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**The Representation of Home in the Novel *Geographies of Home*, by the
Dominican-American Writer Loida Maritza Pérez**

Belo Horizonte

Faculdade de Letras

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

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Dominican-American Writer Loida Maritza Pérez**

By

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To my grandfather Juvenal (*in memoriam*),
for having sown the (wonderful) seeds of literature in me –
today he would have been very proud.

To my brother Sidnei (*in memoriam*),
memory always present in my life –
this is my gift to you.
(Today you would have become 33).

Ao meu avô Juvenal (*in memoriam*),
por ter plantado a semente da literatura em mim –
hoje ele estaria muito orgulhoso.

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memória sempre presente em minha vida –
esse é o meu presente pra você.
(Hoje você estaria completando 33 anos).

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ABSTRACT

Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home* portrays a Dominican family who has emigrated to the United States in an attempt to escape from poverty and the lack of opportunities in the Dominican Republic, an aftermath of Rafael Trujillo's thirty-one years of dictatorship in that country. The family lives in extreme poverty while in the Dominican Republic. Emigration becomes, then, a possibility of hope, of a better life condition. However, even after years of settlement in the United States, an idea recurrently haunts the members of this family: home. Whether in the form of a longing, a fear, and a memory, home seems to be presented and re-presented in numerous ways by the characters, especially the women, who are the objects of this analysis.

I have chosen to investigate how the concept of home is represented in the novel in order to find out whether there would be a single notion of home shared by all characters, as the title suggests (since "home" is used in the singular), or rather if the novel uncovers distinct notions of home for each of them. My hypothesis is that not only are there various homes, opposed to a single one, in the novel, but also that there are different homes even for each character.

The narrative shifts perspectives, each chapter focusing on the perspective of one of the four women characters: Aurelia, Iliana, Rebecca or Marina. This way it is possible to look at the same episode from different angles, crisscrossing information. It is my assumption that whereas a traditional view of home stabilizes and fixes its notion, these characters in *Geographies of Home* offer a counterview, conveying the idea that home is a fluid concept, being a process rather than a product in their lives.

RESUMO

Geographies of Home, escrito pela autora norte-americana de origem dominicana Loida Maritza Pérez, retrata a história de uma família dominicana que emigrou para os Estados Unidos devido à situação de pobreza e de falta de oportunidades na República Dominicana –consequência dos trinta e um anos da ditadura de Rafael Trujillo naquele país. A família vive em extrema pobreza na República Dominicana. Emigrar se torna, portanto, a possibilidade de esperança, de ter uma melhor condição de vida. No entanto, mesmo após anos vivendo nos Estados Unidos, uma ideia insiste em rondar esta família: a de lar. Seja na forma de um desejo, de um medo, e/ou de uma memória, a ideia de lar é apresentada e re-apresentada de formas diversas por estes personagens, principalmente as mulheres – objetos da minha análise.

Escolhi investigar como o conceito de lar é representado no romance a fim de verificar se haveria uma única noção de lar compartilhada pelas personagens, como faz supor o título (já que “lar” está no singular), ou se no romance haveria o desdobramento de diferentes noções de lar para cada uma delas. Minha hipótese é que não somente haveria vários lares, ao invés de um, para cada personagem, mas que também haveria diversos lares até para a mesma personagem.

O ponto de vista na narrativa muda, sendo que em cada capítulo o leitor se depara com a perspectiva de uma das personagens analisadas: Aurélia, Iliana, Rebecca ou Marina. Assim, torna-se possível observar um mesmo episódio sob diferentes ângulos, cruzando informações. É minha suposição que enquanto uma visão tradicional de lar estabiliza e fixa esse conceito, as personagens de *Geographies of Home* oferecem uma outra visão, sugerindo que lar é um conceito fluido, um processo ao invés de um produto em suas vidas.

INTRODUCTION

A major lesson I have learned and tried to present was that there was no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows from them.

(Said 16)

Geographies of Home portrays a Latino immigrant family in the United States whose parents, Aurelia and Papito, struggle to nurture their children and grandchildren, despite their profound sense of dislocation in that country. Aurelia and Papito immigrated to this country in an attempt to escape from poverty and the lack of opportunities in the Dominican Republic, an aftermath of Rafael Trujillo's thirty-one years of dictatorship in this country. However, even after years of settlement in the United States, Aurelia and Papito still seem to be looking for a place to be called "home." Besides them, other members of the family also long for home, especially the daughters Iliana, Rebecca and Marina. This novel, therefore, explores these characters' attempts to construct the idea of home by means of perceptions, identifications, and memories.

It is in the scope of the present work to analyze the concept of home in *Geographies of Home*, how it is built throughout the narrative and what it may represent for four characters: Aurelia, Iliana Rebecca and Marina. However, before attempting to analyze Loida Maritza Pérez's novel, I find it necessary to investigate theoretically and critically key terms which will be recurrent in this thesis and which may seem to be "merely given." The first one is the term

“Latino,” which has been already used in my opening sentence. This term has ambiguities because of its relative novelty. What would Latino refer to? According to Láo-Montes, it was in the late 60s and early 70s

that the term Latino gained momentum as a common denominator for US peoples of Latin American descent. In this context, the substantive Latino signified an anticolonial politics that unified Latin American peoples beyond national borders . . . Before the 1960s the most common descriptor for US peoples of Latin American descent was Hispano. (126)

That is, the term Latino came as a social response to the officially imposed, panethnic label Hispanic, indicating a non-abidance of the politicized peoples of Latin American origin to the fabricated status of their being connected to a European heritage as well as a refusal of a “melting pot” belief, in which immigrants would have melted into the mainstream society of the United States in such a way that the “Americans” would have become a single homogeneous people. According to the Chicana critic Cherríe Moraga, however, “‘spics’, ‘greasers’ and ‘beaners’ do not melt” (302). As a consequence, even after second or third generations, immigrants of Latin American descent are still considered foreign by the U.S. mainstream society.

The term “Hispanic” is the next one that deserves attention due to its political importance and also somewhat ambiguous meaning. Considering official data on population markers, this term is the one mostly used, and many times interchangeably with “Latino.” Both terms are known to have been coined initially with the intention of grouping peoples of Latin American descent (Campello 14). A difference would be that officially the term Hispanic “identifies people of Latin American and Spanish descent living in the United States today” (Oboler, *Ethnic Labels*

xiii), while Latino would identify “only” the Latin American ones. Etymologically, though, Hispanic makes a direct allusion to Spain giving a somewhat false impression of a European status to immigrants from Latin America, as mentioned previously.

The label Hispanic also raises another issue in semantic terms: if it initially refers to immigrants originated from Spanish-speaking countries, then Brazilian-Americans would not be included in it. This may confuse Brazilian-Americans, for instance, when responding to the census charts. Consequently, the data derived from this census would not be so trustworthy. Another issue is that by abiding to the general term Hispanic, many times the official data does not discriminate the peoples that are being represented. Consequently Dominican-Americans, Cuban-Americans and Mexican-Americans, for instance, are all categorized under the same label. The “appeal to the legacy of the Spanish colonial rule” (Oboler, *Ethnic Labels* xiii) is what may legitimate the label Hispanic for all immigrants from former Spanish colonies, but paradoxically it also delegitimizes this very label for not taking into consideration post-colonial specificities of each of the former colonies. These specificities shape the lives of immigrants in the U.S. in much differentiated ways (Oboler, *Ethnic Labels* xiii): a Cuban-American has his/her experience shaped differently from a Mexican-American, for instance.

Another point is that, since both immigrants of Latin American descent and “Spaniards”¹ are considered under the term Hispanic, this label does not make clear who is being represented in the data. So how would one be able to identify the characteristics of the population specifically of Latin-American origin living in the United States? An example is illustrated in *Latinos: Remaking America*, in which an official chart simply says “Hispanic Population by Age and Sex” (qtd. in Suárez-Orozco and Páez xxiii), without making distinctions within the Hispanic category.

¹ This term has been vastly used to refer to peoples of Spanish descent specifically (Gracia 3).

According to Oboler, the term Hispanic “has come into general use in the United States to refer to all people . . . whose ancestry is predominantly from one or more Spanish-speaking countries” (“Politics of Labeling” 22). It is known, however, that there are great differences both economically and socially among the different groups within the Hispanic label. Thus, from the 60s on, Latino became a preferred term by the peoples of Latin American descent as a self-designator. This way they would highlight both their African and Amerindian roots as well, making clear the discontentment with the fallacious status imbued in the term Hispanic, as well as they would point out that there is a great gap between their experiences and those of Spaniards. According to Frances Aparicio, besides immigrants of Latin American origin themselves, most scholars have embraced the term Latino “because it has represented a more organic alternative to the government-imposed ‘Hispanic’” (42). However, it is important to be aware that even though Latino carries a somewhat more conscious and politicized standpoint, it is still a label, liable to misinterpretations and essentialisms. One cannot, for instance, ignore the variety of peoples that are represented under the term neither deny its “internal semantic tensions” (Aparicio 42) when addressing the so-called Latino group.

As an umbrella term, “it can be used strategically to indicate the oppositional location of Latinas/os versus, or outside of, dominant society” (Aparicio 42). However, it applies to a diversity of people, as stated by Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral: “The different Latino groups vary greatly not only in their national origin but also in their time of entry to US society and their mode of incorporation into it” (320). Adding to that, “Latinos represent the whole spectrum of color and class and political position” (Moraga 302). And that is why some people of Latin-American descent in the United States choose to use the label Latino to identify themselves vis-

à-vis Anglos (Flores-González 4), whereas they prefer nationalist terms such as Dominican-American, Cuban-American, etc. when in relation to other Latinos.

Still considering the tensions within the term Latino, I add to this discussion the danger of a natural panethnicity, as if by the magic of the label all so-called Latinos would instantaneously become homogeneous, as well as harmonious. To complete the magic, all of them would be promptly recognized as Latinos by the mainstream society. Needless to say, this magic does not happen: many Latinos face the predicament of not being welcomed by others. Many Dominican-Americans may be examples of counterpoints to the panethnic magic because of their dark complexion: oftentimes neither are they promptly welcomed by Latinos, once they may be regarded as more closely related to African-Americans, nor recognized as Latinos in the public sphere, for the same reason.

Having in mind that when entering the United States one is both ethnically and racially categorized (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 319), Dominican immigrants² share the predicament of being considered “black” by the this country’s racial discourse. This status confronts the former view they may have of themselves in the Dominican Republic:

Dominicans use different terms to refer to different shades of skin color, such as *mulatto*, *jabao*, *trigueño*, and others, all of which intermediate categories between black and white. All these terms, however, are included within the category *indio*, a term that encompasses all intermediate categories. Dominicans distinguish between shades of color referring to people as *indio claro* (light Indian) or *indio*

² I acknowledge the very danger of essentializing the “Dominican” population, as if all Dominicans were “black.” However, I have chosen a generalization in this case, because “blacks and mulattoes make up nearly 90% of the contemporary Dominican population” (Torres-Saillant, “Blackness” 1086). Therefore, at least 90% of the Dominican population would be considered black in the US context, due to this country’s binary racial classification. Furthermore, considering the ideology of the One Drop Rule, then even more than 90% of the Dominican population would fall into the category of “blacks,” since in the Dominican Republic it is the phenotypical trait that accounts for race, differently from what happens in the United States.

escuro (dark Indian) but reject being categorized as black. (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 323)

In the Dominican Republic the Haitians are the ones to be considered “black” for historical reasons that will be addressed in chapter two. Furthermore, race in the Dominican Republic, as well as in most Latin American countries, is regarded as mainly a phenotypical feature that varies in an amount of different shades, opposing binary classification.

In Piri Thomas’ autobiographical novel *Down These Mean Streets* there is a portrayal of this crossroads faced by many Latinos who are challenged by Unitedstatesian binary and racialized discourse, besides the ethnic one. Piri, the narrator, a dark-skinned Puerto-Rican American who had just moved to Long Island from Harlem, explains to his mother, fair-skinned, why he wishes to return to Harlem: “I don’t dig the blancos around here, and they don’t dig me because I am black to them.” His mother replies: “You are not black ... You’re brown, a nice color, a pretty color.” And Piri says: “Not to them, Moms” (135). Piri does not feel accepted by the residents of Long Island, including the ones of Latin American origin, who have emerged as the major source of demographic growth for the region,” (Torras and Skinner 2) preferring to live in Harlem, where there is a greater amount of African-Americans. In short, the panethnic Latino magic does not happen in his case: Piri feels more accepted by the African-American peoples (even though he struggles with his self-recognition as “black”) both because the peoples of Latin American descent tend not to welcome him, and because mainstream society marks him racially in a more effective way than it does ethnically.

Piri desires, then, to return to Harlem. However, he is still constantly struggling with the fact that in the public sphere he is classified as black, not being acknowledged as being of Latin American origin. It is interesting to notice that black refers to race and not to ethnicity, but terms

such as black and Latino seem to exclude one another in US everyday usage: either one is black, or Latino. Racial terms, such as black, are oftentimes used interchangeably with ethnic ones, such as African-American. So, if one is black, he/she is readily categorized as African-American. This way he/she is consequently non-Latino in the US society. What this assumption does not predict or acknowledge is that there may be a crossing-over of the two categories, considering the African Diaspora, which I will discuss in chapter two.

Not only may mainstream society blur the distinction between racial and ethnic terms. Immigrants of Latin-American origin themselves might also do so. Considering the status implied in the terms black and Latino, for instance, the self-referral as a Latino, especially considering immigrants who are considered black in the US context, may function as a kind of shield against racial prejudice. When these immigrants confront the public sphere in which the symbolic system of being considered black may be both new (many do not see themselves as black in their native country) and negative, they tend to reject it by consciously using the label Hispanic or Latino. A survey conducted in 1991 by Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral showed that when the question “What race are you?” was asked to Dominican-Americans in the United States, the majority of them described their “race” in panethnic terms (Hispano or Latino), instead of in the racial ones (black or white) (327), supporting the strategic usage of these terms. Therefore, self-referral as Latino or Hispanic, in this case, would be a form of resistance towards the racial categorization as black. One would rather be a Latino than an African-American for status reasons, a direct consequence of racial prejudice.

However, would “black” Dominican-Americans and others, such as Haitian-Americans, effectively see themselves as Latinos, or would they be using the label just as a anti-prejudice shield? And to what extent are they accepted as Latinos by the very Latino community? My

questionings come to counterpoint the simplistic assumption that the mere adoption of the term Latino would indicate the emergence of a Latino “imagined world” (Appadurai 33), as a transnational and panethnic form of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” (Anderson 7).

Still focusing on the concept of panethnicity, scholars must have in mind that the term Latino is a post-60s construct, conceptualized as a strategy for representation in various political and cultural fronts, such as the claims for Latino rights (Latino Rights Project), Latina Feminist fronts (Somos Hermanas), Latino Coalition for Racial Justice, among others (Láo- Montes 130-31). Therefore, one may not confound this term as having a nativistic contour, as if it had emerged due to a coalition of peoples “seduced by the rhetoric of ancestral purity” (Appiah 953). This is not the case. Latinos have different backgrounds and historical specificities.

The term Latino is a “made in the USA” product. As Suárez-Orozco and Páez point out, there is no Latino outside of the United States’ borders, but Mexicans, Cubans and so forth (4). It is exactly the experience of the Latin-American descent in the United States that makes the Latino identification possible. Likewise, Torres-Saillant says that “before entering American society from the native land, which for each distinct group corresponded to different sociohistorical and geopolitical events, one did not see oneself as Latino . . . but as Puerto Rican, Cuban, Colombian, or Dominican, to name only a few” (“Problematic Paradigm” 438). Therefore, it is only within the borders of the United States that Latinos are constituted. The reference as a Latino (a) is a social construct that departs from one’s awareness of the ways in which they are inserted into ethnic negotiations in the United States, even though marked by the past.

I am aware that Latino is a relatively new term and that it is its usage that will actually perform its meanings throughout history. Nevertheless, as a literature researcher, I will make an

attempt to delimitate it in this master's thesis. So, even though it is argued that "the use of the label is contingent, fluid and relational, used strategically and structurally depending on the context" (Aparicio 42-43), Latino in this work will not be relational or used in its "broader sense," referring to "the segment of the US population that traces its descent to the Spanish-speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American worlds" (Suárez-Orozco and Pérez 30). My approach to the term will take into account a more politicized meaning, as suggested by Cherríe Moraga. According to her, being Latino has more to do with one's awareness of being "non-meltable" into the US mainstream society and to one's desire for representativity in the United States despite a marked foreignness that is imposed on peoples of Latin-American descent (303).

Considering the discussion about the term Latino, the incongruence of my sentence "*Geographies of Home* portrays a Latino immigrant family in the USA ..." lies in the fact that it is a pleonastic construction: if it is a Latino family the experience must be placed "in the USA"; and there is also the apparent pleonasm in it for juxtaposing "Latino" and "immigrant." One could argue that if one is Latino, he/she is an immigrant. However, here I make a distinction between Latinos who have immigrated to the United States and the generations who are already born there.

Finally, another term that I intend to discuss is "America" and, consequently, its derivation "American." Nowadays when one says that he/she is American automatically comes to our mind that this person is from the United States of America. However, this reference should not be seen as a merely given either. One must not forget that it is a continent that primarily carries the reference of America. According to Juan Flores and George Yúdice, the term America was conceived many times throughout history (71) and even though the name remains the same, it has been successively resignified.

Even though the term America went through a process of resignification in such a way to denote a country rather than a continent, Latinos are largely responsible for a counterpoint to that hegemonic discourse. The latter carry one of the latest resignifications of the idea of America, which is the notion that America is a living border, instead of a fixed one (Flores and Yúdice 71). This counter-vision takes place because Latinos, according to Cherríe Moraga, “are a living, breathing contradiction” (301), especially considering Chicanos, who are, according to this author, a “product of invasion” (301). It is known that the Mexican/US border shifted in 1848, due to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. It started comprising an additional 525,000 square miles of land (now Arizona, California, west Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and Utah). That is, all of this land, which was formerly Mexican, from that year on became “American.”

However, political boundaries, whatever the hegemonic discourse, cannot prevent the fact that they are a historical construct, not being a master narrative which cannot be contested or critically revised. Gloria Anzaldúa’s contestation is clear in her lines

This land was Mexican once
 was Indian always
 and is.
 And will be again. (113)

In other words, before belonging to the US the land was Mexican, and even before being Mexican, it was Indian... and is... and will always be. This means that whatever political treaties may state, the land itself is not subjected to it. The land here would be a metonymy for the very people who inhabit it. In other words, even though borders may be forged onto space, it cannot be fully forged onto people.

Anzaldúa's views dialogue with Cherrie Moraga's, when the latter states that Chicanos stand "on land that was once the country of Mexico. And before any conquistadors staked out political boundaries, [it] was Indian land and in the deepest sense remains just that: a land *sin fronteras*" (Moraga 301). A land *sin fronteras* because formerly its political demarcation cannot erase its past and also *sin fronteras* because there is no way of preventing the flow and counterflow of peoples and ideas while within and/or when crossing/trespassing these borders. I am aware that Glória Anzaldúa refers to America as a living border not because of a movement of the physical border itself, but it is relevant to point out that changes on the actual physical borders also have an impact on the clash of cultures Anzaldúa speaks about.

Anzaldúa refers in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* to the living borderlands that come into existence wherever "two or more cultures edge each other" (20), being there or not an actual physical border involved. According to her, the continuous traversing of the *mestiza*, and in my discussion I would dare to add the *mestizo*, to and fro these edging cultures would be responsible for the birth of a new consciousness – a consciousness of being aware of the discourses one is immersed in, a consciousness of one's standing point within these discourses. Moreover, the *mestizos* would not only be traversing but would also be reshaping these spaces. As a result, the United States is going through a process of being reshaped by the very peoples it had once conquered. In Glória Anzaldúa's line "once Mexican, and always Indian" (113) there is a clear reference to the US imperialistic approach towards Mexican land and population, as well as the speaker's tone of revenge. The "American" territory as standing for US territory and peoples is, therefore, being contested and problematized.

Considering the three terms discussed, my approach towards them in the present work will be the following: on the one hand, I will not to use the word Hispanic interchangeably with

Latino. I intend to address only and exclusively peoples of Latin American descent in my work, so I will prefer the term Latino. I also prefer the term Latino over Hispanic due to the fact that it is a product of self-recognition instead of an imposed nomenclature over peoples of Latin American origin in the United States. And even though I am aware of the danger of essentialization, I will use this term with no intention of disregarding differences or tensions within the so-called Latino groups, but only for the purpose of facilitating comprehension of my research.

Furthermore, I will consider in my thesis the meaning of Latino as an engaged term rather than merely a reference to immigrants in the United States of Latin American origin. Therefore, in the latter case the term Latino will not be used. Latino would be as “engaged” as Cherríe-Moraga’s “Chicana:” “to be a Chicana is not merely to name one’s racial/cultural identity, but also to name a politic, a politic that refuses assimilation into the US mainstream” (302). When referring specifically to Latinos, Moraga states that “the Latino is neither wholly immigrant nor wholly white; and here in this country ‘Indian’ and ‘dark’ don’t melt” (303). Therefore, bearing in mind this delimited meaning, I reject the use of Latino as a broad-meaning adjective, like in the expression “Latino population,” which implies that all immigrants of Latin-American descent are automatically Latinos in Moraga’s terms.

Finally, in regard to the term “American,” I will use it when referring to a nationalized categorization of immigrants and their descendants, such as “Dominican-American,” for example. I will do it for the sake of facilitating a general understanding of my study, and when regarding the United States I will use the adjective “US” instead of the misnomer “American” or even “North-American.”

My interest and consequent focus on immigrants of Latin American origin living in the United States is due to the fact that they correspond to the largest group of immigrants there, having surpassed the African-Americans, according to the US Census Bureau. Furthermore, their literary works are also achieving a status of significance in the context of US literature, both because of the increase of the population of Latin American origin *per se* and because of their growing access to higher education.

As a result, one can notice the creation of many Latino Studies departments in higher education institutions, such as in UC Santa Cruz, University of Southern California, Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, Brooklyn College, among many others. Rutgers' website even calls Latinos the "changing face of the US," stating that nowadays 15% of the US population is of Latin-American descent with the estimates of increasing up to 25% in the few next decades (Rutgers). These phenomena enhance the studies and critical approach towards issues related to Latinos. Moreover, the literary works by Latinos have also increased in mainstream publications. Cherríe Moraga, mentioned previously, claimed in 1994 that Chicanos in the decades to come can "make a profound contribution to the social transformation" (304) of the United States through their writing. It is my assumption that her comment regarding Chicanos can be paradigmatically applied to other Latino writers, many Dominican-American ones included here.

Loida Maritza Pérez is a Latina from the Dominican Republic, whose debut novel *Geographies of Home*, the one I have chosen to be the object of my studies, has had a great impact among critics particularly because of her "sensitive representation of the difficulty of immigration" (Voices from the Gaps). The novel portrays the life of Dominican-American immigrants, offering a very enriching perspective insofar as it includes Latinos and African-Americans, as well as provides an overlapping of both groups, because of the participation of the

island of Hispaniola in the African Diaspora. I have chosen to work with a novel that encompasses a Dominican-American perspective because, within Latino studies, this particular group has not been thoroughly studied as other ones so far. Some critics have claimed that this is “a case of what could be called intracolonial epistemological inequality that leaves Dominicans out of the master narrative of the Latino experience” (Torres-Saillant, “Problematic Paradigms” 440). Therefore, by analyzing a work by a Dominican-American writer I hope to contribute to Latino studies.

Loida Maritza Pérez was born in 1963 and, at the time of her birth, the Dominican Republic was going through socioeconomic chaos, an aftermath of Rafael Trujillo’s dictatorship. Though he “was assassinated two years prior to Pérez’s birth, the effects of his thirty-one year dictatorship were still being felt throughout this small island nation”³(Voices from the Gaps). So, because of the economic difficulties, Pérez’s family moved to the United States when she was still a little girl, at the age of three. She attended Cornell University, in Ithaca, and majored in English. Loida Maritza Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* originally started as a short story when she was still an undergraduate student, and was published in 1999. In “that same year she was acclaimed by *El Diario* as one of the fifty most important Latinas of the United States” (Voices from the Gaps). In her novel there are many issues which are continuously portrayed by Latino writers and critics, such as the immigrants’ feeling of displacement in the host country.

Cherríe Moraga states that in the case of Latinos the sense of homesickness is particularly recurrent “because they know that in the United States they will never have it all” (302), since they will always remain “spics” and “foreigners,” as mentioned previously. Instead of feeling part of the United States, Latinos tend to portray themselves as outcasts. Immigrants, in general, tend to portray themselves in an awkward position of displacement, since they feel both

³ I am aware that the Dominican Republic shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti.

dislocated from their native soil and alienated from the US culture. As a consequence, they are in a situation of dispossession, longing for a space to call “home.”

I have selected the novel *Geographies of Home* because there seems to be several portrayals of home in it, enabling a significant analysis of the construction of this concept. I intend to analyze four characters (Aurelia, Iliana, Rebecca, Marina) and each of them seems to have her own way of portraying home(s), and not all under the same perspective. As I will demonstrate in chapter three of my thesis, sometimes one character contradicts the other, and even the same character may refer to home in different ways throughout the novel, according to specific situations. So, by analyzing these characters, I intend to clarify on what grounds their notion(s) of home(s) is built within the realm of fiction. There seems to be a constant construction and re-construction of the idea of home throughout the lives of each character, and this ongoing process appears to be founded on several axes, such as one’s present situation, memory, physical distance from the Dominican Republic, and political standpoints (for example, politics of resistance towards the mainstream culture).

I intend to research whether there would be a single notion of home shared by all characters, as the title suggests (since “home” is used in the singular), or rather if the novel uncovers distinct notions of home for each of them. It is my hypothesis that not only do the geographies, mentioned in the title, lead to various homes in the novel, opposed to a single one, but also that different homes are depicted even for the same character. My analysis has its basis on the questioning of a binary way of thinking. Binaries, even though relevant in terms of allowing a thorough study of each of the represented parts, such as native/foreign, have also encompassed hierarchical relations among them. This way, one part is inevitably the center and the other the margin. As Powell claims, this “form of analysis has inadvertently replicated many

of the critical blind spots of the theoretical paradigm that it helped to displace” (2). One of these critical blind spots is exactly the “center and margin” perspective. Moreover, the binary form of analysis may induce a dislocation of centers, considering hierarchical relations within it, but still maintaining a centered perspective. And by being centered it falls into the danger of becoming essentialist, since it tends to reduce complex forms of cultural identifications into one category, such as “woman” or “native.”

According to a binary line of thought, there would be necessarily a home opposed to a “not-at-home” condition, meaning that, for example, a Dominican in the United States would be not at home, contrasting to what his/her situation would be in the Dominican Republic (considering nationality as point of departure in the construction of the concept of home). However, I argue that even for a Dominican in the United States, there are certain moments in which he/she may be not at home and at home, when taking into consideration gender and race, for example, besides nationality. A black Dominican man, for instance, in the context of the United States, may feel at home in his household for being the “masculine” figure which holds some sense of power in a patriarchal society; and not at home when he considers the public sphere, due to racial and/or ethnic prejudice. And that is why my approach to *Geographies of Home* will take into consideration what would be “embedded within and across binaries” (Brah 184-85) in such a way to analyze if there may be different homes (in the plural) for each and every one of the characters in the novel that I studied. This way there would be an articulation and not the exclusion of different positionalities that these characters may face at different moments.

Therefore, taking into account my previous discussions, some of the questions addressed in this master’s thesis are, concerning the realm of fiction of *Geographies of Home*: what do

physical geographic boundaries effectively represent in contemporary times and what would be their relevance in the process of the characters' constructing of home or homes? What is the role of the native country in their conceiving of home(s)? How is the physical distance from the Dominican Republic significant for the characters' construction of home, if significant at all? Why do these characters feel displaced in the United States, if that is how they do feel? Is this feeling due to some kind of resistance towards their present location, once, according to Rosemary M. George, "imagining a home is as political an act as imagining a nation" (6)? Does displacement result from a comparison of their present to a created idea of home once, considering that "homes and nations are defined in the instances of confrontation with what is considered *not home*" (George 4, author's emphasis)?

The analysis of the four characters in *Geographies of Home* will help understand on which axes they may build their notion(s) of home(s). Adding to that, I intend to problematize the very binary form of analysis by confronting a simplistic home/not home approach to a perspective in which there are intersections and overlapping positionalities, such as gender, "race,"⁴ or nationality that may affect one's construction of this concept.

In order to do so, in my first chapter I primarily intend to work with Rosemary George's *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-century Fiction*, in which she reflects about different aspects of one's construction of home, such as the private and public spheres, and how these two may overlap in the process of representing the concept. I expect to present her propositions in a critical way, and later on, in chapter three, examine whether they apply to *Geographies of Home*.

⁴ In this work the term "race" is used because of its social construction that is founded in the "One Drop Rule" discourse. I acknowledge that "ethnicity" is a more appropriate term when one refers to the aggregation of people as a consequence of a sense of shared experiences (Cashmore 196). However, the US discourse on blackness does not necessarily presuppose sharing of experience. Many people who are considered "black" only recognize this status when facing prejudice in the public sphere.

Furthermore, it is my intention to confront the traditional and taken for granted assumption that home is necessarily linked to the notion of homeland, so I will have as critical and theoretical sources, among others, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities – Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*; Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*; Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*; and the essay "Imaginary Homelands," by Salman Rushdie. In order to help elucidate a critical approach towards the question of being native, I intend to ground my study on Anthony Appiah's "Topologies of Nativism." Kenneth Parker's "Home is where the Heart... Lies" is expected to help me understand the role that literature has played in the process of construction of the immigrant's concept of home as well as how present physical distance from a "native" country may influence the immigrant's construction of this concept. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* will be used to help me clarify current changes in what the concepts of "borders" and "geography" have represented for Latinos in the recent past.

Moreover, taking into account that Dominicans are part of the phenomenon described by Paul Gilroy as the "African Diaspora," in my second chapter I will have as analytical tools the work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. James Clifford's and Stuart Hall's theorizations on diaspora will be used in order to ground this research in relation to intersectionalities of race and nationality (black Dominican-Americans). Yet another important work to be analyzed concerning diaspora will be Robin Cohen's "Rethinking 'Babylon': Iconoclastic Conceptions of the Diasporic Experience," once it problematizes the idea of diaspora as a synonym for loss only. Still in this chapter the work *Neither Enemies nor Friends*, edited by Anani Dzidzienyo and Suzanne Oboler, will help me analyze the intersections of the foreignness of being both Latino and Black and its consequences in one's conceiving of home(s).

Considering the fact that in this thesis I analyze four women characters in *Geographies of Home*, the second chapter will also comprise the discussion of home associated with gender, which will be grounded on works such as Patricia Hill Collins's "It's all in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation," and Carole Boyce Davies's *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. I will also make use of foundational works on feminist studies, such as Teresa de Lauretis's work "The Technology of Gender," Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*.

Furthermore, since I analyze four diasporic women in *Geographies of Home*, James Clifford's "Diasporas," as well as Gayatri Spivak's "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World" will also be used for the purpose of shedding light into my analysis. Finally, Sandra Almeida's "A nova diáspora e a literatura de autoria feminina contemporânea," as well as Leila Assumpção Harris's "Outras cartografias: espaços geográficos e discursivos" will be addressed when discussing the relevance of the works written by diasporic women writers, such as Loida Maritza Pérez.

As mentioned previously, it is in the proposition of this master's thesis to polemicize a binary form of analysis throughout my approach of nation, race and gender in the process of each character's building of home (s) in Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*. In order to achieve this goal I intend to use as sources works such as Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*; Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora;" and Timothy Powell's *Beyond the Binary: Reconstructing Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context*. This discussion will be present throughout the chapters of this master's thesis, whenever adequate.

Finally, there will be an analysis of four characters' conception(s) of home in the third chapter of this work. The characters to be analyzed are Aurelia, the mother; and three of her

daughters: Iliana, the one who has access to higher education; Rebecca, the one who is physically abused by her husband; and Marina, supposedly the mad one. When analyzing the four of them I will be interweaving the earlier theoretical approach with my findings concerning the concept(s) of home(s) within the realm of fiction of Loida Maritza Perez's *Geographies of Home*.

CHAPTER 1 – CONCEPT(S) OF HOME(S) – A CONTEMPORARY STUDY

1.1 The Complexity of Home

Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high
There's a land that I heard of once in a lullaby
Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true
Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me.

(“Somewhere Over the Rainbow”)

In *The Wizard of Oz* Dorothy, the little girl from Kansas, is away from home, in a very far away land. There are witches in this place, both good and bad ones, and friends who, as her, have a wish to be fulfilled by the great Wizard. Her fellows wish to have a brain, or a heart, or even courage. She, however, is different from them in the sense that she is a foreigner; she was not born in that land. She feels dislocated, somewhat lonesome, almost lost. She then has a “simpler” wish than theirs: she longs for “home.” In Dorothy’s case the simple tapping of her ruby shoes heels against one another other transports her home. But, interestingly, when she “wakes up” she finds that so many faces previously noticed as different in Oz were actually very familiar to her:

she recognizes the faces of the lion, of the scarecrow, of the tin man, and even of the wicked witch in the figure of the also wicked Miss Gulch, who had threatened taking Toto from her. So, if these faces were not unknown to her, why had she not recognized them while at Oz? Why had Dorothy not felt at home there? Was it all a dream? Or, was home already with her all the time, despite the apparent foreignness of the Land of Oz, as the good witch seems to have suggested at the end of the movie? *The Wizard of Oz* leaves the spectator with the ambiguity felt by Dorothy's character: was she or wasn't she at home all the time? And what is home, after all?

In literature, this feeling of displacement and of uprootedness has been recurrent in the portrayal of the life of immigrants. As a consequence, literature has also portrayed immigrants' attempts to regain this "lost place" or "fertile soil" to be nurtured from by means of recalling or even creating a place to be called home. However, home is not a simple place to be defined or recalled. According to Rosemary George,

today the primary connotation of "home" is of the private space from which the individual travels into the larger arenas of life and to which he or she returns at the end of the day. And yet, also in circulation is the word's wider signification as the larger geographic space where one belongs: country, city, village, community. Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography. (11)

The complexity of analyzing the concept of home lies in the fact that it signals different spheres of meanings, such as one's household or one's native country, as Rosemary George claims, but also because the very condition of being an immigrant is not something simple to be defined. It is many times essentialized as if all immigrants shared the same experiences and perceptions.

Immigrants do not fall into a same category since the very moment they step onto foreign ground. Some have emigrated due to political coercion; others have decided to leave because of a poor socioeconomic perspective in the native land, while others have actually chosen to emigrate despite a comfortable situation in the country of origin. These different reasons for departing give shape to unique experiences in the host country and, consequently, to different experiences when evoking the idea of home. Even the immigrants with the same reason for immigrating will have subjective and distinct experiences in the settlement country, which will also shape their idea(s) of home(s) in different ways. Having in mind Avtar Brah's definition of essentialism as "a notion of ultimate essence that transcends historical and cultural boundaries" (Brah 95), to essentialize the concept of home would be to essentialize the very peoples that evoke it.

Before entering into the discussion of home itself I will bring into the fore two terms that will be recurrent my work: migration and exile. On the one hand migration will be used as an umbrella term for the movement of peoples in general. It can refer both to emigration and immigration, encompassing the movements performed by exiles, diasporic subjects¹, as well as those who have chosen to migrate for one reason or the other. On the other hand, exile will be used to refer to the movement of people caused by political reasons exclusively, as suggested by Bharati Mukherjee: "in the case of the exile . . . the spectrum of choice is gravely narrowed; the alternatives may be no more subtle than death, imprisonment, or a one-way ticket to oblivion" (73). Under this perspective, political exile would be, therefore, a pleonastic construction, for all exile is political.

¹ The discussion of diaspora will be addressed later in both this and the following chapter.

1.2 Home in a Wider Meaning

Dorothy: [*has just arrived in Oz, looking around and awed at the beauty and splendor*] Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas any more.

Dorothy: We must be over the rainbow!

[*a bubble appears in the sky and gets closer and closer. It finally lands, then turns into Glinda the Good Witch wearing a spectacular white dress and crown, holding a wand*]

Dorothy: Now I... I know we're not in Kansas!

(*"The Wizard of Oz"*)

1.2.1. Nationalism and Home

Each experience is quite unique for a number of reasons. And home, consequently, will have its meanings resignified accordingly. To begin with, home has oftentimes carried the connotation of a homeland, which falls under Rosemary George's "wider signification of home," and which is suggested in the film *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy talks about Kansas, and how she misses her land. Moreover, she recurrently reminds herself and the other characters that she is not from Oz. She marks her foreignness, her displacement. Concerning immigrants, this longing for the native land is especially visible in the case of the exiled, who are forced to leave their country of origin, and do not know exactly if or when they will be able to return. John Durham Peters states that "exile is, perhaps *the* central story told in European civilization: the human state as exile from God, the garden of Eden, the homeland, the womb, or even oneself" (17, author's emphasis). I would expand his statement to Western civilization, which is greatly influenced by the Bible because of Christianity (Kurth 6). In the Bible's symbolism, after eating the forbidden

fruit, the one that gave access to wisdom of good and evil, the Lord sent Adam and Eve away from the Garden of Eden. The garden represents the security, the warmth of living under God's protection, besides having all necessities promptly provided by Him. Once outside it, Adam and Eve are cursed: "Adam in sorrow shall eat, and Eve in sorrow shall bring forth children" (*Holy Bible*, Gen. 3.16). They are deprived of the heavenly status of the garden, suffering the consequence that from that moment on they would have to provide for themselves.

In Genesis, as well as in so many other written accounts, exile is represented as a fairly negative experience, in which there is more loss than gain. Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, a land that represented belonging as well as their very intimacy with God. That is, they were provided by Love itself while in the garden and, when exiled, they felt the distance from God, from what was good. The exiles and whoever is forced to leave their home-countries in some way also may feel that what they left behind is the very Eden and that whatever is outside of that is not-home and probably not good as well, because, according to Peters, "exile suggests a painful or punitive banishment from one's homeland" (19). A consequence of this displacement would be the exile's desire for a previous condition of belonging – even if this previous condition is no more than a fabricated idealization. In other words, many exiles would tend to make up an idealized and safe homeland to "go home" to. Perhaps that explains why the exiles most explicitly evoke the notion of home as if it were interchangeable to homeland. In other words, when evoking the idea of home, the exiles oftentimes refer to their native lands, the place where they have departed from.

However, as this discussion unfolds, it will get clearer that home is not necessarily synonymous to homeland, even though it may also have this connotation. The idea of home may include what would be an idealization of this very homeland, as Salman Rushdie describes in his

essay “Imaginary Homelands.” According to him, Indian exiled writers – for being elsewhere, away from their native land – would tend to *create* Indias of the mind (10, author’s emphasis) when trying to recall a past India. This happens because time also constitutes a space between the writer’s memory and the native land disabling any attempt “to reclaim precisely the thing that was lost” (Rushdie 10). Rushdie states that the writer would “create fictions rather than an actual city or village” (10), since he/she would deal with “broken mirrors, some of whose fragments are irretrievably lost” (11) when trying to reclaim the homeland. That is, memory is fragmented, therefore not fully reliable when evoking the past. What is more, memory is politically-oriented, being shaped by one’s experience in the present as well. Therefore, it is not exactly faithful to what the homeland may have been like in one’s life experience, but memory can, nevertheless, make this experience of the past feel like home. Salman Rushdie even dares to say that it is “the present that is foreign” (9), since the past for the exile tends to represent home because of a confrontation with the present, which is portrayed as not-home. However, this author makes a point that the past is home “albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of a lost time” (9). That is, this home comes into existence in one’s mind. It is built upon an imagined homeland.

Expanding Rushdie’s idea on exiled writers, I would say that not only writers but also other exiles would tend to create native countries of the mind when trying to recall their homelands. That may happen especially if there is a defense mechanism, a refusal of belonging to the host country, triggering the idealization of the native one. According to Denise Rollemberg, exiles would have the will to “return to an idealized, far-away and happy past”² (Rollemberg 29, my translation) as an attempt to counterpoint a “sad present.” I am aware that this statement carries an essentializing feature for being a generalization. However, literature has examples of exiles’ idealization of the past, conveying that it is indeed a possibility, even though not a rule.

² “a volta a um passado idealizado, longínquo e feliz.”

One example is Gonçalves Dias's "The Song of Exile," in which this longing for an idealized homeland is portrayed by the speaker:

My homeland has many palm-trees
 and the thrush-song fills its air
 no bird here can sing as well
 as the birds sing over there...
 Don't allow me, God, to die
 without getting back to where
 I belong, without enjoying
 the delights found only there,
 without seeing all those palm-trees
 hearing thrush-songs fill the air.³

("The Song of Exile," trans. Nelson Ascher)

However, this romanticized view is present in many literary works in which homeland is portrayed as a fixed, rooted, idealized space. Furthermore, in these portrayals homeland is oftentimes used interchangeably with the concept of home. I would add to this discussion that not only exiles in the strict sense of the term – those who are politically forced to depart from their countries – experience nostalgia concerning a far away past. Many non-exiled immigrants have reported this feeling as well, perhaps in a time when human flow was not as common as it may be nowadays. For example, people who have departed from their original countries due to economic reasons may fall into this category. Even though they are not exiles, many of these immigrants were unable to visit their native countries for long periods of time, in such a way that

³ "Minha terra tem palmeiras/ onde canta o sabiá/ as aves que aqui gorjeiam/ não gorjeiam como lá/ não permita Deus que eu morra/ sem que eu volte para lá/ sem que desfrute os primores/ que não encontro por cá/ sem qu'inda aviste as palmeiras/ onde canta o sabiá" (Dias).

a sort of an unbridgeable gap was built between their host and native⁴ countries. To sum up, even though exiles could have an official reason for idealizing the homeland, other immigrants might also do it.

Eva Hoffman, a Polish who immigrated to Canada in the late fifties, reports her experience in her autobiographical account⁵ “The New Nomads” in such a way to illustrate that idealizing the homeland is not exclusive to exiles: Hoffman’s family left Poland in 1959 because of the Cold War, when she was at an early age. She states that “they chose to leave, though that choice was so overdetermined that it could hardly be called ‘free’” (Hoffman 45). She reports that at the time of her arrival in Canada she felt as if her childhood, which she had considered to be happy, had been taken away from her. Besides that, Hoffman states that when she immigrated to Canada “Poland was abruptly sundered from [her] by an unbridgeable gap; it was suddenly elsewhere, unreachable, on the other side” (45). That is, even though she was not an exile in its strict, political sense, she did feel a kind of mourning and nostalgia towards her homeland, as if it were from that moment on no longer reachable.

Eva Hoffman at this point states her experience in a very binary way (there/here; present/past) because of the distance she feels from Poland, both physically and culturally. She states that “the past [had become] all one of a sudden one part of the divide, the present on the other” (Hoffman 46). The divide here can be seen both as the bar between the binaries home/not home or past/present; and as the divide that she experienced within herself. According to her, she was no longer whole. Her home and her childhood happiness belonged to the past whereas her displacement and feeling of loss took place in the present. Hoffman then narrates a process she goes through of creating a native country, shaped by her present experience of unhomeliness

⁴ This term will be discussed later on in this chapter, as well as in chapter two of my thesis.

⁵ I acknowledge the fictionality also present in autobiographical accounts, but I presuppose here an autobiographical pact that takes place between the reader and the autobiographical text when the former is in contact with this genre.

while away from Poland, which would serve her as a fixed, immutable space to go to whenever she pleased. This memorial space is the one which would serve her as a place of comfort, of belonging, of home.

However, when returning to Poland already an adult in 1994 to visit Krakow, her native city, she noticed that it was nothing like that mental immutable picture she had kept for so many years. Taking up Salman Rushdie's statement that "it is the present that is foreign" (9), Eva Hoffman's present is foreign both because to her it is used to confront a homelike past memory and because it is in the present time, when visiting her native town, that she is finally able to notice the inventedness of her version of Krakow. For Hoffman, who had been away from her native town for years, the present of Krakow turned out to be as foreign as Canada or any other host country had been for her – considering her condition as an immigrant both in Canada and later on in the United States. That is because Krakow had gone through such a process of Westernization (which Hoffman would have never predicted or considered in her mind) that it did not match the Krakow of her memories. When she got there she observed that "she felt the loss of the very sense of loss [she] had experienced on [her] emigration" (47). After returning to Krakow, Hoffman realized that her present physical homeland was not exactly home to her, as she had imagined it to be: the "actual" Krakow did not correspond to her "imagined" one.

On the contrary, she then realizes that she felt as dislocated in Krakow as she had felt in her host countries for so many years. Her present, even within the borders of her native town, does not correspond to home, at least not the one she had treasured for so long. She admits that, such as the divisions of East/West of her town had been blurred, the "very divisions and oppositions [she] had set up in her inner landscape were shifting and blurring too" (46). The distinct division home/not home blurs in her mind as she realizes that both physically and

culturally her native town had also blurred binary oppositions, such as East/West: now it has Western features as well, such as boutiques, Armani suits, etc. remaining just a little trace of what it had been previously. Eva Hoffman concludes that “now [she] would have to live in a world in which the bipolar structure was gone, in which everything is intermingled and no site is more privileged . . . than anywhere else. [She] would have to change her narrative” (47) because the abrupt rupture she had felt from Poland when emigrating, which had created the chiaroscuro contrasts that she helped to shape her biographical drama (45) no longer exists.

So what is home for Eva Hoffman? The concept of home has been revisited and rethought because of worldwide changes, such as the ease of travel and of communication. Hoffman even proposes that nowadays leaving “one’s native country is not as dramatic and as traumatic as it used to be” (42). Immigrants now would have the chance to come and go more easily in such a way that emigrating is not as traumatic as it used to be. It is undeniable that present cross-cultural movements have changed the perspective of so many immigrants’ experiences, and consequently of their views of home but, despite that, one must be aware of the danger of essentialization when generalizing these experiences. Many immigrants are still deprived of contact with their native lands for a number of reasons, such as economic restraint. In their experiences the gap between the host and the native countries remain somewhat unbridgeable, at least physically. And that is why I wouldn’t say that nowadays leaving “one’s native country is not as dramatic and as traumatic as it used to be” (42), as Hoffman states. Rather, I would say that it is different now and these different experiences are responsible for the various conceptions of home as well.

Returning to the discussion of home in relation to homeland, one may notice that these terms are not synonymous in the case of Hoffman, especially evidenced in the moment she

realized that her geographic native town did not convey the signification of home she had thought it did for such a long time. Present Krakow does not carry what she had treasured as homely, worthy of remembering and of feeling the loss of throughout her immigrant experience. Another theorist to analyze the exiled writer's condition in relation to the feeling of being "at home" is Kenneth Parker: he makes the interesting claim that "if to be in exile is to be in a state of banishment, and enforced state of separation from either physical or mental habitation endeared by association, then 'home' is that space where the affections center" (67). Up to this point one could establish a parallel between this place where the affection centers and Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands." However, Parker continues: "but if 'home' is also a place where the writer finds a refuge, a space in which to find satisfaction in the task of writing, then the notion of 'home' as a native land, a postcolonial nation-state, simply will not work" (67). If the exiled writer would not consider homeland as home, my question is: would he/she then attempt to imagine a homeland to go back to, one that could represent home? Or would he/she rather try to create a space to be called home within the host country's territory? It must be remembered that the exiled writer is in the condition of being a foreigner exactly because he/she cannot find a place of security in the homeland. Summing up this discussion of home and homeland, I would say that even though homeland and home may refer to the affectionate retrieval of a native, familiar space, homeland seems not to encompass all possible meanings of home, because the former does not necessarily cover the nuances, principally of reassurance and of belonging entailed in the phrase *at home* (George 15).

It is a common sense to relate the idea of home to a homeland, to a national ideology, because both homes and nations are traditionally "defined in the instances of confrontation with what is considered 'not-home', with the foreign, with distance" (George 4). That is, homes and

home-countries⁶ share the characteristic of being exclusive (George 2). Following this logic, “natives” within that space would share the characteristic of commonness, of belonging, whereas the immigrant would be seen as the other, the different one, and consequently not-at-home. That is why I propose to discuss home, firstly, in relation to a public space, such as a native country. In order to do so, I chose to begin from the very starting point of the concept of “nation.” What is a nation? And in what circumstances could home refer to nation or nation-state?

As philology would suggest, the first meaning of the word nation indicates origin or descent (Hobsbawm 14). According to the *New English Dictionary* “the old meaning of the word [nation] envisaged mainly the ethnic unit” (qtd. in Hobsbawm 18), and only recent usage stressed the notion of political unity and independence (qtd. in Hobsabwm 18). In its original sense, therefore, nation was not yet linked neither to the notion of territory nor of government. Before 1884 the word *nación* simply meant “the aggregate of the inhabitants of a province, a country or a kingdom” (Hobsbawm 14). Only after this date *gobierno* would come attached to the notion of nation as well as *tierra* to the notion of state (*Dictionary of Spanish Academy* qtd. in Hobsbawm 15). And only after 1925 “we would hear the emotional note of modern patriotism, which would define *patria* as ‘our own nation’” (Hobsbawm 15). It was, then, from 1925 on that the meaning of nation became closer to the one of territory and government, a nation-state.

Hobsbawm proposes that communities that would regard themselves as nations in order to differentiate their members from foreigners gradually gave space to nationalist longings, which would privilege the political entity of the nation rather than the ethnic features within it. This phenomenon was responsible for the nation-making process, which reached its climax in the nineteenth century, in which “the equation nation = state = people, and especially sovereign people, undoubtedly linked nation to territory, since structure and definition of states were [then]

⁶ In the present work the terms homeland and home-country are used interchangeably.

essentially territorial” (19). Timothy Brennan acknowledges that nowadays nation, “as a term . . . refers both to the modern nation-state and to . . . the *nation* – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging” (45). That is, nowadays the terms nation and nation-state are many times used interchangeably. However, he emphasizes that the distinction between these terms is often obscured for discursive purposes, especially by nationalists. They would seek to place their own country in an immemorial past where the arbitrariness of the nation-state cannot be questioned (Brennan 45). There was a purpose in using the word nation when referring to a nation-state, which would be the invocation of an ancient common origin, a purity of descent. Summing up, the idea of a patriotically-based rhetoric of home, which links nation to land and to government, is also relatively new in history. So, as Brennan and Eric J. Hobsbawm argue, both the contemporary concepts of nations and nation-states are novelties and both ideas have gone through some kind of creation in their process of being conceived, even though they seem to be so transparent and genuine in the collective mind. This discussion is relevant in my work because, as nations and nation-states carry the connotation of home, their degrees of inventedness brings up the idea that home may also, in this deeper structure, be a product of creation as well, instead of being a fixed, denotative concept.

It is interesting to highlight that both the conception of nation and of the nation-state came as a means to distinguish “us” from “them.” In the case of the nation, the principle would be that peoples who shared some commonalities of birth – *naissance* – and culture would form communities, which were defined as nations. Whoever was born in that community was part of “us” and the rest was “them”; in the second case, the nation would have aggregated to their territory a central government. Consequently, this nation-state, besides centralizing the political control of the territory, would also provide some kind of assurance that whatever masses of

peoples that would enter it, who would be part of the “them”, never becoming part of the “us” that were born within that space. The nation-state would create the idea of an “imagined community,” as a nation would do concerning an “actual” original, native community.⁷ According to Hobsbawm, the period from 1880 to 1914 was mostly responsible for the making of the idea of patriotism, of nationalism because it was the time in which there were the “greatest mass migrations yet known, within and between states, of imperialism and of growing international rivalries ending in world war (91). According to him, “nothing stimulated nationalism . . . as much as international conflict” (Hobsbawm 91) and all of these features underlined the differences between “us” and “them” (Hobsbawm 91). That is, since the states would use all the machinery they could to build the image of a nation as they wanted it to be, the idea of nationalism, and, consequently, of the “imagined community” also spread.

It is impossible to talk about imagined communities without citing Benedict Anderson because of his thorough study of the nation as a political unity. According to him, the nation is imagined in three different ways: as limited, as sovereign and as a community. I will focus on the latter aspect because it is very much related to one’s feeling of belonging to the so-called nation. The nation is imagined as a community, first of all, because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, [it] is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Members of the nation, therefore, tend to assume equality and comradeship among its members that actually does not come into being. According to Anderson, in fact “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members” (6). He gives the example that a US citizen will never meet or even know the names of more than 240.000 fellow US citizens and that the former “has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” (26). Hugh Seton-Watson

⁷ I acknowledge an inventedness also attached to the concept of nation. It will be discussed later on in this chapter.

supports Anderson's claim of the nation as a construct when he says that even the nation in the original, not political sense, "exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, *or behave as if* they formed one" (5, emphasis mine). That is, it is implied here that nations are not exactly formed due to a principle of shared values and nativity in communities, but that they may be also a construct. Therefore, the transformation of the nation into a political unit, a nation-state, is even more complex. Ernest Gellner, cited by Benedict Anderson, states that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist" (169). And by doing so nationality, or as Anderson suggests, nation-ness, despite being "cultural artifacts," are still able to lead people to kill or die for nations.

People would be willing to go to war for this political unit also due to the aspect of imagining the nation as being limited, such as Anderson claims (7). Imagining the nation as limited encompasses the acceptance of boundaries beyond which lie other nations. So, delimitation of territory and of peoples comes to define the "us" and "them." As Benedict Anderson observes,

no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet. (7)

In other words, despite the already mentioned inequality and imagined comradeship among its members, still the nation grants to them the notion of belonging, of being part of that political unity. So, even though nationality is a cultural artifact of a particular kind (Anderson 4), it still resonates legitimacy, influencing one's sense of belonging, of being at home.

Benedict Anderson claims that the spread of the national discourse was mainly indebted to the primacy of capitalism and that one of the earlier forms of capitalist enterprise was book-publishing. He cites that by the year 1500 at least 20.0000.000 books had already been printed and that “the years 1500-1550 were a period of exceptional European prosperity” (38), leading to a publishing boom. Anderson claims that Reformation itself owes its success due to print-capitalism because before that Rome easily won every war “against heresy” for having better lines of internal communication. However, after print-capitalism it was possible to challenge Rome’s communication empire. That would have given Luther support when attempting the Reformation. A consequence of the print market is that Luther’s works represented one third of the all German-language books sold between 1518 and 1525 (Anderson 39).

The coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism opened the reading markets, creating therefore new reading publics. Moreover, since the primacy of Latin and of its divine status was being contested, other languages gradually began to be seen as ones of power as well. A consequence is that an impulse was given to nationalist discourses, which started to exalt the country’s official language. Language is a very important factor in one’s idea of a nation-state, because it is also a distinguishing factor between the “us” and “them” that marks these imagined communities. That is so despite the fact that oftentimes the so-called official language is an imposition that does not regard dialects or other languages that may be spoken within the nation-state. Summing up, two main factors would “help” distinguish insiders from outsiders of a nation-state: descent and language.

The impulse given to literature exalted national values and “traditions.” According to Timothy Brennan, “it was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the ‘one, yet many’ of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation”

(49). The novel joined the newspaper as a major vehicle of the national print media, allowing people to imagine the special community that was the nation (49). Different from the oral tradition that would invoke the idea of story-telling, printed novels would give the sense of authenticity to what was being told. This was especially convenient when the national discourse was written to serve a colonizer/colonized discourse, needless to say, from the colonizer's point of view.

However, the importance and convenience of written accounts is not restricted to the period of the rising of the nation-states or to the colonizers. As Kenneth Parker discusses, in post-independent Africa, that is, after the 50s and 60s, a very recent past, the rulers of these new states still used the strategy of literary products as means to reinforce the idea of a collectiveness, of an "imagined community" in the post-independent nation-states. It was

the ruler's expectation that the writer should be an instrument of this process of construction. The act of writing, as well as the institutions of literary production, [had] one overarching objective: to build the notion of the nation. (Parker 69)

The governors try to build this idea of nation by conveying "some notion of blood, or heredity, or overarching ethnicity" in some "notion of a past that predates the colonial moment" (69). This way, a process of trying to recall or invent whatever could be regarded as native, common to all, becomes a strategy. Kenneth Parker claims that

what we therefore have in the postindependence African nation-state is a classic example of the "invented traditions" that Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger suggest are responses to novel situations that take the form of old situations. (69)

In order for the population to recognize themselves as part of an "authentic" nation, rulers would do what they could to pass the image of an original community, of a sense of belonging and of

traditions. In short, the idea of belonging, of home, is linked to a physical site, a land, even though the means by which this is done is of an “invention,” a fabrication of what would have been an original, native, community in a distant past.

I have discussed nation and nation-state as a construct, as cultural artifacts because I suggest that home is also a construct. If it is known that the ancestral purity claimed by nations is somewhat mythical, and that the nation-states formed out of them are imagined communities for so many reasons, how can this territory stand for home? How can this nation-state be home for all of the peoples that live within its borders? It is interesting to pinpoint the inevitable parallel between nation as a construct and the consequence of home as being one as well. When one relies on nationalistic ideas in order to retrieve a sense of home, different idealizations occur because of this superficial understanding and acknowledgement of what a nation represents. Nativism, which is the belief in an original, native community is a danger when trying to retrieve the idea of home as a nation-state, since “the attempt to define (and thus to invent) the ‘national character’ . . . always lies close to the surface” (Appiah 952). It does not take into consideration deeper considerations, such as the differences of peoples within the national borders. The idea of the nation-state tends to take for granted assumptions of common ancestry and of purity among its members. As a consequence, if one relies on a national basis in order to retrieve one’s sense of home, this idea of home is also somewhat created in the process.

Sara Ahmed argues that collective memory shared by peoples from a same country is utterly convenient (77). It is easier to rely on collective memories than to try to recall private experiences. That is so especially if we bear in mind that one has to deal with broken mirrors, in Rushdie’s terms, when trying to retrieve the past on his/her own. Being that task quite a difficult one, according to Ahmed, this failure of individual memory is conveniently replaced by a

constructed collective memory, such as of the nation-state as home. Still according to her, this collective memory works as a facilitator in the very process of recalling home (77). I would say, however, that when one creates home on nationalistic assumptions, even though he/she may think that this home is a collective retrieval, shared by the members of the “imagined community,” in fact it is not that simple, because if one considers a collective, homogeneous idea of home, there is a danger of falling into an essentialist approach towards it. Not to mention that memories are also very much shaped by one’s present circumstances.

Furthermore, I add here the hypothesis that home as a country – delving into a deeper structure of the concept – is a construct of a construct: if the nation as a community is regarded to be a construct (as Seton-Watson suggests), and the nation-state is yet another construct (as Benedict Anderson claims), all of them trying to convey a notion of belonging (due to the idea of *naissance*), I would say that the conceiving of home that derives from these ideas is also a construct. In other words, a notion of home that has as its basis a nation-state (a collective construction – an imagined community), which is derived from a prior idea of nation (also a construct), is away from the concept of *naissance* (which would give the sense of belonging) three times. So the imagining of home would be thrice as far from what traditionally could be considered an “essence” of it, since nation and nation-state would be already constructs from the very beginning.

Kenneth Parker’s article has an interesting use of the verb “lie” in the very title of his work: “Home is where the heart... lies” (Parker 1). This verb holds the ambiguity of referring both to an affectionate base upon which the concept of home can be constructed upon, as well as to the process of one deliberately creating, either consciously or not, a space to be called home. Therefore, home would be an imaginary location, not fixed, even if linked to an idea of nation,

since, under the light of Benedict Anderson, the latter is not as fixed and “natural” as it seems to be.

I have also discussed the problematic of nation because it connects to home in the sense that they are both defined traditionally in confrontation with what is considered not home, with the foreign, with distance (George 4). This approach reinforces binarisms, which have been throughout history used as a tool for the very understanding of the subject’s identifications in the world. Helene Cixous in her work “Sorties” gives examples of many of these binaries that have guided human thought, such as: father/mother; sun/moon; head/heart; man/woman. She states that this binary thought is

always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection. Thought has always worked through opposition, speaking/writing; parole/écriture; high/low. (63)

Transposing this discussion to the topic of migrations, the binary configuration is very much used in the case of exiles, as I have discussed earlier: out of their native countries there would be an idealization of the past (home) opposing the present (not home). Furthermore, the native versus foreign is emphasized. However, this traditional binary way of thinking seems to be blurring nowadays, as Eva Hoffman argues (46), especially because human flows and counterflows, when possible, seem to make distances smaller both in physical as in cultural aspects, turning what was formerly unbridgeable (such as visiting family members, revisiting the native land) into something possible. So, since the very notions and gaps between homeland and host countries are revised, the idea of home is consequently also resignified.

I acknowledge that the binary form of analysis has been an important early tool in Cultural Studies, one that “helped scholars to delineate the inner workings of oppression and to establish a critical paradigm that would allow minority voices not only to be heard, but to be esteemed as a critically important point of view” (Powell 1). One example in Cultural Studies of binaries that has been adopted by scholars is the perspective Self/Other. Needless to say, this binary opened the doors for studies of former disregarded points of view, such as of Latinos, African-Americans and others. However, binaries in the very attempt to empower ironically designate which part of it is the most powerful in relation to the other. That is, the binary way of analysis has encompassed hierarchical relations among the parts it represents. The outcome is inevitably a center and a margin perspective, claimed by Timothy Powell to be a critical blind spot of the theoretical paradigm that binaries helped to displace (2). So, even if it tries to empower the marginal side in such a way to invert the center, there will still be a marginal part. Furthermore, this binary critical framework “implicitly relied on the very Eurocentric model that it was attacking – reducing these complex forms of cultural identity to being simply an ‘odd metaphorical negation of the European’” (Powell 3). Consequently, binaries trigger an essentialist approach towards the parts it represents if not looked at in a critical way.

It is not my intention here to suggest that binaries should not take place at all. As Avtar Brah states, “a bipolar construction might be addressed fruitfully and productively as an object of analysis . . . that is, as a means of investigating the conditions of its formation, its implication in the inscription of hierarchies, and its power to mobilize collectivities” (184). Thus, in the present work binaries will be approached in a critical way in order to analyze their very construction in relation to gender and race as well as their contribution in one’s conception of home. I would say that we are living in a time, perhaps, in which these binaries are not being excluded, but

challenged. Timothy Powell suggests that we live in a time in which a reconstruction of “cultural identities . . . in a theoretical mix where there are no centers and no margins” (5) becomes necessary. I would not go that far. I would not say that the center-margin perspective will necessarily be erased, but I would suggest that they will become more complex or even blurred when analyzing cultural issues, such as processes of migration.

On the one hand, I advocate against a suggestion of erasure because I acknowledge that binaries will be serving their analytical function if considered strategic, that is, if seen as a tool to enable “subaltern” groups to be noticed and represented, such as advocated by Gayatri Spivak. On the other hand, however, they fall into the danger of essentializing its parts, of reinforcing “the belief that certain people or entities share some essential, unchanging ‘nature’ that secures their membership in a category” (Leitch 2194). The oversimplification of the categories must be taken into consideration when dealing with binaries, and that is why Timothy Powell emphasizes that especially concerning Cultural Studies there would be a tendency to go beyond them. He claims queer theory to be one of the landmarks in this new way of looking at binaries, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work *Epistemology of the Closet*, because “in the process of deconstructing the homo/heterosexual binary, Sedgwick helped to lay the foundations of Queer theory and to point the way to a new direction in Cultural Studies” (4). Sedgwick claims that there has been a crisis of representation of pairings, such as of hetero/homosexual and secrecy/disclosure. According to her

along with and sometimes through . . . epistemologically charged pairings, condensed in the figures of “the closet” and “coming out,” this very specific crisis of definition has then ineffaceably marked other pairings as basic to modern

culture organization as masculine/feminine, majority/minority . . . health/illness, same/different, cognition/paranoia. (72)

Therefore, Sedgwick asserts that the appropriate place for critical analysis to begin is, then, from a relatively decentered perspective rather than a centered one (1).

Traditionally the approach to binaries have tended to oversimplify the historical complexities of categories such as woman, man, black, white “and the many points at which these cultures intersected, overlapped, or else came sharply into conflict” (Powell 2). The beyond status is possible, then, if a more de-centered approach is considered, as proposed by Eve Sedgwick (in such a way that the very constructions of the parts within the binaries are problematized, as feminist theorists do in relation to gender⁸); and if one takes into account instances that were traditionally not considered when dealing with these binary categories (still having binaries as grounds for analysis).

The point is that there are multiple others embedded within and across binaries, albeit one or more may be accorded priority within a discursive formation. For instance, a discourse may be primarily about gender and, as such, it may centre upon gender-based binaries . . . But this discourse will not exist in isolation from others, such as those signifying class, “race,” religion or generation. (Brah 185)

The binary form of analysis is important insofar as it enables topic-oriented discussions, but the analysis of a subject’s identification cannot be limited to one single binary. One has to deal with many binaries, according to the context. An example would be a black Dominican-American woman. This subject is influenced by at least three different binaries: white/ black; native/ foreign and man/woman. Interestingly, this particular subject is in the marginal side three times, but “individual subjects may occupy minority and majority positions simultaneously” (Brah 189).

⁸ This topic will be discussed in chapter two.

These perspectives also change one's perceptions of and reactions to the environment that surrounds him/her, as well as they are landmarks in one's formation of subjectivity. Perhaps, then, going beyond these binaries would be to try to analyze issues in a somewhat de-centered approach, even though binaries could be a point of departure. I intend to approach the many geographies of the subjects in my analysis of *Geographies of Home* in such a way as to portray the very decentered standpoint that the characters may have, even though immersed in a hegemonic and prevailing national/ not-national, man/woman, white/black (binary) discourses.

1.2.2 Transnationalism and Home

For now I would like to focus on the binary native/foreign in relation to home. As I have discussed earlier, the traditional view of migrants, especially relying on the experience of the exiled, reinforces binaries by emphasizing the native as home opposing the host country as not home. However, even without considering Brah's "multiple others embedded" within the binaries, it is possible to see that the binary home/not home paralleling the native/foreign one is yet too simplistic to encompass specific experiences, such as the one fostered by the so called transnational phenomena. By transnationalism I mean the loosening and crossing of borders, the movement that expands national boundaries, both in physical and psychological ways. The notion of transnationalism problematizes a binary opposition form of analysis because it questions the idea of a center so clearly opposed to a margin. The clear distinction between the self and the Other, which has guided Western epistemological thought, becomes then blurred. As Inderpal Grewal claims when discussing a "postmodern" view, "it is imperative for us to examine new forms of subjectivity that are radically different from this European imperialist and state-nationalist subject that is binarily constructed and essentialist" (233). She points out the

oppressive alliances that are inevitably inherent to the process of one's becoming "center", opposed to "margin." I would not say that transnationalism necessarily brings this new form of subjectivity. However, it does destabilize binaries, such as self/other, majority/minority. The phenomenon at least opens the doors, therefore, for non-imperialist and non-state-nationalist new subjectivities.

Diasporic figures, for instance, would be examples of peoples that have expanded national borders. "Etymologically derived from the Greek term *diasperien*, from *dia-*, 'across' and *-sperien* 'to sow or scatter seeds,' diaspora . . . suggests a dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation-states, territories or countries" (Braziel and Mannur 1). A seminal work on diaspora, by William Safran, discusses the conceptual problem of what would constitute diasporic communities. According to him, diasporic communities are the ones that aggregate several of the following characteristics: they have been dispersed from a specific original 'center' to two or more 'peripheral' regions (already different from Braziel and Mannur's definition); they retain a collective memory or myth about their original homeland; they believe not to be fully accepted by their host country; they regard their ancestral homeland as their 'true' home; and they are committed to a maintenance or restoration of their homeland (83). As James Clifford summarizes, the main features of diaspora would be: "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (305).

Clifford, as well as other theorists, however, revisits Safran's theorization on diaspora claiming that Safran's criteria are too strict once they do not entirely encompass the features of many diasporic communities, such as the Jewish one, which is regarded to be the classical

example of diaspora. Clifford asserts that “large segments of Jewish historical experience do not meet . . . a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland” (305), for instance, opposing Safran’s view. The latter would have a centered diasporic view, formed around an ideology of return. James Clifford, on the other hand, proposes a de-centered approach, in which the ambivalence of the very diasporic subject is exalted. This ambivalence is characterized by this subject’s attraction as well as repulsion towards his/her very own diasporic condition. It would be a myth, according to Clifford and other authors, such as Robin Cohen, to say that diaspora is synonymous exclusively to loss. According to Cohen,

despite the general acceptance of the negative view of diasporas, if the historical record (as opposed to folk memories or the ideologies of those advocating the return to natal origins) is examined, the experience of “Babylon” can be understood in a far more benign or, at the very least, ambivalent way. (253)

Babylon here is used as a metaphor for the diasporic condition, in which historically there would be implied “the afflictions, isolation and insecurity of living in a foreign place, set adrift, cut off from [one’s] roots and . . . sense of identity” (Cohen 253). However, Cohen states that this negative connotation attributed to diaspora has only come into existence as a post-Christian idea.

Considering the many definitions of diaspora, Clifford suggests that perhaps “rather than locating essential features, we might focus on diaspora’s borders, on what it defines itself against” (307). And diaspora would be against, for example, the norms of the nation-states (307). He says that “the nation-state . . . is traversed and, to varying degrees, subverted by diasporic attachments” (307). That is because diasporic peoples do not necessarily long to go back to a center represented by a nation-state (as Safran suggests). According to Clifford, “homecomings are, by definition, the negation of diaspora” (307). So where is home for the diasporic subject?

According to Brah “on the one hand ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin. On the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality” (192): the diasporic subject both may have home as a place of desire in a mythical, not exactly tangible place, and experience home in the host country. Home becomes somewhat de-centered and not attached to an origin, to a homeland. That is because “the concept of diaspora places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*” (Brah 192-3, author’s emphasis), so the nation-state to the diasporic subjects would be more mythical than an actual geographical site to go home to. Brah suggests, therefore, a difference between feeling at home and declaring a place as home (197). According to her, despite the fact that diasporic subjects have a homing desire, this desire does not equate a return to a homeland.

Still focusing on diasporic subjects, their experience also comes to defy binarisms, both because it confronts the us/them logic and also because it subverts the very logic of majority/minority. Not that it surpasses the logic of power between majority societies and minority communities, whatever their figures are, but diaspora challenges this binary concerning the relation of these minority communities with the majority society. That is because the experiences of diaspora are paradoxical for encoding “practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms” (307), instead of a traditional expected resistance towards the host country. There is not really a shared wish of return to a specific land. Consequently, the relation that takes place towards the settlement country is of both sympathy and resistance.

Thus, diasporic subjects experience double (and even plural) identifications that are constitutive of hybrid forms of identity . . . hybrid national (and transnational)

identities are positioned with other identity categories and severed from an essentialized, nativist identity that is affiliated with the constructions of the nation or homeland. (Brazier and Mannur 5)

Since there is not exactly a wish for return, the thought of home as a homeland or a nation-state is somewhat made distant in this experience. The diasporic communities may even treasure nation, in its sense of *naissance*, of natives (even though I have discussed previously that this is also a kind of construction) but not a nation-state, actually. Their tendency would be to build transnational networks, creating “imagined worlds” in Arjun Appadurai’s terms (33), instead of an “imagined community” (Anderson 6). Imagined worlds carry a transnational sense of belonging since they are “the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the globe” (Appadurai 33); differently from an imagined community, which has a nationalistic approach towards a so-called “home.”

Diaspora trespasses the borders of a land, of a nation-state in such a way that home cannot be regarded simply as a homeland, whether created, imagined, or retrieved. Nevertheless, despite these lateral connections, the diasporic experience can indeed be constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion (Clifford 224). The diasporic experience may share an “ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation or resistance” (Clifford 219), despite the ambivalent position of the diasporic subject towards the country of settlement. However, this longing for home, rather than triggering a teleology of origin/return, tends to lead towards de-centered connections. Moreover, the condition of being diasporic is not a synonym for loss, as already mentioned previously in this chapter. So what location is home for diasporic subjects? Is there any location to be called home?

Critics argue that diasporic subjects, rather than longing for home in another place, carry homes with them. However, whether they carry homes with them for perhaps having “a multi-placedness of home” (Brah 197) in their imaginary, like in the case of the communities encompassing the “African Diaspora” (which will be addressed in chapter two) or for projecting homes in a distant past, Salman Rushdie’s metaphor of the broken mirror fits well. Home is still some kind of narration, a process of filling in the broken parts of either a centered or a de-centered mirror. Migrants (included here immigrants, exiled and diasporic subjects) in different ways and influenced by different factors, imagine a home and/or a homeland when either attempting to retrieve an imagined community (in which the natives would share common features) or idealize an imagined world (in which the ‘natives’ all around the globe would also share common features).

Not only diasporic subjects represent transnational movements. Nowadays we have flows and counterflows of masses of peoples, a phenomenon that has become more noticeable each day because of global market and due to an era in which Cold War restraints apparently have ceased to operate. Needless to say, communication via telephone and especially the internet has completely changed forms of communication worldwide in the sense that distances seem to have become smaller, enabling a transnational flow and counterflow both of peoples as well as of ideas. The phenomenon of transnationalism is present in such ways that it displaces the very notion of place. As a consequence, the analysis of home/not-home as paralleling native/foreign is, once again, not able to encompass the complexity of one’s sense of belonging. The very bipolar home/not-home is being revised: perhaps one can feel both at home and not at home in a certain space, according to specific moments and contexts. I acknowledge, however, that immigrants’ experiences cannot be essentialized as if all of them would have access to the same transnational

mass movements. These experiences are influenced by other factors as well, such as of class and ethnicity.

The phenomenon of transnationalism is yet not only represented by flows and counterflows of masses of peoples and information. It is also present in the experiences of peoples that are born in one country, but who are of other country's descent. Suzanne Oboler, in her work *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Problem of Representation in the United States* reports a case that she witnessed in a literature conference, in the United States: she says that there was a Chicana scholar that asked the panelist (who was Mexican and had just arrived in the United States for her presentation) how she would define "Mexican writers". What the scholar wanted to know was if herself as a Chicana and as a member of a new generation of Latinos born or raised in the United States would be considered a "Mexican writer" if she were to take up writing as a career. She was questioning the very notion of nationality. The panelist's answer was: "A Mexican author . . . is somebody born in Mexico or somebody who has been raised there since a very young age" (159). According to Oboler, the audience was shocked and disappointed at the panelist's answer because it lacked the awareness of the complexity of the scholar's questioning.

Suzanne Oboler states that "moments such as this capture one of the dilemmas that the new generation of Latinas and Latinos born and raised in the United States confront in respect to their personal identities and their understanding of the meaning of cultural and ethnic identities and national affiliations" (*Ethnic Labels* 159). Even though Oboler here also cites other instances that are embedded in this question, I would like to focus on the national affiliations for now. The author points out the case of generations in relation to nationalism and transnationalism. She says that the dilemma of national affiliations is present in new generations of Latinos and Latinas, that

is, the ones that were probably born or even raised from a very early age in the United Statesian territory. Their bonds to their “native” country are different from the one of their parents or older generations, who probably arrived already adults in the United States. The tendency of the new generation is to have a conflict of identification for they have contact to the “native” country by means of their parents memory of the “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s terms, as well as by the facilitation of communication and of information worldwide for many of them; but they are also immersed in another culture since they were born, or perhaps from a very early age. So what sense of nationalism do they have? Considering immigrants of Latin-American origin, which are my focus in this master’s thesis, would the hyphen that designates the national descent, such as a “Dominican-American,” keep distance from or unite these subjects to the United Statesian culture? And how do these peoples recognize themselves? Is there a tendency to privilege any side of this balance? And what is home for them?

Gloria Anzaldúa says that “borderlands are physically together whenever two or more cultures edge each other” (19). Consequently, there is no need to be traversing the actual borders for the borderland to take place in a *mestizo*’s life. She states that “borders are set up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (25, author’s emphasis). So, if these borders are continuously clashing, what is *us* and what is *them*? What is native and what is foreign? What is home and what is not-home? Home in this case cannot simply be regarded as the “native” country. If we consider a Dominican-American, born and raised in the United States, for example, how can home, “where the affections center” (Parker 67), for him/her be the Dominican Republic? And, on the other way round, how can this home be entirely the United States? What about the imagined community, the cultural legacy that this person may be subject to?

I am not trying to suggest, however, that the era of nationalism is gone. It is not that the nation-state or that nationalism is over or that it does not have an impact both on cultural and economic terms nowadays. One example of how the nation-state is still operating in contemporary times is the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks. It is undeniable that the subjects, however transnational they may feel or act have been subjected to judgment of national (and ethnic) backgrounds when attempting to enter the Unitedstatesian territorial boundaries since this tragic event so that “we cannot ignore the very real ways in which communities are legally and politically bounded by nation-states and their (often multiple) movements across such borders” (Braziel and Mannur 15). National power and influence has not been superceded, despite a so called tendency of easiness concerning transnational flows and counterflows of people. Another example is present in the very realm of capitalism, in which one would presuppose minimal state intervention and the prevalence of the “laws of the market” instead of the current situation in which “state intervention in ‘unstable financial markets’ has become . . . more rather than less pervasive” (Rowe 2). One example is president Barack Obama’s decision in 2009 to give additional taxpayer dollars (financial support) to the auto companies General Motors and Chrysler, which were struggling to remain open. Barack Obama states that these companies are “an emblem of the American spirit . . . a once and future symbol of America’s success” (Obama), so they cannot simply vanish. It is worthwhile to cite Barack Obama’s final lines in this announcement:

now, let there be no doubt, it will take an unprecedented effort on all our parts – from the halls of Congress to the boardroom, from the union hall to the factory floor – to see the auto industry through these difficult times. And I want every American to know that the path I’m laying out today is our best chance to make

sure that the cars of the future are built where they've always been built – in Detroit and across the Midwest – to make America's auto industry in the 21st century what it was in the 20th century – unsurpassed around the world. (Obama)

Needless to say, this president has made a nationalistic, “imagined community” approach towards the Unitedstatesian peoples in order to justify the government’s intervention. And his speech highlights the very excluding and hierarchical aspect of imagining a nation, which is the us/them binary: “to make *America’s* auto industry . . . *unsurpassed around the world*” (Obama, author’s emphasis). Along with the nationalist discourse, hierarchical powers in the binary colonizer/colonized are also emphasized in Obama’s speech.

Francis Fukuyama, political scientist, when interviewed by Chico Mendez, states that contrarily to what one would suppose, “[we] are watching an increase in economic nationalism. Not only in the US, but all over the world. [And] its most hideous consequence is protectionism”⁹ (Mendez 20, my translation). According to him “from now on we will see a greater presence of the State in economy. That is, it will be an economy more of the State, and less of the market”¹⁰ (Mendez 20, my translation). Therefore, despite all transnationalism movements of peoples and information, the nation-state still has its place.

And this place of the nation-state, even if somewhat imagined, still shapes experiences of home. John Carlos Rowe argues that “if we have not superseded the nation-state, neither have we superseded nationalism” (2). So, whatever processes an immigrant may face when conceiving home, the national instance should not be regarded as outdated, even though there are many other instances that also traverse these experiences, such as transnational movements, as

⁹ “Estamos assistindo a um aumento do nacionalismo econômico. Não só nos Estados Unidos, mas em todo o mundo. Seu desdobramento mais nefasto é o protecionismo” (Mendez 20).

¹⁰ “A partir de agora veremos uma presença bem maior do estado na economia. Ou seja: será uma economia mais de estado e menos de mercado” (Mendez 20).

discussed previously, and the very local perspectives of one's life – not to mention the very loci of enunciation of these subjects regarding race and gender, for example. These instances in one's conception of home will be addressed in chapter two.

1.3 Home as a Private Space

Auntie Em: Find yourself a place where there isn't any trouble!

Dorothy: Some place where there isn't any trouble. Do you suppose there is such a place, Toto? There must be.

(*"The Wizard of Oz"*)

So far I have discussed home in relation to a broader meaning, both in national and transnational terms. However, as Rosemary George points out, home may also carry the signification of the private sphere (1). Nevertheless, taking into consideration the intimate sphere, home could be misinterpreted as a space in which to encounter somewhat idealized characteristics, such as protectiveness and warmth. This would be a traditional view of home, one that claims an essence, a fixed and stable view of it. Moreover, this idealized view carries a gendered connotation: the private sphere would be the space of the feminine, the immobile and passive, opposing the public one, mobile and active (Franco 363).

This romanticized view of the private sphere as home is thoroughly depicted in Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. He depicts both a fixed and a gendered space when describing the house. On the one hand, Bachelard claims that "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (5). That is, if a *house* is inhabited, it carries with it the essence of home.

Essence brings to mind an idea of purity, fixity. According to Bachelard this essence would consist of features such as safety, protection, and nurturing.

Besides fixity, Bachelard claims that “always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle” (7), as if surrounded by maternal care. As Rosemary George points out, “the word ‘home’ immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection” (1). In other words, the notion of home as the intimate sphere in one’s life is traversed by the patriarchal roles that are assigned to women, as if the occupants of this private space would be carried in the womb, nurtured and protected from an outside world. Actually, Bachelard even compares the house to a universe, “our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (4). According to him, memories of the outside do not bring satisfaction, opposite to what happens when one recalls this inside space of the house.

Interestingly enough, both home as a private space and home as a wider space carry the connotation of “sanctuaries for group members” (Collins, “It’s all in the Family” 161). However, if we establish a parallel between nation-state and a household, we can argue that, as nation-states are imagined communities, which are invented in their very process of existing, households are also imagined local communities, in the sense that they do not necessarily grant the characteristics that their traditional discourse tries to imply. In the case of the nation-state, the imagined community would bring about the feeling of kinship, whereas in the case of the family household the “imagined local community” would bring about the idea of fraternity.

Bachelard’s view may be regarded as idealized since he only accounts for the benefits of living in “the house,” comparing the experiences within it to dreams. In Bachelard’s conception, “the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). In other words, the house grants protection to its occupants. He does not take into account that the household may be

witness to not so good happenings as well. What is more, he claims that by restoring memories of one's first house we "add to our store of dreams" (6). That is, this house can only grant satisfaction to its occupants, even when they depart from it.

Gaston Bachelard conveys the idea of house/home as linked to emotion. Nevertheless, because of his idealized view, he lacks (or omits) the insight that perhaps this emotion is not always positive. When he states, for instance, that "life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house" (7), he is not taking into consideration child abuse, for instance, which may happen in this same space. An example of a family household as defying idealized characteristics is present, for example, when the patriarch does not allow the occupants of this intimate space the right to daydream, in Bachelard's terms. That is, when the individualities of the occupants of that space are not respected by the one who is in "command." It would be as if that household was a nation-state under dictatorship. Needless to say, the "warmth of this house's bosom" (7) would not effectively take place, as a traditional view of home takes for granted. As the nation-state does not necessarily guarantee the notion of community, of belonging, of safety to its "natives," likewise a household does not necessarily assure the sense of community, belonging and safety to its inhabitants.

In relation to home as having an essential core, both fixed and rooted, as an idealized view would suppose, I argue that the concept of home(s) has so many overlapping instances (one's political standpoint, one's imagining of a public space to be called home and one's experience in the private sphere) with all of them happening at the same time, that it becomes difficult to conceive this concept as fixed and stable. Home is not stable considering different people, and it is not stable even considering the same person in different occasions: at one moment one may be confronted directly with a comfortable domestic situation, regarding home

as this private space, whereas at another point this person may be overtly confronted with another domestic situation in which this space is, instead, recognized as not-home. In yet another point, the same subject may face a more political situation in his/her public realm, longing for “home,” for example, as an “imagined community” (Anderson 7). The notion of home resonates differently for different people and even for the same person, according to one’s location (both in physical terms as in terms of enunciation) and context. And this is my hypothesis in relation to *Geographies of Home*: the notion(s) of home(s) resonate(s) differently for each of the characters. Moreover, these notions change for each of them throughout the narrative, being fluid rather than fixed.

In relation to a gendered connotation of home, the gendered and patriarchal perspective must be contested, for it is known that the space of the household does not necessarily fulfill the idealized notion of it. This space oftentimes becomes one of oppression for women. Other dimensions of home may also be engendered, such as the discourses of both nation and the nation-state (which point to the wider meanings of home): the idea of land carries the metaphor of the “feminine,” while the nation-state of “the masculine.” Land would be a womb, a fertile soil from where one is nurtured, traditionally a feminine role. The nation-state, however, would stand for the political system; the force and power, standing for the masculine. Expanding this thought to rape as a metaphor, the colonizer/masculine/active would be the rapist, whereas the colonized/feminine/passive, the raped. One can notice that the nation-state, the masculine, rapes the land, the unconquered or regarded to be unconquered territory. And when it happens that an already established nation-state is attacked, the colonizer’s patriarchal discourse then feminizes the state, transforming it into the status of land, as a means of subjugating it. It becomes feminine in the rape process. The occupation of the Dominican Republic by US troops, for instance, could

be seen as the masculine figure of the state subjugating a weak one, the feminized one. The Dominican Republic would be treated as a land, a not-masculine state in such a way that this otherness, in gendered terms, already justifies its symbolic rape, characterized by occupation and/or domination.

Finally, it becomes necessary to confront traditional ideas of home as a private space in order to demystify it. Not all family households encompass a nurturing and safe environment, as Gaston Bachelard seems to suggest, and, especially, not all experiences of one's childhood in a primary household can be regarded as dreamlike. It is important to bear in mind that essentialization is not a reasonable path to follow when conceiving the many possibilities entailed in the notion of home, being it a wider and/or an intimate space.

Opposing the traditional view of the private sphere as a home (fixed and gendered) there is the view of it as a contested space. In this view the space of the private realm is questioned, as well as it is revised. It is questioned both in relation to granting safety and in relation to being static. The private space would be rather ambivalent, such as the public one, in the sense that it may cause attraction as well as repulsion of its members, according to one's present moment. The reaction to this present moment would then be the thermometer of ambivalence. It is my assumption that at one time the subject may regard a particular space (either private or public) as home, whereas at other times the contingencies would make him/her recognize it as not-home. And, going beyond the binary home/not home, I would even dare to say that at some point the subject may see the space as home and not home, according to the variables he/she may be taking into account. An example would be: a black woman may feel at home in the family household in relation to ethnicity; and at the same time feel not at home in relation to gender, if, for instance, she is sexually abused by an occupant of this space. I am aware that there may be

time gaps between these assumptions, but I claim that these time gaps do not affect the idea that it is possible to go beyond the binary home/ not home in relation to space.

The private sphere as a contested space in relation to race and gender will be discussed in chapter two. However, just by the example given above, it is clear that the dilemmas of identifications are present because of the very contingencies one may face throughout his/her life. And these contingencies fatally affect one's concept of home, whatever space it may be accounted for.

1.4 Home as an Imagined Location

Close your eyes and tap your heels together three times. And think to yourself, there's no place like home.

("The Wizard of Oz")

I have discussed the concept(s) of home(s) in relation to one's public and private spheres. In these instances home may be seen as an imagined location because both the ideas of a community (a nation-state) or a world (de-centered diasporic lateral connections) in the terms of Benedict Anderson and Arjun Appadurai depend on some degree of imagination in order to come to being. Considering the private sphere, the local community of the household also demands a certain degree of imagination in order for it to be sustained, as already discussed in this dissertation. However, the concept(s) of home(s) that may be achieved in these cases are in some degree bounded to a physical geographical place. In the wider meaning of home, it could come up as a homeland, or an ancient territory, especially considering immigrants and exiled subjects; whereas in the private register of home it could come up imaginatively as the intimate place of one's house.

I would like to argue, though, that the very term geography may be linked to other “physicalities,” such as geographies of the mind. That is, geographies of mental spaces rather than of physical places. And these geographies could be paralleled to one’s *loci* of enunciation in the various discourses that everyday life encompasses. This way home in this axis, which would be Rosemary George’s third one to be considered in her work *The Politics of Home*, carries yet another set of varied meanings: according to one’s *loci* of enunciation home as an imagined location is shaped.

Home as this imagined location gives food for thought in the sense that it enables the analysis of feeling not at-home in geographical places which, by a simple binary thought native/foreign, should have been considered home. When, for instance, an African-American feels estrangement in the US territory, the binary form of analysis native/foreign is not enough to account for a not-at-home sensation. It becomes clear that other factors come into play as well: the instance of ethnicity, the perspective of race, etc. In other words, if not as a space of imagined location, guided by specific standpoints, how could one account for foreignness, the feeling of strangeness in one’s very “native” soil?

This axis of home makes it possible to contest the proposition that home is necessarily bound to an “away” place, in physical terms, as Sara Ahmed discusses in her essay entitled “Home and Away.” I suggest that home may be bound to away, meaning to the different, but also in ways other than physical. An African-American, for instance, may feel “away” even within US borders. He/she may feel more or less at home according to specific articulations that are processed according to specific discourses. The geographies, then, that would guide home as an imagined location are rather the geographies of the self, instead of being necessarily inscribed on any soil.

As already discussed, the concept(s) of home(s) rely(ies) on at least three axis, as proposed by Rosemary George: one's wider sphere, one's private sphere, and one's imagination. So equalizing home to territory is a rather too simplistic approach to it. Even within the borders of one's nation-state it is possible to feel strangeness. Moreover, as David Morley states, foreignness is not just a matter of physical boundaries. It "can sometimes be a matter of nationality, but in other cases also a matter of class, of gender, of race or ethnicity" (159). That is, other elements, besides territory-bound ones are present in the process of one's longing for home.

If on the one hand it is possible to feel estrangement while inside the boundaries of the native soil, one can think of a counter-situation, in which it would be possible to feel at home, despite being in a foreign land. One deals with various intersectionalities when imagining a space to be called home. Rosemary George states that "homes are not neutral spaces" (6). In other words, the imagining of home, the creation of this space, is not arbitrary, even though somewhat invented in the process of coming to existence. It depends on the very *locus* of enunciation of the subject, which will grant (or not) authority to him/her. And here I make a parallel between authority and difference. I argue that when one faces a discourse in which he/she is on the empowered side of a binary, difference as estrangement does not take place. On the other hand, when one faces a discourse in which he/she is on the disempowered side of the binary, difference comes to being. And the condition of being the other is the factor that triggers the not-at-home and "away" feeling. For example, a Dominican-American man can be on the powerful side of the binary, if confronted by a gender- biased context. However, he can be on the weak side if confronted to ethnicity in the native/foreign binary. Yet, this analysis is quite simplistic in the sense that these binaries do not occur in everyday life in isolation. People's

experiences may be traversed by many binaries at the same time. And these positionalities mark and shape their imagining of home.

If, as George asserts, homes are not neutral spaces (6), the feeling of being bound to a national discourse does not happen as a neutral phenomenon either. People have different concepts of home according to their politicized positions in specific situations. I say here politicized instead of political because I do not only refer to a position related to nation-state issues, such as parties. I am rather referring to one's standpoint in the various instances of life, such as when confronted by situations involving ethnicity and/or gender. As Avtar Brah states, it becomes necessary to take into account the various instances that shape the individual's experience, rather than separating every study into so specific binaries. One discourse, according to her, does not exist in isolation to others (185).

This is relevant when discussing home as an imagined location because other binaries, rather than only the native/foreign one, for instance, will guide its construction. Here I emphasize that I am addressing these bipolar constructions as objects of analysis themselves. By citing binaries I am also suggesting the critical approach to their formation and to their underlying discourses. In this case, for instance, I would suggest that traditional analysis of home not only fail its complexities by taking into account especially only one binary (native/foreign), or perhaps only one at a time, but also because it entails a rigidity between the very parts that are represented by them as if they had been always unbridgeable from the start. One has to be aware that the binary way of analysis itself is marked by created discourses, and not neutral ones. If the sign is arbitrary, I would say that discourse underlying the binaries is not.

Sara Ahmed makes the interesting proposition for the purpose of criticism that "home is associated with a being that rests, that is full and present to itself and that does not over-reach

itself through the desire for something other. To be at home is the absence of desire” (87).

However, “such a narration of home assumes the possibility of a space that is pure, which is uncontaminated by movement, desire or difference” (Ahmed 88), being somewhat impossible to achieve. It presupposes that inside physical geographical borders one would never feel estrangement. It also points out to the impossibility of traversing boundaries in order to guarantee the “sameness” within those boundaries.

However, especially in contemporary times, in which so much has been discussed about transnationalist movements that subverts a traditional and simplistic nationalistic approach to home, and when binary oppositions such as center-periphery (Appadurai 32) and home/not home are revised, a place to be called home becomes then something new, “hybrid,” and not necessarily limited by physical borders or by national boundaries. And because home is a desire, whether for immigrants, diasporic communities or *mestizos* (so many different subjects and experiences), it is not possible to conceive it as a pure concept, which would encompass all experiences. It is difficult, likewise, to imagine a complete lack of desire for it, even among non-immigrants, because of the traditional Christian discourse of humanity as somewhat exiled from the start. Under the light of this discourse, one is, since he/she is born, out of place, in a constant struggle to both try to make earthly experience more bearable to live in (homelike) and by trying to deserve the ultimate home, the eternal one.

Finally it is my assumption that home may be homes, politicized ones, performed by each subject in different ways. Furthermore, it is a construct. I suggest home as an ongoing process, contingent, rather than a fixed and stable product.

CHAPTER 2 - RACE, GENDER AND HOME

2.1 Politics of Location

Geography is linked deliberately to culture, language, the ability to hear and a variety of modes of articulation. It is where one speaks from and who is able to understand, to interpret that gives actuality to one's expression.

(Davies 20)

We all speak from somewhere, which is one's *locus* of enunciation, one's geography; and we all are marked one way or the other by the inscriptions we carry. One's geography is influenced by one's historical legacy and by one's perspectives. According to Stuart Hall "all discourse is 'placed,' and the heart has its reasons" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 392). Discourse, then, does not come without a point of departure neither is it deprived of emotion. Moreover, the articulations one has to make in order to express him/herself, having as points of departure these *loci* of enunciation, is what I refer to in my title "politics of location." First coined by Adrienne Rich in order to "deconstruct hegemonic uses of the word 'woman' within a context of US racism and elite or academic practices" (Kaplan, "The Politics of Location" 138), the term "politics of location" moved beyond Rich's conception, signaling the formation of diasporic identities (Kaplan, "The Politics of Location" 138). I use this term under the light of Avtar Brah, who uses it as "locationality in contradiction" (Brah 204), positionality of dispersal, position of multi-axial locationality, since it both signals situatedness and movement and border-crossing. She points out the fact that when discussing diaspora – and here I dare to expand her thought to other kinds of migrations as well – usually what comes to mind are the ideas of displacement and

dislocation rather than of location (204). However, as she asserts, it is the contradiction of and between location and dislocation that is a regular feature of diasporic positioning.

My object of study contemplates this diasporic struggle: the articulations one makes when attempting to locate oneself both in relation to one's point of departure (here I refer to *locus* of enunciation and not a physical space) and in relation to the conception of a *locus* (or of *loci*) to be called home. I propose a discussion of these politics of location, in which nationality, gender, race, and class clash, affecting one's standpoint, as a process diasporic subjects go through in order to conceive possible homes (which supposedly stand for places of belonging and of location). I have discussed in the previous chapter the articulations one goes through when conceiving home in relation to the private and public spheres. In this chapter I intend to include in this discussion two more instances: race and gender.

Concerning location, Adélia Prado's poem "Exhausted" illustrates the idea that one is not deprived of a locus of enunciation in life. And that it is an undeniable and unforgettable fact that one necessarily has to deal with one's own inscriptions and points of departure, as long as one is alive. The speaker, in this poem, claims to be exhausted, asking for "a license to sleep:"

Exhausted
 I want a license to sleep
 forgiveness to rest for hours to come
 without even dreaming
 the slightest straw
 of the smallest dream
 I want what before life
 was the deep sleep of the species

the grace of a state

seed

much more than roots.¹ (Prado 27, my translation)

When the speaker mentions that he/she wants to sleep, he/she is willing for a kind of oblivion. The speaker claims to be exhausted from life, longing for “the deep sleep of the species.” This deep sleep implies a detachment of oneself from all kinds of geographies, all kinds of life inscriptions. The speaker would rather be a seed, a state which would come before ever gaining some kind of root, some kind of mark. That is, the speaker longs for a point in which there is no “before,” with no legacy or experience that could disturb a hibernating state. In order to rest from her/his geography, he/she would like to sleep profoundly, in such a way to forget, or rest, or even be able to have a fresh start. And that is only possible by becoming a seed again, a state “before life”, because life creates roots, which is a metaphor for one’s historical backgrounds and experiences. And these roots inevitably lead to *loci* of enunciation, to positions. They prevent oblivion or neutral standpoints.

As Stuart Hall observes, “what we say is always ‘in context,’ *positioned*” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 392, author’s emphasis), so whatever reaction or perception one may have in relation to the environment is not destitute of a partial – rather than an impartial – standpoint. Stuart Hall claims that practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*” (“Cultural Identity” 392, author’s emphasis). Home, then, may be regarded as a number of different spaces, according to these perspectives.

Moreover, one’s *loci* of enunciation are not fixed. They depend on each moment of one’s life, varying, therefore. According to Stuart Hall,

¹ “Eu quero uma licença de dormir/ perdão pra descansar horas a fio/ sem ao menos sonhar/ a leve palha de um pequeno sonho/ Quero o que antes da vida/ foi o profundo sono das espécies,/ a graça de um estado./ Semente./ Muito mais que raízes” (Prado 27).

what recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. (“Cultural Identity” 392)

The position of enunciation is directly influenced by one’s present identifications, which are ongoing processes rather than fixed products. Identifications depend on the dialogues one may have with the past in relation to the present moment. Since both the perception towards the legacy of the past and one’s place in the present are not fixed and stable, the dialogues will always be in movement as well. Besides not being stable, identifications are never complete because, as I said previously, one’s standpoint is partial: partial both in the sense of not being neutral and in the sense of not reaching a state of wholeness. Achieving a state of completeness would imply the existence of an essence of the subject, with a fixed core. And, as Stuart Hall observes, identifications ‘far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past . . . are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (“Cultural Identity” 394). So, in this chapter I intend to discuss dialogues immigrants may have with two instances when conceiving home: race and gender. I intend to discuss these instances because, as Carole Boyce Davies claims,

the terms that we use to name ourselves (Black, African, African-American . . . Latina(o) . . . women of color, Afro-Caribbean, Third World and so on) carry their strings of echoes and inscriptions. Each represents . . . a constant striving of the dispossessed for full representation. Each therefore must be used provisionally; each must be subject to new analyses, new questions and new understandings if

we are to unlock some of the narrow terms of the discourses in which we are inscribed. (5)

So, in this chapter I intend to untangle a little this ever so complex historical weave of racial and gender relations, and how these relations interfere in one's conception of home(s).

2.2 Race

2.2.1 Race in Context

That race *should* be irrelevant is certainly an attractive ideal, but when it has *not* been irrelevant, it is absurd to proceed as if it had been.

(Mills 41)

Race is a controversial term. I acknowledge that it has been debated and problematized in such a way that there is a tendency to believe it should be dropped. However, it is my intent here to give a little explanation of my choice for still employing it in this master's thesis.

The term race has been vastly used in the context of biology, differently from the usage of the term "ethnicity," which denotes awareness, a sense of shared experiences (Cashmore 196). Nevertheless, as Teresa de Lauretis theorizes in the "technology of gender" (Lauretis 713), I would say that there is also a "technology of race." The discourse on race goes beyond biology: it is, foremost, a social construct, which has implications in everyday discourses. I appropriate Teresa de Lauretis's theorizations on gender, making a transposition to race in the following two aspects: race is also a representation, "which does not say that it does not have concrete or real implications, both social and subjective, for the material life of the individuals" (Lauretis 715);

and that the representation of race is its construction. The construction of race has served imperialist purposes, for instance. Peter Wade observes that “race thinking and colonialism are imbued with the same impetus to draw a binary distinction between – civilized and – primitive and the same necessity for the hierarchization of human types” (198). Race thinking emphasizes a convenient binary construction that comes to legitimate colonization.

In the twentieth century yet another form of social construction concerning race is employed: the belief in the superiority of certain races. This belief comes to justify the extermination of determined groups in the name of racial “cleansing,” having as a classical example the Nazi policy in the 1930s, in which the “Arian” race is exalted. These social constructions seem to shift from time to time, but still persist to legitimate segregation in one way or the other.

In the context of the United States, race is very much conceived in a binary system white/black, being “the White race . . . defined by the absence of any non-White blood, and, the Black race . . . defined by the presence of any Black blood” (Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman 523). There is no in-between term because what mostly defines race in the United States is the legacy of the “One Drop Rule,” which states that “a single drop of ‘black blood’ makes a person black” (Davis 5), no matter one’s phenotype. This dichotomous way of perceiving race in the United States, then, differently from what may happen in other places, illustrates Avtar Brah’s claim that “the binary is a socially constructed category whose trajectory warrants investigation in how it was constituted, regulated, embodied and contested, rather than taken as an always present” (184). In the case of the binary racial system in the United States one may say that, besides the “One Drop Rule,” it has been embodied also because of the Jim Crow Laws, which legitimated segregation between 1877 and the mid-1960s and which “operated primarily, but not exclusively

in southern and border states” (Pilgrim 1). By means of these laws the separation between so-called whites and blacks became highlighted and even legally legitimated. According to Wendy Gaudin, this social system “made virtually impossible the ability to assume an identity that did not comply with the binary racial system that white southerners established and defended” (1).

However, as Gaudin observes,

in writing the laws that protected white status and in dividing the public sphere into "colored" and "white" spaces, white legislators and citizens overlooked the large body of persons of mixed race, who presented many challenges to southern ideologues. (1)

These persons of mixed race could, then, perform a phenomenon known as “passing,” which is “the black experience . . . passing as white” (Davis 14). A person who is one-eighth black, for example, could try to “pass as white” because phenotypically he/she may be regarded as white in the public sphere. This way he/she would not “assume” his/her blackness, accordingly to the US racial discourse. Interestingly enough, “passing as black” is not debated. Couldn’t a person with one-eighth of white blood be considered as “passing as black,” using the same logic? Therefore, there is an underlying discourse of power relations within the binary white/black in such a way that the phenomenon of passing as black is not even considered. Another evidence of this discourse is in the very “technical” name of the “One Drop Rule,” which is the “hypo-descent rule,” meaning that “racially mixed persons are assigned the status of the *subordinate* group” (M. Harris 56, emphasis mine). Needless to say, in this case, the “subordinate” group refers to black.

This cultural conception of race is not the same in all places, though. In Latin America, for instance, “race may have blood lines as a referent, but there [are] also other dimensions brought up into ‘racial classification:’ for example, class, physical type, and ethnic background”

(Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman 524). Therefore, people that are considered black in the United States may be considered white in Latin America because in the latter it seems that a more “socio-economic conception of race has been the norm” (Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman 526). As a consequence, not only genotypic definitions are taken into consideration when defining race.

The various different approaches to race have led Clara Rodriguez and Hector Cordero-Guzman, therefore, to the conclusion that race must be placed in context in order to be studied and/or understood. In their work “Placing Race in Context” they even add that “the US conception of race with its emphasis on genetic or biological inheritance privileges a static conception of race” (526), in the sense that one is and always will be the race in which one was born, and also meaning that this conception “disallows or ignores more contextual definitions” (526). The emphasis on a binary racial system white/black in the United States completely ignores or disallows, in the authors’ terms, any kind of contextual variation, opposing what happens in Latin America, in which there is a plethora of terms used to describe races, rather than a plain white/black classification. This does not mean that race is not a social construct in Latin America.

Even though Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman observe that Latin American countries seem to have a more fluid view of race (526), still a social construction with social implications exists. James F. Davis asserts, for instance, that in Latin America “the color designation applied to a family or person depends more on the place on the class ladder than on racial traits” (99). So, even though not relying in a binary and biological construction of race, racial classification is still biased, with social implications as well.

Bearing in mind that race should be placed in context, and focusing on the realm of fiction of *Geographies of Home*, what happens when these characters leave one racial context

and get immersed in another one? How may racialization happen to them, once they come from a different cultural background, when in the context of the United States? In the novel some characters go through a complex process of self-assessment concerning race, which will be addressed in the following chapter of this thesis. Marina, for instance, does not accept her African heritage. This may be so because in the Dominican Republic a very particular situation takes place: the Haitians are the ones to be considered black, even though “blacks and mulattoes make up nearly 90% of the contemporary Dominican population” (Torres-Saillant, “The Tribulations of Blackness” 1086). That is because of historical reasons:

in founding their nation, Dominicans had to separate from the political jurisdiction of Haiti, then the only black republic in the Americas. The various military attempts of Haitian leaders between 1844 and 1855 to bring Dominicans back under Haitian rule gave rise to a nation-building ideology that included an element of self-differentiation with respect to Haitians. (Torres-Saillant, “The Tribulations of Blackness” 1092)

This self-differentiation, then, was accomplished in terms of race: Haitians are black, not Dominicans. The *antihaitianismo* campaign was not restricted to the 19th century in the Dominican Republic. It actually “reached its peak during the Trujillo regime – and found its most horrifying expression in the expulsion and massacre of Haitians in 1937 – but it did not end with the death of Trujillo in 1961. It continued . . . and is still present nowadays” (Itzigohn and Dore-Cabral 323). That is why the view that Dominicans have of race, which many times differs from the racialization they go through in the United States, influences their perception of belonging within this country’s borders.

Dominicans, as well as many immigrants of Latin American origin previously regarded as white in their native land, see themselves racialized as blacks when entering United Statesian society, having to fit into a binary racial category under the “light” of the One Drop Rule. This causes confusion and a sense of displacement, because they “have to find a position within the parameters of the dominant racial symbolic system – a symbolic system that is alien to them and assigns them negative characteristics” (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 321). Foreignness for them is triggered not only by physical location, but also by a sense of loss in terms of self-identification, and, foremost, of self-appraisal.

These conflicts, then, trigger the use of particular labels in order to protect oneself, as discussed in the introduction of this master’s thesis. So, at one time, an immigrant might prefer referring to him or herself in national terms, as Dominican-American, and yet at other times prefer to be seen as “Latino,” etc. Suzanne Oboler observes that many times immigrants will choose one term or another, “according to social and political alternatives available in each specific context and situation” (103). In *Geographies of Home* Marina struggles with this self-identification, since she does not want to acknowledge herself as black, even though she is aware that she is seen as black in the host country’s society.

What happens, then, when the subject is “transnationalized,” such as the experience of immigrants of Latin American origin in the United States? What discourse prevails? Suárez-Orozco and Páez observe, for instance, that

Latinos, by the sheer force of their numbers, finally break the black-white binary mold . . . In the process they are redefining double consciousness, interacting with the institutions of the mainstream culture . . . and acting transnationally by

maintaining linguistic, social, economic, political and cultural links with their relatives and other compatriots in Latin America and the Caribbean.² (21)

The binary racial discourse, then, is revised and questioned, because of its discrepancy in relation to the ones lived by these immigrants in their original countries. Transnationalism subverts national racial ideologies both in terms of who is black or white and in terms of questioning a binary classification. This subversion does not express itself uniquely by the passing as white phenomenon, but in terms of questioning the very options one has when trying to define oneself in racial terms. In the United States there are only two options: either white or black. Juan Flores, for instance, revisits DuBois' notion of double consciousness, suggesting a "triple consciousness" for the case of "Afro-Latinos,"³ since the former term emphasizes the white/black binary relationship, whereas the latter questions it (qtd. in Sandín 103). Flores implies that Afro-Latinos face a different predicament from the so-called African-Americans⁴, once the former deal with an extra instance, which is to be of Latin American origin (or descent). Many times they do not feel as belonging to neither white nor black classifications. In *Geographies of Home* Iliana illustrates the struggle of this triple consciousness, since she feels rejected by both white and black America. She struggles not between "two souls, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body" (DuBois 7), but rather between three unreconciled strivings.

² I am aware that Suárez-Orozco and Páez use the terms "Latino" as a synonym to "immigrants of Latin American origin". Here I reproduce their use, since it is a quotation. However I emphasize my choice of and claim for a more politicized use of the term "Latino."

³ This term is used in reference to immigrants of Latin American origin, who are marked by the African Diaspora, such as from the Caribbean. The term Latino in this hyphenated term does not necessarily refer to a politicized standpoint. It is used for practical reasons; for the sake of a more concise terminology.

⁴ I am aware that both "African" and "American" in this term are misnomers. The first term tends to be nativistic—"an attempt to create a monolithic construction out of a diverse continent of peoples, cultures, nations and experiences" (Davies 9), whereas the second follows the US "imperialistic identity" (Davies 9). I use the term, however, for practical means. Moreover, I have chosen to use the term "American" whenever I cite hyphenated peoples, such as Dominican-American, as I have stated previously in the introduction of this work.

Finally, my object of study encompasses the story of a Dominican-American family in the context of the United States. And this family is part of a greater context that involves race, which is the African Diaspora. Positioning towards race has, therefore, a great influence in the characters' conception of home(s) in *Geographies of Home*.

2.2.2. Race and Home

The racial system in the United States influences immigrants' conception of home(s). If on one hand immigrants may feel away from home in the sense of a national space, on the other hand race may also make them feel foreign even in relation to their perception of themselves, because sometimes a shocking contrast with a previous racial "status" in their homelands. So, in order to regain a feeling of connectedness, many immigrants try to find, then, sources of identification which may have as a reference a national space, but which may also be based on a transnational connections.

The African Diaspora refers to the dissemination of African descendants throughout the Americas because of the Caribbean's strategic geographical position in the slave trade, which began as early as the fifteenth century (Torres-Saillant, "Tribulations of Blackness" 1086). The Caribbean, specifically the island of Hispaniola, which is divided into the territories of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, served as a port of entry for the first African slaves. And, by means of the Atlantic Ocean, these African slaves crossed national boundaries, creating a contact zone between Europe, Africa and the Americas.

In the context of the transatlantic slave trade, the Atlantic Ocean becomes, then, a metaphor for a hyphenated space between Europe, Africa and the Americas. And the slave ship becomes a "living micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" (Gilroy 4) within this

hyphenated space. The “rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation” enabled by means of the slave trade is what Paul Gilroy calls “the Black Atlantic” (4).

The experience of the Black Atlantic enables transcendence from the structures of a nation-state and of national particularities (Gilroy 19) because the involved subjects continuously traverse national borders in the “micro-cultural system” of the slave ship. As a consequence, the Black Atlantic fosters W.E.B. DuBois’s notion of “double-consciousness.” And even though this term was coined to refer, primarily, to the African-Americans, who would have “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (DuBois 7), as stated earlier in this chapter, I take advantage here of Paul Gilroy’s assumption that “the Black Atlantic politics of location frames the door of double consciousness” (19). Double consciousness, therefore, is not restricted to the experience of the African-Americans. Considering the African slaves in the hyphenated space of the Atlantic, double consciousness was already present. And it persists nowadays, as double and as a triple consciousness (as suggested by Juan Flores), with the legacy of the Black Diaspora⁵.

And the Black Diaspora brings to mind the idea of transnational connections. Whereas Benedict Anderson discusses the idea of national connections with his notion of the imagined community, Arjun Appadurai discusses the idea of transnational connections by means of his term “imagined worlds.” Black Dominican immigrants in the United States, for example, as participants of the African Diaspora, will also be influenced by its transnational feature. They might feel, then, belonging to both his/her Dominican counterparts, establishing a national connection; and to African-Americans, establishing a transnational connection.

What binds these diasporic subjects, specifically concerning the Caribbeans, is perhaps the hyphenated feature that the African Diaspora grants them (rather than a desire to return to an essentialized and frozen territory in space and time). If on the one hand Stuart Hall observes that

⁵ In my present work “Black Diaspora” is used interchangeably with “African Diaspora.”

in one way or the other, they must face the African presence (triggering somehow a decentered, lateral connection), on the other hand he points to the danger of a nativist discourse when addressing the African Diaspora. He observes that “the original ‘Africa’ is no longer there. It has too been transformed. History is, in that sense, irreversible . . . To this ‘Africa,’ which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can’t literally go home again” (“Cultural Identity” 397). Hall actually argues that “the diaspora experience . . . is defined not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity” (“Cultural Identity” 402). Therefore, what binds the African Diaspora subjects is not a longing for an essence, but rather an awareness of hybridism, initiated in the very slave trade. Homi Bhabha states that hybridism implicates “rearticulation, translation of elements that are *neither the One . . . nor the Other . . .* but *something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both” (“The Location of Culture” 28, author’s emphasis). The past-present, this in-between space, according to Bhabha, becomes part of the necessity, and not the nostalgia of living (“The Location of Culture” 7). It exists despite, and not because of any conscious desire.

Therefore, this experience of being marked by translation, a hybrid discursive space, neither the one, nor the other, is what connects these diasporic subjects. Under the light of Salman Rushdie, they are “translated peoples,” marked by the bearing across of a culture into another (17). And having in mind that Africa does not have an essence nor does any other place, it would be even more accurate to say that African diasporic subjects are marked by the bearing across of cultures into other cultures, preventing, therefore, essentializations of any kind.

Paul Gilroy compares the Black Atlantic to a rhizomorphic structure (4). And, according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the

middle, between things, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance” (385). Under that perspective, the experience of African diasporic subjects is rhizomorphic as well: there would be no longing for filiation in the sense of trying to re-root oneself to a specific soil, but rather alliances would be formed among these “in-between” subjects. Stuart Hall observes, for instance, that the term “Africa” is a modern construction, referring to “a variety of peoples, tribes, cultures and languages, in which commonness was granted by the slave trade” (*Da Diáspora* 31, my translation)⁶. That is, any attempt to frame Africa in such a way to claim a longing for an essentialized native soil would be a fallacy.

Home, in the case of these diasporic subjects, then, is filled with ambivalences and tensions. Ambivalence because, as discussed in chapter one, diasporic subjects tend to reject and feel attracted to their host countries, and tensions because there is a struggle of identification within these foreign and yet somewhat homely spaces. Concerning diaspora communities, such as the African one, James Clifford argues that whatever their eschatological longings, diaspora communities are ‘not-here’ to stay. Diaspora cultures mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of “separation and entanglement” (Clifford 311), desiring some place else other than the host country, but at the same time having practices of accommodation with this host country and its norms. And that is because diaspora, according to James Clifford, is not temporary – diasporic subjects are in the host country to stay, different from the perspective of travelers – so diasporic subjects would learn to have collective homes away from home. A shared sense of nativity (even if somewhat imagined), then, would foster the maintenance of communities as a strategy to cope, to define the local. And home becomes, then, “the lived experience of the locality” (Brah 192).

⁶ “a uma variedade de povos, tribos, culturas e línguas cujo principal ponto de origem comum situava-se no tráfico de escravos” (Hall, *Da Diáspora* 31).

Avtar Brah observes that the term native has been resignified throughout time. She analyses specifically the case of Britain and says that “during imperial conquests the word ‘native’ came to be associated with pejorative connotations. . . with the effect that the word Native became a code for subordination . . . the Native became the Other . . . [They] were excluded from Britishness by being subjected as natives” (190-1). So, the nativist discourse at that point inferiorised the native. A classic literary example of the native as inferior is William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, in which Caliban embodies the native concept: the one who is vilified and dehumanized. He must be submitted to the colonizer in order to be.

However, this connotation of being native has been resignified and Avtar Brah claims that in Britain the shift in its connotation is closely related to racialized conceptions of Britishness, by which former colonial natives become inferiorised. She claims that “the term ‘native’ is now turned on its head. Whereas in the colonies the ‘colonial Native’ was inferiorised, in Britain the ‘metropolitan Native’ is constructed as superior” (Brah 191). There is a kind of nativist discourse in both senses, only that on the one hand being native is negative and on the other it is positive. Even though Avtar Brah analyses the British case, her theoretical approach may be employed to discuss other experiences.

In what ways does the idea of “native” work for diasporic subjects? Does the diasporic subject occupy an inferior or superior status in the binary native/non-native? It is oftentimes difficult to draw the lines of this binary considering the African diaspora, for instance. African-Americans, for example, are natives in the United States in the sense of having been born within its borders. However they are otherized and considered non-native when an African nativistic discourse prevails. That is because, according to Clifford, for African diasporic subjects there is no transition to ethnic American status after the canonical three generations – “they are kept in

subordinate positions by established structures of racial exclusion” (311). However, diaspora consciousness, as Clifford points out, is constituted both negatively and positively. Whereas it may be considered negative due to experiences of discrimination and exclusion, it may also be considered positive through identification with “world historical cultural/political forces, such as of ‘Africa’” (312). So a simplistic binary native/foreign; insider/outsider is destabilized by diaspora. Diasporic discourse enables negotiation, a continuous articulation among “antagonistic or contradictory elements”, under the light of Homi Bhabha (“Commitment to Theory” 2385). Sérgio Costa adds that “transnational contexts of action”⁷ (126, my translation) such as the Black Atlantic, create tension among the local, national and transnational dimensions.

Consequently, home will also be resignified:

the question of home, therefore, is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of “belonging.” (Brah 192)

And that is why it is necessary to have a critical approach towards the construction of the binaries themselves to avoid reaching simplistic conclusions relative to diasporic subjects.

As Sérgio Costa claims, it is not a matter of finding out whether there is or not truth in the discourses, but rather of discussing the context in which these discourses are produced (86). So, bearing in mind that racial positionalities may be influenced both by national or transnational discourses, it is not the concern to find out which context would be more trustworthy or which one would be the closest to a “truth.” It is rather a matter of noticing that in each context there is a specific kind of social regulation, which will shape one’s positionality in a different way.

⁷ “contextos de ação transnacionais” (Costa, 126).

Analyzing only one single binary, such as native/foreign, it is not possible to grasp one's *locus* of enunciation at a specific time and site. What matters mostly, as Brah states,

is how and why, in a given context, a specific binary – e.g. black/white- takes shape, acquires a seeming coherence and stability, and configures with other constructions, such as . . . male/female. *In other words, how these signifiers slide into one another in the articulation of power.* (185, author's emphasis)

In order to analyze how the signifiers slide into one another and having already discussed the issue of race, I intend now to include yet another instance that will aid my analysis of the concept of home in the realm of fiction of *Geographies of Home: gender*.

2.3 Gender

2.3.1 Gender and Binaries

Where is she?

Activity/passivity

Sun/moon

Culture/nature

Day/night

Father/mother

Head/heart

Intelligible/palpable

Logos/pathos

...

Man
 Woman
 (Cixous 63)

Hélène Cixous in her work “Sorties” lines up several binary oppositions, such as activity/passivity and day/night. She observes that human thought is driven by oppositions and that these are dual, hierarchical ones (Cixous 64). That is, there is no egalitarian status between the parts of the binaries. And she suggests that all of these pairs of oppositions are related to the couple man/woman (64). She asks: “Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought – all concepts, codes and value – to a binary system, related to ‘the’ couple, man/woman?” (64). Hélène Cixous argues that binaries have an underlying value system, which is dictated by patriarchal ideas of men and women’s roles. Toril Moi adds that “it does not much matter which ‘couple’ one chooses to highlight: the hidden male/female opposition with its positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm” (211). According to Moi, not only can each opposition be analyzed as a hierarchy, but also within the hierarchy the “feminine” side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance, once it is immersed in a patriarchal value system (211).

Before I advance the discussion, it is relevant to point out that Toril Moi makes a distinction between the terms female and feminine, opposing male and masculine, respectively. She uses the terms “male/female” in order to emphasize the patriarchal discourse in which characteristics are considered a “natural given,” as if they were biologically determined. She does explain in her work conceptual differences when approaching gender from the perspective of the pairs male/female or by masculine/feminine: the latter explicits a social construction underlying the binary, opposing the former. Adding to that, I acknowledge that the very so-called “sex” is also claimed to be a construction, as advocated by Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler. So the

very concepts that underlie the binaries masculine/feminine and man/woman have been also problematized.

Gayle Rubin states, for instance, that “every society has a sex-gender system – a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention” (538). According to this author, even though the sex-gender system is a neutral term, in the sense that oppression is not an inevitable characteristic, this system “is the product of specific social relations which organize it” (539). Therefore, according to social relations, the sex-gender system can indeed imply oppression. Finally, according to her, what characterizes sex as we know it – a gender identity – is a social construct and not a biological given, since “sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained” (538). That is, the construct that is labeled as sex is built upon existing biological differences, but “as the basis of institutionalizing unequal treatment of the sexes” (Brah 157). So what is labeled as sex by patriarchal society is a cultural construct, such as gender.

Judith Butler, supporting the assumption of gender as a construct, claims that it is rather performative – echoing J.L Austin’s theory of the performative utterances (1432):

in other words, acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance . . . Such acts, gestures, enactments . . . are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.

(Butler 2497, author’s emphasis)

Butler argues that gender is performative because there is no preexisting identity by which it can be measured: “it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (2497); and because gender is created by repetition of acts, which have been tenuously

constituted in time, in such a way as to give the illusion of a gendered self (Butler 2500-1). So, according to her, what is traditionally regarded as an internal essence of gender is created via discourse, and in this case in order to maintain patriarchal order, specifically regarding the “obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (2597) that it dictates.

Judith Butler argues that it is the repetition of the gender performances that legitimates gender meaning (2500). Still according to her,

the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (Butler 2501)

There are ways by which gender performances may subvert the established gender binary, such as the case of drags, for instance. They mock the gender system and the “fiction of heterosexual coherence” (Butler 2498), since they create a distance, a postponement of the anatomy of the performer from the very gender that is being performed: “*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*” (Butler 2498, author’s emphasis). By imitating gender, drags subvert the body inscriptions that are socially put upon them, defying patriarchal codes. Consequently, the very binary man/woman is subverted.

A fine example in literature of subversion of the binary man/woman and of its social conventions is Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*. This work, even if in a playful intention of the author, as stated by Pawlowski (v), illustrates a questioning of the very fixity that is implied when approaching gender and gender roles. *Orlando* conveys a critique of gendered “identities” as having a fixed and metaphysical core because it portrays a main character that is fluid, and who

trespasses the borders of the dichotomous classification man/woman. Orlando may be regarded to act somewhat accordingly to the expected for the sex he/she currently performs – for he/she is inevitably part of a discourse which predates his/her performance of sex, whatever it is. However, if looked at in a closer reading, throughout the narrative one can find attributes of femininity in his man version and vice-versa. Finally, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* subverts the epistemic logic of patriarchal discourse, since Orlando crosses the borders of the binary man/woman, implying a fluid rather than a fixed identification of gender. In *Geographies of Home* Iliana is the character who mostly questions the fixity that is implied in the binary man/woman. The way she is characterized poses a challenge to the traditional social construction of the sex-gender system, even though agency is not exactly a term I would apply to her. She does not seem to be conscious of performativity, in Butler's terms, despite the fact that towards the dénouement of the novel she does act in a very much assertive way when deciding to leave her parent's house. She is then finally able to stand for her grounds in relation to her father, to some extent. I will analyze Iliana in chapter three of this thesis.

By establishing the construction of gender under a binary thought, there is a convenient fixation of the parts in such a way that patriarchal order is maintained. And if there is a fixation of the parts, these are also essentialized. Any kind of deviance from the norm is considered unnatural, impure or even dangerous. Judith Butler comments, for instance, that homosexuality is conveyed as both “uncivilized and unnatural” (2494). That is, it is reproached for defying the patriarchal value system.

Bearing in mind that binaries are submitted to a patriarchal value system, it does not come as a surprise to see that “organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man” (64), as claimed by Hélène Cixous. Victory is equated with activity and defeat

with passivity, and since men are the victors, women are either equated to passivity or even led to death because Hélène Cixous observes “that either woman is passive or she does not exist”(64). Her assumption recalls Gayatri Spivak’s question: “can the subaltern speak?” (2204). According to Spivak, they cannot. And Cixous’s claims seem to support this view.

Cixous cites fairy tales in order to convey her theory on representations of women, according to her traditionally portrayed as passive and apparently destitute of voice. In these stories women are depicted, for instance, as “beautiful, but passive; hence desirable,” (66) such as the Sleeping Beauty, who *waits* to be awakened by her prince. Cixous states how interesting it is that the story ends as soon as the beauty is woken-up. She says:

the secret of her beauty, kept for him: she has the perfection of something finished.

Or not begun. However, she is breathing. Just enough life – and not too much.

Then he will kiss her. So that when she opens her eyes she will see only *him*; him in place of everything, all-him.

– This dream is so satisfying! Whose is it? What desire gets something out of it?

He leans over her... Cut. The tale is finished. Curtain. Once awake (him over her), it would be an entirely different story. Then there would be two people, perhaps.

You never know with women. (66, author’s emphasis)

Cixous implies here that in the binary one part is objectified in relation to the other. If the Sleeping Beauty were awake, then, perhaps there would be two people, two agents. And that is why the tale conveniently ends as she wakes-up. Sleeping Beauty, Snow White and Cinderella are all passive, waiting for the prince to in one way or the other save them. They are found, rescued, saved. Perhaps after being rescued, a wedding scene is shown afterwards, as a *grand*

finale for the consolidation and triumph of patriarchal gender roles. After all, procreation is a part of women's role, if not the part.

The passivity that is granted to woman in the binary man/woman can be found in multiple binaries, having in mind Cixous' argument that perhaps all binaries reflect "the" couple man/woman. I suggest taking a critical look upon two binaries: the colonizer/colonized one and the light/dark one. Considering the colonizer/colonized on the one hand, the colonizer conquers, explores the colonized. The colonizer stands for the active, the manly part, whereas the colonized stands for the passive, the womanly part. Interestingly, conquered lands are usually given feminine names, since they represent the explored, the penetrated territory. bell hooks states that indeed

sexuality has always provided gendered metaphors for colonization. Free countries equated with free men, domination with castration, the loss of manhood, and rape – the terrorist act re-enacting the drama of conquest, as men of the dominating group sexually violate the bodies of women who are among the dominated. (57)

The colonizers, then, are legitimated to do with the body of the colonized whatever they please. Even rape is legitimated.

Bodies are seen in patriarchal societies, under the light of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, as bounded systems, naturally permeable only to man (2493). So the permeability of the feminine or feminized body is legitimated by patriarchy. Bearing in mind that the colonized body may be an encompassing metaphor both for land and women, men then are allowed (and even expected) to permeate the body of land, as conquerors, and the body of women, as dominators. Rape, according to bell hooks, is also a gesture of symbolic castration (57), besides being one of

domination. It is a symbolic castration when the body of land is conquered and the colonized men are made impotent by the spectacle of “their” women being possessed by the dominators. The winner, the colonizer assumes the masculine, the active feature, whereas the colonized becomes feminized. Thus, rape is made legitimate towards both who carries the anatomical features of women, whose bodies are dominated; and towards who is metaphorically being castrated – as consequence of the domination of the body of land.

On the other hand, considering the light/dark binary, the light is the knowledge, the ability to think, linked to activity and manhood (light/man/active) whereas the dark is the unknown, the savage, the one asking to be civilized (dark/woman/passive). In literature both of these binaries (colonizer/colonized and light/dark) are illustrated, blended one into the other, in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: the land is dark, passive, the territory to be colonized, explored and penetrated by the knowledgeable, enlightened and active colonizer. So on one side of the binary there is the active/light/man, and on the other side the passive/dark/woman. Ross Murfin claims that *Heart of Darkness* reveals the collusion of imperialism and patriarchy because Marlow’s narrative aims to colonize both savage darkness of the land (which I have discussed as having a patriarchal tone already), and women, such as the silent savage woman (180). Therefore, once again the binary activity/passivity comes with the patriarchal underlying: women are passive, voiceless, in opposition to men, who are active and voiced. That is, one part of the binary is objectified and silenced in relation to the other.

Hélène Cixous argues that a battlefield takes place in the binaries, in such a way that there is victory and defeat. The defeat is marked either by silencing, passivity or by death (64). And “in such thinking, difference is defined in oppositional terms. Patricia Hill Collins claims that one part is not simply different from its counterpart; it is inherently opposed to its ‘other’”

(*Black Feminist Thought* 70). So, besides the danger of essentialism and fixity, binaries come as a marker of oppositional difference. And, according to Collins, “objectification is central to this process of oppositional difference. In binary thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled” (*Black Feminist Thought* 70). Furthermore, if in a binary one part is objectified, silenced, made passive, then there is no dialogue. In order for dialogue to exist, two voices are required.

How are women to voice their experiences if they are not granted a voice within the official code for understanding difference, which are binaries? And what happens when a woman is within multiple binaries that come to put her in the subaltern spot, such as a black, immigrant woman? This subject is thrice destitute of power: black, in the binary white/black; immigrant in the binary native/foreigner; and woman in the binary man/woman. What can home(s) be for this woman?

I will address these questionings when I dissect the experiences of four women characters in *Geographies of Home*. My analysis will not summarize experience in general, for I am aware of essentialism when doing so. Neither will it be a reflection of society itself. The representation of these women in the narrative will rather promote reflection and discussion within the realm of fiction, since these four characters have complex experiences, such as being embedded within binaries, and for their subverting these same binaries in many points of the narrative.

These women are marked by foreignness, since they are immigrants in the United States; by race, since they are part of the African Diaspora; and, needless to say, by gender, since they are women within a patriarchal society. It is interesting to notice that they depart from a country that is still living the aftermath of Trujillo’s dictatorship, in which an authoritarian patriarchal society was held in its extremes, to a so-called democratic society, but still under patriarchal

values. I will approach these women's experiences in such a way to see how living in one society has influenced (or not) their experiences in the other. Besides that, the many contexts in which these women shape their experiences will also be approached in a way to observe whether or not these women perform resistance and/or complicity towards the patriarchal system they are immersed in. Ultimately it is my goal to analyze, under these so many perspectives, what can be seen as home(s) for each one of them.

2.3.2 Gender and Home

At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations.

(hooks 148)

In chapter one, when discussing home as a private sphere, I have pointed out Gaston Bachelard's arguments of it being a dream-like place, imbued by an essence of security and warmth. Home to Bachelard is synonymous with the physical space of the house, as long as it is inhabited (5). Moreover, he assigns to this space a gendered connotation, since he states that "life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house" (7). The house is, therefore, compared to the womb, in which its inhabitants are nurtured and taken care of. He also assigns motherly features to the idea of home, such as protection and nurturing, in such a way that the homely space is paralleled, then, to the "feminine." As a consequence, Bachelard implies fixity both of women's roles within patriarchal society and of home: the latter stands for

protection, safety, welcoming, such as the former represents the same features towards their children.

I have discussed earlier in this chapter the contingency within the sex-gender system, despite the patriarchal rhetoric of its fixity. When it comes to the concept of home, the fixity and the assumption of it as a safe household is also challenged. The traditional idea of the household as a sanctuary for its members, in which all have equal and respected rights, seems to be rather problematic. Patricia Hill Collins asserts, for instance, that “surrounded by individuals who seemingly share similar objectives, these homes represent idealized, privatized spaces where members can feel at ease” (“It’s all in the Family” 161). That happens because, first of all, this idealized view requires a gendered idea about the public and private spaces.

The public space would be the “masculine” domain whereas the private one the “feminine.” And since home in this view is regarded primarily as the household, one’s first community, this specific space is directly linked to what is regarded as “feminine” by patriarchal rhetoric. That way, the domestic space would grant to its inhabitants nurturing, protection, and safety; such as a woman is expected to do towards her family. It is important to mention that the feminized space of home does not mean that women rule it, but only that they belong to it. Women are as flowers within the garden of home (Ruskin). Home is equated to the domestic space and women within it are naturally beautiful (patriarchal rhetoric of biological determinacy of gender), and conveniently fixed within the walls of this garden. In the metaphor one can imply that the gardener, the one who trims and controls, is the man.

Returning now to the binary active/passive, home would be the passive, fixed space in contrast to the male domain of the public sphere, which would be active and mobile. This patriarchal feature of gendering space is questionable: first of all the idea of home as fixed is

already problematic, as discussed in chapter one of the present work. An interesting definition of home that sheds light into this discussion may be found in *New Keywords: a Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Its entry of home says that it is

a place of belonging, involving a sense of family, intimacy or affinity among those who live close to each other, surrounded by movement . . . Defined increasingly in terms of the nuclear family of cohabiting adults and their children, the home acquired marked gendered characteristics as a private, largely feminized domestic sphere separated off from the male-dominated worlds of work and public life. [However], the relations between home, rest, settlement, belonging, and movement have had fatal consequences for peoples whose practices of home are not spatially centered in this way. . . The relations between home – whether understood as place of domicile, hometown, or home country – rest, settlement, belonging, and movement are also being revised in light of new ways of living associated with increased labor mobility and migration. (“Home” 162-4)

The relations between home and fixity are, therefore, problematized due to contemporary phenomena, such as migration, which has already been discussed in chapter one: home is not necessarily synonymous to the household or to one’s country of origin. Moreover, considering diasporic subjects, because of the ambivalence they may feel towards their host country (desiring at the same time as resisting to it) it is even said that they carry their homes with themselves, rather than having one single place that would stand for it. According to Avtar Brah, there is actually a “multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary” (197). This way, homes are not synonymous to a fixed or stable location.

Caren Kaplan proposes a re-writing of home by stating that the notion of settlement, both as the territorialized space of the homecountry and as the private sphere assigned to women, is itself a fictional terrain, since there is a “reterritorialization that has passed through several versions of deterritorialization to posit a powerful theory of location based on contingency, history and change” (“Deterritorializations” 197). So location, meaning one’s *locus* of enunciation, according to her, is not fixed or fixable by any discourse. The settlement that is implied when gendering spaces, then, does not go unquestioned. Michelle Cliff (a Jamaican-American part of the African Diaspora) seems to support this view by means of her revisiting the garden metaphor. According to her, the garden is

Not a walled place – in fact, open on all sides.

Not secret – but private.

A private open space. (52)

Cliff suggests a resignification of the concept of private, of this garden where women would be confined. In her view women may even see themselves in the private, but this private is not synonymous to secret or to being enclosed. It is rather an open, reterritorialized space.

The reterritorialization fostered by women leads us to the second reason why gendering space is questionable: by doing so, women have their individualities erased, being all generalized into a single and essentialized category, as if all women shared the same characteristics and experiences. Moreover, if one bears in mind patriarchal discourse of women belonging to the private sphere, how can one account for their crescent participation in diasporic migrations? Gayatri Spivak calls the contemporary migrant phenomenon the “new diaspora,” since it opposes to the old one. Instead of being the result of religious oppression, war or imperialist politics, it would rather have a new element, which is the differentiating role of women (“Diasporas Old

and New” 245). In *Geographies of Home* the “new diaspora” is illustrated especially by the character Rebecca, who immigrates in order to work, save money and provide tickets, as well as green cards, to her parents and siblings.

One consequence of gendering space is the perverse legitimating of violence against women in both private and public spheres: if violence happens inside the household it is no-one else’s concern (the man is the lord and no one is to interfere in private matters); and if outside of it, it is because women deserved it, after all, they belong to the domestic sphere. Concerning the household, it would function as a microcosm that parallels the macro, patriarchal and hierarchical society. Thus, this microcosm would create all conditions of hierarchy required to perform and to naturalize the parameters that are present in the macrocosm of society itself.

Individuals typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class in their families of origin. At the same time, they learn to view such hierarchies as natural social arrangements, as compared to socially constructed ones. Hierarchy in this sense becomes ‘naturalized’ because it is associated with seemingly ‘natural’ processes of the family. (Collins, “It’s all in the Family” 158)

The ideal family rhetoric is heterosexist and has a male headship. It privileges and naturalizes man as the authority. It also grants invisibility to whatever “condition” that may defy the patriarchal norm, such as gay, lesbian, etc. Moreover, this discourse emphasizes hierarchies between man and woman, setting specific spaces and roles: there is a differential treatment of boys and girls from the very moment they are born (colors to be used, toys to play with, allowance or not to cry), shaping and naturalizing what is expected to be their roles in society.

Even in relation to access to the public space, according to Collins, there is a regulation

already within the family (“It’s all in the Family” 160). Boys traditionally have more free access to the public sphere than girls do. The latter seems to have tighter schedules due to a “protective” role of the family. After all, the public sphere is a “masculine” domain. This protection comes as a paradox to the very notion of the household as being a safe place for women. If the public space is dangerous, the private one, in the patriarchal rhetoric, then should not be. However, as pointed out previously, patriarchal discourse, paradoxically, “minimize[s] understandings of violence” (Collins, “It’s all in the Family” 160) by turning domestic violence into some kind of private affair. This legitimating of violence against women comes against the conception of the house as a place that is supposedly safe and destitute of conflict. The household is not exactly heaven in women’s experiences, coming as a contrast to the so often idealized view of it. When race also comes into play, then this sphere becomes even more complex.

Patricia Hill Collins observes that black women in the United States find themselves in a constant crossroads: at the same time that they may see themselves silenced and subjugated within the private sphere by their husbands (a microcosm of patriarchal society), they also feel compelled to support them and defer to these men in order to support their struggles when dealing with racism (“It’s all in the Family” 159) in the public sphere. So, bearing in mind that the domestic sphere is a feminine space by excellence, according to patriarchal thought, this sphere is also the space in which negotiation is performed (L. Harris 49). Concerning the experiences of black women, then, negotiation is performed in relation to both the binary man/woman and the binary white/black.

These overlapping instances also shape conceptions of home(s) in different ways. Bearing in mind patriarchal values, then, for women, the household becomes a contested space. A space of continuous negotiation, of resistance and of subversion, concerning the politics of location. It

may sometimes mean protection and at others even terror. It may mean inclusion as well as exclusion. And when it means exclusion, it has its meaning postponed from the idea of home.

The question of home, therefore, is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of “belonging.” (Brah 192)

Taking into consideration the fiction of *Geographies of Home*, the domestic sphere is a place of negotiation between gender and its performativity, as well as of race in the process of some of the characters’ self-discovery as black while in the Unitedstatesian territory. Most of the story takes place within the walls of a domestic sphere, whether in Aurelia’s (the mother), or in Rebecca’s (the daughter who is constantly beaten by her husband) houses. These places may at some times connote home whereas at others they seem to be the opposite of it.

The very idea of home seems to vary, according to each character’s discovery and perspective. As Gláucia Renate Gonçalves suggests when discussing space, this term does not encompass only a physical location. It also relates to the human space, inhabited in its psychological dimension (241). So when discussing home, more than physical places must be considered. As I discussed in chapter one, home is also an “imagined location.” I intend to readdress the concepts of place and space in this master’s thesis, but for now I just highlight that both will be considered in my analysis of each character’s conceiving(s) of home(s).

Finally, *Geographies of Home*, perhaps for being written by a woman who is marked by diaspora, brings to the fore women’s perspectives and experiences – as Almeida suggests (“A nova diáspora” 196) – that are interesting to be analysed, since, according to James Clifford, these experiences are “particularly revealing” (Clifford 313). Loida Maritza Pérez is a

Dominican-American writer, marked by the African Diaspora, who has written a story that has as central figures four women characters. Their varied perspectives are interwoven in the third person narrative in such a way that it becomes difficult to discern whether there is a main character, even though the narrative seems to evolve around Iliana's character. My next chapter is devoted, then, to the analysis of Iliana, Aurelia, Rebecca and Marina – four characters marked by gender, race and nationality in different ways, and who seem to conceive home(s) in different ways as well.

CHAPTER 3 – GEOGRAPHIES OF HOMES

3.1 The Geographies of my Research

She had wanted, more than anything, to belong. Having spent years plotting how to leave only to discover, when she finally did, that she felt as displaced in the world as much as in her parents' house. And that is why she had made the decision to return and to re-establish a connection with her family so that, regardless of where she went thereafter, she would have comforting memories of home propping her up and lending her . . . courage.

(Perez 312)

Geographies of Home will be analyzed in this chapter in such a way as to interweave my findings and the theoretical discussion presented in the previous chapters. Even though new theoretical elements will appear throughout my analysis, the reader will be recurrently invited to go back to the former chapters.

Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home* portrays a Dominican family who has emigrated to the United States in search of a better life. The family lived in extreme poverty while in the Dominican Republic. Emigration becomes, then, a possibility of hope, of a better life condition. However, while in the United States, an idea recurrently haunts the members of this family: the idea of home. Whether in the form of a longing, a fear, and/or a memory, home seems to be presented and re-presented in numerous ways by the characters, especially the women, who are the objects of my analysis. It is my hypothesis that these characters build their notions of home throughout the narrative and that these notions shift, according to specific

moments and contexts lived by them. So, different geographies lead them somehow to a home, or, as I suggest, to homes.

In the present work, therefore, I intend to analyze four women characters in order to examine their representations of home(s): Rebecca, the oldest daughter and the one who first arrives in the United States; Aurelia, the mother of the family, who immigrates to the United States with Papito (the father) after Rebecca manages to get them green cards; Iliana, the only daughter to have access to higher education; and Marina, the so-called mad daughter of the family. I choose to focus on these characters firstly because they have a space of privilege in the narrative, and secondly because their perspectives bring about interesting food for thought concerning the paths they go through when conceiving home(s).

The narrative shifts points of view, being each chapter focused on the perspective of one of these four characters. This way it is possible to look at the same episode from different angles, crisscrossing information. It is my assumption that whereas a traditional view on home stabilizes and fixes its notion, these characters offer a counterview, trespassing the borders of conventional arrangements, such as the binary home/not home, and the spatiality of what is considered “feminine” and “masculine.”

3.2. The Complexity of Home in the Novel

The multiple meanings attached to the concept of ‘home’ – home as a family household, home as neighborhood, home as native country – speak to its significance within family as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality.

(Collins 161)

As discussed in the previous chapters, home may be linked to different spheres in one's life, such as the wider sphere, one's country, and the private one, the house. In both of these spheres home is intricately related to the idea of kinship, whether of the imagined community, or of the household. And, as Patricia Hill Collins asserts, "surrounded by individuals who seemingly share similar objectives, these homes represent idealized, privatized spaces where members can feel at ease" ("It's all in the Family" 161). Idealized because not always are they experienced as they are imagined, and privatized because these homes tend to revolve around the idealization of family itself – on its supposedly feature of functioning as a private haven from a public world. These homes described by Collins take for granted the assumption that "family is . . . held together through primary emotional bonds of love and caring" ("It's all in the Family" 161). Therefore, the idea of home would take family and familiar ties as points of departure, as foundations. That is why there would be the tendency to privatize spaces: in order to make them seem more "familiar."

Privatization of spaces can be seen in *Geographies of Home*, once the characters' routes for building home(s) revolves around the family, whereas in the Dominican Republic, through memories, or in Aurelia's and Papito's house. The notion of family, of what is familiar, permeates all characters' construction of their concept(s) of home. And, as a consequence, home spaces are also somewhat engendered:

because women are so often associated with family, home space becomes seen as a private, feminized space that is distinct from the public, masculinized space that lies outside its borders. Family space is for members only – outsiders can be invited in only by family members or else they are intruders. Within these gendered spheres of private and public space, women and men again assume

distinctive roles. Women are expected to remain in their home 'place' . . . Men are expected to support and defend the private, feminized space that houses their families. (Collins, "It's all in the Family" 161)

Gendered ideas demarcate places as well as specify the roles that are being expected from men and women within those places. Women are expected to remain within "the home," traditionally represented as the place of the household, and men outside, providing for their family.

In *Geographies of Home* the house is oftentimes represented as a space to be called home by some characters. I emphasize space because it is not exactly the physical place of the house that connotes home for the characters at specific moments, but what this house represents. The spatiality of home as the house includes idealizations of love and caring between its members, as well as the feeling of a safe anchor for its inhabitants in relation to the dangerous ocean of the outside life. And bearing in mind that "'home' immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection" (George 1), patriarchal conventions are also very much present in the novel. According to patriarchy, as discussed previously, women are flowers within the garden of the house, thus trapped in the restricted boundaries of that private sphere as well. And the duty of women in this location is to provide warmth, protection and a welcoming environment for its members. This way, the house as home is idealized as having the dream-like atmosphere that Gaston Bachelard proposes in *The Poetics of Space*. However, this view is questioned within the realm of fiction of Loida Maritza Pérez's debut novel.

In *Geographies of Home*, interestingly enough, women are portrayed mostly within the walls of houses (Aurelia's and Rebecca's). And these women permeate their notions of home with the notion of family, even if the latter is idealized and gender-marked by patriarchal

conventions. Therefore it would be expected that these women follow what is dictated by patriarchy. However, by analyzing these characters it is possible to untangle a series of loose threads that seem to defy the embroidery of patriarchal conventions in which they are inserted.

Besides being women, these characters also share the feature of being diasporic figures. They all come from the Dominican Republic, sharing Stuart Hall's claim that they must face, at least at some point of their lives, the predicament of participating in the African Diaspora ("Cultural Identity" 399). They come to terms with their blackness in the context of the United States, bearing in mind the discussion on race held in chapter two of this thesis, by different means and in different degrees of estrangement. The diasporic and transnational condition shared by the characters give them a particular *locus* of enunciation towards belonging and identification, what, ultimately, shapes their concept(s) of home(s). Stuart Hall interestingly claims that sometimes the identification of Caribbeanness or of Africanness only happens when in diasporic condition, such as he claims to have happened to himself. The tensions and ambivalences felt within diasporic space is what triggers identifications, even if these have not been imagined before, considering Dominicans in the Dominican Republic, for instance. That is because "in diaspora situation, identities become multiple"¹ (Hall, *Da Diáspora* 27, my translation). Bearing in mind *Geographies of Home*, it is only in the context of the United States that the characters perceive themselves as black, for example, which triggers ambivalent identifications with African-Americans. And identifications seem to emerge out of difference: it is only when experiencing difference that a search for sameness takes place. Iliana, for instance, finds herself being ridicularized for being black, looks for "sameness" within African-American community, and when she is not fully accepted by this community as well she goes on shifting identifications in a search for feeling equal, in a search for belonging, for home. These evidences

¹ "Na situação da diáspora, as identidades se tornam múltiplas" (Hall, *Da Diáspora* 27).

are what make me claim that home is not singular for each of the analyzed characters: they shift perspectives according to space, place and identification.

In this work I follow Kathleen M. Kirby's distinction between place and space:

place seems to assume set boundaries that one fills to achieve a solid identity.

Place settles space into objects . . . It perpetuates the fixed parameters of ontological categories, making them coherent containers of essences, in relation to which one must be “inside” or “out,” “native” or “foreign,” in the same way that one can . . . be in only one place at a time. If place is organic and stable, space is malleable, a fabric of continually shifting sites and boundaries. (*Indifferent Boundaries* 19)

Place, then, confines, draws borders, emphasizes sameness/difference. One is supposedly at one place at a time: in or outside of the house, in or outside of the country. Space, however, enables more possibilities. One can be in two spaces at the same time: the space of the house and the space of sexism; the space of the public sphere and the space of racism. According to Kirby,

space, then, seems to offer a medium for articulating – speaking and intertwining – the many facets, or phases, of subjectivity that have interested different kinds of theory: national origin, geographic and territorial mobility (determined by class, gender and race), bodily presence and limits, structures of consciousness, and ideological formations of belonging and exclusion. (*Indifferent Boundaries* 174)

Therefore, in my analysis I will deal, under this perspective, with both the concept of place and of space.

It is a difficult task to try to analyze the characters separately because one influences too much the others' perspectives. It would be as trying to separate the threads of a multicolored

yarn which had been woven together from beginning to end. The beauty of it is exactly in its intricateness. Therefore, even though I will divide this chapter into two sections, trying to give more emphasis to two characters at a time, all characters will inevitably appear in all sections.

3.2.1 Aurelia and Iliana

Among the four characters, Aurelia represents the perspective of an older generation. She has come to the United States already an adult after experiencing the harshness of trying to raise a family in the Dominican Republic run by Rafael Trujillo. Even though not an exile in the strict sense of the term – political, always coerced (Kaminsky 10) – Aurelia is not able to visit her native country due to financial restraints. A sort of unbridgeable gap is created between her native and her host country, paralleling Eva Hoffman's experience when away from Poland, as discussed in chapter one. It would be expected from Aurelia, then, to create a Dominican Republic of her mind, somewhat idealized, such as Eva Hoffman does in relation to Poland before being able to revisit it. However, perhaps because Aurelia is already an adult when she emigrates (aware of her native country's frailties), she does not idealize the Dominican Republic when evoking its memories, differently from Hoffman.

Aurelia, in some moments, does define her present in confrontation with what "is considered 'not-home', with the foreign, with distance" (George 4), as Eva Hoffman did, emphasizing a home/not home binary, now paralleled to the Dominican Republic/United States, such as when she describes the grayness of New York's concrete contrasting it to the soil of the Dominican Republic. This happens as soon as Aurelia gets to New York, so the connectedness to place at this moment is very present in her perspective. She is a recent outsider in the land of the United States. Nevertheless she still bears in mind the difficulties she had when at "home" in the

Dominican Republic, so even though at this point she is marked by placelessness (physical/binary marked) and/or spacelessness (psychological), by feeling different, she still does not idealize the place of the Dominican Republic. She has a homing desire that does not exactly match a desire for a homeland, supporting Avtar Brah's view that the concept of diaspora offers a critique of fixed origins (16). Aurelia mentions that something she had in the past is missing in the present, but even then she does not convey the idea that by going back to the Dominican Republic she would or could retrieve this something that has been lost. It is important to keep in mind that Aurelia and her family are part of the African Diaspora, having to deal, then, with the tensions and ambivalences inherent to the condition of being diasporic as well. These tensions are relevant in their search for home.

Among the characters studied, Aurelia is the one who mostly reminds the reader of the Dominican Republic, not as a place to go home to, as stated previously, but as an imagined space from which she tries to build the notion of home from. When evoking the memory of her native country, she is able to connect the dots, reminding herself of the pros and cons of her life there:

so often Aurelia and Papito had considered returning to the Dominican Republic but had remained in the United States to be near their married children and because their youngest, remembering little of their birthland, considered it a backward, poverty-ridden place . . . It wasn't that [Aurelia] romanticized the past or believed that things had been better long ago. She had been poor even in the Dominican Republic. (22-23)

Aurelia is aware that if she had the chance, going back to the Dominican Republic or to the past (if that were a possibility) is not a solution for her problems. Moreover, as Brah claims, diaspora is not a synonym for loss: "diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings"

(193). Aurelia is depicted as having made the choice that best meets the needs for her family, in her point of view. And that choice means living in the United States. After all, as Clifford asserts, diasporas are “not-here to stay” (311), so diaspora cultures both desire some place else than the host country, but are still attracted to it in many ways. It is the diasporic lived tension – and ambivalence.

The non-idealization of the Dominican Republic does not mean, though, that Aurelia does not go through displacement in the United States. Her feeling of being out of place is evident at some points in the narrative, such as when she describes her arrival in the host country:

everything had seemed grim and violent . . . Terrified to step outside and claustrophobic in the three-room apartment shared with Papito and their children, she had deteriorated to a skeletal eighty-one pounds. Only the realization that her children would be left motherless in a country whose language and customs she still barely understood had inched her towards health. (24)

When arriving in the United States, Aurelia sees herself as if in hostile territory. Her feeling of displacement, of foreignness affects not only her mind, but also her body. An intimate battle takes place between her desire to stay inside the house, for the fear of what is outside, and the claustrophobia she feels within this household. Home, then, at this point, is not her host country, but neither is it the house. Aurelia does, later on in the narrative, connect home to the house (one purchased by Papito), which she claims to have transformed into a home after five years of arduous work. So far, however, her house is not home (yet).

She seems to feel displaced in the United States both because of descent and because of language. She does not speak English when arriving and neither is she acquainted to Unitedstatesian culture. In fact, it is the thought of not letting her children motherless in the

United States, whose customs and language were foreign to her, which she claims to have given her the proper strength to recover. Language is an important marker of foreignness because it is closely connected to the idea of the nation-state: it helps distinguishing the “us” and the “them.” Therefore, nations and language are intricately woven together. When Aurelia highlights that she does not know the language of the host country, she is automatically marking her difference, for, as Rosemary George points out, “homes are not neutral spaces. Imagining a home is as political an act as imagining a nation” (6). Aurelia seems to mark her standpoint by seemingly not even wanting to learn English: even after years of settlement she still needs the help of one of her daughters to understand what a doctor is saying about Marina, when the latter is hospitalized. Not learning the official language may be a form of resistance that Aurelia performs in relation to the host country, not fully embracing it as home.

She claims that in the Dominican Republic “with bare feet planted on familiar ground she had trusted her perceptions” (23). So, in the United States, on unfamiliar ground, she could not. What is interesting to notice is that Aurelia confirms Patricia Hill Collins’s assertion that “the multiple meanings attached to the concept of home – home as a family household, home as neighborhood, home as native country – speak to its significance within family as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality” (“It’s all in the Family” 161). Aurelia claims that the ground of the United States is not familiar: “assaulted by the unfamiliar and surrounded by hard concrete and looming buildings, she had become as vulnerable as even Trujillo regime had failed to make her feel” (23). Aurelia privatizes, then, the places she occupies, not idealizing the Dominican Republic itself, but idealizing the notion of familiar ties that supposedly takes place there. Aurelia not only treasures familiar ties by means of her memories, especially her mother’s, but also tries to create a “familiar” environment for her children and grandchildren in the United

States in her pursuit of enabling the experience of home for them. Myriam Ávila argues that for diasporic subjects family networks have the role of maintaining a sense of collective identity in face of the dislocation they may feel in the host country (84). Under this light, Aurelia tries to foster, by means of familiar ties, a sense of safety and of feeling at ease for her children and grandchildren in the space of the household.

As discussed previously, Aurelia connects the idea of home to her experience in the Dominican Republic, even though not idealizing it. Adding to that, Aurelia connects home to the family unit, as well as to the private location in which this family lives, such as the house. It becomes for her a spatial reference of home. When Marina sets fire to the kitchen, for instance, Aurelia thinks about the struggle she and Papito had to go through in order to transform, in her point of view, that place into a homelike space:

as Aurelia watched the flames through the window in her bedroom door, she had recalled the dust thick in the air when they'd first moved in; the impenetrable darkness caused by boarded windows and relieved only by flickering candles . . . It was these memories . . . which had sparked her terror. Five years of arduous work had transformed the house into a home, and she was incapable of the strength necessary to begin again or to dream of possibilities after she and Papito had invested all they had in the house which was to be the comfort of their old age, the anchor in their children's lives. (22)

Aurelia, at this point, conveys the traditional assumptions of home as the place of the house, such as Gaston Bachelard proposes. The house is a metaphor for what Aurelia considers to be home. She parallels the house to a supposed place of safety, an anchor for her children. So the burning of the house is equated to the burning of home as well, to the frustration of all her efforts.

Aurelia is not worried about the walls themselves, but about what they represent – an embodiment of home. However, paradoxically, by dealing with representation, she also begins her trajectory of discovering that home may be more a matter of space than one of place. When Marina sets fire to the kitchen and Aurelia sees the walls burning, she is regretting not the walls, but the effort she may have to go through once more to transform the place of the house into a space of home. And that demands much more effort than the simple rebuilding of the walls.

Home is recurrently described as relating to familiar ties by the characters. However, that does not mean that home as the familiar and that patriarchal conventions are not questioned by each of them to some extent. On the contrary, the analysis of these characters shows that the house, which is marked by the imaginary of patriarchal society concerning private and public spheres, becomes a crucial *locus* for negotiation (L. Harris 49) for each of these women. Iliana, for instance, refutes the idea of home as a sanctuary for family members when returning from college:

the house looked nothing like what Iliana remembered. It was yellow now – a bright canary-yellow which drew attention to itself, unlike the dull red of the brick facing it which had covered its exterior . . . She had expected to find the house cloaked in mourning and, somehow, as she approached it, to get a sense of what waited for her inside. . . Her parents' residence appeared deceptively new. She pushed open the front gate and climbed the steps leading to the door. As her fingers moved toward the bell she swallowed her apprehension. This was home: safe and familiar despite its appearance. There was nothing in it she should fear.

(27)

Iliana knows deep inside that the house is not an embodiment of a dream-like environment or a place of safety. At the end of the citation above she is consciously trying to convince herself that homely characteristics are to be found in that place, even though she hints to the contrary. The house, as Gaston Bachelard proposes, dream-like, a haven for its members is somewhat represented in the description of Iliana's house, only that to her this image is deceptive. She is aware that what is expecting her inside the walls of this house is not canary-yellow, bright, or happy. She in fact foreshadows what she is going to face within her household. When Iliana arrives "home," she is not even welcomed by her sister Marina. Bearing in mind Bachelard's proposition that "the house is a large cradle" (7) in which one is always welcome, as the bosom of a mother, the reception Iliana gets counterviews this discourse. Marina shuts the door at Iliana's face as soon as the latter arrives.

Even before arriving at her parents' house Iliana tries to make herself believe in the house as a place to be called home, even though her memories insist on proving different: "I've even flattered myself by thinking I'll be welcomed with open arms. But that's pretty funny, considering we were never one big, happy family to begin with" (11). Her thoughts are confirmed when Marina shuts the door at her face. Despite this fact, Iliana stills tries to build a notion of home based on the idealization of the household, consciously attempting to erase all evidences that could prove different: she silently denies Marina's act, by pondering that "of course she was welcome home" (28). The third-person omniscient narrator makes it clear that Iliana wants to believe in this idealized conception of home, a desire that clashes with her experiences within the space of her household.

Iliana also seems to privatize spaces, such as Aurelia, transforming her idealized notion of the Dominican Republic (a wide meaning for home) into the idealized space of the house (a

private meaning): “while she’d been away, her memory had consisted of images imbued with the warmth of a Caribbean sun magically transported to New York and of a house furnished with objects lovingly carved by the inhabitants of an island she had dreamed of” (30). Her view contrasts against Aurelia’s, since, as mentioned previously, the latter does not idealize her native country.

Iliana’s search for home in the novel, such as other characters’, parallels a search of identification, of subjectivity. When a child, Iliana lives for some time in a neighborhood where few other Dominicans lived, so

she had yearned to look like the Puerto Rican or black American girls so that she could be easily identified as belonging to either group. She would have traded her soul to have the long, straight hair and olive skin of her Spanish-speaking friends or to wear her hair in cornrows and have no trace of a Spanish accent like the Johnson girls down the street. (190)

Iliana’s diasporic condition already shows in her attempt to construct a space to feel at home. The tensions she lives for being a member of the African diaspora are explicit in her hating the question “Where are you from?” – usually asked because of her dark complexion –because few of her classmates knew of the Dominican Republic. Not only that, but many African-American friends assumed that she claimed to be Hispanic “in order to put on airs” (190). As discussed previously in the introduction of this thesis, the labeling Hispanic makes a direct allusion to Spain giving a somewhat false impression of a European status to immigrants in the United States of non-Spanish descent, besides not emphasizing their Latin American origin. So Iliana gets caught in an identification war:

throughout elementary, junior-high and high school she had frequently been harassed by black friends for hanging out with greasy spics who in turn questioned why she wanted to be around loud-mouthed spooks. With her skin color identifying her as member of one group and her accent and immigrant status placing her in another, she had fit comfortably in neither and even less in the circles she had found herself in when she finally went away to school. (190-1)

Even if nationally connecting herself to immigrants of Latin American origin and transnationally to African-Americans, Iliana feels that she does not fit comfortably in either group. When a child she is apparently claimed by each of these groups, being somewhat invited for inclusion, even though she intimately does not feel as genuinely belonging to either of them. However, as she grows up she also faces voices of exclusion, especially concerning mainstream society's view of race.

At college Iliana is marginalized for being considered black in the Unitedstatesian context, having in mind Clara Rodriguez and Hector Cordero-Guzman's article "Placing Race in Context," which discusses how the concept of race is a social construct, being therefore seen in different ways by different cultures. Iliana has to deal with prejudice since childhood, both in disguised and in overt ways. She is warned by her former guidance counselors, for instance, that she would have to face racial prejudice at university, saying to her: "even just upstate they're – well – you know – racist. They don't want you there" (66). Her counselors advise her not to apply for university so she doesn't get hurt "when the rejections come" (66). They think Iliana will not even be accepted into college because of racism.

Iliana does go to college, though, but yet the prophecy is fulfilled: there she hears the word “nigger” erupting from the lips of strangers (70); every time she goes back to her room she faces a message board hanging from her door with the ghostly trace of the same word (1); and when classmates had presumed to know the inner workings of those of her race and class . . . she had stopped up her ears and gradually trained her eyes not to see. Yet rage had turned her body against itself, transforming her stomach into an acid mass that heaved bitterness into her mouth. (70)

She, then, decides to go back “home.” That is, to a place where she imagines she belongs, in which she has an equal status. Nevertheless, when getting to her parents’ house, she is described as being “overwhelmed by the politics of being home” (30). And that is because Iliana is both attracted and repelled by her household. At the same time that in her longings, there would be “no place like home,” quoting Dorothy’s line in *The Wizard of Oz*, when Iliana is in this idealized space she realizes that it does not exactly fulfill her expectations.

She has to deal with many instances while there, such as the repressive patriarchal space within this household, the so-called madness of her sister Marina, the conflicts that Rebecca goes through and that inevitably affect her as well, and the feeling that not even among her family members she is equal: besides the oppression Iliana suffers from her father, Marina does not welcome her as an equal either. Marina continually marks the difference Iliana poses within the family members in relation especially to two instances: on the one hand there is education, since Iliana is the only daughter to have been able to go out in order to study – defying the patriarchal norm that formally rules in this household. On the other hand there is sexuality, for Iliana defies patriarchal conventions in that sense as well, being suggested by Marina the possibility of Iliana not even having female genitalia. Marina is jealous of Iliana for the former having been able to

drift away from the father's laws: "what the fuck is your problem?" Marina demanded. 'You're in school far away from here and can do anything you want! Look at me – I'm stuck at home and can't even fart without asking for permission!'" (39). What is more, Iliana does it without actually having to break social codes – such as Marina does – in order to be seen and heard. Marina here sheds light onto her own behavior and the fact that despite being the character who most overtly tries to deviate from norms and conventions, she is yet not able to free herself from them.

Iliana is an interesting character once she sheds light onto the construction of gender itself and on the implications of it in one's conception of home. Concerning the construction of gender, Iliana is characterized as being an ambiguous and almost amorphous character sexually speaking. She is described by her best friend as having a drag queen runway walk (75), and by her brother as being easily confounded to be a man (107). Marina suggests the absence of female genitalia in her sister and the possibility of finding something else inside Iliana's body in the place of her uterus, and it is also suggested in the narrative that Iliana was predicted to be a boy while in Aurelia's womb (4). This portrayal of Iliana may be seen as a highlighter for the sex-gender system social construct, using Gayle Rubin's term. According to Rubin, what characterizes sex as we know it – a gender identity – is a social construct and not a biological given, since "sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained" (538). So, whether Iliana has or doesn't have a womb does not really matter in the social construction of her gender identity. She is expected to act like a "woman," conforming to patriarchal roles.

However, bearing in mind that, as Judith Butler claims, what is traditionally regarded as an internal essence of gender is created via discourse, and in this case in order to maintain patriarchal order (2597), Iliana's character may be seen as a gender "counterdiscourse" by means

of her characterization. Even though she does not perform agency in relation to gender, bearing in mind Butler's theorization on it, Iliana's characterization offers a critique of traditional assumptions of gender roles. Iliana sheds light on to the arbitrariness of the imposed relation body/sex-gender dictated by patriarchy. She is not depicted, for instance, as a character who longs for marriage or for having children, and she has also been in love with her gay friend (76), not conforming to the "obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler 2597) that patriarchy dictates.

Iliana actually "looks like drag queens wished they could," (75) according to her friend Ed. It is interesting to recall Judith Butler's claim that *'in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency'* (2498, author's emphasis). If drags are the mockers by excellence of patriarchal codes, Iliana's characterization suggests the mocking of the mockers: Iliana would look like a drag to the very eyes of drags without being one. But, even though apparently not a drag or homosexual (the antithesis of conventionality), neither does Iliana fit into patriarchal conventional codes: she is attractive to the eyes of Ed (who is gay), and has a hard time getting dates; she wishes Ed would have "eased her into womanhood" (76) being attracted to his "feminine" traits, such as "his narrow lips, graceful hands, shoulder-length hair and lashes longer than most women's," which "set her sexually at ease" (76); she is described as being barely distinguishable from a man, according to Gabriel, her brother; and she is accused by her family members of dressing and of looking like a man (260). Marina describes Iliana as having narrow waist, broad shoulders and wide hands, that first hinted at her secret (275). And of walking as a man imitating a woman (276), what matches the homosexual's episode of calling Iliana a drag and also Gabriel's view. Gabriel says to Iliana:

“If you weren’t my sister I wouldn’t know if you were a man trying to look like a woman or a woman trying to be a man” (107). Iliana does not seem to fit patriarchal conventions.

The same way as Iliana is unconventional in regard to patriarchal roles for men and women, she is also unconventional concerning her views upon space, such as private and public spheres. If the private sphere is the one reserved for women, she decides to go out in order to have access to higher education (she is the only daughter to do so). And, if the private space is intended to embody home, Iliana challenges this patriarchal convention as well: she is conscious, despite her will to believe the contrary, that her parents’ house is not necessarily a synonym of belonging, of feeling at home.

When packing, Iliana makes an effort to maintain the idea of her parents’ house as home, but she is aware that she will not exactly feel at ease in this place. She knows that by returning she will also have losses, such as a chance to manifest her voice, because of her father’s dominant figure within the house. Iliana

had reluctantly given away the items she dared not take home with her: skirts . . . clip-on earrings; and all her books . . . Only now did she realize the implications of her decision to go home . . . She had not stopped to consider that by returning she would be relinquishing her independence. Not only would she have to live according to her father’s dictates, she would have to join him in Bible study . . . and listen to his sermons if her face but revealed an expression interpreted as defiant. (8)

In her parent’s house she was not allowed to assert herself without fearing consequences, as when she contradicted her father in relation to the scent of a soap he had bought. He claimed it was strawberry and she said that it was cinnamon-scented. The aftermath was that she was

beaten into silence. Iliana knows that by going back to her house she will go back into her father's domain. She is, then, afraid of falling silent once again.

While in Iliana's childhood she is apparently totally under a male-oriented perspective, being silenced by it, when she goes back to her parents' house it is noticeable that Aurelia has an intriguing role within that patriarchal space, oftentimes dictating behavior which contradicts Papito's desire. Iliana is the one who mostly notices her mother's strength within that space, even if these counterviews are portrayed in the background of this patriarchal household. It seems that, despite the fact that in the house the formal rule is patriarchal, it is the informal rule coming from Aurelia that guides Iliana's search for subjectivity wherever she goes. So, contrarily to what happens in Iliana's relation with her father, which is of submission in his presence and of transgression in his absence, what her mother does not overtly assume but nevertheless performs in some ways is what mostly influences Iliana's attitudes. Towards the end of the novel, however, Iliana's transgression starts to take place even in Papito's presence, as she gets more mature about her own convictions, including of home.

Iliana is very much connected to Aurelia. In the novel she is depicted as being Aurelia's heir of the mission of never forgetting, of keeping somewhat rooted to family and traditions. Iliana has inherited the supernatural powers her mother and grandmother had: in the university campus, she claims to have heard her mother's voice telling her all about each member of her family. In fact, Iliana is portrayed as the only daughter to hear the voice, which reassured [her] of her own existence and kept her rooted" (4). No matter how hard she tried, she could not escape from it: "she willed the voice to go away, but it persisted, hounding her as her mother's had at home" (3). The voice was stronger and "though unable to explain the phenomenon, she became convinced that the voice was in fact her mother's" (4). And it was her mother's voice that had

also made her want to go “home”, besides the prejudice she suffered while at school. No matter how hard she tried, she was unable to escape from the voice, from her roots, as a mission (or a curse) –a mission Bienvenida, the grandmother, had also passed to Aurelia in the previous generation.

Moreover, the voice connects Iliana to her grandmother as well: “It spoke of her of birth immediately following her grandmother’s death” (4). Bienvenida was dying without having Aurelia close to her. And as Bienvenida had already told Aurelia that when she died she would find a way to make all of her children know, Aurelia on that occasion saw a black cat, which was inexistent in her town. And immediately started labor: Iliana was to be born.

Aurelia’s voice attaches Iliana to the Dominican roots, transporting “her to a Dominican Republic where summer days were eternal, clouds evaporated in the scorching heat, and palm trees arched along beaches of fiery sand” (4). This exoticism in Iliana’s evoking of the Dominican Republic is intriguing, for despite it, not at one time she expresses a wish to live there. It seems that she parallels an idealized or even stereotyped view of the Dominican Republic with the expectation she would wish to find in her parents’ house. The exotic seems to be part of Iliana’s construct of her parents’ house as an “imaginary homeland.” She wishes to “return” not to the Dominican Republic, but to her parents’ house – up to this point an idealization of home for her. The household for Iliana becomes a privatized space which would embody an idealized Dominican Republic. Aurelia’s strong connection to Dominican culture perhaps triggers Iliana’s evoking of it. However, one must bear in mind that “the past is not preserved, but reconstructed on the basis of the present” (Halbwachs 40). Iliana departed from the Dominican Republic at a very early age, so her view of it not only departs from the present, as Halbwachs advocates, but is very much shaped by it. The shaping of Iliana’s Dominican Republic “of the mind,” in

Rushdie's terms, is influenced by many reference groups in the present, such as her family, friends, and even classmates. Bearing in mind her contact with the public realm in a bigger extent than the other characters as a consequence of her moving from the household in order to study and because of her experience while at college, she has been more in contact with US mainstream stereotypes than her sisters and mother – what sheds some light into Iliana's exotic depiction of the Dominican Republic.

The parallel Iliana makes between the Dominican Republic and the household explains her disappointment when arriving from college and finding out that her parent's house did not carry any longer the features of what she had expected to find, a reproduction of her Dominican "imaginary homeland:"

to Iliana, eyes opened wide by a year and a half's absence, the room seemed a version of what her parents believed a rich person's house, or at least an American's, might look like. Gone were the hand-carved statuettes and worn but sturdy wooden rocking chairs and tables brought from the Dominican Republic . . . Already Iliana felt as if her parents' home were not her own. While she'd been away, her memory had consisted of images imbued with the warmth of a Caribbean sun magically transported to New York and of a house furnished with objects lovingly carved by the inhabitants of an island she had dreamed of. (30)

At this point, home for Iliana is compared to an idealized notion of the Dominican Republic, which she expects to be reproduced in her house in the United States. However, even Iliana goes through a process of rebuilding her concepts of home in such a way to question any physical place (imagined or not) that could connote it. Her conclusion by the end of the narrative seems to

approximate the concept of home, in her view, to the one of self-assurance: wherever she feels comfortable and self-assured is home.

Aurelia also connects home to a distant place, even though she does not idealize the Dominican Republic:

more and more Aurelia found herself remembering the distant past. She might be in the middle of a conversation or in church listening to a sermon when she would suddenly recall an event, words spoken, even a scent, a flavor, a texture . . . As she delved into the past she was conscious of something missing in the present – something her mother had possessed and passed along to her but which she had misplaced and failed to pass on to her own children. She could not identify what it was, but its absence was felt as acutely as hunger pangs. And she was determined to discover what had caused the loss and to figure out how she had brought herself to the present moment so that she might guide herself into the future. (23)

Aurelia's account of something missing in the present is perhaps what her mother had passed to her, which she claims to have failed to pass on to her children, even though the reader knows better. Bienvenida had passed to Aurelia the mission of not forgetting, the beliefs from her traditions. The latter explains: "the future can hurt if you deny the past" (132). And Aurelia passes this inheritance on.

Iliana, besides hearing her mother's voice, is also the one to most thoroughly perceive Aurelia's Dominican traces:

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

were her mother's clogged holes pried open, she would transform into a sorceress dancing, not secretly . . . but freely, unleashing impulses Papito had suppressed. This image had sharpened whenever Aurelia had undone the braids wound tightly around her head. At such moments, before Iliana's intruding eyes caused her to braid the cascading locks into submission, she had smiled at her own reflection shifting from a matriarch's to that of a young girl's with hoops dangling from her ears. (3)

Even though it was a desire of Papito, the father, for the whole family to become Adventist, for according to him, in the harshness of living in Trujillo's terror it was the only possible way for him to distinguish right from wrong (149), still Aurelia keeps beliefs passed on to her by her mother.

Iliana is capable of seeing her mother beyond the apparent conformity that Aurelia seems to embody towards Papito's rules. Iliana throughout the narrative unveils particularities about Aurelia that seem to pass unnoticed by the others in the family, such as Aurelia's having powers beyond conventions, beyond "normality." The memory of her mother's braids, for example,

evoked others to which Iliana had previously attached no significance: Aurelia waking restlessly before dawn to scrub clean floors; Aurelia wringing sheets dry with a strength that defied exhaustion; and Aurelia slicing onions, a sharpened knife blurring dangerously toward her thumb at a speed which would have resulted in the loss of a finger had anyone else attempted it. (3)

Iliana even thinks to herself that maybe all of this strength was an attempt to contain forces that otherwise would have escaped from Aurelia's control. Aurelia, then, would consciously do her

best to at least apparently fit into the system. However, her ideas go beyond what shows. And Iliana is the one to notice it.

Aurelia is perhaps the character who is mostly portrayed within the space of the house. She is portrayed in the kitchen, sometimes the bedroom, and few times in the living room. When in the latter place, she is usually taking care of her children (in moments of fights and tension) and grandchildren, apparently conforming to the patriarchal dictate that “avoiding the dangerous space of public streets allows women to take care of the children, the sick, and the elderly, and other dependent family members” (Collins, “It’s all in the Family” 161). Even when apparently practicing voodoo in order to have Pasi3n killed in the episode of the plucking of the chicken, Aurelia acts within the space of the house, and specifically the kitchen. She makes an effort to make the space of the house feel or embody the notion of home, such as when she consoles Marina, who had just returned from the hospital after attempting suicide, saying: “It’s hard to believe you’re finally home. But you really are, mi’ja. You’re home and no one here is going to hurt you” (P3rez 246). This seems to be an idealized view of home as a space for protection, a space for the self, perhaps because of this character’s former experience of living in a politically unstable Dominican Republic.

The only times Aurelia is represented outside houses (either hers or her mother’s) is when she goes to the livestock market, accompanied by Papito, in order to buy three chickens for Christmas feast (or her voodoo practice against Pasi3n); and in her attempts to bring Rebecca to live with her, but still accompanied by Papito, who is actually the one who drives their Buick. Aurelia is characterized in such a way that the space of the house is highlighted. Nevertheless, Aurelia’s depiction does not convey the house as a space for either submission or confinement.

Aurelia seems to experience the house as a space for continuous negotiation – with her husband, daughters, son, and grandchildren.

Aurelia's view of home privileges family, whether in her evoking of experiences while in the Dominican Republic or in her attempts to make her best to provide for her children and grandchildren. She is the one that seems to most embody the role assigned by patriarchy to women. However, the narrator signals to the reader that her abiding to these rules may be much more a marker of strategy, articulation, than of passivity or submission. It is in her intimate moments with Papito that her strategies and strength within this family are mostly revealed. It is known, for instance, that Papito rejects her connection to voodoo traditions since the beginning of their relationship, which leads to her conversion to the Adventist Church. However, even though apparently following his new faith, she is still very much connected to her original beliefs, and he knows it:

Aurelia silently undressed. Despite her many winters in New York, she continued to sleep nude. Nights were the only times her body breathed freely, she had often claimed, unwilling to admit what her husband already knew – that, like her mother, she too believed that garments confined her dreams. (163)

It is not that Aurelia's portrayal suggests that her strength relies exclusively on her use of strategies, as if it were constantly concealed. She is also portrayed to be the character that has the strength to keep both Papito and the others of the family standing upright in moments of tension. However, these moments, in relation to Papito, the "head" of the house, occur mostly in the bedroom, away from the others, such as when Papito cries, deeply grateful for Aurelia's embrace after Marina's near death. Papito thrives for Aurelia's forgiveness:

her flesh was unexpectedly warm as she wrapped her arms around him and twined her legs through his. The tenderness of that gesture unleashed tremors along his spine. He shut his eyes to steel himself. Yet, as she pillowed his head between her breasts, his tears burst forth in streams whose flow he was powerless to stop . . . Aurelia drew him nearer. Although her embrace elicited more tears, she did not try to stop them, nor did she suggest that he be strong . . . she . . . shifted his head so that it came to rest directly over her heart. Papito heard its insistent beats. He heard it murmur that she forgave and loved him still. (165-6)

At this moment the façade of patriarchy is torn apart: Papito is fragile towards Aurelia, she who represents at this moment the pillar, the founding rock of this family.

However, in the overt environment of the house it is Papito's voice that is highlighted and understood as dominant, with Aurelia's strategically abiding to that, such as when Iliana wants to go out with Ed, her friend, and Aurelia permits, but with a piece of advice: "Just make sure you return before your father does" (68). Iliana is allowed to go out and meet a man, even though her father would not have permitted, but she is advised to not confront him. In his presence, Iliana must abide to patriarchal conventions, being a flower within the walls of the garden.

Throughout the narrative both Aurelia and Iliana struggle in this desire for homing, in Avtar Brah's terms. To Iliana home ultimately becomes a space she is able to carry with herself wherever she goes, which is very closely related to what Brah suggests as being home in the diasporic imagination: "the lived experience of a locality" (192). Whatever place one is, the lived experience of it is what will enable one to find within it a space to be called home. This space is possible through the negotiation of positionalities within discourse – positionalities in relation to nationality, gender, race, subjectivity, etc.

I would add that by trying to look at home through a spatial perspective rather than as a fixed place, following the distinction between place and space made earlier in this chapter, it is easier to conceive such struggles over “the social regulation of ‘belonging’” (Brah 192). It is even easier to attempt to go beyond the marked territories of binary configurations. Brah states, for instance, that there are “multiple others embedded within and across binaries” (185), so it is fallible to try to analyze complex issues, like the experience of home for diasporic subjects, by analyzing only one binary at a time as if each binary could actually be isolated within discourse. I suggest that when binaries are embedded, then, the parts represented in them are also juxtaposed in such a way that no longer one is dealing with clearly defined boundaries. Thus one starts dealing with social spaces, the spaces of discourse, in which nationality, gender, generation, race all come at once instead of separately, as in a didactic syllabus.

As Aurelia develops her concept(s) of home throughout the narrative, at a certain point she seems to begin to conceive it as a space, rather than a place. By doing so she is able to allow herself to “sprout roots past concrete into soil” (137). That is, for the first time she allows herself to experience home as “the lived experience of a locality” (Brah 192) in her experience of New York, despite its concrete grayness. Even though she has not been depicted in the novel as idealizing the Dominican Republic, she has refused up to a certain point to allow the space of the present to be felt as home, confirming the ambiguity of the feelings experienced by her in relation to the concept of home, which is part of the ambivalence dealt with by diasporic subjects:

throughout more than fifteen years of moving from apartment to apartment, she had dreamed, not of returning, but of going home. Of going home to a place not located on any map but nonetheless preventing her from settling in any other.

Only now did she understand that her soul had yearned not for a geographical site but for a frame of mind able to accommodate any place as home. (137)

Aurelia does not seem to put a closure on her concept of home, but rather seems to open the borders of what home may represent in her life.

Aurelia's pondering regarding home as perhaps a space of the mind rather than a physical place also matches Iliana's, who after building and re-building the concept, concludes at a certain point that she can (and must) leave her parents' house in order to assert herself. Her parents' house does not embody home, mostly because of the family dynamics that are perpetuated in that place, which prevent Iliana from feeling fully at home, even though she cares for each of her family members. Iliana's experience in relation to Aurelia's attitude of (apparent) complicity towards Marina's and Papito's abuses, her father's narrow-minded view concerning gender roles and the feeling that these dynamics would not change, trigger Iliana's departure. She concludes that

everything she had experienced; everything she continued to feel for those whose lives would be inextricably bound with hers; everything she had inherited from her parents and gleaned from her siblings would aid her in her passage through the world. She would leave no memories behind. All of them were herself. All of them were home. (321)

Iliana considers home, then, everything that is part of her: experiences, family, roots. Home is rather a space than a fixed place. It encompasses experiences, the past, the present. It is a state of mind, a feeling of belonging that takes place within the space of her own self, instead of elsewhere. Home is nowhere and everywhere at the same time.

3.2.2 Rebecca and Marina

I have chosen to analyze Rebecca and Marina together because they are both very intriguing characters who, despite being so different, also share similar grounds. Both of them seem to drive their lives under a narrow notion of happiness, dictated by the rules of patriarchy. On the one hand Iliana and Aurelia just apparently fit into the system: they do not call too much attention to themselves in terms of social behavior, but are capable of critiquing patriarchal conventions, ultimately finding, therefore, routes in order to enable life without so many patriarchal constraints. This is exemplified by Iliana's decision to leave her parents' house and by Aurelia's coping strategies even under Papito's roof. On the other hand, Rebecca and Marina behave in an opposite direction: they defy social conventions, being seen as deviants each in a different way, but are still constrained in patriarchal law. They are not able to dissociate themselves from patriarchal thought, no matter how defying their actions may seem at first sight. Therefore, their concepts of home become somewhat narrowed.

Rebecca could be seen, at first, as a character who willingly and overtly defies patriarchy from the very beginning of this family's story as immigrants: she is the one who decides to go to the United States, young and alone, in order to enable for herself and her family a better life condition. She is aware of her family's poverty and lack of opportunities while in the Dominican Republic. She decides, then, to work in the United States in order to make it possible for her family to emigrate afterwards. As stated by María Cristina Rodríguez,

Rebecca, the oldest daughter, was able to secure a work permit, and was later able to bring her parents, Aurelia and Papito, and thirteen of her siblings . . . to the United States . . . Her commitment to her family went as far as securing green cards for each one of them even though she was not eligible for residency. (89)

Rebecca also sees the family unit as the cornerstone of the concept of home, as suggested by Patricia Hill Collins (161). Whether in the Dominican Republic or elsewhere, she grounds her notion of home on her family ties. Home may not be, in her view, necessarily her native country. In fact, it seems that to her, at least at this point, home is not a national category.

What Rebecca performs in a bold way is a wish to rebuild her life, as well as her family's, and leave behind poverty, oppression and a very much repressive patriarchal society (Rodríguez 59) she is subjected to in the Dominican Republic. She believes that in the United States she and her family will have better opportunities, such as reported by ones who had returned to the Dominican Republic after living abroad:

she remembered how, at the age of twenty-one, she had begged her parents for permission to move to the United States. She had honestly believed that she would be able to pick gold off the streets and send for her parents so they might live as grandly as those who returned to the Dominican Republic claimed was possible. (59)

As soon as she arrives in the United States, though, she realizes that this dream is not so easily achieved: many of those who had decided to emigrate were living miserably. But still she is relieved about her choice, comparing it to her former life in the Dominican Republic under Trujillo's regime, in which she had experienced the fear of riots and of military raids (59-60).

Not only is Rebecca the first daughter to consider departing from their native country, but also she sends money for her family while working in the United States. She becomes a provider for some time before she actually has enough money to send for each of them. So far Rebecca is portrayed as bold, self-assured, and determined. She chooses and pursues a plan to free herself

from the repressive patriarchal law of Trujillo's regime (and the aftermath of it), consequently also opening some space for agency within her household as well.

However, Rebecca's characterization throughout the novel indicates that her will to free herself from patriarchal conventions is rather shallow. If while in the Dominican Republic she is oppressed by Trujillo's dictatorship, a pungent threat both to her family and to herself (bearing in mind all kinds of crimes that were committed by Rafael Trujillo), when in the United States Rebecca faces a private regime perhaps worse than Trujillo's: Pasi3n's "dictatorship." It is not, however, that Rebecca is victimized as if she had not led herself into this relationship, trapped by an internalized set of patriarchal values, or as if she hadn't had the opportunity to free herself from Pasi3n's ruling.

Time and time again Rebecca chooses to remain with Pasi3n. She is trapped in the hegemonic idea of what is expected from women in patriarchal societies: to be an obeying wife, a sex toy, a housekeeper, and a child bearer. What is more, she feels she has failed in all of these roles. She becomes a victim not only of her husband but also of herself within the walls of Pasi3n's garden, or I should say, coop. Perhaps Pasi3n's house could be seen as a metaphor for patriarchy: no matter how many times Rebecca considers leaving or breaking away from it, she is still immersed in its values, in its space, under its regiments.

She consents to patriarchal ideology most of the time, and in the few ones that she attempts to defy it, she is coerced to maintain patriarchal order, which is mostly represented in the narrative in the episodes in which Pasi3n beats her to silence and submission. The space of Pasi3n's house reaches way beyond the geographical place it occupies, and it molds Rebecca's view of what would be considered appropriate within a woman's experience, as well as her conception(s) of home.

Rebecca does have the choice, though, perhaps not to outlaw the system, but at least to change perspectives towards it by distancing herself from Pasi3n's direct influence. Iliana ponders:

it was not as if Rebecca had no options. All of her children were American-born. As such, she could divorce her husband and qualify for state assistance or move with her parents until she found a job and an apartment of her own. Either way she'd be better off than she was now. (66)

Rebecca's parents indeed show an open door to her. Their offer does not mean a complete freedom from patriarchy, for Rebecca knows that by returning to her parents' house she will be submitted to her father as well. However, her parents' house does not represent the oppression she experiences while in Pasi3n's house.

Rebecca ultimately does not show the strength to leave, to lead a life of her own. She constantly depends on the mercy of others in order to attempt to detach herself from Pasi3n's reign of terror. She engages in her role as a victim and clings to it. It is her excuse for not taking responsibility for her acts or for her complicity towards a system which oppresses her. She denies that in order for Pasi3n to reign, she does have a role in consenting. So her primary tool to deal with her anger and frustration is to blame others for whatever she feels she has failed in, according to internalized patriarchal conventions, such as her roles as a wife and a mother.

Rebecca does not become "a flower" (beautiful, preserved, protected) within the gardens of the house, but rather a chicken within a coop. Pasi3n keeps chickens in the apartment because he "liked having them around" (52). However, these hens are privileged in relation to Rebecca: they inhabit the "top apartment," while Rebecca and the children inhabit the two first floors, clogged with junk. Besides that, the chickens are not to be touched or harmed, while Rebecca

does not have the same rights: “not long after their marriage she had plucked and cooked one for dinner. Pasi3n had taken one look at the stuffed bird and punched her in the face” (52). Actually, the first thing Pasi3n does in the rare times he comes home is to “run upstairs to see [the chicken]” (42). Not only is Rebecca abused for not taking good care of the hens, in Pasi3n’s point of view, but also she is punished by him when any of them eventually die (which triggers her strategy of constantly buying hens to replace the dead ones).

An interesting foreshadow of Rebecca’s experience with Pasi3n happens when her mother, in the occasion of her wedding reception, warns her to stop bragging about Pasi3n’s house, saying: “shouldn’t you stop bragging, considering you haven’t seen it yet?” (55). Rebecca responds: “we haven’t been married a day and already you’re pecking like a hen” (55). Ironically, not only is Aurelia right in her concerns, but also the hen-pecking situation is shifted: it is Rebecca who becomes a hen – but without even having a chance to “peck”. If according to common sense wives may be able to dominate their husbands by annoying them, “hen-pecking,” it seems that the actual hens have more prestige with Pasi3n than Rebecca does. As illustrated previously, Pasi3n treats the actual chickens better.

Rebecca actually compares her marriage with Pasi3n to living under Trujillo’s dictatorship while in the Dominican Republic, but concludes that

during Trujillo’s reign of terror, [she] had learned of the disappearances of neighbors only to then witness –months later and sometimes years –the return to life of several of these people given for dead . . . Compared to these marvels, Pasi3n’s transforming into a better husband, father and provider seemed an easy thing. (57)

She excuses Pasi3n for all the brutalities he makes her go through, even if her own life is at stake. But, if in Trujillo's regime the neighbors are the ones to die, in Pasi3n's apartment Rebecca is the one who is disappeared, lost, given for dead by her family and by herself. And she expects to return to life still under his control.

It does not happen though, culminating with her going to her parents' house with her three children. Nevertheless, she still believes that her home is with Pasi3n, so, she attempts to meet him one day (unaware that he is already dead). While going towards his house, she ponders:

she wanted nothing less than to submit again to the possessive passion that usually overtook her husband after she'd be gone. She longed, with an urgency that kept her legs moving quickly, to lose herself in his embrace, to experience the familiar rush of blood and loss of breath, to feel the laying on of his long-fingered hands and the demanding weight of his body on her own. (301)

She connects her sexual experience with Pasi3n to a possible fulfillment of a desire she used to feel in the Dominican Republic. This desire had been triggered at the times when she used to repeatedly sneak out of her parents' house and "experience the thrill of grass and the warmth of rays in her naked skin" (301). There she used to stimulate herself sexually, experiencing both freedom and pleasure (205). However, those experiences did not completely satisfy her, for she yearned "to share with another the tenderness she had conjured on her own which no amount of abuse had managed to subdue" (205). So Pasi3n comes as a possibility of fulfillment of Rebecca's desire. However, her experience with her husband rarely enables these moments. He mostly humiliates her, despising her feelings, her morality, and her body.

Rebecca is driven to Pasi3n first because she feels physically attracted to him, and second because he has a house. Her connection to Pasi3n, then, seems to be grounded on her notion that

he would provide her the feeling of being at home, both for transporting her back to her carefree moments in the Dominican Republic during sex, and for owning a house (a place in which she unsuccessfully tries to create a homely environment). She believes that with Pasi3n she would feel at home, different from dictatorships both of the Dominican Republic (which triggers her emigration in first place) and of her parents' house (in which she claims to be watched and controlled all the time).

However, Rebecca submits to patriarchal values, even though she tries to challenge them at some moments. She seems to be in an infinite struggle within herself. I argue, though, that despite her own questionings, she still tends to be trapped in patriarchal system, doing whatever she can, at all costs, to try to fit into its mold. One episode that illustrates this is when Pasi3n brings a girl to his house and has sex with her in front of Rebecca, who had been strategically strapped to a chair by Pasi3n previously. Enraged, Rebecca first tries to convince herself that it is the girl who had forced the situation. Then she realizes that Pasi3n, in fact, likes the whole situation just as the girl does. And Rebecca's reaction is:

she felt implicated for witnessing her husband's infidelity and for not turning away . . . Rebecca held herself responsible for all that had occurred. Had she submitted to each of her husband's sexual demands, he would not have found it necessary to prove to her that other women were willing to comply. (170)

There is a complete reversal of interpretation. Rebecca makes herself responsible for her husbands' sadomasochist infidelity, blaming herself for perhaps not having agreed to perform all of his sexual fantasies up to that day. She completes: "his actions confirmed how sexually naive she'd been. A virgin until the age of thirty, she had disdained alternate forms of sex" (170). In her view, it is her fault that Pasi3n has promiscuous sexual behavior.

Another example of Rebecca's thinking in complicity with patriarchy is in her desire to have a house. She especially values men who have one because she believes in the conventional, patriarchy-based assumption that home is synonymous to the household, where women belong. When she finds out that Pasi3n owns one, she brags in bewilderment. Her mother tries to warn her, as discussed previously, telling her that she should at least see the house first before bragging about it or putting all of her eggs into the basket of marriage to Pasi3n. She does not give credit to Aurelia, though. However, upon seeing his house, Rebecca stares in disbelief: it was the antithesis of what should be home in her concept, being all cluttered with old stuff and garbage.

Mute with shock, Rebecca had followed him through a corridor lined with stained and gutted mattresses. They climbed a staircase with only inches of cleared space for a person to squeeze through. The second-floor landing was just as cluttered . . . Shabby armchairs were clustered in ways to serve as the living room. In the dining room, mismatched vinyl chairs circled in a green Formica table that collapsed when she leaned against it. (55)

Even though perplexed with the reality that faces her, which is the opposite of what she had expected and longed for, Rebecca still does her best in order to create a place to be called home:

gradually Rebecca had depleted the savings from her former job in a garment factory. She bought lace doilies for the tops of peeling dressers, an embroidered tablecloth for the dining room, colorful sheets for the mattress, curtains for the window, and . . . flowers for all the rooms. (55)

She even tries to maintain the illusion to others that everything is fine and that she is very happy with Pasi3n, despite his never having given her the slightest chance to create a homely environment as she had imagined.

Not only within the house does Pasi3n show his authoritarian power over Rebecca, but also in other places, such as when Rebecca tries get a job in order to help him pay the bills:

when the plumbing clogged, she defied him by returning to her former job so as to be able to pay for the repairs, cover bills, buy a few presents she planned to tell her sisters had been purchased for her by Pasi3n. Days after she was hired, he appeared at the factory to cause such a scene that the police had to be called in.

(56)

Rebecca does try to defy Pasi3n sometimes, but he places her (either by coercion or by her own consent) into the role that patriarchy has designed for women: the private sphere, submissive and passive to the man – the dominant figure. Pasi3n uses many strategies to make her comply with that, from trying to make her feel guilty, such as when he says “a little faith . . . a little faith that things will soon work out. Is that too much to ask for from my wife?” (56) to silencing her by violence. Rebecca believes, or tries to believe, that he will change.

She believes in miracles. Even when invited by her mother to leave Pasi3n and live with her, Rebecca replies: “it’s my home . . . Pasi3n and the children are all I have” (60). She is very much imbued in patriarchal values, doing what she can to adjust to the system. Not only would she stay within the walls of Pasi3n’s garden, for “almost nothing ever brought her downstairs” (52), but also she would not respond to the world outside of it, for “only a determined person pounding mercilessly on the front door could cause Rebecca to poke her head out of the window” (53). Her isolation from the public sphere is also perceived when her children’s

teachers send warnings to her concerning the lack of hygiene she has in relation to her children, which still does not cause any change in her behavior. She seems unaffected by the public realm.

As Rebecca becomes more and more convinced of the fact that Pasi3n is not the husband she had dreamed of, she tries to figure out why. She creates excuses for Pasi3n's behavior towards her: "despite her knowledge to the contrary, she sometimes imagines that, if not for the untimely birth of her children, Pasi3n might by now have become a better husband" (58). Rebecca suffers from self-depreciation for not achieving the – very difficult to achieve – conventional patriarchal expectations of what it would mean to be a woman. She feels a failure as a wife, for not seeing herself as sex-appealing for her husband, and as a mother. Soledad, her youngest daughter, is depicted to be the one who is the most reserved, yet the one who captures what perhaps Rebecca wants to hide from herself:

whenever Soledad focused on her – sunken eyes contacting while the rest of her features remained still – Rebecca had the impression that she was being judged. She'd feel claustrophobic and her throat would constrict, as if she were forced to swallow not only the failure she'd become but also the arrogance of a child reminding her of it. (58)

Soledad does not judge her, however. She is a reminder of Rebecca's condition of being alone, of being disregarded by the system she is immersed in and that she so desperately wants to fit. Soledad, solitude in Spanish, is perhaps the mirror Rebecca has of her own self.

Not only Soledad, but her other two children also have symbolic names: Esperanza, hope; and Rub3n, a biblical name, referring to a son that in the context of Genesis was given to his mother (Leah) in order to make her more appealing to the father (Jacob), for he preferred another woman (Rachel). So God "opened [Leah's] womb" (*Holy Bible*, Gen 29.31), enabling her to

conceive. When Leah gives birth to Reuben she says: “surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me” (*Holy Bible*, Gen. 29.32). Perhaps, then, Rebecca’s motherhood is also an attempt of hers to fulfill the perfect wife agenda. However, Pasi3n does not show any sign of caring even then. Even while pregnant she is not spared from her husband’s abuse.

Rebecca says, in one of her moments of awareness, that her children are the only happiness she actually has in her marriage. And that she strategically learns to pretend that she does not like them for the sake of preventing Pasi3n for doing them any harm:

her satisfaction had been so great that she had concealed it from her husband for fear he would hurt the children and deprive her of the good their marriage had produced. For her children’s sake and her own, she had pretended that they were a nuisance whenever their father was around. (204)

She is aware of Pasi3n’s brutality and tries to protect the children from being abused as well.

However, as the children get older and start observing the politics of being part of that space, Rebecca changes her perspective towards them. She understands that her children notice not only Pasi3n’s brutality, but also her complicity towards it:

yet as the children had matured into more than just mouths for her to feed and bodies for her to cuddle against on the nights when her husband slipped out of the house and did not return for days, as they began to make demands and to condemn her with their eyes, she had secretly begun to despise them for their needs as much as she did herself for her dependence on Pasi3n. (204)

Rebecca tries to blame the children for all that she feels to have gone wrong with her marriage.

Under her perspective they are to be blamed for her lack of time to properly bathe herself for

Pasión, for her unattractive body under the eyes of any man, to her incapacity to fit in to the role of a proper wife. That is, it is not Pasión's fault or her own that she is trapped into a microcosm of extreme oppression and silencing, but the children's.

Aurelia comes as a reminder for Rebecca, though, that the children have nothing to do with Pasión's attitude towards the latter or even with Rebecca's reiterative condition of "attracting" violent men. Aurelia says to Rebecca:

it was you who stayed with Samuel although he'd broken half your bones. It was also you who took up with Pasión and stayed with him although he's had you living with filth since the first day. And since you have conveniently forgotten, he had already set about trying to kill you before any of your children were even born. So don't you dare blame your life on them. You are responsible for it,
Rebecca. (199)

Aurelia tries to show Rebecca that the consequences come out of choices, personal ones. And that it is up to Rebecca to change the routes of her life, if she wants to, instead of blaming others for her fate.

Rebecca seems, though, imbued with traditional ideas of the roles of a wife, and of home consequently. Even though she knows that Pasión represents danger both for herself and for her children, she clings on to the idea that home is Pasión's house. And, even when she finds him dead and one would expect her to change her viewpoint, allowing herself to act critically towards her own history with Pasión, she does not assume another perspective. She excuses him once more: "tears streamed from Rebecca's eyes. Eight years of believing herself misunderstood and it was she who'd understood little, she who had misjudged her husband and abandoned him to a

solitary death” (304). At this point she assumes some kind of responsibility, even if through the distorted lens of patriarchal hegemony.

I would say that Rebecca’s concept of home changes throughout the narrative, shifting from the view of a country to the view of an idealized household. However, though, her grounds for imagining home do not change for they are constantly under the umbrella of patriarchal values. She does not change perspectives such as Iliana and Aurelia, who ultimately imagine home as a space rather than a place. Rebecca clings to the idea of the house (either Pasión’s or perhaps of another man’s) as a place to embody home. Feeling at home should take place within the boundaries of a house, in her view, even though it is exactly within the walls of the house with Pasión that throughout the narrative she is the most subjugated and displaced.

Finally, Marina, the “mad” daughter, is a very disturbing character. I must say that she has been my most troublesome character to analyze. She may seem mad, smart, aware, oblivious, attached to conventions, careless about conventions, all at once – and none at once. She leads and misleads throughout the narrative, but she also gives herself away at some moments. And these are the exact moments that have aided me in trying to understand this rather complex character. Furthermore, since Marina is such a complex character to be analyzed, I elicit the fact that I found it necessary to choose among the episodes she is part of the ones that were the most appealing to me having in mind both my hypothesis and my intention of promoting a tentatively non-shallow approach towards Marina. In the present work, therefore, I especially focus on Marina’s madness and on what it may represent in her process of constructing home(s). In my previous research I found very little (or none) on this aspect of Marina’s characterization (her madness), especially under the gendered perspective I chose to engage in. Researchers have focused especially on trauma, rape, violence, when approaching Marina. I am aware that the rape

she suffers (rather fictitious or not) is of great importance in her analysis as a whole, but I chose to engage in the analysis of this specific episode (and consequences) in future studies of mine.

Before effectively getting to the analysis of Marina, it is interesting to point out a feminist approach towards madness:

hysteria, madness, insanity and depression have been historically inscribed as negative spaces inhabited primarily by women. Even the etymology of the word ‘hysteria,’ which goes back to the Greek word ‘uterus,’ reiterates the antiquated notion that disturbances of the womb were responsible for woman’s mental illnesses. (Almeida, “The Madness” 102)

There is a clear demarcation, according to a binary thought, between sanity/insanity. And if one is to follow Hélène Cixous’s suggestion that binary pairs are coupled according to patriarchal ideas of man/woman (as discussed in chapter two of this master’s thesis), in which the feminine side is the “weakest” one, then women are granted the insanity in the binary sanity/insanity, which parallels the logo/pathos one.

It is a tricky position for women in patriarchy, then: if they comply with patriarchal rules, they are granted sanity. That is, if a woman remains silent she is sane. However, if she defies these rules, she is insane. As Sandra Almeida states, “women’s (in)sanity . . . depends either on compliance (‘sanity’) with, or upon subversion (‘insanity’) of, the rules imposed by society . . . The madwoman serves patriarchy insofar as she opposes men’s rationality and sanity” (“The Madness” 103). So, the more aware women become of the forces that are driven upon them within hegemonic patriarchal discourse and the more deviant, the more insane – consequently, the less heard and . . . silent again.

Almeida also interestingly points out that “in her marginal role in society, the mad woman is often identified with the sorceress who attempts to destabilize the symbolic order” (“The Madness” 103). The madwoman is, then, equaled to a non-representative woman in the man/woman binary. She does not fit into the representation, therefore must be excluded, or at least, undermined. The madwoman is seen as a witch, an embodiment of evil, a disturber of the order. In *Geographies of Home*, when Marina claims to have seen God at church, she is considered to be possessed by evil. People at church say: “The devil has possessed her soul” (109). She is then expelled from church with her father’s consent. He claims that she is possessed, asserting that “Satan preferred those very guises insidious enough to be attributed to the Holy Ghost” (148) and that he knows better.

Besides being depicted as madwomen, as incarnations of evil, women who do not fit the role that is ascribed to them in patriarchy are also depicted as monsters: “it is debilitating to be *any* woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (Gilbert and Gubar 2029). Marina is depicted as monster-like. She has an eating disorder that deforms her body:

her mouth had opened wide for any food within her reach. Her body had ripened to a shape the envy of her sisters, then past plumpness she had been told Hispanic men preferred and, finally, to the obesity which had drawn down on the ridicule of others. Yet still her life had remained as empty as before. (101)

She struggles for fulfillment, for feeling at ease, for belonging.

Marina is a deviant in society for her non-conventional behavior: she sets fire to her parents’ house, rapes her own sister, and takes pills in order to attempt suicide. All of these acts are very symbolic. In each of them she is either conveying a message or trying to provide

answers for herself: in the first example, when she sets fire to the kitchen, she claims to be stopping spiders from taking over the house. Therefore, she is trying to stop potential intruders from unsettling a location that should mean home. These creatures that she sees are seemingly preventing her from feeling at ease in the place that should mean protection (according to a traditional view of home) – thus the spiders are a threat to peace within the house; in the second example, when she rapes Iliana, she is trying to understand how come that sister, being a woman, has so many privileges that she does not have herself, how come Iliana is so welcomed at her house while she is not (according to Marina’s perspective); and finally when she takes pills, she is attempting to free herself from the body that in her conception prevents her from feeling at ease, or at home. This body marks her foreignness, “womanness,” and blackness (bearing in mind the “One drop Rule,” discussed in chapter two).

Marina’s character enables a discussion on bodily inscriptions bearing in mind Judith Butler’s suggestion of the body “as the ground, surface or site of cultural inscription” (2490). The body, according to Butler, becomes “a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to [it]” (2491). Following that line of thought, Marina tries to free herself from bodily inscriptions (of gender and of race) that mark her geography in such an explicit us/them way, in which she sees herself mostly as part of the “them.”

On a surface level, Marina tries to free herself from the bodily inscription of race by trying to clean herself from her color with Lysol. She tries to disinfect herself from blackness. Marina seems to be attached to the idea of mainstream Dominican society, who do not see themselves as black, who historically were taught to value whiteness, as discussed in chapter two. Thus, Marina suffers when confronted to the public realm of the United States, in which race is binarized, and in which it is the “One Drop Rule” discourse that prevails.

She does not accept blackness, but neither is she able to call herself white, once she cannot deny her own traits of African heritage (even though she suffers when acknowledging them). She goes through the struggle of “triple-consciousness” of the Afro-Latinos, as discussed by Juan Flores (qtd. in Sandín 103). He argues that Afro-Latinos face a different predicament from the African-Americans, once the former deal with an extra instance, which is to be of Latin America origin (or descendant). Many times they do not feel as belonging to neither white nor black classifications. Indeed, Marina does not feel effectively as belonging to neither group. Thus she clings to a panethnic term: “I’m Hispanic, not black,” when confronted on race by Iliana. This sister confronts her again: “What color is your skin?” and receives the reply: “I’m Hispanic” (38). Marina apparently subverts the binarized conception of race in the context of the United States. One could even think that she were questioning the very idea of race, by using a panethnic label opposed to a racial one.

However, in Marina’s case, it does not seem that she is questioning the binary system, but rather that she wishes to be on the white side in the white/black binary. She insists on the superiority of the so-called white group, claiming for instance that “white people have always been nicer to [her]” (39). Her feeling of displacement comes, then, from the fact that she refuses to accept her blackness but cannot either see herself as white. Marina’s distancing from whiteness is portrayed when she is jealous of the white woman in her former office job: “for some reason it was the memory of her green eyes and smiling lips which sent the bitter taste of bile rushing towards her mouth” (98). She distances herself from “white people.” However, she longs for white people’s company. Marina wants to have a relationship with a white man, both because she sees in white men a more plausible way to ascend socially: “give me a break, Iliana. How many black people are at your school?”(38); and because she clings to the US mainstream

hierarchical view towards race, as well as to Dominican Republic nationalistic mainstream values concerning blackness in which blacks (the Haitians) are devalued, in a lower rank, as well as de-humanized:

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

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

“Only that you could do better.”

“Better? What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“You know how black men are.”

“No, Marina. Tell me.”

“They’re lazy as shit and undependable.” (39)

So, by trying to cleanse from blackness, a socially constructed bodily inscription that goes beyond mere skin pigmentation, Marina shows that she actually abides to mainstream conventions. Not only does she never accept her own African heritage, but also she essentializes and devalues blackness, wishing to be on the other side of the binary. Iliana tries to point this out to her by saying: “Look at yourself. You’re suffering from the same thing they are, thinking anything lighter must be better” (38). And it is at this point that Marina attempts to justify her point of view by responding: “I’m Hispanic” (38). Therefore, contrary to what could have been expected, Marina’s attempt to destroy this bodily inscription is not subversive in the sense that she is trying to challenge the construct of race in the context of the United States. Marina instead shows her condition of being trapped into the system.

Still having body in mind, race is not the only issue to mark Marina’s experience of feeling the “other,” the “them,” and to trigger a response from her. Marina draws a parallel

between the body and the house (both her parents' and God's house – the church), in such a way that her body becomes a site for questioning the enclosures as well as the frustration she experiences for not finding home in places that patriarchy claim to be home. On the one hand, when setting fire to the family's house, Aurelia interestingly asserts that “what Marina had conveyed by setting fire to the kitchen was that the house, like the life she had previously attempted to destroy . . . meant little” (21). It is not that the house means little for Marina, however. Perhaps the contrary would be more accurate: because Marina values the house so much, guided by patriarchy, she feels deeply frustrated for not fitting “properly” into what it should represent. She is not able to find home there, so her acts of apparent underestimation of the place of the house are but a reaction to her frustration.

On the other hand, when expelled from church after claiming to have a vision of God, Marina becomes “painfully aware that she was an outcast even among those who claimed to believe in God” (112). In the novel the church plays a role in maintaining patriarchal values. That is evidenced, for instance in the preacher's speech about women, in which he claims that women deceive men by making use of devices to appear “beautiful.” What the preacher does not consider is why women feel compelled to engage to those devices in first place. Iliana sharply remarks: “and now this: as if she had not heard that sermon a million times and again needed to be warned that as a woman she was inferior to all men” (106). Marina, though, has another reaction: during the speech she claims to envision God and decides: “I'm going home where I belong” (110). Marina gets to the conclusion that home is not the church and makes an attempt to find home somewhere else. Following a Christian idea that the body is the prison of the soul, Marina tries to liberate her soul, her self, from its prison. If the house is traditionally regarded as home, as a familiar sanctuary, it is not so in her experience: she sets fire to it. And if Christianity

(Marina is Christian) claims the body to be the temple, the sanctuary of one's mind and of God, according to St. Paul, it is not so for her either: she attempts suicide.

Marina is a complex character. She seems to be aware of the social restraints that patriarchy sets upon her and her social deviations come to show that. However, I argue that, despite Marina's unconventional acts, she does not perform resistance towards patriarchy. Her madness results from the frustration for feeling like a failure in relation to what is expected from her by the very patriarchal society, and not from trying to challenge it.

Marina is portrayed as having conventional, patriarchy-set "feminine" dreams, such as of becoming a model (99), embodying the view advocated by mainstream patriarchal society, after all, women are "flowers in the garden;" of wanting to marry and to be provided for by a husband (97); and of seeing home as the assigned "feminine" place of the house. Walking down the street, Marina sees a house "she has grown to love" (84):

indifferent to the cold, she paused in front of the house to imagine herself looking out of one of its windows rather than trying to see in. A loving husband approached her from behind. He wrapped his arms around her and sprinkled kisses on her neck. Turning to face him, she returned with kisses of her own. (85)

Marina does not flee from the frustration she feels from not being able (according to her) to fulfill what is expected from women in a patriarchal society.

She reveals, thus, complicity towards the patriarchal system she is immersed in. Her attack on Iliana, for instance, shows that she is investigating possible reasons why Iliana has so much benefit, "despite" being a woman. She in a sense agrees that women should not have these "benefits." Marina tries to prove, then, that Iliana is not a woman. She observes that Iliana

was self-seeking as a man and, like Vicente, had abandoned home when she'd been needed most . . . She was as indifferent as Tico, as confident about her opinions as Gabriel, as volatile as Caleb. Overall, she behaved more like her brothers and shared few of the personality traits of her sisters. (277)

Marina believes that Iliana may have “male organs tucked inside” (277). And

if such were the case with Iliana, it would be the reason why she had never had a boyfriend, expressed no interest in marrying or bearing children, and appeared at moments like a woman but at others like a man. It would also account for why her parents, sensing that she was different, allowed her more freedom than they had granted their other girls. (277)

Therefore, in Marina's narrow-minded point of view, Iliana is not a woman, for if she were she would not have all the possibilities she has.

In the passage above two other aspects are also made clear: Marina is aware of her social limitations as a woman in a patriarchal society, and she shows her own connivance with the system. When she says that she does not understand why Iliana does not show desire for marrying or of having children, which to her sounds strange, Marina reveals her own acceptance of patriarchal values that women are naturally born to marry and bear children. She essentializes the category “woman” according to the binary man/woman, reinforcing patriarchal ideology. Her madness does not depart from a desire to change structures, but from a frustration for not fitting in as she wishes.

Marina's ambiguity regarding being mad, deviant, hysteric, but yet not free from conventions, meets with Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément's claim that

this feminine role of the sorceress, of hysteric, is ambiguous, antiestablishment, and conservative at the same time. Antiestablishment because the symptoms – the attacks – revolt and shake up the public, the group, the men, the others to whom they are exhibited . . . The hysteric unties familiar bonds, introduces disorder into the well-regulated unfolding of everyday life, gives rise to magic in ostensible reason. These roles are conservative because every sorceress ends up being destroyed. (5)

And that is what seems to happen to Marina, which is illustrated in her setting fire to the lawyer's documents in the office, after feeling rejected: “mesmerized by the beauty and destructive power of that flame, she flung the tip of the match into the bin and stood back to watch as the papers caught fire” (98). This moment is seen by Marina as Pentecost, a moment of revelation:

the flames leapt into the air and spoke to her with their forked and incandescent tongues. She was free, they murmured, free of the conventions which had kept her wobbling on a tightrope for fear of plummeting in the abyss she now reached. (98)

However, it seems that what Marina assumes to be the revelation is not exactly it, for “what the flames, quickly expiring into smoke, failed to convey was that her sorrow would not cease because she had allowed herself into the freefall” (98). Her attempts are compared, then to flames that, despite introducing disorder, do not cause change.

She keeps struggling in the surface. Despite her various attempts of defying social norms of behavior, she does not challenge deeper structures of ideology, so she ultimately ends up contained. A metaphor for Marina would be a bottle full of water in the ocean. She is the water within the bottle that represents patriarchy. She ultimately is contained by the bottle of patriarchy.

It is as if, by means of her madness, she provoked tempests within this bottle, but without removing the cork, the hegemonic force that keeps her contained and that shapes her. Her madness does not spill drops beyond the cork. She is incapable of reaching the ocean in which this bottle is immersed. A new birth, a renewal, an escape from patriarchal law, would only be possible if Marina's waters could reach the sea beyond the bottle, instead of only provoking turmoil in the still waters of patriarchy.

Marina ultimately seems not to find home perhaps because "the hysteric interrupts phallic mastery, but does not change it" (Davies 77). Marina is very much disempowered: first because she is repressed, silenced, destroyed by mainstream society because of her deviant behavior; and second because she does not dive into deeper layers of understanding in regard to how or why she is dominated. Therefore, in relation to Marina's analysis, her performance as a madwoman does not point to a transformation of the ideologies that repress her, such as of gender. On the contrary, under the light of Marta Caminero-Santangelo in *The Madwoman Can't Speak*, Marina conveys that insanity is the final surrender to dominant discourses "precisely because it is characterized by the (dis)ability to produce meaning – that is, to produce representations recognizable as meaningful within society" (11). Thus, contrary to what I had initially expected, Marina does not free herself from conventions by means of her madness. And Rebecca also seems not to be able to free herself from patriarchal conventions, even though life does provide her (and Marina) with opportunities for new beginnings.

Bearing in mind that both Rebecca and Marina are trapped inside patriarchal thought, their concepts of home also become somewhat limited. If, on the one hand, Aurelia and Iliana, in different ways, re-shape their concepts of home towards the direction of conceiving home as a space rather than a place, on the other hand Rebecca and Marina, even though constantly re-

shaping their concepts as well, remain attached to the idea of home as a place. And because home as a physical place is quite intangible – because this idealization does not enable articulation between the many facets that influence one’s subjectivity and consequently one’s construct of home – while home as a space is more palpable, Rebecca and Marina seem to be the ones mostly damaged in the process of finding home.

CONCLUSION

It was in the scope of the present work to analyze the concept of home in *Geographies of Home*: how it is built throughout the narrative and what it may represent for each of the characters studied. I have come to the conclusion that Aurelia, Iliana, Rebecca and Marina, even though in different ways, construct more than one concept of home throughout the narrative. Moreover, the novel's dénouement points to yet new life experiences for each character. Iliana, for instance, decides to depart from her parents' house; Aurelia allows herself to sprout roots past the concrete soil of the United States; Rebecca is presented to a life without Pasión; and Marina has another opportunity for recovering, having left the hospital. Therefore, as open-endedness is suggested. These characters are still to take other paths, which will also inevitably shape other constructs of home.

Perhaps the articulations the characters make in *Geographies of Home* corroborate Gloria Anzaldúa's conception of the *mestiza's* "new consciousness." Aurelia, Rebecca, Marina and Iliana, as diasporic figures, illustrate Anzaldúa's depiction of the *mestiza* in the following poem:

Because I, a *mestiza*,
 Continually walk out of one culture
 And into another,
 Because I am in all cultures at the same time,
Alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
Me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
Simultáneamente. (100)

As the speaker in Anzaldúa's poem, the characters in *Geographies of Home* are also in more than one *mundo* at the same time: the *mundos* of gender, race, ethnicity, etc. Under the light of Kathleen M. Kirby, place "perpetuates the fixed parameters of ontological categories, making them coherent containers of essences, in relation to which one must be 'inside' or 'out', 'native' or 'foreign'" ("Thinking through the Boundary" 174). Thus, Anzaldúa's poem would refer to spaces because the speaker claims to occupy more than one *mundo* at the same time.

Furthermore, Anzaldúa asserts that "the ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity" (100) and that because of this perplexity the *mestiza* is led to divergent thinking "towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (101). This is what happens to the characters in *Geographies of Home*: they are traversed and many times perplexed by the *mundos* they find themselves in – a condition that directly influences their concepts of home.

I suggest that Aurelia and Iliana change perspectives throughout the narrative from the conception of home as a place to the one of home as a space. I propose that Rebecca and Marina keep attached to the idealization of home as a place throughout the narrative, even though they point out the idea of home as space exactly by conveying the fact of not being able to feel at home in places. Actually, the house, which is a place traditionally linked to the idea of home, constitutes a site of domination and of conflict for all of all the characters analyzed.

Space, different from place,

seems to offer a medium for articulating – speaking and intertwining – the many facets, or phases, of subjectivity that have interested different kinds of theory: national origin, geographic and territorial mobility (determined by class, gender, and race), bodily presence and limits, structures of consciousness, and ideological

formations of belonging and exclusion. (Kirby, “Thinking through the Boundary” 174)

According to my analysis, then, Iliana and Aurelia get to the point of allowing themselves a more inclusive perspective than Rebecca and Marina do. The latter, by building their concepts of homes as places, do not allow a medium for articulating the many facets they inevitably deal with in their lives. Consequently, they constantly perceive themselves as not belonging. Home as a space enables a more fluid and beyond the binary conception, allowing articulation between different discourses (gender, race, and nationality). Therefore, the feeling of belonging becomes more tangible.

I also would like to draw attention to the word “geographies” in the title of the novel. The geographies of home for the characters may refer both to the routes they go through in the search for home and also to the *loci* of enunciation of these characters: where they depart from. On the one hand, each character goes through very different routes in their struggle to build the concept of home. Aurelia, for instance, goes through the routes of motherly concerns and anguish (due to Marina’s recurrent hospitalizations and suicide attempts, Rebecca’s being abused by her partners, her sons’ cheating on each other, etc), poverty, and others. Throughout the narrative she shifts the notion of home from a national perspective, the Dominican Republic, to a patriarchal one – the household, and finally reaches a conclusion that home is perhaps a perspective, a future-oriented space, rather than a physical locality.

Iliana’s routes are somewhat different from her mother’s, but she also shifts perspectives in relation to home: initially she idealizes home as her parents’ house (in confrontation with the hostile environment she faces at college), and then she goes through a process of self-discovery

in which home is re-signified. Ultimately she concludes that home is within herself instead of being a physical place.

Rebecca, on her turn, goes through many routes in the narrative, which include subjugation, oppression, but also, even though rare, attempts to create a new perspective. Rebecca is, in fact, an example of Gayatri Spivak's "new diaspora" ("Diasporas Old and New" 250) – one must bear in mind that she is the member of the family to first depart to the United States and to work in order to send for the others. Rebecca works in underpaid jobs for some time in order to be able to send for her family, who had stayed in the Dominican Republic. Aware of the limitations imposed by the *Trujillato*, Rebecca expects to open the gates to a better life, both for her family and for herself. However, contrary to what one could expect, she remains trapped in patriarchal law while in the host country, not being able to effectively stand a ground in relation to her own subjectivity, even after being so bold in first place. *Pasión* re-creates a dictatorial space in Rebecca's life while in the United States, representing, in fact, a system harsher than the *Trujillato* had ever been for her. Rebecca does, however, follow many routes of self-assessment throughout the narrative, even though she ultimately maintains a limited view on what home may represent.

Finally, at a first reading Marina may be regarded as subversive character, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, a careful analysis tends to show the opposite. The routes she follows in order to build her attempts of homes are very much limited to patriarchal domain. She struggles to fit in the very system she apparently fights against. And her conceptions of homes, very much shaped by frustration, illustrate her surrender to dominant discourses.

Still bearing in mind the term "geographies" in the title, it may refer, on the other hand, to the *loci* of enunciation of each character. It is from particular standpoints that the concepts of

home are constructed. And these geographies influence the routes by which one tries to find home. Each of the characters studied speaks from somewhere in relation to race, ethnicity, gender and subjectivity. Consequently, they envision home(s) under different perspectives, which will help determine the choice of each of the routes they take.

It was my intention to approach the characters' cartographies of home in order to analyze what and how each of them builds and re-builds this notion. And during my studies I noticed that their cartographies of home also include maps which are inscribed on their very bodies. The four characters have bodily inscriptions manifested in a very significant way throughout the narrative, which very much lead to their views towards home (as well as of subjectivity). In my discussion I have pointed out some of these bodily inscriptions, but a more thorough study is required.

Aurelia, for example, when arriving in the United States, loses a considerable amount of weight until she understands that she needs to have a stand in order not to succumb to the foreign status she so deeply feels. She is terrified to step outside of her apartment, becoming skeletal. Her body is, at this point, directly related to the perception she has of herself. Only when she finds out that she has to overcome her fears in order not to leave her children motherless in the United States is she able to reconstruct herself, both psychologically and physically. And that is also when she allows herself to experience home as a lived locality.

Iliana also has her bodily inscriptions marked in the narrative, which I have briefly discussed in the previous chapter of this master's thesis. The characterization of her body defies patriarchal definitions of gender roles, and her performance of gender also influences her views of home. She does not feel accepted or welcome at her parents' house, for instance, due to the fact that her siblings think that she does not behave or dress as a woman should. She is regarded as having masculine physical features, not to mention that Marina is almost certain that Iliana

hides masculine organs. Another important bodily inscription in Iliana's characterization which influences her feeling of belonging is her complexion. She is part of the African Diaspora. Throughout the narrative Iliana conveys the struggle she goes through because of racial and/or ethnic prejudice and because of rejection by mainstream society (while at college), by immigrants of Latin American origin and by African-Americans.

Rebecca has bodily inscriptions which influence her views of home and of her own subjectivity as well. She has inscriptions of both physical and moral violence on her body. The cartography of Rebecca's body enables an interesting discussion on the process of women's victimization in patriarchy: to what extent there would be resistance and/or connivance to this very oppressive system; and how it can – if it can – possibly be explained. Not to mention Marina, whose parallel between body and subjectivity are made clear by Aurelia in the narrative.

Therefore, I suggest further studies of these characters taking into consideration the question of the body. It may shed light on the relation between the body and “feminine” subjugation and/or victimization. How and when do these women find themselves as victims and/or victimizers? And how is that presented in the narrative by means of their bodily inscriptions? Elódia Xavier in her work *Que corpo é esse? O corpo no imaginário feminino* suggests different types of bodies, such as the “immobilized body,” the subaltern body,” “the disciplined body,” etc. which can be applied to the characters. It is not that each of them necessarily corresponds to one type, once it is possible to envision them in more than one category. I would say, for instance, that Marina may have features of the “disciplined body” for carrying the inscriptions of a repressive system, such as in relation to race in the context of the United States. Arthur Frank argues that

with regard to control, the disciplined body makes itself predictable through its regimentation. So long as the regimen is followed, the body can believe itself to be predictable. . . . When internal discipline can no longer neutralize the threat of its own contingency, the disciplined body may turn to domination, enforcing on the bodies of others the control it cannot exercise over itself. (55)

This is what Marina conveys: she is predictable because she does not effectively defy the patriarchal system, despite her episodes of madness. Adding to that she is predictable for ultimately remaining constrained to patriarchal law. Frank argues that in order “for discipline to be sustained, the sense of lack must maintain conscious” (55). And that is what happens to Marina. She is permanently conscious of the lack, of the non-belonging, of the non-fitting into the system.

Agreeing with Franks’ description of the “disciplined body,” it is when Marina feels the most trapped in patriarchal law that she turns to domination, enforcing control over the body of others, such as of Iliana’s body in the episode of the rape. It is interesting to notice that this feature of the “disciplined body” is also present in Rebecca’s characterization, especially in relation to her children. I argue, however, that Marina can also be regarded as the “immobilized body,” described by Xavier, for being constrained within patriarchal law, despite apparently subverting it. There is so much to be studied in relation to the “typologies of the body” concerning these characters, and I especially intend to engage in future studies analyzing how body inscriptions convey oppression and resistance within the patriarchal society in which they are immersed.

Finally, I have reached the conclusion that the analyzed characters’ attitude towards the concept of home is very ambiguous. And that may be explained, among other factors, because of

their diasporic condition. As advocated by Avtar Brah, diasporic subjects have a homing desire and not a desire to return to a specific place, such as homeland (197), once “the concept of diaspora places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins” (193). In Brah’s view there is a “multi-placedness” of home (197) for these subjects, which, in the present work – under the light of Kirby – I suggest to be called the “spaceness” of home. Moreover, Aurelia, Iliana, Rebecca and Marina are portrayed to experience “difference,” non-belonging as a gendered phenomenon.

According to James Clifford, “diasporic experiences are [in fact] always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diasporas and diaspora cultures to overlook this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experience.” There is a convenience in unmarking diasporas in gender terms, since “women’s experiences are particularly revealing” (Clifford 313). And that is why Leila Assumpção Harris suggests, regarding diasporic women writers, that when one analyzes the works of writers who have left their native countries while still at a young age it is possible to observe in their writings the questionings, ambivalences and mediation that become part of a hyphenated existence (48). Harris advocates that

both the migrant writers and the characters created by them are influenced by two or more cultures, developing hybrid identities due to the ruptures that are triggered by the geographical and cultural dislocations they go through. (49)

Adding to that, according to Hall, “we all write and speak from a particular place in time, from a history and culture that are specific . . . [and] practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we write or speak” (“Cultural Identity” 392).

Loida Maritza Pérez left the Dominican Republic as a child to live in the United States with her family. She is both a migrant and a diasporic subject. And in *Geographies of Home* it is possible to see in the characterization of Aurelia, Iliana, Rebecca and Marina the tensions and ambiguities which are part of the diasporic experiences. *Geographies of Home* is Loida Maritza Pérez's debut novel and, as pointed out in the introduction of this master's thesis, it has had a great impact among critics particularly because of Perez's "sensitive representation of the difficulty of immigration" (Voices from the Gaps). I add that not only does it represent the difficulty of immigration, but that also, and foremost, it offers a very enriching perspective of diasporic women while in their search for homes.

Sandra Almeida observes that

the concern with cultural, historical and political specificities is inherent to many narratives by contemporary writers in which the women characters are presented through multiple experiences, building a frame of alternative possibilities for women as diasporic subjects.¹ ("A Nova Diáspora" 195, my translation)

The multiple experiences traverse all of the analyzed characters of *Geographies of Home* and the alternative possibilities for women as diasporic subjects are very present especially in the characterization of Aurelia and Iliana, according to my analysis.

Finally, it was also my intention in this study to problematize binaries, since, according to Brah "there is no binary that can be analyzed in isolation . . . individuals are faced with multiple binaries, which account for a multidimensionality of power as well" (187). Therefore my analysis attempted to simultaneously analyze what is embedded within and across the binaries

¹ "A preocupação com as especificidades culturais, históricas e políticas é parte integrante de várias narrativas de escritoras contemporâneas nas quais as personagens femininas são apresentadas através de experiências múltiplas, compondo um quadro de possibilidades alternativas para as mulheres como sujeitos diaspóricos" (Almeida, "A nova diáspora" 195).

native/foreign, man/woman and white/black. I paid special attention to the question of power that emerges within a binary way of thinking as a way of challenging the very construction of these binaries in first place. It is the multidimensionality of power in discourse that comes to configure each of the characters' positioning, shaping, therefore, their concepts of homes. Each of them, whether by idealizing spaces or places, ultimately looks for a site (physical or imaginary) "where the heart...lies" (Parker 65). And here I take advantage of the ambiguity of the verb "lie." Whether defying patriarchy, being oppressed by it or even colluding with it, the characters analyzed in one way or the other try construct home as where their hearts lie, and/or as where they lie to their hearts.

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