unable to speak to them shows how fearful she is of her surroundings. Instead of thinking that the two men could simply want to help her change her tire, Yo immediately jumps to the conclusion that they want to rape and kill her like her aunts warned her about. Castells continues, “Although she has returned to the Dominican Republic in search of a place to call home, her linguistic shortcomings and her cultural awkwardness suggest that she is as much out of place in the land of her birth as the blond Palmolive model in the village” (37). Ultimately, Yo is depicted as being “awkward” in this scene with the two men who try to help her and she quickly discovers that she is very different than others around her and that she does not fit in with other Dominicans on the Island. As a young girl in the Dominican Republic, Yolanda lived a lavish life of wealth and prosperity—a member of the few elite families on the Island; however, now that she has come back to the Island, she is considered the “Other” because she does not speak the primary language of the inhabitants and she has lost a lot of her knowledge of the Dominican culture, thus making her an outcast.

Expanding upon the theme of language, when a person learns a new language, s/he is essentially learning about a new culture. Thus, when Yo forgets to speak Spanish fluently—the language she was once felt comfortable communicating and expressing herself in—she is ultimately losing connection with her Dominican heritage. Throughout the novel, it becomes obvious that Yo feels more comfortable thinking and speaking in English than she does in Spanish. The loss of her native language is due to her being

away from the Dominican Republic for so long and because she doesn't have anyone to communicate in Spanish with in the United States—especially since her parents have dedicated so much time, money, and effort into making her and her sisters lose their Spanish accents. I believe the loss of her native language shows that Yo no longer knows much about her Dominican heritage and culture; Yo concentrated too much on trying to assimilate to American customs so she could fit in with her peers and when she travels back to the Dominican Republic in her thirties, her relatives also notice that she has become overly “Americanized.” When Yo talks to her extended family members, she finds that she stumbles on Spanish words and cannot think of the correct way to express herself in the language she grew up with and was once fluent in. Alvarez depicts a scene where Yo is trying to talk to her aunts about how her sisters are doing in the U.S.:

In halting Spanish, Yolanda reports on her sisters. When she reverts to English, she is scolded, ‘*¡En español!*’ The more she practices, the sooner she’ll be back into her native tongue, the aunts insist. Yes, when she returns to the States, she’ll find herself suddenly going blank over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase. This time, however, Yolanda is not so sure she’ll be going back. But that is a secret. (7)

In this passage, we see that Yo is torn between staying on the Island and going back to her hectic and fractured life in New York City. Yo left the U.S. assuming that her family that stayed on the Island during the Trujillo Era would be eager to welcome her “back home” and to Yo’s dismay, they treat her as if she is an outcast. Her family also doesn’t know much about her since she hasn’t been back to see them in five years and they still call her by her childhood nickname, Yoyo. Ultimately, it was rash to think that she would fit in well with her family and expect to see the Island to be in the same state as it was when she was a child. Ricardo Castells says, “...Yolanda García seems to be a member

of an intermediate generation that is not fully part of either its native or its adopted country. Yolanda thus appears to be in a contradictory cultural and linguistic situation” (36). Yo’s family members mock her and call her “Miss America” (4) yet Yo still doesn’t understand that “her native land is no longer her island home” (Castells 36). Overall, many things have changed on the Island since Yo left as a child and she no longer fits in with her cousins that she used to play with when she was younger. She has also become too Americanized and she doesn’t know how to act around her family members and strangers. Ultimately, Yo didn’t expect that the Island would have changed so much over the course of about twenty years and she is shocked to see that she does not fit in with other Dominicans, including her extended family members. It seems that Yo thought life in the Dominican Republic would be the same as it was when she was a child, however, because of the language barrier, she does not feel a sense of belonging nor does she feel as if she is a part of a “home created by a community of language, culture, and customs” (Said 176).

The theme of language plays a major role in the novel and we see that the García girls struggled in the U.S. to learn English as children and we also see Yo struggle as an adult in the Dominican Republic to speak and understand others in Spanish. As the title of the novel suggests, Yo’s mother and father went to great extremes to make sure all four girls became fluent in English and would lose their Spanish accents. When the García family arrived in the U.S., their father “had paid to straighten their teeth and smooth the accent out of their English in expensive schools” (Alvarez 36). Their father wanted to make sure that his daughters would have all the opportunities of success and prosperity in the future, thus, he made sure his girls had a good education and would have

ample help learning English—the language of those that surrounded them in the U.S., a country that was still very foreign to them. Joan M. Hoffman, author of “‘She Wants to Be Called Yolanda Now’: Identity, Language, and the Third Sister in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*,” says, “The struggle to master a second language is a constant reminder to these girls of their weakened position as strangers in a new land. Spanish is the mother tongue, a refuge; English, as it is portrayed in ‘Trespass,’ is big and overwhelming and fearful” (22). The language barrier makes Yo and her sisters feel inferior to those around them that speak English fluently. The girls may not understand their father’s desire for them to learn a new language quickly and to rid them of their accents, but their father “...with his ever present heavy accent understands that his daughters’ proper use of their adopted tongue is a key component to their adjustment in the New World” (Hoffman 22). In order to fully assimilate to American customs and traditions, Carlos García believes that it is necessary for his daughters to break down the language barrier *and* to rid his daughters of their Spanish accents so people do not treat them as if they are foreigners in the U.S.

Both the beginning and the end of the novel focus on Yo’s experiences on the Island, but I believe that there are hints throughout the entire book, as subtle as they may be, that show that Yo will struggle with developing an identity since she is constantly trying to figure out who she is and where she belongs. By including narratives about Yo’s adolescence and teenage years, readers see the various incidents that Yo and her sisters’ encounter as they try to fit in with their peers. Yo recalls her years at the Catholic school and she says, “As the only immigrant in my class, I was put in a special seat in the first row by the window, apart from the other children so that Sister Zoe could tutor me

without disturbing them. Slowly, she enunciated the new words I was supposed to repeat: *Laundromat, corn flakes, subway, snow*” (Alvarez 166). It doesn’t seem like Yo notices that she is different than other children her age, other than the language barrier, until she is given an assigned seat in the classroom. Since her teacher separates her from the other students, her classmates are ultimately taught to look at her as inferior and/or different, and that she needs special attention from the teachers. It seems that the García girls grew up always being treated with respect and dignity because Carlos was wealthy and he was well known on the Island; however, as newcomers in America their lifestyle had drastically changed and Carlos made a decent salary, but not enough to spontaneously buy the girls gifts or dine out often. William Luis, author of “A Search for Identity in Julia Alvarez’s: *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*” says:

Like the first wave of anti-Castro exiles, the García’s were privileged and professionals. The grandfather had studied in the United States, held a diplomatic appointment, and owned land where the members of the family constructed their homes, with servants and private guards...In the United States, the García girls continued to receive the best education money could buy. But the events had changed; they now experienced life in the United States from a different point of view, not as members of a privileged class associated with the Dominican Republic, but as common Hispanic immigrants. (841)

The García family experiences life as the “Others” and do not fit in with surrounding Americans due to their skin color, lack of knowledge of American customs and culture, and because of their heavy Spanish accents. The incident in the classroom where Yo was singled out in front of her peers and the sudden cultural displacement ultimately indicate that Yo has not had a smooth transition from her life in the Dominican Republic to the United States. There is obviously a lot that Yo has to learn about American culture in order to fit in with her peers, but we soon see that even as Yo gets older and is seen to

master the English language, she is still treated as an inferior compared to other Americans and she is made to believe that she does not belong in the United States.

From the narratives that Alvarez has created for all of the García girls, it is obvious that the girls' peers at school and even complete strangers do not help them to feel welcome in the U.S. Boys yelled at Yo's sister, Carla, saying, "Go back to where you came from, you dirty spic!" (Alvarez 153) and like Yo, Carla feels lost in a strange country and is desperate to find a place where she belongs. Luis continues, "The reaction North Americans have when they see Carla García is similar to the one she and other members of her family exhibit toward servants in general and Haitians in particular while living in the Dominican Republic" (841). When the García family lived in the Dominican Republic, they were members of the elite class and they looked down on others that were not of the same social and economic class as they were; the García's were once the ones that others looked up to, but in the U.S., they are simply considered to be among the many exiles and immigrants that have come to the U.S. to achieve the American Dream. When the García girls first arrived in the United States, they were young and afraid; the girls felt lonely in America because they thought everyone was looking down on them and because their family was no longer wealthy and well known as they were in the Dominican Republic. Yo, in particular, felt as if "She would never get the hang of this new country" (Alvarez 151) because she had such a hard time assimilating to American customs and traditions. By the time Yo gets to high school, readers see that she constantly doubts herself because she know others immediately judge her based on her physical appearances and because of the language barrier. Yo thought, "What use was it trying to compete with the Americans: they would always have the head start. It was their

country, after all. Best stick close to home” (Alvarez 140). As an escape from the intimidating American world around her and from the pressures put on her by her parents to do well in school, Yo writes poetry in the confines of her room. She finds that she can express her emotions even though she writes “in her new language” (Alvarez 136) and through writing, Yo is able to cope with her daily encounters of being discriminated against by her classmates.

Yo’s love of writing and poetry ultimately lead her to take a literature course in college. At this period in her life, she still does not feel comfortable speaking in English and she says, “English was then still a party favor for me—crack open the dictionary, find out if I’d just been insulted, praised, admonished, criticized” (Alvarez 87). Yo is not comfortable holding an entire conversation in English and ironically, her first course that she takes at college is an English class. As the professor takes attendance he bonded with students as he read their names aloud, “acknowledging most of the other students with nicknames and jokes and remarks” (Alvarez 88). The students laugh at his jokes, yet when he comes across Yolanda’s name, he “smiled falsely at me, a smile I had identified as one flashed on ‘foreign students’ to show them the natives were friendly” (Alvarez 88-9). It becomes apparent that people, regardless of their age and/or occupation, do not help Yo feel comfortable and welcomed even in a classroom. It would be assumed that her professor would know how to interact with all students, regardless of their ethnicity or race, yet he stumbles over Yolanda’s name and makes her feel as if she is different than the other students. This is the only glimpse that readers get of Yo’s experience in college, but this scene is crucial because it shows that it doesn’t matter where she is or who she surrounds herself with, Yo is still treated as if she does not belong. Yo had hoped that the

educated groups of people that she would be surrounded by would know how to make her feel welcomed and equal to her peers, but she is distraught because she experience the exact opposite. One thing that Yo did take away from her college experience was the passion for language and of writing which we later understand has helped her to recreate herself and move forward to learn to understand who she is as a Dominican living in the U.S.

The narratives shift and we soon see that Yolanda is so overwhelmed by trying to be the perfect daughter, writer, and wife that she loses focus of her goals and aspirations and is admitted to a psychiatric hospital where she is described to continue to grapple with questions of belonging. One of the most dramatic scenes in the novel is when Alvarez discusses Yolanda's name and how each nickname that she has has some significance to it. Alvarez writes, "Yolanda, nicknamed *Yo* in Spanish, misunderstood *Joe* in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, *Yoyo*—or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains, *Joey*—stands at the third-story window watching a man walk across the lawn with a tennis racket" (68). I believe that the many names that Yolanda has indicates her inability to adhere to one single identity. Yo wants to be Dominican, yet she also doesn't realize how Americanized she has become. She is ultimately trapped between two very different worlds and struggles to understand who she truly is. Jacqueline Stefanko, author of "New Ways of Telling: Latinas' Narratives of Exile and Return," says, "As Yolanda's names proliferate on the page, we begin to see the multiplicity of her identity. We must also reckon with the ethnocentric irony of 'personalized' when one is Latino and not Anglo" (59). It drives Yo crazy that she has so many identities trapped inside one body; Yo is a Latina, an American, an immigrant, an

exile, the “Other,” and she struggles to define who she is and where she ultimately belongs. Another scholar, Helen Atawube Yitah, discusses Yo’s various names by saying, “These names are the linguistic signs of her American and Dominican identity. Their arrangement seems to suggest that when others look at her what they see is an Americanized ‘Joe,’ whereas she is yearning to be Yolanda” (239). This personal struggle with her identity is what ultimately leads her to go back to the Dominican Republic, a “physical journey back to the island” in order to start her “journey for self-discovery” (Yitah 239).

In her attempt to define herself, her husband, John, is seen to hold Yo back from understanding who she is and where she belongs. When Yo and her husband were together, they sat and made poems and rhymes with each other’s names. Yo began to rattle off words that rhymed with her own name:

“*I*”—she pointed to herself—“rhymed with the *sky!*”

“But not with *Joe!*” John wagged his finger at her. His eyes softened with desire. He placed his mouth over her mouth and ohed her lips open.

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

Nothing that Yo says or does is ever right for John and he even calls her “crazy” and he insisted that she should see a shrink (Alvarez 73). Yo could never be herself around her husband and she didn’t understand who she was when she was with him because it was like they were speaking two different languages (Alvarez 81). Alvarez writes, “She talked in comparisons, she spoke in riddles” and John simply did not comprehend her (79).

When Yo checks in to get help at an asylum, she talks to her doctor and readers can see

how delusional and unstable Yo has become. She starts to speak and as various words come out of her mouth, Yo believes she is having an allergic reaction to certain words and she says that she breaks out in hives and “her lips prickle and pucker” as she recites her own name (Alvarez 84). I believe that this “allergic reaction” to her own name signifies her fear that she is becoming someone she is not and that she does not like the person that she has become. Yo wonders who she truly is and she feels even more alone in the United States when her own husband does not understand her and no longer cares for her. Readers may think that over time Yo would learn to accept herself for who she is, but with further textual evidence, it becomes apparent that Yo is never satisfied with who she is, but she continually searches for someone that she is not.

What I believe to be one of the most crucial scenes of the novel is found in the very last chapter, titled “The Drum,” where Yolanda is a child in the Dominican Republic. In this section Yolanda is referred to as Yoyo, a childish rendition of her Spanish name, which makes readers believe that she is very young and naïve. In a particular scene, Yoyo steals a kitten away from its mother and she is excited to play with the tiny animal, but soon gets easily annoyed with it. Yoyo puts the kitten inside the toy drum, a present she received from her grandmother who brought it back from New York for her, and pounds on the drum with the drumsticks (Alvarez 281-288). It seems that Yoyo is at an age where she understands that she is harming the innocent animal, yet she doesn’t seem to feel remorse for hurting it. Yoyo says:

I detested the accusing sound of meow. I wanted to dunk it into the sink and make its meowing stop. Instead, I lifted the screen and threw the meowing ball out the window. I heard it land with a thud, saw it moments later, wobbling out from under the shadow of the house, meowing and stumbling forward. There was no sign of the mother cat. (Alvarez 288)

This passage depicts Yoyo as a brutal child, yet it is significant because it shows readers that just like the kitten was taken away from its mother, Yoyo was also taken away from her extended family members and her home in the Dominican Republic—a place that she has fond memories of and where she had no worries. The mother cat provided her kittens with food, shelter, safety, and necessities; the fragile and frail kitten would not have lived long away from its mother and Yoyo, knowing the kitten depended on its mother, took it and harmed the innocent animal. Jacqueline Stefanko states, “The reference to the kitten conjures the image of Yolanda as a child ripping a kitten from its mother, just as she was ripped from her mother-land, mother-tongue” (67). The kitten’s only sense of familiarity was its mother and Yoyo’s only sense of comfort and security was her home in the Dominican Republic. Even though Yoyo does not know that she is going to be taken away from her home, readers are able to understand that the kitten is symbolic because it represents Yoyo’s innocence and fear of leaving the one place she was familiar with.

The passage directly after the scene with the kitten is when Yoyo first moved to the United States. We do not know how much time has passed, but she remembers how she harmed the kitten and she has nightmares that the mother cat is always lurking around, looking for her and reminding her of how she harmed its baby. Yoyo knows the mother cat could not have possibly followed her all the way from the Dominican Republic to New York City, but Yo recalls:

That night I woke with a start in the claws of a bad dream I could not remember...That night, sitting at the foot of my bed, poking her face in so that the gauzy net was molded to her features like an awful death mask, was the black mother cat. I froze with terror. She glared at me with fluorescent eyes. She let out soft, moaning meows. (Alvarez 288-9)

The chronic nightmares eventually stop, but Yo says that “There are still times I wake up at three o’clock in the morning and peer into the darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life” (290). The mother cat is ultimately a reminder of Yo’s childhood and the life she never got to live in the Dominican Republic. She was taken away from her homeland at a very young age and longs to be back on the Island because she has such pleasant memories with her family and friends. Luis relates to this idea by saying:

The nightmares recall that past but most importantly Yolanda’s own trauma of being taken away from her natural environment, from her own litter; it was after this incident that her family moved to the United States...The mother cat is a reminder of what Yolanda did, but it is also a symbol of the psychological fear of being taken away from her surrounding at an impressionable age. (847-8)

Yo was only a child when she left the Dominican Republic, but she still holds on to the memories she had of her life she lived on the Island. Yo is traumatized by the fact that she was ripped away from her home and she is scared because her parents took her to a strange new country where she knew no one and was unable to communicate with others because of the language barrier. Alvarez ultimately ends the novel with Yo discussing her nightmares of the mother cat haunting her dreams and readers are left with the impression that Yo only remembers very little about the Island and her life as a child when Trujillo came to power. The mother cat signifies the “old” Dominican Republic and Yo’s childhood and it is one of the few memories that Yo has of her life on the Island. Yo ultimately had the belief that when she traveled back to the Dominican Republic that she would be welcomed by everyone and she would fit in with her family and friends. To her dismay, Yolanda realized that she doesn’t belong in the Dominican Republic, but she is ultimately doomed to have an “eternal quest for identity” (Luis 848).

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Julia Alvarez portrays Yolanda García as a young woman that is in a continual search to understand her position in life and to define who she is and where she belongs. I believe that Yo is in search for a sense of nationalism and longs to feel a sense of belonging to *one* place that she can truly call her home. She desperately wants to forget the incidents that have happened in her past that have haunted her and move forward to start a new chapter of her life; however, in order to move forward, she must embrace her past and learn from her mistakes and failed relationships—not run away from them. It seems as if Yo has suffered from depression due to cultural displacement and in a sense, she has caused some of the hardships that she has endured herself. Her father chose to uproot their family for fear of assassination and he wanted to protect his family and provide his four girls with a safer home in New York City. However, Yo uproots herself and she assumed that she would fit in with her extended family when she returns to the Dominican Republic in her thirties. Readers are never told if Yo stays in the Dominican Republic, but we are given an ambiguous ending; we do not know what the future holds for Yo, nor do we know if she heals from her emotional wounds. Overall, “Yolanda is still a troubled soul haunted by the island of her birth; she is neither able to return to its bosom nor to completely escape its clutches” (Hoffman 26). In order to heal, Yo needs to confront her past and embrace the various traumatic events that have caused her to question who she is and where she belongs. When she realizes that she can move forward with her life and that she has to stop running away from those who have harmed her, she will ultimately begin to understand who she is and where she truly belongs in the world.

Chapter 2:
Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and the Destruction of the del Pino Family

Cristina García is a well-known Cuban-American author who came to the United States with her family in 1960 when she was two-years-old. García has no vivid memories of her life in Cuba since she was merely a toddler when her family uprooted themselves, but her family members have told her what happened on the Island that forced them to leave their native country. García has also gone back to Cuba as an adult to meet family members that she has only heard her mother and father mention in reference to stories about events that took place on the Island. García incorporates historical events into her works of fiction and if a reader is not familiar with particular events that occurred in Cuba within the past 60 years, it might be hard for them to understand the depth of meaning that is imbedded within her texts. Thus, I feel that it is imperative that I give a quick overview of some of the historical events that have occurred in Cuba since 1959 and to briefly describe Fidel Castro's revolution before I delve into an analysis of García's *Dreaming in Cuban*.

Fidel Castro had a vision that he was going to change Cuba by eliminating the gap between the wealthy and the poor, but he would only succeed by ousting the current President, Fulgencio Batista. Batista was a corrupt socialist President and dictator that exploited the Island's resources and inhabitants by making a profit off of drugs and prostitution. In 1959, Castro rounded up men to overthrow the Batista regime which subsequently led to Castro becoming the new Cuban President. In order to make changes to Cuba's government and economy and to give Cubans more freedoms, Castro began a revolution where he promised to provide women with equality, develop more educational opportunities for children, create better health services, and to end illiteracy. At the

beginning of his regime, Castro gained a lot of supporters because many that lived on the Island lived in dire poverty and many Cubans naively believed that he would successfully create a “new” and improved Cuba. In María de los Angeles Torres’s book, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States*, she says, “The Cuban revolution of 1959 restructured class and power relations on the island. Policies were instituted that greatly redistributed wealth and other societal benefits. The revolution was deeply rooted in the struggle to define a nation and institute a just social program” (30). The history of Cuba is very complex, yet many Cubans were excited that Castro was trying to make Cuba stand out from other Caribbean islands by making drastic social, political, and economic changes. Castro gained the support from those that believed in him and his abilities to change Cuba, but other Cubans began to worry that he could not fulfill his big plans. Those that did not trust Castro and feared that he would not bring about the right kind of change to the Island fled as quickly and quietly as possible to live as exiles in surrounding countries.

By reading about the Cuban exile’s experiences in literature, readers learn that many had no other choice but to leave their families and homes behind in order to obtain safety and security in the United States with the hope of a more optimistic future in a democratic nation. Torres continues to say that “the 1970 U.S. census reported that there were 560,628 Cubans in the United States and that 252,520 lived in Florida” (83). Not all Cubans left their home country at the same time nor did they all leave for the same reasons, but many families were torn apart because of an exile’s decision to leave their home country. Edward Said states that “Exile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out: but only sometimes” (178) and he goes on to discuss how he believes

exile should not just be looked at as a negative experience, but there are positive experiences that can come out of establishing a new home and life in a foreign country. One aspect of exile that Said completely leaves out of “Reflections on Exile” is how families suffer and lose their close-knit relationships with other family members due to the tension and overwhelming emotions that are associated with the huge choice of leaving one’s home. Furthermore, those that leave their home country are not the only ones impacted by exile; those that choose to stay behind are heavily impacted by the decisions of their family members to leave their native country behind and are seen to experience just as much emotional turmoil as those that seek exile.

At the beginning of *Dreaming in Cuban*, readers are introduced to Jorge and Celia del Pino and their three children—Lourdes, Felicia, and Javier—and we see that the family unit that was once solid is seen to dissolve over the course of the novel and is ultimately destroyed because of various characters’ choices to seek exile in order to escape Castro’s revolution and dictatorship. Celia, the matriarch of the family, has been brainwashed by propaganda and was convinced that she and others would have a brighter, more optimistic future on the Island with the chance of living in a safe environment and with the opportunity to have a healthy life run by a democratic government. In reality, Castro did help lift many out of poverty, but he created a more hostile environment on the Island that led to many fearing for their lives. When Cubans fled their home country during the Cuban Revolution, they were considered traitors by many that were pro-revolution and “leaving the island was equated with abandoning the Cuban nation, with treason” (Torres 30). Those that fled the country felt as if they had no other choice but to escape, but in many instances, they also feared going back to their

home country because they worried that others on the Island would look down upon them and treat them differently because they left their home and the revolution behind. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, characters like Lourdes and Jorge leave Cuba with no intentions of going back, but they are also forced to leave behind family members in order to start a new life in the U.S. or in Javier's case, the Soviet Union. Pilar, Lourdes's daughter, on the other hand, struggles because she was taken away from Cuba as a child and feels as if she needs to travel back to her native country in order to see where she belongs—does she belong in the U.S? Or, does she belong back on the Island with her grandmother? In all efforts to help Pilar understand her Cuban past and the history of her Cuban heritage, Lourdes realizes that she must go back to Cuba with her daughter in order for Pilar to see the Island for herself and to have Pilar make the decision to choose where she wants to spend the rest of her life.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Cristina García gives a voice to the women that sought exile and/or stay behind to continue to support the revolution and she develops narratives that show readers the various emotions that are associated with exile. By focusing on three of the primary female characters—Celia, Lourdes, and Pilar—it becomes evident that all three characters have conflicting issues as to where they think they belong. One of the few characters that does not seek exile is Celia, yet she experiences the same sort of emotions that an exile would because family members keep leaving her to make “new” homes in other countries and she is ultimately left on the Island by herself and she fears that she will die alone. Lourdes may not understand how much she has hurt her mother by leaving the Island and by taking Pilar away from her, but by closely analyzing the mother-daughter relationships depicted in the novel, it becomes noticeable that the

fractured relationship that Lourdes has with her mother is comparable to the relationship that Lourdes has with Cuba. To Lourdes, her mother's dedication to the revolution disgusts her because she has been so traumatized while living on the Island and she doesn't understand why her mother keeps supporting Castro's revolution. Since Celia has dedicated so much time, money, and effort to aide the revolution, Lourdes ultimately detests her mother just as much as she hates the Island. Therefore, because Lourdes has had so many terrible experiences in Cuba, she cannot stand to return "home" to visit her mother because she feels so betrayed by Cuba. Furthermore, because her own daughter, Pilar, has such a strong connection with her Abuela Celia and is described as being able to communicate telepathically with her, Lourdes's relationship with Pilar is depicted as unhealthy since they are constantly arguing and doing things to make each other angry. It is Pilar's strong attachment to her grandmother and to Cuba that makes Lourdes not trust or be affectionate to her daughter and the only glimmer of hope we see in their relationship is when Pilar finally goes to Cuba as a young adult and decides for herself that she does not belong on the Island, but would rather return home to New York.

Similar to Yolanda in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Pilar struggles to understand where she truly belongs since she arrived in the United States when she was a toddler. Pilar says, "Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out. If only I could see Abuela Celia again, I'd know where I belong" (García 58). Pilar is what Gustavo Pérez Firmat calls the "1.5 generation," a group of children that have left their native country when they were very young and have been brought up and educated in the United States. Pérez Firmat describes the plight of the "one-and-a-halfers":

Although it is true enough that the 1.5 generation is “marginal” to both its native and its adopted cultures, the inverse may be equally accurate: only the 1.5 generation is marginal to *neither* culture. The 1.5 individual is unique in that, unlike the younger and older compatriots, he or she may actually find it possible to circulate within and through both the old and the new cultures. While one-and-a-halfers may never feel entirely at ease in either one, they are capable of availing themselves of the resources—linguistic, artistic, commercial—that both cultures have to offer. In some ways they are *both* first and second generations. Unlike their older and younger cohorts, they may actually be able to choose cultural habitats. (3-4)

As the “one-and-a-half” generation children grow up, they begin to struggle to understand where they belong; the “1.5 generation” do not feel as if they belong in the country they left behind nor do they feel as if they belong in the country they currently live in (Pérez Firmat 3-4). Relating Pérez Firmat’s discussion on exile to Pilar, readers are shown how Pilar is trapped between two worlds and two cultures; Pilar was taken away from Cuba and her grandmother and doesn’t have a full understanding of *why* she left and what Cuba is actually like. In order for Pilar to fully understand *who* she is and *where* she belongs, she must travel back to the Island and see what life is truly like in Cuba herself without any influence from her mother and/or grandmother.

Lourdes and her brother, Javier, leave Cuba when they are adults and they leave with no intentions of returning to Cuba. Lourdes goes to Brooklyn in order to open her own bakery and her brother travels to the Soviet Union where he falls in love with a woman and is seen to suffer and quickly die from alcoholism. By analyzing Lourdes’s behavior, it becomes evident that she, like her father who left the Island years before, wants to cut all her connections with Cuba and even goes to the extreme to travel as far away from the Island as possible. García writes, “When she had first left Cuba, Lourdes hadn’t known how long they’d be away. She was to meet Rufino in Miami, where the rest

of his family had fled. In her confusion, she packed riding crops and her wedding veil, a watercolor landscape, and a paper sack of birdseed” (69). All of these items that Lourdes chose to bring are of no use to her in the U.S.; Lourdes packed quickly and naïvely brought items with her and in her excitement to leave Cuba, she did not bring anything that would help her adjust to the new climate and country. She did not want to bring anything that would remind her of her past life that she led in Cuba, thus she packed lightly and would buy anything she needed and desired in the U.S. In order to start a new life in the United States, she also believed that she had to be as far away from the Island in order to form a new identity as an American citizen; Lourdes did not want to be known as a Cuban-American, but she simply wanted to live the American Dream and achieve success and prosperity. Ultimately, Lourdes knows that she will never be able to forget about her past life she led in Cuba, but once she arrives in New York City, a city that is known to be densely populated with exiles and immigrants, she knows she has found her new “home.”

Before arriving in New York City, the plane that Lourdes and Rufino took to escape Cuba brought them to Miami—a major city where many exiles and immigrants live in because the tropical climate reminds them of their native country. Unlike other exiles and immigrants that suffer from nostalgia and long to go back home, Lourdes and her husband immediately got in their car and drove as far north as possible in order to leave behind her past and be as far from her old “home” as possible. Lourdes and Rufino discuss where they want to live after they leave Miami:

“I want to go where it’s cold,” Lourdes told her husband. They began to drive. “Colder,” she said as they passed the low salt marshes of Georgia, as if the word were a whip driving them north. “Colder,” she said through the withered fields of a Carolina winter. “Colder,” she said again

in Washington, D.C., despite the cherry-blossom promises, despite the white stone monuments hoarding winter light. “This is cold enough,” she finally said when they reached New York. (García 69-70)

Rufino does not question Lourdes’ desire to travel north because he, too, was psychologically traumatized when Castro took his family’s land and wealth away from them. Lourdes knew that she could not live in Miami where the atmosphere is reminiscent of Cuba because she desperately wants to forget her past and move forward to establish a new identity as an American, so Lourdes and Rufino drove until she told him to stop in New York City. Fatima Mujcinovic, author of “Multiple Articulations of Exile in US Latina Literature: Confronting Exilic Absence and Trauma,” states that the coldness of New York “symbolically acts as an anesthetic that helps deaden the past, freeze the emotion, and reduce the intensity of pain. Lourdes embraces the coldness as a protective barrier, seeing the layers of thick, winter clothes as an armor for her vulnerable body” (177). In other words, Lourdes seeks the coldness in order to “freeze” her sadness and pain that she experienced in Cuba, but she also does not want Pilar to grow up on the Island and encounter similar incidents that she had experienced as a woman on the Island. To Lourdes, the only logical thing to do to escape her past and to have the opportunity to start a new life was to leave everything she had and was familiar with behind.

Another reason why Lourdes left Cuba was because she wanted to find a place where she could feel comfortable and secure; Lourdes feared that she would lose more than her wealth and property if she stayed on the Island. Said states that “Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past” (177) and this is exactly what Lourdes *chose* to do. By leaving Cuba, she also left her mother behind, but in order for her to heal and be able to move forward, Lourdes has to cut all ties with Cuba *and* her mother. Her mother

has put so much of her energy, time, and money into helping the revolution, thus, Lourdes felt as if she had to end her relationship she had with her mother in order to fully excommunicate herself from the Island and her past. García writes about an incident that took place shortly before they left the Island where Rufino was traveling to Havana and Lourdes was maliciously attacked and raped by two Cuban soldiers:

The other soldier held Lourdes down as his partner took a knife from his holder. Carefully, he sliced Lourdes's riding pants off to her knees and tied them over her mouth. He cut through her blouse without dislodging a single button and slit her bra and panties in two. Then he placed the knife flat across her belly and raped her. (70-71)

Readers later find out that Lourdes was pregnant and she lost her unborn child after the soldiers savagely attacked her and she never fully recovers from the loss of her unborn child (García 129). The gruesome rape and the loss of her unborn child symbolize the loss of Lourdes's dignity and only son. Lourdes envisions what her son would look like and how "He would have come to her for guidance, pressed her hand to his cheek, told her he loved her. Lourdes would have talked to her son the way Rufino talks to Pilar, for companionship. Lourdes suffers with this knowledge" (García 129). Lourdes does not know the gender of the baby she lost, but she believes it would have been a boy and that they would have a close relationship like she had with her own father. Whenever Lourdes thinks of Cuba, she thinks of the child she lost and how that child would have loved her and respected her. Fatima Mujcinovic says that Lourdes "alienates herself from her homeland in order to elude the troubling past...The novel maintains that the space of home represents a betrayal that she cannot forgive. Its professed security and impregnability turned out to be illusory: she was violated in the space where violation was not supposed to exist" (175). In other words, Lourdes felt betrayed by her country

because Castro was supposed to provide her and other Cubans with a safe environment; contrary to feeling safe, she was raped in her “home” and she no longer felt as if she could trust Castro and other government officials that enforce safety because they were the ones that violated and harmed her. Furthermore, the traumatic experiences that Lourdes encounters force her to “alienate herself completely from the space of home(land) and embrace exile as a space where she can recuperate her obliterated self” (175). For Lourdes, it was essential that she leave her home country in order for her to heal her physical and psychological wounds. However, even when she is in the United States, she is constantly thinking about the son she lost and she believes that she would have had a close relationship with him; even when she is far away from the Island, Lourdes continually thinks about the son she lost and how he would shower her with endless love and affection, something her own mother never gave her. Lourdes ultimately associates her son’s death with Cuba because if she were able to leave the Island sooner, she believes that she would have been able to bring another life into the world. With one tragedy after another, Lourdes could not trust anyone in Cuba and she knew that she had to leave the Island in order to have a chance at creating a new, safe home for herself and for her family that she felt determined to protect.

When Lourdes and her family arrived in New York, she realized that the streets of Brooklyn revealed a plethora of opportunities for her and she didn’t waste time starting her own business in order to make herself well known among others in the city. Lourdes opens a bakery and names it “The Yankee Doodle Bakery” where Cuban exiles all gather to gossip and gather to buy her tasty treats. It also becomes obvious that Lourdes is trying to achieve the American Dream, form a new identity as an American, and to be

economically successful like many of the men and women that come and buy pastries at her shop. Mujcinovic continues to describe Lourdes's continual battle to rid herself of her Cuban past:

America allows her to live in one time frame and create an ideal, yet false, self-image: a successful business owner who has transcended her past obstacles and has a promising future. She follows the classic American ideal of the self-made woman, adopting the mainstream culture and pursuing the American Dream. Lourdes' single task, as she sees it in exile is to move forward on her own and never turn back. (177-8)

Lourdes devotes her entire life to her bakery and even opens a second one. Because she has devoted so much time to her bakeries and to create a new identity for herself, readers begin to see that her once close relationship with her husband has vanished and she continually encounters battles with her daughter. Even though she works so many hours and she is constantly arguing with Pilar, who begs her to take her back to Cuba to visit her Abuela Celia, Lourdes can't help but think of the glorious life that she has created for herself and her small family in the United States. García writes, "Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful...she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention" (73). Lourdes is making the best out of the situation she put herself and her family in; Lourdes felt as if she had no other choice but to leave Cuba and travel to the United States to create a new life for her family, and in doing so, she has become successful and developed a new, yet false, identity. Lourdes is making the best out of her situation and we can see that even though she is haunted by her past, she is seen to move forward to make a better future for herself and her family. Even though she continually argues with Pilar, who believes that Lourdes is a terrible mother for not letting her go back to Cuba and live with her Abuela Celia, Lourdes puts her family first and she knows that her daughter is safer and will have more opportunities

in the United States. Though Pilar may not see how much her mother loves and cares about her, Lourdes teaches her daughter to look around her and see the positives in everything instead of dwelling on the negatives that could consume her life.

Towards the end of “Reflections on Exile,” Said repeatedly discusses the positives of choosing to live as an exile and he discusses in great length that once an exile overcomes the feelings of despair and loneliness, they will soon realize that that they can live a happy life as an exile. Said says:

I speak of exile not as a privilege, but as an *alternative* to the mass institutions that dominate modern life. Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you. But provided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity. (184)

Relating his thoughts on exile to *Dreaming in Cuban*, we see that Lourdes does not focus on her past, but she confronts the present with eagerness and longs to see what the new country has in store for her—Lourdes “refuses to sit on the sidelines” and watch others become successful while she nurses old wounds. Lourdes, unlike her husband, embraces the English language and is excited that she can start a new life in the United States where she will not continually be haunted by her past traumas. García writes about how Rufino is unable to assimilate into American culture because he feels such a strong sense of nostalgia towards Cuba; Rufino “would never adapt” to American customs and traditions and “he could not be transplanted” into a new country (García 129). Lourdes realizes that there is nothing that she can do to make her husband happy in their new home because she refuses to leave the United States to go back to Cuba where she was violated and where she lost her only son. Compared to Rufino, Lourdes is described as looking at the positives and making the best of her situation as an exile. Rufino, on the

other hand, is overwhelmed by feelings of nostalgia and he does not notice the great opportunities that surround him. Lourdes always daydreams about the son she lost and she will never be able to forget what happened to her in Cuba, but she has chosen to move forward and establish a new, prosperous life for her and her family. At this particular point in the novel, readers become aware that Lourdes's marriage is slowly coming to an end because she and her husband have different outlooks for their future and exile has created a rift in their marriage that may not have happened if they stayed on the Island. Lourdes and Rufino are at two different points in their lives but Lourdes knows that she made the right decision to leave Cuba, especially because she has a young daughter and did not want to worry about Castro's soldiers making Pilar their next victim of a brute attack and/or rape.

We finally see how the various traumas have impacted Lourdes psyche when she describes the nights where she would see and talk to her dead father walking the streets of New York City. Lourdes talks to him and seeks guidance and support from her father, which leads readers to believe that she is in desperate need of someone to simply talk to in order to overcome her mental and physical traumas that led her to leave Cuba. García writes about Lourdes's conversation with Rufino, saying, "'He's back,' Lourdes whispers hoarsely, peering under the love seats. 'He spoke to me tonight when I was walking home from the bakery. I heard Papi's voice. I smelled his cigar. The street was empty, I swear it.' Lourdes stops. Her chest rises and falls with every breath" (65). Rufino doesn't seem to think that Lourdes is serious; he thinks that Lourdes is delusional and sleep deprived because she has been extremely busy with her two bakeries. Lourdes misses her father since they had such a strong connection since her birth and García describes their close-

knit relationship by saying, “Lourdes is herself only with her father. Even after his death, they understand each other perfectly, as they always have...He is proud of his daughter, of her tough stance of law and order, identical to his own” (131-2). Even Lourdes questions her sanity thinking, “Is her mind betraying her, cultivating delusion like a hothouse orchid?” (García 65), she can’t help but think that she actually saw her father while walking the streets of Brooklyn and that he understood the various struggles she was experiencing. Jorge comes back into his daughter’s life at a crucial time; Jorge realizes that her daughter needs him and that Celia has not been there physically and emotionally to help their daughter. Julee Tate, author of “Matrilineal and Political Divisions in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*,” says, “Lourdes’s exclusive attachment to her father allows her at once to distance herself from Celia and to compensate for the absence of a close relationship with her mother” (149). To Lourdes, she believes that she must cut off all communication with her mother because her mother represents all that Cuba was and is becoming. In order for Lourdes to fully heal from her physical and emotional wounds that were caused in Cuba and as a result of Cuba’s revolution, she must distance herself from her mother as much as possible. By confiding in her father, Lourdes is still able to talk to a parent about what is happening in her life, but she is also able to push her mother further out of her life. The further that Lourdes is able to push Celia away from her, the more Lourdes is able to heal and move forward to create a new identity as an American. Her father also comes into her life at a crucial time when she is having trouble with her marriage and even though he is not “physically” with her to talk in person, he appears to let her know that he is always with her.

After living in the United States for a short time, Lourdes begins to notice Rufino is distancing himself from her and she seems to know that she is doomed to live in a loveless relationship (García 129). García says, “These days, Lourdes recognized her husband’s face, his thinning reddish hair, and the creepy pouches under his eyes, but he is a stranger to her. She looks at him the way she might look at a photograph of her hands, unfamiliar upon close inspection” (131). Lourdes feels lonelier than she has ever felt because she has been trying so hard to start a new life with her family in the United States, but she now realizes that she is losing her husband and she is constantly arguing with her daughter. It angers Lourdes that Pilar doesn’t understand all that she went through in order to give her a new life in the United States and it pangs Lourdes to know that her daughter wants to go back to Cuba to live with her Abuela Celia. Not knowing all that her mother has been through in Cuba, Pilar buys her mother a book filled with essays about the Cuban revolution. Angered by this deliberate act to make her furious and to start a fight, Lourdes “filled the tub with scalding water, and dropped it [the book] in” (García 132). The only “true” accounts of Cuba’s history is told to Pilar through telepathic communication with her grandmother and since Celia has a biased view of Cuba because she has been brainwashed by Castro, Pilar is infuriated with her mother for taking her away from the dreamland that Pilar envisions Cuba to be. Tate says, “Pilar needs for Lourdes to relate her memories of Cuba so that Pilar can negotiate a bicultural identity,” but Lourdes refuses to talk to her daughter about why she left Cuba and the incidents leading up to leaving the Island (153). Instead of asking her mother about their family and why they left Cuba, “Pilar circumvents her mother and relies on her grandmother’s ‘truth’ for an understanding of her Cuban and familial heritage” (Tate

154). Overall, Pilar is in a tough position as an exile that left her home country as a toddler because she did not get to “choose” to leave her home and family members behind. Pérez Firmat seems to adequately describe the situation that Pilar is in as a “one-and-a-half” by stating:

Cuban-American culture is a balancing act. One-and-a-halfers are no more American than they are Cuban—and vice versa. Their hyphen is a see-saw: it tilts first one way, then the other. The game ends at one point (the one-and-a-half generation passeth away), and the board then comes to rest on one side. But in the meantime it stays in the air, uneasily balancing one weight against the other. (5)

In other words, it seems that Pilar, like other “one-and-a-halfers,” is in a unique position where she is in a constant search to understand who she is and where she belongs. Pilar has the privilege to choose where she wants to live as an adult, but she will never be able to rid herself of her “Americanness” if she chooses to move back to Cuba, just as she is never able to rid herself of her “Cubanness” living in the United States. Instead of seeking the truth from unbiased sources, Pilar struggles to understand who she is and she thinks she belongs in Cuba, but until she is able to physically visit and experience Cuba and see her grandmother, she is at a stalemate and continues to struggle to form an identity and continues to fight with her mother.

I believe that because Lourdes never had a strong bond with her own mother, she ultimately doesn’t know how to connect with her daughter. From the day that Lourdes was born, Celia never wanted to touch her or care for her; Celia made it clear that she did not want Lourdes and instead of coddling her as an infant to express her maternal love for her, she tells Jorge “I will not remember her name” (García 43). These hurtful words have followed Lourdes into her adulthood and she is continually in search of somewhere to belong and for someone to love her. Lourdes yearns for love and affection as an adult

and she truly cares about her daughter, but it seems that Pilar keeps deliberately doing things to further destroy their relationship. As the arguments escalate between her and her daughter, Lourdes feels as if there is no other choice but to seek advice from a psychiatrist in all efforts to help her reconstruct the mother-daughter relationship that Lourdes longs to have with Pilar. Tate suggests that the continual arguments that Lourdes and Pilar have are due to “a lack of maternal bonding” and that “It is Lourdes’s inability to resolve her conflict with her own mother and motherland that prevents her from healing her relationship with Pilar” (154). Lourdes knows that her relationship with Ceila is beyond repair at this point in her life, but she realizes that it is not too late to repair the mother-daughter relationship with Pilar. In some scenes in the novel it seems that Lourdes believes that she would have had a strong bond with the son she lost in Cuba and she daydreams about him and how he would have treated her with love and respect; however, in order for Lourdes to move on and to create a healthy relationship with Pilar, she needs to concentrate on her daughter, not think about the child she lost in Cuba. Ultimately, Lourdes realizes that she must go out of her way and earn her daughter’s trust and respect and that she needs to let go of her past in order to have a healthy and optimistic future with Pilar.

Readers finally see a glimmer of hope for Lourdes and her daughter’s relationship when Lourdes asks Pilar to paint a mural for the grand opening of her second bakery that ironically opens the same day as the 200th birthday of the America. Lourdes does not ask Pilar to discuss the painting before it is revealed and has no clue what Pilar will create, but she gives Pilar the opportunity to use her imagination to paint anything she wants. As Lourdes pulls the sheet off of the painting to display Pilar’s artwork in front of members

of the public, customers immediately criticize her painting of the Statue of Liberty “in her full punk glory” (García 143-4). Holding her breath because she is worried that her mother is going to scold her for painting something so abstract, Lourdes immediately defends Pilar and lunges towards those who yell “Gaaahbage! Whadda piece of gaaahbage!” and because her mother went to such extremes to defend her artwork, Pilar says, “And I, I love my mother very much at that moment” (García 144). At this point in the novel, readers are able to see that Lourdes and Pilar are finally bonding and they are both putting forth the effort to mend their relationship. I believe that the longer that Pilar is away from Cuba, the more that she believes she feels as if she belongs in the United States. Pilar gradually loses her “Cubanness” because she has been away from the Island for so long and has immersed herself in American customs and traditions; thus, since Pilar is more “Americanized,” Lourdes feels as if is able to trust Pilar more because Pilar has distanced herself from Cuba, intentionally and unintentionally, and their mother-daughter relationship is seen to strengthen. To Lourdes, she could not have a healthy relationship with Pilar because Pilar had too many connections with Cuba. Lourdes even pushed her own mother away because Celia devoted so much of her life and energy to Cuba and Castro’s revolution; Lourdes distanced herself from everything and everyone that resembled or reminded her of Cuba and she is seen to have failing relationships with anyone that has any allegiance or devotion to the Island. Tate says that “Lourdes’s relationship with Celia is emblematic of her relationship with Cuba: she is estranged from both” (152-3). Lourdes never wants to return to Cuba because she has so much hatred towards her mother who favored Castro and his revolution over her own husband and children. The tarnished relationship that Lourdes has with Celia ultimately represents the

fractured relationship that Lourdes, and other Cuban exiles, has with their mother country.

The longer that Pilar is away from Cuba, the weaker her connection with her grandmother gets; as time goes by, Pilar realizes that she no longer has the ability to communicate telepathically with Celia. Pilar says, “Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there’s only my imagination where our history should be” (García 138). The longer that Pilar is away from Cuba and her Abuela Celia, the stronger the relationship gets with her mother and I believe that Lourdes and Pilar are only able to mend their mother-daughter relationship because they are so far away from Cuba and Celia. When Pilar goes back to Cuba with her mother to visit the Island and her grandmother, she falls in love with the scenery and imagines waking up every morning and sitting outside, breathing in the cool ocean air. She says, “I’m afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I’d have to return to New York. I know now it’s where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here” (García 236). By physically seeing her grandmother and the Island, Pilar feels confident that she does not belong in Cuba, but she truly belongs in New York with her mother where she can continue to pursue her dreams as an artist. Jacqueline Stefanko, author of “New Ways of Telling: Latinas’ Narratives of Exile and Return,” says, “...she [Pilar] realizes that Cuba, although it cannot be her home, will always be a part of her consciousness. She perceives Cuba and her cultural memory to be a place she can continually renew and re-invent through narrative, with her imagination” (67). Pilar is finally able to make the decision for herself as to where she knows she belongs and by making this decision, she feels confident that she needs to go back to the U.S. with her

mother because New York City is her *home*. Pilar ultimately ends up leaving her grandmother *again* and readers are left with a final passage that leaves us wondering what happens to Celia.

García creates an ambiguous ending to the novel that leaves readers puzzled. Lourdes and Pilar have gone back to the United States and even after Celia has begged Pilar to stay with her on the Island, Pilar refuses. García describes Celia gradually taking off her clothes and she:

...steps into the ocean and imagines she's a soldier on a mission—for the moon, or the palms, or El Líder. The water rises quickly around her. It submerges her throat and her nose, her open eyes that do not perceive salt. Her hair floats loosely from her skull and waves above her in the tide. She breathes through her skin, she breathes through her wounds. (243)

Readers are not told directly that Celia commits suicide, but it seems as if Celia has given up all hope because she is left alone on the Island. She no longer has any family left that will take care of her as she ages and it seems as if she has lost all hope in the revolution. Celia has outlived two of her children, her husband left her, her daughter has cut her out of her life, and Pilar has come to visit her but refuses to stay with her to keep her company. So is Celia's ending simply an end to her story? Or, does it represent the end of her life? Either way, Celia realizes that a new era is beginning and women like her are no longer needed in Cuba to promote Castro's revolution. Because Celia decided to stay on the Island when everyone else left her, she created a home that no one wanted to return to; she completely destroyed the relationship that could have blossomed between her and Lourdes, her husband left her to go to the United States, and even her son left her to live in the Soviet Union. The only one that she hoped would return to live with her was Pilar

who made the decision herself to stay in the United States. Thus, alone and desperate for love and affection, Celia's story and life ends.

Exile does not always promise to bring people happiness, but it does provide people with the opportunity to distance themselves from their home country. Edward Said states that "The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience" (185). In other words, homes are not always stable and the exile is sometimes forced to find the courage to leave their home behind and to establish a new home in a foreign country. To Lourdes, she felt as if she was in a prison when she lived in Cuba; Lourdes could not escape Castro's revolution or those that devoted their lives to supporting him. The only way Lourdes could escape this prison was to seek exile with her family, but by doing so, she knew she had to leave some of her family members behind. *Dreaming in Cuban* ultimately shows how a family is torn apart because of various family members' decisions to live as exiles, but other familial relationships blossom as a result of exile; marriages end, siblings are dispersed across the globe, and others are left behind because of characters choice to leave their homes behind. Overall, exile can be detrimental to the structure of the family, but it can also bring about unforeseen treasures, like the relationship that Lourdes mends with Pilar.

Chapter 3:
Ana Menéndez's "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd" and Julia Alvarez's
"Exile": Gender and Exile

In the previous chapters, I have discussed two novels that have incorporated how females have been forced to or have chosen to live as exiles. In this chapter, I expand upon my analysis of exile and literature and I believe that it is imperative to further discuss the plight of the Cuban and Dominican exiles when they are in the United States. By using Ana Menéndez's short story "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd" and Julia Alvarez's poem "Exile," I discuss how others treat exiles and how the exile reacts when confronted by those that simply see them as outcasts or foreigners in *their* country. Like Yolanda and Pilar, the characters in the short story and poem illustrate how hard it is to belong in a country where they feel unwelcomed. Expanding upon the theme of belonging, Said states that "We take home and language for granted" (185) and people also don't realize that there are thousands of exiles and displaced peoples worldwide that simply want to belong to a single place and have a place that they can call their *home*—they want long to belong to one place and one group of people. In this chapter, I focus on the importance of having a home and I go on to further discuss how many exiles are overwhelmed by feelings of nostalgia; in some cases, the feelings of nostalgia are so strong for some subjects that everything they look at around them reminds them of their home country.

By critically analyzing Ana Menéndez's "In Cuba I was a German Shepherd," readers are shown firsthand how traumatic the life of a Cuban exile can be as seen through two Cuban men, Máximo and Raúl, and two Dominican men, Antonio and

Carlos. All four men gather at Domino Park to talk, reminisce about the past, and to play dominoes. In this short story, two major emotions that are present that are related to the exilic experience are loss and nostalgia. The main character in “In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd,” Máximo, is seen to suffer greatly because he had all intentions of returning home to his family in Cuba, but he is described as being stuck in Miami where he continually suffers from dreams and headaches caused by the burdens of exile.

Furthermore, I find it important that as a woman, Menéndez writes about the emotions of men that have left their native country as exiles. In Caribbean literature, men are often described as being “macho” and do not express their emotions because that would make them seem weak and inferior; however, Menéndez writes about Máximo’s emotional struggles and portrays him as a man that is incapable of containing his emotions in public because others treat him as if he does not belong in the United States. In Julia Alvarez’s poem, “Exile,” we are told that the poem is about Alvarez’s own experience coming to the United States when she was a child and she, too, seemed to experience similar incidents like the fictional Máximo because she felt out of place in her new home in the United States. A major difference between Menéndez’s story and Alvarez’s poem is that Alvarez’s narrator is a young girl who came to the United States with her family when she was ten-years-old, whereas in Menéndez’s story we are told that Máximo came to the United States as an adult and prior to leaving Cuba, his wife passed away. Ultimately, the purpose of this chapter is to compare and contrast the poem and short story to show that regardless of one’s age, gender, and where their home country is, the exiles in the two texts are shown to experience the same conflicts when they arrive in the United States because they are displaced.

Throughout this thesis, I have used Edward Said's theories to expand upon my own discussion of exile in literature, but Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a major contributing author on the Cuban exilic experience, is also crucial to my discussion on Caribbean literature and exile in the United States. In Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban American Way*, he delves into conversation about exiles and how they consume their lives with imagining, dreaming, and thinking about their previous lives that they left behind. Pérez Firmat discusses the "disorientation" that the exile faces when they are in a strange new land where they are deemed the "Other":

Grounded in compensatory substitutions, the re-creation of Havana in Miami is an act of imagination. But imaginings cannot sustain one indefinitely. Sooner or later reality crashes through, and the exile loses a place that never was. His or her reaction to the clash of substitution is vertigo, disorientation...The painful knowledge that they live in exile has been attenuated by the comforting feeling that they never left. You walk into a restaurant on Eighth Street in Miami and not only does it have the same name as one in Cuba, but it probably has a map of Havana on the wall and a Cuban flag over the counter. (Pérez Firmat 8-9)

Because many subjects come to Miami as exiles, they encounter a similar atmosphere and landscape as the one they just left in Cuba or the Dominican Republic. When the exile closes their eyes and breathes in the humid tropical air, they may imagine that they never left home; many exiles and immigrants stay in Miami because the climate is reminiscent of their old home and they feel comforted and at ease in a climate that is familiar. As seen in Menéndez's short story, Máximo never intended to leave his family behind *forever*, but he planned on staying in the U.S. for a few years and he would come back to his family when tensions eased in Cuba. For Máximo, it was not hard to meet others that understood his plight as an exile because in Miami, he was surrounded by many other displaced peoples that also suffered from nostalgia. When it comes to home, as Said describes, many people take their home "for granted"; people in general do not think

about how lucky they are to belong to a single place and to feel a sense of nationalism for the country and/or state that they live in and have grown up in. For an exile, their home was taken away from them and they may not ever get a chance to go back to their mother country. Thus, all that an exile has left of their country are the dreams of what they once had and the memories of what they can no longer have and these dreams and memories have the possibility to fade away over time. For the exile that knows that they cannot go back to their home country, dreams are important to them because by dreaming, they are temporarily taken out of reality and the exile can be happy and feel content for that particular moment. On the other hand, when an exile dreams about their home country, it can be detrimental because they are continually focusing on what they know they cannot have and may never be able to obtain or experience again.

In “In Cuba I Was A German Shepherd,” readers are never told exactly why Máximo left Cuba, but we can infer that he left because he did not support Castro’s revolution since he continually makes references to Castro’s corrupt dictatorship. When Máximo arrived in Miami, he became a cab driver because his college degree that he earned in Cuba was not accepted in the U.S. The narrator in Menéndez’s text says, “His Spanish and his University of Havana credentials meant nothing here. And he was too told to cut sugarcane with the younger men who began arriving in the spring of 1961” (6). Once a member of the elite in Cuba, he fell to the bottom of the social and economic ladder when he arrived in the United States and is depressed because of the drastic lifestyle change. In order to cope with his depression as a displaced person, Máximo daydreams about his past life in Cuba with his wife and how they would sit around the table with friends, telling stories about their love for Cuba and the beauty of their

surroundings on the Island. They did not worry about money and they lived a luxurious lifestyle and did so much for others. Máximo says that “In Cuba, the stories always began, life was good and pure” (Menéndez 7). However, since he has been away from the Island for so long, the dreams and flashbacks turned into “something withering, malignant. Máximo never understood it. The stories that opened in the sun, always narrowed into a dark place. And after those nights, his head throbbing, Máximo would turn and turn in his sleep and awake unable to remember his dreams” (Menéndez 7). Once always daydreaming about Cuba and his family, his happy memories turn into nightmares. It also becomes obvious at this point of the story that Máximo is living in some sort of false reality and he refuses to admit to himself that he may never be able to go back “home.” I believe that one of the main reasons that Máximo gathers with his friends Domino Park is because he feels as if the other men understand his plight as an exile. Said says, “Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search for them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as a part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people” (177). By surrounding himself with other exiles, Máximo feels as if he belongs to a small group of people and he is comforted by the fact that the other men do not question his past, but accept him for who he is. The only time that Máximo really talks about his experiences as an exile is when he tells jokes; Máximo is so emotional about his predicament as an exile that he finds comfort in gathering with the other men that have been through the same or similar experiences as he has. Together, these men that gather to play dominoes in the park

understand one another and have formed a union of “restored people” that help each other cope with the everyday emotions that are accompanied with exile.

At Domino Park, Máximo gathers with Raúl, another Cuban exile, and they both long to go back home, but are stuck in Miami for untold reasons. Unlike Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban*, Máximo *wants* to return to his home country and would do anything to go back to the way his life was before Castro came to power and before the revolution started. The other two men that they gather with, Antonio and Carlos, do not fully understand the unique Cuban exile experience, but they certainly know when to be there to listen to and console their friends when they have flashbacks of their life on the Island. The short story ultimately demonstrates how exiles are trapped between two worlds and are able to travel back to the past and their home country using their imagination and by dreaming. Maya Socolovsky, author of “Cuba Interrupted: The Loss of Center and Story in Ana Menéndez’s *In Cuban I Was a German Shepherd*,” describes characters like Máximo as “a generation of North American Cubans who move between the two cultures and who have, in a sense, a double perspective and attachment that allows them to feel an affective and intense connection both to the land of their past (or their parents’ past) and to that of their present and future” (236). Máximo has such a strong connection with Cuba and even though he does not have any more immediate family members that live in Cuba, he refuses to cut ties with his home country; thus, by dreaming and imagining that he is in Cuba and about the life he once had while living on the Island, he is able to temporarily remove himself from the U.S. and pretend that he is back home—a time when he was happy and his family was together. As a displaced man living among other exiles in the United States, all that Máximo has left is the memories of the life he left

behind and he dreams about his home in Cuba that no longer exist since Castro took over and the revolution erupted. Even if Máximo did return to Cuba, he would be discouraged since so much has changed and because the “old” Cuba that he has memories of no longer exists.

Máximo and the three other men are described as regular visitors to the Domino Park that is depicted as “a fenced rectangle of space” (Menéndez 3), which seems comparable to how animals are fenced in at a zoo. As the men gather and play dominoes, a common Dominican pastime, tourists stare at them as they walk by and make them feel uncomfortable in their new environment in the United States. Once a foreign land to them, the United States has become their home, yet they are treated as if they are on display at the park. The name Domino Park also suggests that it was named after those the builders planned on “fencing in” in order to contain them in one spot. With the plethora of exiles entering Miami, many Americans feared that the exiles would take their jobs and they did not trust the “foreigners” due to the lack of communication because of the language barrier and because of the drastic cultural differences between many Americans and the exiles entering the U.S. Thus, by containing the exiles in the park, it is as if they are on display for others to see how exiles act and what they do in their free time, mocking them and treating them as if they are subhuman. Similar to the characters in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*, Máximo and Raúl came to the United States in order to escape the Castro dictatorship and his revolution that was erupting in Cuba. They both lived on the same street in the city of Havana and they both had prestigious jobs where Raúl was an accountant and Máximo was a professor. The narrator says that “They weren’t close friends, but friendly still in a way of people who come from the same place

and think they already know the important things about one another” (Menéndez 5). The Cuban men have a connection that is unlike any other; Máximo and Raúl understand the history behind their decision to leave their home and they both are described as longing to go back to Cuba, but they know they cannot, most likely out of fear of being cast as a traitor and/or killed by one of Castro’s government officials. The narrator continues to say that the men “sit under the shifting shade of a banyan tree, and sometimes the way the wind moved through the leaves reminded them of home” (Menéndez 3). Unlike other texts that I have discussed, Máximo and Raúl *want* to go back to Cuba and are depressed because they know that the Cuba that they dream of no longer exists. In Dalia Kandiyoti’s essay, “Consuming Nostalgia: Nostalgia and the Marketplace in Cristina García and Ana Menéndez,” she says, “In Cuban discourses, the codified nostalgia dovetails, of course, with anti-Revolutionary politics that repeatedly construct Cuba before Castro as a prelapsarian paradise” (83). In other words, in Menéndez’s story, Máximo and Raúl long to return to the “old” Cuba where they lived lavish lives and where Máximo “left behind the row house of long shiny windows, the piano, the mahogany furniture, and the pension he thought he’d return to in two years’ time. Three if things were as serious as they said” (Menéndez 6). As Máximo ages, he realizes that he cannot return to his home country and since he has been away from his home for so long, his memories of Cuba are slowly vanishing and the years keep passing by. Máximo ultimately fears that if he does not continue to dream or talk about the life he lived in Cuba that he will ultimately forget his home altogether; if he no longer has memories of Cuba, Máximo fears that he will forget his family and past that has made him the person he is.

Over the course of the story we see that Máximo is caught between the present and the past; he is stuck between Cuba and the United States and longs to feel as if he belongs to *one* place. Sometimes, Máximo's thoughts consume his life and he confuses his reality with his dreams and his desire to have his wife and children with him. Máximo has a vivid daydream and it becomes evident to readers that even though he has been away from the Island for so long and his wife has been deceased for quite a while, Máximo cannot cope with the reality that his home and his wife are out of his grasp. Máximo thinks about his daughters and his wife and the narrator writes of his dreams and nightmares:

He knew he was caught inside a nightmare, but he couldn't stop. He would emerge slowly, creaking out of the shower and there she'd be, Rosa, like before, her breasts round and pink from the hot shower, calling back through the years. Some mornings he would awake and smell peanuts roasting...He would awake, caught fast in the damp sheets, and feel himself falling backwards. (Menéndez 10)

Máximo is shown to suffer from the side effects of nostalgia, a Latin word where *nostos* means return and *algia* means suffering. He longs to return to his home in Cuba that he once had with his wife and children, yet he suffers because he knows he cannot. Lene Johannessen, author of "The Lonely Figure: Memory of Exile in Ana Menéndez's 'In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd,'" says, "The dream images are evocations of 'somewhere else' and can in fact be read as a series of synecdochical representations of that impossible location" (62). In other words, Máximo only enjoys life in the United States when he is dreaming and he keeps himself ignorant to the fact that his family is not together and that he is not back in Cuba; Máximo wishes that he can revert back to the time where he was in Cuba before the revolution and he is stuck somewhere between then and now. Máximo cannot bear to face reality, but in once scene, Máximo closely

analyzes his surroundings and those around him and he notices that people are watching him and commenting on how he and the others communicate and conduct daily activities. Máximo ultimately has a psychotic episode that leaves readers concluding that he is not mentally stable. In traditional Cuban culture, Cuban men are supposed to be “macho” and not show their emotions; however, Máximo has a psychotic breakdown that seems to be caused from years of bottling up his emotions because exile has caused him to suffer from emotions and to express feelings that he never would have experienced if he never left his home and family behind.

Leading up to Máximo’s outburst and emotional breakdown, he is described as having an increased amount of nightmares and headaches. Máximo wakes up in the middle of the night, terrified and dripping in sweat. The narrator says, “He would awake, caught fast in the damp sheets, and feel himself falling backwards” (Menéndez 10). Máximo is never able to call Miami his home, but he thinks of it as a temporary location, even though he knows he will most likely never get to return to Cuba. In the chapter entitled “My Repeating Island,” Pérez Firmat discusses thoughts, memories, and dreams that a Cuban exile has:

Three ways of thinking about Cuba: as *pais*, as *pueblo*, and as *patria*. Not living among Cubans (*el pueblo*), and not having gone back to Cuba (*el pais*), the chronic exile thinks of Cuba as his *patria*, a personal possession, an imaginary homeland, a country he cannot leave or lose. This Cuba goes with him wherever he goes. It dreams with him. It wakes up with him. It gets sick with him. It will die with him. (191)

Máximo will always long to go back to his native country and because he knows that he will never be able to even visit Cuba again, the nightmares will continue. As the nightmares escalate, readers see that Máximo is unable to contain his emotions, perhaps because he is so agitated due to his lack of sleep. As the four men are sitting in the park,

Máximo notices that a tourist pulls out a camera and takes a picture of them. Máximo is enraged by how the tourists act towards them and how they treat Máximo and his companions as if they are animals in a zoo, looking at the park waiting for them to do something that they can go home and tell their families about. The narrator says, “‘You see Raúl,’ Máximo said. ‘You see how we’re a spectacle?’ He felt like an animal and wanted to growl and cast about behind the metal fence” (Menéndez 23-4). In this instance, the camera that the tourist has acts as more than just a simple piece of technology used to capture the moment, but it also represents the preservation of time. In her essay, “Cuba Interrupted: The Loss of Center and Story in Ana Menéndez’s Collection *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*,” Maya Socolovsky says, “...the men, through the act of photography, become already dead or absent, and as the objects of the photograph, lose all artistic control over the work that is produced” (245). In other words, the men in Domino Park are stuck in the past and cannot move forward, especially Máximo, because they have not come to terms with their tragic past and are haunted by their dreams and images that continually remind them of what they cannot grasp—their past life in Cuba.

By the end of the short story, readers see that Máximo is no longer sane because he has so much rage and sadness built up and has not been able to express how he feels. Readers become aware that Máximo’s rage increases as the story unfolds and we are told various incidents that lead up to him lunging at tourists as they walk by and gawk at him and the other men at the park. As Máximo’s dreams and flashbacks of his home in Cuba and of his family that he left behind increase, we see that his tolerance for tourists and others that take home for granted decreases. When a trolley passes by the park, Máximo

overhears the tour guide announce over the loud speaker ““This here is the Dominican Park...Most of these men are Cuban and they’re keeping alive the tradition of their homeland...Folks, you here are seeing a slice of the past. A simpler time of good friendships and unhurried days’” (Menéndez 25). For years, Máximo has mourned the death of his wife, Rosa, and he left behind his children and the life he loved in Cuba, thus, his overwhelming sense of nostalgia gets the best of him and he is no longer able to contain his emotions. In Latin American literature and culture, “machismo” is a popular characteristic that a Latin American man possesses in which the man is said to be aggressive, proud, strong, and superior. A Latin American man is not supposed to show weakness and fragility, but he is supposed to have the ability to contain his “feminine” emotions. At this point in the story, Máximo does not have control of his emotions and he is no longer “macho”; Máximo loses control of himself and lunges at the trolley and yells at the tour guide, yet the metal gate that surrounds the park holds him back from physically assaulting anyone (Menéndez 26). In this scene, Máximo is depicted as if he is an animal trapped in a cage; he is enclosed like an animal in the zoo that has been taken out of his natural habitat and forced to live in an unknown and unfamiliar environment where anyone can come and look at and talk about him as if he doesn’t comprehend what their looks and gestures suggest. Máximo’s rage ultimately turns into sadness and despair and as he walks away from his friends to go home, he tells one last joke and has to shield his face in order to hide his tears from his companions.

One way that Máximo deals with his plight as an exile is by making jokes about Castro’s corrupt dictatorship and the terrible things that have happened to Cuba that made him leave his home country. Even though the jokes have a sinister undertone to them,

Máximo and Raúl laugh because the only other alternative would be to cry and/or dwell on their sadness which would ultimately make them seem weak and fragile. By closely analyzing the text, readers see that Máximo is homesick and telling jokes is his own way of remembering what he has lost. Some of his jokes are aimed at poking fun of the Castro administration and Raúl is the only one who truly understands the depth of these jokes. The narrator says, “He [Antonio] and Carlos were Dominican, not Cuban, and they ate their same foods and played their same games, but Antonio knew they still didn’t understand all the layers of hurt in the Cubans’ jokes” (Menéndez 9). The men know that there is a lot of emotion packed into each joke that Máximo tells, but laughter seems to help Máximo deal with reality and his predicament as a displaced person living alone in the U.S. Lene Johannessen discusses the jokes told between the two Cuban men by saying, “always lingering beneath the laugh is the sadness of no return” (57). Máximo’s friends laugh at his jokes, but there is one scene in the short story where we realize that Máximo no longer has the capacity to joke about his home(land). He is so distraught that he can no longer hold in his emotions and his final joke turns out to be reflective of himself and how he feels as an exile trapped in an unfamiliar country.

In the final scene of the short story, Máximo tells one last joke to the men and passerbys are still looking toward them. He tells his friends a joke about a tiny dog named Juanito that has just arrived in the United States from Cuba. Juanito is described as a “feisty” dog that is quickly distracted by an “elegant white poodle.” The men begin to chuckle as he tells this joke, but they soon realize that Máximo is serious and has tears welling up in his eyes. Máximo continues to tell the joke to the men:

So Juanito says, ‘I would like to marry you, my love, and have gorgeous puppies with you and live in a castle.’ Well, all this time the white poodle

has her snout in the air. She looks at Juanito and says, 'Do you have any idea who you're talking to? I am a refined breed of considerable class and you are nothing but a short, insignificant mutt.' Juanito is stunned for a moment, but he rallies for the final shot. He's a proud dog, you see, and he's afraid of his pain. 'Pardon me, your highness. Here in America, I may be a short, insignificant mutt, but in Cuba I was a German Shepherd.' (Menéndez 27-8).

Readers become aware that Máximo is referring to himself when he tells this story about Juanito and his friends suddenly understand how much depression he has suffered from since he has had to leave his home. As Máximo finishes his joke, he "turned so the men would not see his tears" and in this moment of the story, we understand the plight of exile and how traumatic of an experience exile can be for those that are forced to leave their home and loved ones behind. In the United States, Máximo feels small and as if people look down upon him; he feels like he is useless and people do not respect him like they would have respected him in Cuba. This passage is also significant because it illustrates how other Americans have treated Máximo in the United States; Americans have treated him as if he is insignificant and not deserving of equality. Even though he is an American citizen, he is not treated with respect and he is stripped of his pride and dignity.

The story of Juanito and the white poodle serves to show readers how Máximo and other exiles feel out of place in the United States. The exiles in this story are trapped, figuratively and literally, in a fenced in park where others look at them as they walk by; the four men make up an exhibit where tourists come to look at them and take pictures of the displaced peoples that have flooded the city of Miami. Máximo was once a German Shepherd when he lived in Cuba because he was powerful, educated, and "macho"; in Cuba, Máximo he had a degree, a good job, and a loving family, but in the U.S., he feels as if he has nothing. It seems like his whole world fell apart all at once when he was

forced to leave Cuba—Rosa dies and his children do not contact him often, even though they are said to be living in the United States. All that was once familiar to Máximo disappeared and he was forced to take a job as a cab driver and live in a false reality in order to keep moving forward. Said states, “The exile’s new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction” and I believe that this applies to Máximo’s life in the United States. Máximo learns to play dominoes and gathers with men that have gone through a similar exilic experience as he has. He is also stuck in the past and refuses to move forward, thus, creating tension in his life because he lives off of memories and refuses to make new memories in the United States with his daughters and friends.

Shifting to Julia Alvarez’s poem “Exile,” the narrator is a young, unnamed girl that left the Dominican Republic in 1960, the year that Alvarez’s own family fled the Island and created a new home in the United States. The poem is reminiscent of Alvarez’s own experience when her family fled the Dominican Republic and her own feelings about being cast as the “Other” are incorporated in the poem. Alvarez writes about the fear and uncertainty the young girl feels as she is taken away from her home. Similar to Alvarez’s own exilic experience, the young girl in the story is approximately ten-years-old, the age Alvarez was when her family uprooted themselves and left the Dominican Republic to live as exiles in the United States. The girl in the poem says:

*On the way to the beach, you added, eyeing me.
The uncles fell in, chuckling phony chuckles,
What a good time she’ll have learning to swim!
Back in my sisters’ room Mami was packing*

*a hurried bag, allowing one toy apiece,
her red eyes belying her explanation:
a week at the beach so Papi can get some rest.
She dressed us in our best dresses, party shoes. (lines 9-16)*

Like the García girls in Alvarez's novel, the young girl in this poem wore her best outfit and was only able to take her only toy with her on their journey to their new home, or as their parents tell her, to the "beach." As Alvarez is writing this poem, she is remembering her own parents taking her and her other siblings to the airport to be transported to Miami. Jessica Wells Cantiello, author of "'That Story about the Gun': Pseudo-Memory in Julia Alvarez's Autobiographical Novels," says that poems like "Exile" incorporate "storytelling" which

is a complicated confluence of truth, lies, and memory, and memory is not always to be trusted. 'Memory is a storyteller,' she [Alvarez] said in 1998, 'what I do with this fictional family is that I take some of my memories, *which are already just stories*, and I recast them following the necessity of the fictional characters and the narrative, not the necessity of telling what really happened.' (85)

Thus, "Exile" is not just about her and her own experience when she was a child and left the Dominican Republic, but she is telling the story of others who have had to leave their homes behind in order to highlight that exile *does happen* and affects many people globally. Just as Máximo only has memories and dreams to remind him of his former life in Cuba, Alvarez uses storytelling to help her remember her life she once had on the Island and she also highlights the plight of the exilic experience and the emotions that the exile undergoes as they are uprooted from their home to live in a strange, foreign country.

When the family arrives in the United States, they are confronted with the fear that they do not fit in with other Americans; they notice that they look and act different and that American customs and traditions are strange compared to their own. The young girl in the poem says:

Weeks later, wandering our new city, hand in hand,
you tried to explain the wonders: escalators
as moving belts; elevators: pulleys and ropes;

blond hair and blue eyes: a genetic code. (lines 45-48)

The girl begins to realize that she is not like the other Americans that live around them; she is different because of her skin color and Spanish accent whereas others that walk by her seem to all be light skinned with blond hair and blue eyes. She holds her father's hand because she is afraid that she will get lost in the new city and her father is the only one that she feels she can trust. As they continue to walk down the street, the girl and her father stop in front of Macy's and look at the display in the big glass storefront, only to see that the family made up of mannequins are all white and seem to represent the majority of those that walk past them on the sidewalks (lines 49-56). Just as the tourists made Máximo and his friends feel out of place when they were in the Domino Park, standing in front of the storefront looking at the plastic family makes the girl and her father feel as if they will never be able to fit in in the U.S. because they do not look like the mannequins with blond hair, blue eyes, and white skin. It is also symbolic that they stop in front of the Macy's storefront window because Macy's is a huge American based retail store that caters to middle- and upper-class citizens. The clothing and household goods that Macy's carries is reminiscent of what is popular in American culture, thus, when the girl and her father look at what the mannequins are wearing and compare the clothes to their own clothing, they instantly realize that they do not blend in well with other Americans.

The girl and her father stand in front of the window for a long time; the father and daughter question who they are in retrospect to others that walk by the same store. If they are truly Americans like everyone else, why do they feel so alone? The girl ends the short poem by describing the overwhelming emotions that are associated with exile:

And when we backed away, we saw our reflections
superimposed, big-eyed, dressed too formally
with all due respect as visitors to this country...
eager, afraid, not yet sure of the outcome. (lines 62-68)

The girl in the poem seems to understand at an early age that people do not see her and her father as true “Americans.” They look at their reflections and see themselves as others would see them and they make the connection that they are outcasts. They do not know where they belong, but they know that they cannot go back to the Dominican Republic. The girl clings to her father because she is scared and does not want to face this battle of trying to belong by herself. Thus, in this particular passage, we see that the girl and her father both feel the same—they know that they look different and are somewhat ridiculed by their clothing. They know that others are looking at them as if they are odd and they can sense that they have not been in the U.S. for a long time because they have not adapted to American customs.

I believe that the last line of “Exile” is the most important because it truly captures the exilic experience as depicted in literature. The girl says that they were “eager, afraid, not yet sure of the outcome” (line 68) which leaves their story ambiguous and we are unsure of how they will attempt to fit in or if they ever truly will fully assimilate to American culture. Will they always be looked at as outsiders? Will they always be treated as the other since they cannot change their skin color? The girl can learn English and rid herself of her Spanish accent as the girls in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* did, but by doing so, she will also lose a part of her Dominican culture that was abruptly ripped away from her when she was forced to leave the Island. Ultimately, the father and daughter are at a crossroads and they are “not yet sure” what the future holds for them. They are scared, lonely, and do not know who to trust or who

to befriend. Alvarez's poem ultimately captures the emotions of the exile and shows that the father and daughter both feel the same emotions: fear, inferiority, sadness, despair, loneliness, and alienation.

Overall, the theme of belonging is present in many works about exile because once a person leaves their home behind, they usually do not have the opportunity to go back to the one place they at one time felt safe and secure. In Said's "Reflections on Exile," he relates the experience of exile to "orphanhood." He says, "No matter how well they may do, exiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as a kind of orphanhood" (182). The girl in Alvarez's poem knows that she is not alone because she came to the United States with her entire immediate family, but she feels as if she is out of place and longs to belong to a home, just as an orphan longs to belong to a family. Said continues to say that exile is literally like being "alone and friendless"; the exile feels as they are isolated and living in a "temporary" life as if they are visitors in their new home (Said 183). By comparing Máximo and the unnamed female character in Alvarez's poem, it is obvious that both characters feel a sense of loneliness and they feel as if they are "orphans" in the United States. The female in "Exile" had her family as they left the Dominican Republic together, but Máximo was alone and left Cuba to find a job in hopes of returning to his home country in the near future. Though each character has left their home country for different reasons, they both have an ambiguous future filled with uncertainty and fear. Thus, regardless of the characters age, gender, and motive to leave their home behind, both characters that I have discussed are seen to experience the same or similar emotions and experiences as exiles in the United States.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, many look at exile as being something that is undesirable, yet there are positives aspects that can arise out of leaving one's home behind. Said states that "Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure" (186). Those that seek exile leave their homes for various reasons, but they come to the U.S. with the hopes of be welcomed and treated as equals to those that already have established lives there. Sadly, many exiles are not welcomed with open arms and they face many obstacles as a foreigner in a strange, new country. There is a plethora of set backs that the newcomer faces, but some that I have discussed in great detail include: language barriers that permit communication between those that live in the U.S. and the exile, discrimination due to skin color, and being treated as the "Other" because the exile is depicted as not adhering to American customs and traditions. Overall, exile is not something that many *want* to experience, but those that leave their country usually do not have any other option but to leave their home country behind out of fear of assassination, yet others also leave for various socioeconomic and political reasons.

By reading about the exilic experience in literature, readers are able to gain an insight into the lives of those that are forced to or have chosen to leave their homes behind. As readers, we are able to gain an understanding of why people leave their native country and how they are treated when they come to the United States to seek safety in a democratic nation. As Edward Said has stated, people "take home and language for granted" (185) and many seldom stop to think about how lucky they are to have a stable home and to be born in a democratic nation and not have to uproot themselves and their families in order to seek safety in a foreign country. Thousands of people are displaced

annually and many people seldom take the time to think about those that are displaced and in desperate need to feel a sense of nationalism and belonging to one particular place. Not all exiles have negative experiences when they arrive in a new country, but many face obstacles that hold them back from achieving their goals and/or being able to smoothly assimilate into the dominant culture.

Ultimately, exiles feel alone and afraid in the United States because they are looked at and treated as if they are outcasts. The exile may feel as if they belong in their new home one day, but then something may happen or someone may say something that makes them feel like an outcast again. Said states:

Exile, in the words of Wallace Stevens, is “a mind of winter” in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential for spring are nearby but unobtainable. Perhaps this is another way of saying that a life of exile moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew. (186)

The exilic experience is not something that people would usually want to go through, unless they *want* to leave their country to establish a new life in another region of the world. Exiles may never fully feel comfortable in their new environment, but as depicted in the various works that I have discussed, they seem to continually try to fit in and be accepted by others. However, some characters in the works that I have included refuse to assimilate because they desperately try to hold on to their native customs and traditions and long to go back to their native country. Máximo in “In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd” is the perfect example of someone that simply does not want to assimilate and he even associates himself with other exiles that do not want to immerse themselves in American customs and traditions. Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban*, is the exact opposite

because she came to the United States with the hopes of becoming as “Americanized” as possible in order to rid herself of her “Cubanness” and to distance herself as much as possible from the Island and from her past. When the exile does not feel as if they belong in their new home, they will feel vulnerable, insecure, and scared because they believe that people are always watching them and that they don’t want them in *their* country.

I have also discussed in great detail the concept of exiles discovering who they are and where they belong. Yolanda in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is in a continual search to understand who she is—Is she Dominican? Is she American? Or, is she Dominican-American?—and she believes that she doesn’t belong in the U.S., but thinks that if she travels back to the Dominican Republic, that she will be instantaneously welcomed by her extended family members. To her dismay, she finds out that she doesn’t belong in the U.S. nor does she belong in her native country. Similarly, Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban* decides that she must also return to her native country in order to make the decision for herself as to where she wants to spend the rest of her life. Both Yolanda and Pilar were young when they were taken away from their native country, their first home where they felt comfortable and secure and where they had friends and family, and they are ultimately in a unique position as a “1.5 generation” because their parents forced them to leave their homes behind. They both struggle to understand who they are as foreigners in the U.S., but they also feel as if their true home is their native country. Ultimately, both characters are described as feeling the need to travel back to their native country in order to make the decision themselves as to where they believe they belong.

Finally, I have also found that based on the texts that I have analyzed, the emotions and experiences that exiles face are cross-cultural; regardless of where an

exile's home country is, many exiles are treated as "Others" and are described as having strong feelings of nostalgia, despair, loneliness, alienation, and/or sadness. For example, Lourdes concentrates on the positives of her new life as an American, but Máximo is described as bottling up all his emotions because he feels such a strong sense of nostalgia towards Cuba and the life he was forced to leave behind. Lourdes does suffer from sadness, depression, and anger because she was savagely raped and lost her child in Cuba, but she comes to the realization that the U.S. has provided her and her family with safety and security and she looks at her experience as an exile in a positive manner and as a new adventure filled with many opportunities. Máximo, on the other hand, cannot look at the positives of exile because he is always dreaming about Cuba and about Island life. Máximo is overwhelmed with loneliness because his wife passed away when they lived in Cuba and his children are in the U.S. but do not contact him often, thus, he is forced to live by himself in Miami. By comparing Lourdes's and Máximo's experiences as exiles in the U.S., it becomes evident that they have *very* different experiences as exiles; not all exiles have the same experiences when they come to the U.S., but as described in the texts that I have analyzed, many exiles are faced with the same or similar obstacles when they arrive as newcomers in America.

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