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***Dreaming in Cuban: A Portrayal of Cuban Exile to the  
United States***

Trabajo de Fin de Grado realizado por

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## **Abstract**

This final degree project focuses on Cuban-American literature and its main features, in which culture and traditions have a fundamental role, and how all these elements are portrayed in the novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), by Cristina Garcia.

In order to achieve this objective I have carried out an investigation based on documents and books which deal with Latino and Cuban literature, Cuban culture and traditions, the experience of the exile in general and, particularly, of the Cuban-American one. The project is organized in four parts, addressing the following topics: a socio-historical introduction of the novel, contextualizing it according to the age it belongs and what was happening at that time; an explanation of the main aspects of Latino culture; an introduction to the author, her life, works, and the novel in which the project is based; an analysis of the novel according to family relationships, the question of the exile and sense of belonging, how it is to live in America and how this has changed some characters and a portrayal of Cuban culture and traditions in the novel.

The work concludes that *Dreaming in Cuban* is a clear and perfect example of Cuban culture, traditions, exile, adaptation to a new foreign country and all the consequences that this involves: it is a very accurate portrayal of Cuban exile to the United States since the 1960s. Throughout my analysis I have tried to demonstrate that, what was explained in the socio-historical introduction is exemplified in the novel, with the study of each important part of Cuban-American culture and traditions.

**Keywords:** Cuban-Americans, “Cubanness,” ethnic writers, exile, magical realism

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The exile is a person who, having lost a loved one, keeps searching for the face he loves in every new face and, forever deceiving himself, thinks he has found it.

–Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls*

## 1. Introduction

In the present project I have studied the process of exile to the United States that was carried out by Cuban people during the 1960s and 1970s, because of political disagreements with the Cuban government. Moreover, I have also presented various aspects of Latino culture in general and Cuban one in particular, providing as an example the analysis of the novel published by Cristina Garcia in 1992, *Dreaming in Cuban*.

I decided to choose this theme because, since the third year of the degree I have been interested in Caribbean literature after studying the subject *World Literatures in English*. I thought it would be interesting to investigate about this kind of literature and, after discussing with my tutor, I determined that Cuban-American literature could be a good and prolific choice. Inside this vast field I concluded to focus my project on the process of Cuban exile to the United States, their adaptation to the new country, the attempt to preserve their culture and traditions and how these different aspects are portrayed by Cristina Garcia in her work *Dreaming in Cuban*.

The aim of this study is to know more about Cuban literature, culture and its main features, alongside with the experience of exile that many people had to live, and the reflection of these characteristics and events in a literary work. Furthermore, I considered that it would be appealing to increase my knowledge with a kind of literature that is not as well-known as the North American or British.

My paper is structured in four parts, each of them with different sub-sections inside, including the conclusion and followed by the list of works cited. The first part deals with the socio-historical context of the novel, focusing especially on the 1960s and 1970s. There it is explained the situation that Cuba was experimenting at that time, the Communist revolution and its rise to power and how many people who were against this new regime had to move to the United States. In addition, a description of the situation of the exiles is made, with an account of the most important aspects of Latino culture in general and the process of adaptation of Cuban people in the States.

In the second part I present Cristina Garcia, the author of the novel, pointing out the most fundamental facets of her life, the autobiographical sense of the novel and also I introduce *Dreaming in Cuban* itself, explaining its structure and main points. Along with that I make a brief explanation of some of the themes that appear through the novel, as a way of providing a context for the reader.

The third part constitutes the analysis of the novel: firstly, an examination of the family and intergenerational relationships; secondly, an study of the bond between the exiles and their motherland and also an analysis of Pilar, the main character, and her struggle between two cultures; thirdly the project focuses on the characters that live in America and their lives, with a special section for the idea of the American Dream; the last part of the investigation deals with Cuban culture and traditions and it also makes emphasis on magical realism as an important element of Cuban literature.

Finally, in the last part of my project I present the conclusions extracted from the thorough analysis carried out in the previous sections. I make emphasis on what has been done throughout the whole project, showing how the characters and their stories fit perfectly into the main features of Cuban-American exiles' culture and traditions.

## 2. Socio-historical Introduction

### 2.1 The Story of Cuban Exile

Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all.

–Cristina Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban*.

The Latino peoples of the United States involve one of the largest minority groups in the country. They represent a high percentage of the overall United States population, having increased highly since the beginning of the 1990s; and they are expected to continue growing up<sup>1</sup>. Each Latino community has its own story and reasons that made them decide to emigrate to the United States. Many of them decided to leave their homeland in order to find new opportunities, with the idea of the American Dream in their minds, which, as *Investopedia* asserts, is “the belief that anyone, regardless of their social class, origin or race, can achieve success throughout hard work and sacrifice.” But there were also people which had to emigrate from their countries because of political issues and disagreements with their governments. Cubans were one of those communities. Their story is totally different and unique as a consequence of the circumstances and events they had to face in their motherland, issues that forced many of them to start a new life in another country.

As it is stated in *The Cambridge Dictionary*, exile is defined as “the condition of someone being sent or kept away from their own country, village, etc., especially for political reasons.” Cuban exile is a story that dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it perfectly fits in this explanation. The wars of independence (1868-78, 1895-98), alongside with the struggling economy and the often radical shifts in government at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made a great contribution to Cuban emigration, although the key point was Fulgencio Batista’s defeat in favour of Fidel Castro’s July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement in 1959, which supposed the end of Batista’s dictatorship, the victory of Castro’s revolution and the Cuban communists’ rise to power. It was since 1959 that the largest number of Cubans emigrated to the United States, mainly in three different periods: from 1959 to 1962, after the revolution; from 1965 to 1973, during the “freedom flights” that allowed a great majority of Cubans to leave the island; and, finally, during the “Mariel boatlift” in 1980, a fleet of boats provided by Cuba’s government that allowed a lot of citizens to leave

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<sup>1</sup> A great part of the information about Cuban exile to the United States has been taken from Maria Cristina García's *Havana-USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban American in South Florida, 1959-1994*.

and to escape from the country to the United States –as a consequence of the weak economy, the lack of jobs and houses and the internal tensions in the island. When they arrived to the States, the great majority settled in South Florida, especially in Miami. Cuban emigrants felt attracted by this place as a result of its climatic and geographic conditions but also because there was a small group of Cuban people living there, consequence of the emigration of the previous decades. In spite of that, the majority of Cuban emigrants did not consider themselves immigrants, but rather political exiles who hoped to return to their island when Castro’s regime was replaced by another one with whom they agreed. So they did not want to become North-Americans, they did not wish to start a new life and forget everything about their homeland (at least, this was what most of them thought). They had the sense of “Cubanness”: their desire was to preserve their Cuban identity and to define what it meant to be Cuban in a country which was not the one they were native to.

That “Cubanness” was really present in Miami, which became the centre of Cuban exiles and where they developed their institutions, different journals, radios and television stations in Spanish; it was the place from where many Cuban intellectuals emerged and, above all, Miami was seen as the heart of the expression of Cuban culture. That desire of preserving their identity is expressed here by one of the most important Cuban artists of all times, Celia Cruz:

I have thirty-seven or thirty-eight years outside my country, and the longing for it is precisely what allows me to conserve that feeling and never lose it...I’ll continue with my Cuban music until the last day. You can call it “salsa” or “sulso” or whatever you want to call it; it’s still Cuban music. I will always have it present within me. I can be here in Mexico or in Venezuela or in Spain or Argentina, and my accent is still a Cuban accent. (qtd. in O’Reilly Herrera 253)

Her words are just an example of how proud Cuban exiles are of themselves and their origins, they feel really attached to their motherland and their goal is to promote and live following Cuban culture and traditions wherever they are.

Taking this into account, it has to be said that their lives in the States were based on surviving. They needed to earn a wage to maintain their families, to be able to send their children to school to learn but, apart from that, the inner desire of returning someday to the island was in their minds, so the economic aspect and how they faced it is really important; some of these aspects are going to be analysed in this project. It was difficult for them to adapt to a new country, they had to learn a new language and to deal with a new culture but, in spite of that, they integrated very well in the labour market, partly thanks to their disposition and values and also to the Cuban Refugee Program, which contributed greatly to their integration. This plan was established by the US government and it helped Cuban emigrants to their



adaptation, not only in the economic field, but also providing them with employment opportunities, essential health services or assistance in daily necessities.

## **2.2 Cuban-Americans in the US: Adaptation to the American Culture and Preservation of Their Identity**

In relation to Cuban-American emigrants and their process of adjustment into the States, it has to be taken into account that there were different generations of Cuban immigrants and that their assimilation of this new culture and way of life was not the same. On the one hand, the First generation of Cuban-American emigrants were those who moved to the States in the 1960s. On the other hand, the Second generation of emigrants is composed by those who were born in the United States and one of their parents was born in Cuba. There is a huge gap in relation to age when comparing both groups and this is a very important point regarding the process of adaptation or the education. The age breach influenced in the education and the incomes. In general, second generation people had the opportunity of going to school, having an education and being more academically prepared than their emigrant parents or relatives. As a consequence, they learnt the language in an easier way, it was something spontaneous for them, their process of adaptation was natural, so, at the end, second generation emigrants felt more identified with American culture and way of life than the older generation; some of them were even more prepared than Anglo people and this situated second generation Cuban-American emigrants in a very good place in society<sup>2</sup>.

Emigrating is always a hard decision, and it becomes harder when it is made because of discrepancies with the government of your country, as it happened in Cuba in the 1960s. However, as it has been mentioned above, what is really important for people who leave their homeland is to maintain their country's identity, culture, customs and traditions. There are different aspects which are considered very important inside Cuban emigrant community and Latino people in general. One of them is the family. This is a basic concept in every Latino culture, it does not matter if they are from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico or any other country. Family and relatives are the most important responsibilities for Latino citizens, considering that they are taught to behave respectfully and with submission towards their parents and seniors. There is not just one important figure inside a Latino family, each person plays a fundamental

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the information gathered for this section has been taken from Thomas D. Boswell's *A Demographic Profile of Cuban Americans* (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED480201.pdf>).

role in children's education. However, these families are based on a patriarchal system in which men are the ones who hold authority over women. It is also a hierarchical structure: the father is the one who leads and supports the family, then his responsibilities are passed down to the oldest son and so on. Nevertheless, this system has changed through the years because of the emigration and the influence of the new country. Many immigrants that arrived to the United States experienced that their authority as fathers or mothers started to decrease little by little, mainly because of the fact that they had to work outside home (sometimes they had more than one job), they did not have so much time to be with their children, so the youths commenced to get their influences from American way of life and culture. This meant that they began to lose what their relatives had been teaching them since birth about traditional Latino families and they started to act and think as Americans, something that really affected their families. However, the family bond did not break up, it did not matter how many external influences children could get, their origins and roots were never forgotten.

Continuing with the essential aspects of Latino culture, religion has to be mentioned, a field which is closely related with family traditions. It often involves a close and personal relationship between God and the individual, with many conversations in which people pray in order to be helped by the deity (or deities). Religion in Latino cultures is officially Catholic, but in some of them, as is the case with Cuba, it is also connected with *santería*, a kind of practice which involves spiritualism and where the spiritualist is a *santero*, more or less like a doctor. Most Latino communities believe in this kind of practice, so in the United States there are lots of little pharmacies where people could go and buy medicines to cure different sicknesses, such as "evil eye." Religion is something very important for Latino people, the way in which they think that problems or diseases can be resolved.

When talking about Latino people and their identity features, there is a fundamental topic that cannot be omitted: the community. This aspect is highly related with family and religion, since both of them are necessary to create a sense of community. Latino immigrants to the States have always tried to create bonds of unity and fraternity, so they have worried about living near each other or having places where they could feel integrated and in contact with other immigrants (such as associations, educational centers, neighbourhoods...); all these elements have helped to create that sense of community in a country that was not their homeland. It was also important for Latino people when they arrived to the USA to be identified, for instance, as "Cuban," "Mexican," or "Puerto Rican" because these concepts specified who they were and where they came from, these identifications helped to create that

sense of community between people from the same place. Related to this concept, the question of cultural identity has to be mentioned. Immigrants had to face the fact that, when they arrived to the new country, they had to choose what aspects of American life they wanted to integrate in their lives and what things that belonged to their homeland were going to be transplanted to their new story in that new place. On the one hand, there were Latinos who did not feel –or did not want to feel- identified with the United States, they preferred to maintain the link with their motherland and to develop their lives following their traditions and culture. On the other hand, there were also some of them who lost their roots and adopted other beliefs, more linked to America, although the connection with their origins was never lost, so they lived wondering about who they really were and where they belonged to; this is also portrayed in the novel that is going to be analysed, *Dreaming in Cuba*.

Closely connected with the sense of community are the arts. Each Latino society in the United States had the right and the desire to express themselves, to tell who they were, where they came from and what their story was; thus they started to paint, to write or to sing in order to be heard by the others, they wanted to highlight their origins and to be understood in a country which was not their own, as a way of expressing their nostalgia and escaping from suffering.

Each society has its own characteristic features, as it has been seen in in this brief account of those of the Latino community, and wherever they go they will proudly spread their beliefs, traditions and ways of seeing the world. Undoubtedly, emigrating is a very difficult issue, so it has to be understood and emphasized what these people have undergone for many years –and they still continue undergoing nowadays-, how many obstacles they have overcome in their attempt at finding a better life and, moreover, how the Latino community, its culture, traditions and perspectives of the world has influenced the United States as we know them today.



### 3. Cristina Garcia and *Dreaming in Cuban*

Cristina García is considered one of the most important Cuban-American writers in the United States. She was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1958, but she emigrated with her parents to New York in 1961, as a consequence of Castro's rising to power. She grew up in Queens, surrounded by American culture, traditions and way of life, but she never lost her roots and attachment to Cuba. In 1992, Garcia gave birth to her daughter Pilar, and it is clearly seen in their relationship that Cuba is fundamental in her life; in fact, she spoke Spanish to her daughter in order to keep alive the bonds with the island. The importance she gave to Cuban culture, traditions and origins is interesting, although she grew up more as an American than a Cuban. This is because her parents used to tell her stories about the island when she was a child, a fact that made her develop a strong sense of pride towards her motherland: "In terms of the Cuban experience, the Revolution is 34 years old –as old as I am. We're in a unique position to tell the story of exile in a way our parents couldn't because they were too scarred [sic] and busy remaking their lives" (qtd. in Álvarez Borland 136).

It could be said that Cristina Garcia belongs to the second generation of Cuban American emigrants, those who went to United States when they were children or who were born there. This fact places her in an exclusive position in order to tell and to give a contrasting and unusual perspective of the experience of Cuban American emigrants in the States, the problems they had to face, the difficulties they had to overcome and how they evolved, little by little, in a society which was not their own.

Among her best novels the one that is going to be analysed in this project stands out. *Dreaming in Cuban* was published in 1992, it was nominated for the National Book Award that year and, according to Álvarez Borland, it "is one of the best-known Cuban-American works written to date" (137). The novel deals with the experience of exile and issues such as identity or the question of belonging, which are told from the perspective of an "ethnic writer" (Álvarez Borland 137). As stated in *The Oxford Dictionary*, an ethnic person is someone who belongs to an ethnic minority, "a group within a community which has different national or cultural traditions from the main population." Garcia can be considered one of this kind of authors and the multiculturalism and defence of Cuban customs and heritage is portrayed, for example, in her use of magical realism. According to E. Martin, magical realism is a form of writing which allows, in a perfect way, to express ethnic words in a multicultural atmosphere, where opposite

concepts are related, such as life and death or fact and fiction. The magic and the ordinary worlds coexist together in magical realism, characters admit magic as a common element of their everyday lives and consider it as something basic. It is that acceptance in which magical realism is really based, the fact that there is no logical explanation for magical events and they are a normal part of daily living, and it is also that what differentiates it from fantasy (12-23).

In *Dreaming in Cuban* Garcia treats the different themes through Pilar, the protagonist of the novel, who was also born in Havana in 1958 but, as the writer, moved to the States when she was just a child and grew up in New York. This is how Álvarez Borland presents the main stories through which the novel is structured:

In the narrative, the author examines three important dimensions of Cuban exile: the story of the Cubans who remained in Cuba (exemplified in the book by *abuela* Celia and *tía* Felicia), the story of the Cuban exiles who came to America in the 1960s (the story of Lourdes, Pilar's mother), and, finally, the story of the children of exile (that is, Pilar's story). (137)

As it is said here, three different realities are portrayed in the book: the story of Cubans who decided not to emigrate, the story of those who moved to the United States and the experience of those second generation children. Throughout these different perspectives, Garcia examines a variety of themes which can be considered fundamental in Cuban American literature, such as intergenerational relationships, the sense of belonging, the bonds that Cuban Americans have with their motherland, the American Dream, the use of Spanish and English and, moreover, Cuban culture, traditions and their connection to magical realism, aspects which are fundamental in the novel and that, in some way, define and characterize *Dreaming in Cuban*.

#### 4. *Dreaming in Cuban* as a Portrayal of Cuban Exiles to the United States

##### 4.1. Family and Intergenerational Relationships

Family is an important and central role in Cuban culture. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Garcia explores the relationships between relatives, at the same time that she deals with the ones between generations. The 1960s, as it has been explained above, supposed an age of exile and, as a direct consequence, many families had to split up. *Dreaming in Cuban* exemplifies these situations. The novel deals with three generations of the Del Pino family: Celia and Jorge Del Pino (the parents), Lourdes, Felicia and Javier (their children, each one with their respective partner) and Pilar (Lourdes's daughter), Luz, Milagros, Ivanito (Felicia's children) and Irinita (Javier's daughter). It is known that, at that time, the exile was produced because of political reasons: not all Cubans were in favour of Castro's revolution and communists' rise to power, so the majority of those who were opposed to the new regime decided to emigrate to the United States. Lourdes Del Pino took this decision, thus she moved to North America together with her husband Rufino and their little daughter, Pilar. Jorge Del Pino, the patriarch, also had to travel to the States, but as a consequence of his health problems and the need for medical care. So, his wife Celia and the rest of the family stayed in the island.

Celia believes in the revolution, she is "a paradigm of those who remained in Cuba and support the Castro government. Of humble origins, Celia was raised without her parents, and, like the Cuban leader, she is married to the revolution" (Luis 217). After her husband's death, Celia feels that she has to fill her life with something else, so she decides to join the revolution, but Felicia and Lourdes do not agree with her. On the one hand, after Felicia tried to commit suicide, she is sent to the mountains with the guerrilla in order to try to convert her and other social misfits into the communist revolution. Nevertheless, it is clear in the novel her resistance to the rebellion: "Felicia tries to shake off her doubts, but all she sees is a country living on slogans and agitation, a people always on the brink of war. She scorns the militant words blaring on billboards everywhere" (106). On the other hand, when Lourdes emigrates to the States she "becomes an active anti-Communist and an astute businesswoman, determined to live the American Dream" (Luis 217). She does not share any of the values of the revolution; in fact, there are moments in the novel in which her discontentment is expressed through Pilar's words: "My mother says that Abuela Celia had plenty of chances to leave Cuba but she's stubborn and got her head turned around by El Líder. Mom says 'Communist' the way some people say

‘cancer,’ low and fierce” (26). Consequently, the confrontation between Celia, Felicia and Lourdes is evident, showing the different values of each of them:

Her daughters cannot understand her commitment to El Líder. Lourdes sends her snapshots of pastries from her bakery in Brooklyn. Each glistening éclair is a grenade aimed at Celia’s political beliefs, each strawberry shortcake proof –in butter, cream, and eggs –of Lourdes’ success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba.

Felicia is not less exasperating: “We’re *dying* of security!” she moans when Celia tries to point out the revolution’s merits. No one is starving or denied medical care, no one sleeps in the streets, everyone works who wants to work. But her daughter prefers the luxury of uncertainty, of time unplanned, of waste. (117)

It is clear that Lourdes Del Pino is totally opposite to the new Cuban government and to any relation with Cuba, she wants to live in the States and to adopt the American way of life and customs. Felicia seems to be more indifferent to the political issues, she is only interested in her own life and her troubles but, at the same time, she shows her dissatisfaction to the regime and the situation the country is living. Taking this into account it could be said that Celia is not supported by any of her closest relatives and that, although Lourdes and Felicia were born in Cuba, they did not feel sympathy for the rebellion. But Del Pino’s grandmother has two allies on her side: her son Javier and her granddaughter Pilar. When the revolution triumphed, Celia and Javier (who was a teenager at that time) were delighted but they had to hide their joy because of Jorge, who was not in favour of the communists:

Her son was almost thirteen when the revolution triumphed. Those first years were difficult, not because of the hardships or the rationing that Celia knew were necessary to redistribute the country’s wealth, but because Celia and Javier had to mute their enthusiasm for El Líder. Her husband would not tolerate praise of the revolution in his home. (118)

Celia felt a really close connection with her son as a consequence of the values they shared; however, Javier was never able to express his ideals to his father so he decided to secretly leave the country. Even though he and his mother kept in contact through the years, Celia perceives he is not as attached to her as he was at the beginning of the revolution, so, although both of them believe in the revolution they almost do not have contact.

The relationship between Celia and Pilar is, despite the distance, a strong one, and its different aspects will be analysed deeply in the following sections. Pilar left the island when she was a child, but she stills keeps in contact with her grandmother in her dreams:

Abuela Celia and I write to each other sometimes, but mostly I hear her speaking to me at night, just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the seas was like that day. She seems to know everything that’s happened to me and tells me not to mind my mother too much. Abuela Celia says she wants to see me again. She tells me she loves me. (29)



Apart from that connection in dreams, Pilar also has in common with Celia the support to the communist revolution, a kind of rejection of American values and a connection to the Cuban ones. Pilar belongs to a generation of people who were born in Cuba but raised in the States, what Rubén Rumbaut has called the “1.5 or one-and-a-half generation” (qtd. in Pérez Firmat 4). This means that she belongs to a different generation than her mother, her values and ways of thinking are different and the issue of the revolution causes a great disagreement between them:

The last Christmas, Pilar gave her a book of essays on Cuba called *A Revolutionary Society*. The cover showed the cheerful, clean-cut children gathered in front of a portrait of Che Guevara. Lourdes was incensed.

“Will you read it?” Pilar asked her.

“I don’t have to read it to know what’s in it” Lies, poisonous Communists lies” Che Guevara’s face had set a violence quivering within her like a loose wire. (132)

This fact and also the attachment Pilar feels towards Cuba are the main problem in the relationship among Pilar, Lourdes and Celia. It is clear that they belong to three different generations, each of them with their own convictions; in spite of that, Pilar and Celia seem to be more connected and that is something Lourdes does not like at all.

A particularly interesting case is the one which involves Felicia, her daughters and her son. Felicia lives a different kind of life. She is traumatized, since she almost killed her husband and also later attempted to commit suicide. She is very traditional and in her story a lot of Cuban traditions and culture can be found, together with magical realism. Her daughters do not live with her, they study in a boarding school, so they are familiarized with another type of life. Ivanito is the only one who lives with Felicia and he is accustomed to that style of living. His sister always tries to change him in order to not be like their mother, they think Felicia is mad and he will end the same way: “His sisters bristle. They tell him that he’ll end up crazy like Mamá, that he’s starting to show her symptoms. Luz say that families are essentially political and that he’ll have to choose sides” (86).

Celia manifests that Luz and Milagros do not feel as Del Pino women do, they are very attached to their father and influenced by their memories of their mother’s attempt to kill their father: “Despite this, Luz and Milagros insisted on keeping their father’s name. Even after he left for good. Even after Felicia reverted to using her maiden name. The girls, Celia realized, would never be del Pinos” (47). As a consequence, Luz and Milagros do not have a close connection with their mother or the Del Pino family in general. It seems that they only need each other and that there is a profound feeling of hatred towards Felicia:

Luckily, Milagros and I have each other. We're a double helix, tight and impervious. That's why Mamá can't penetrate us. [...] This was just like her. Pretty words. Meaningless words that didn't nourish us, that didn't comfort us, that kept us prisoners in her alphabet world. My sister and I call our mother "not-Mamá". As in not-Mamá charred the chicken and is cursing in the kitchen. Not-Mamá is playing that record again, dancing by herself in the dark. Watch out, not-Mamá is feeling sorry for herself. She wants us to tell her we love her. When we don't, she looks right past us as if she could see another pair of girls just behind us, girls who will tell her what she wants to hear. (121)

As it has been analysed in this section, the Del Pino family is not characterized by its cohesion. Three generations can be distinguished, each of them with distinctive beliefs and thoughts, each of them influenced by events they have lived, each of them condemned to have discrepancies with each other. The impressive thing about this is how members of some generations, as Celia and Pilar, are able to transcend any barrier and connect deeply with one another; this shows that it does not matter to what generation you belong, there are always elements from different ages which can be connected in any way.

## **4.2 Sense of Belonging**

### **4.2.1. The Exiles and Their Eternal Bond with Cuba**

As it has been mentioned in the socio-historical introduction, Cuban exile to the United States took place in three different periods; the majority of the exiles decided to settle in Miami, South Florida, because of its closeness and similarities with Cuba and the fact that there were a lot of Cuban emigrants from the previous decades. In Miami, the exiles wanted to maintain the connection with their island and their identity. They considered themselves Cubans although they were not living in their motherland; they did not see themselves as Americans, so emigrants decided to establish exile organizations in the city and sponsored Spanish as their language: "Miami was home to Little Havana and Calle Ocho, the Ermita de la Caridad, the *municipios*, and a host of cultural institutions that defined *cubanidad*" (M. C. García 3). The promotion of this "Cubanness" is shown in the novel when Pilar decides to escape to Cuba through Miami: "All the streets in Coral Gables have Spanish names-Segovia, Ponce de Leon, Alhambra -as if they'd been expecting all the Cubans who would eventually live here"(60). It seems that it was a Latin American city instead of a North American one and that made Miami an extraordinary place.

Despite this transformation and attempt at adaptation into the new country, many Cubans never lost the desire of returning to the island. They thought that preserving the sense of

“Cubanness” was essential because the repatriation would be produced some day and they could not lose their uniqueness. However, as Álvarez Borderland states, “Cubans who could not agree with the new demands of the Castro regime left Cuba for the United States and other continents, although they often did not realize that they were leaving their homeland for permanent exile” (5). For the majority of them, returning to Cuba could not be possible, so they had to adapt to North America the best way they could; nevertheless, it was not easy, as it can be seen in the bonds Rufino Puente still has with the island and his old life:

It became clear to Lourdes shortly after she and Rufino moved to New York that he would never adapt. Something came unhinged in his brain that would make him incapable of working in a conventional way. There was a part of him that could never leave the *finca* or the comfort of its cycles, and this diminished him for any other life. He could not be transplanted. (129)

Each emigrant lived the exile in a different way. It was less difficult for some of them to leave their homeland and to adopt a new kind of life but others, as Rufino, are not able of leaving behind them their entire world and assimilating a new one. Being in exile means to change your lifestyle and, maybe, to do things that you have never done before; Cuba is an island, the jobs and economic activities are not the same that in a big city like New York, it supposes a big change and contrast between both lands. Pilar also finds this struggle reflected in her father:

Dad feels kind of lost here in Brooklyn. I think he stays in his workshop most of the day because he'd get too depressed or crazy otherwise. Sometimes I think we should have moved to a ranch in Wyoming or Montana. He would have been happy there with his horses and his cows, and a big empty sky overhead. Dad only looks alive when he talks about the past, about Cuba. (138)

What Rufino lived in America was the reality of many emigrants, the homesickness they felt when they remembered their time in Cuba, in their homes, how they had to struggle in order to try to accustom themselves to a totally unfamiliar way of life. It was not easy to escape from their country and live abroad, although in the next sections it will be analysed how other characters of the novel - like Lourdes- experienced the exile in a completely different way.

#### **4.2.2. Pilar and Her Inner Struggle**

The question of belonging and the necessity of knowing where you really fit is clearly presented in the novel in Pilar. She is a second generation immigrant or, following Rumbaut, a one-and-a-half generation girl who was born in Cuba but had to move to the States when she

was a child, and throughout her it can be seen the struggle to discover her real homeland. Pilar has lived almost her whole life in New York, so she does not know how it is to live in Cuba. The only relationship she still has with the island is the one with her grandmother Celia. Pilar's knowledge of the island is basically what others have told her, something extremely common in second generation emigrants, as Pérez Firmat states:

Like other second-generation immigrants, they maintain a connection to their parent's homeland, but it is a bond forged by my experiences rather than their own. For my children Cuba is an enduring, perhaps an endearing, fiction. Cuba is for them as ethereal as the smoke and as persistent as the smell of their grandfather's cigars. (5)

Nevertheless, she feels a real bond with the island, she is not totally attached to United States, as she herself declares: "Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me" (58). Her closeness to Cuba and the struggle to know where she belongs is intensified by her conversations with Celia:

Abuela Celia and I write to each other sometimes, but mostly I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She seems to know everything that's happened to me and tells me not to mind my mother too much. Abuela Celia says she wants to see me again. She tells me she loves me. (29)

However, as the novel advances, the relationship between Pilar and Celia gets worse. The girl realizes that her grandmother is getting away from her: "Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me" (138) and Pilar's mother's attitude is contributing to that. Lourdes, who does not want to know anything about Cuba, acts like an American citizen, she has forgotten her motherland, her roots; moreover, she denies to talk about Celia or any of her Cuban relatives. In spite of that, the link between the daughter and the grandmother is impossible to break, there is a legacy that Celia has left to Pilar, something that characterized Celia's personality and that has been transmitted to the girl, as she explains:

I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom, even though I haven't seen my grandmother in seventeen years. We don't speak at night anymore, but she's left me her legacy nonetheless – a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog and disregard for boundaries. Even in silence, she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions. (176)

That situation influences Pilar and increases her desire of returning to the island to discover her identity. She decides to take the decision of going to Cuba after visiting a pharmacy which sells things related to *santería*. The seller gives her some herbs, a candle and a bottle of holy water and he points out how she has to act to know what to do with her life. Pilar follows

his instructions and, at the end, she feels the need of flying to Cuba, so she goes there with her mother: “On the ninth day of my baths, I call my mother and tell her we’re going to Cuba” (203).

It is in Cuba where Pilar realizes where she belongs to and also where she discovers her true self, her identity. From the very first moment she feels the connection with the island and with her grandmother. The transmission of Celia’s legacy to Pilar is portrayed in this part of the novel. Both of them have conversations in which the grandmother tells her granddaughter stories about her life and her knowledge. It is very important for Celia to preserve all her experiences and stories. She has always had a special connection with Pilar and she knows that her granddaughter will be capable of preserving her legacy: “Women who outlive their daughters are orphans, Abuela tells me. Only their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the first fire” (222). After living many beautiful moments with her grandmother and discovering Cuba, Pilar finally realizes that she belongs more to New York than to Cuba. Travelling to the island has allowed her to create her own experiences, to form a stronger bond to Cuba, to love its landscapes and singularities, to make her feel like a Cuban woman; but she has also discovered that she belongs to New York:

I’ve started dreaming in Spanish, which has never happened before. I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There’s a magic here working its way through my veins. There’s something about the vegetation, too, that I respond to instinctively - the stunning bougainvillea, the flamboyants and jacarandas, the orchids growing from the trunks of the mysterious ceiba trees. And I love Havana, its noise and decay and painted ladyness. I could happily sit on one of those wrought-iron balconies for days, or keep my grandmother company on her porch, with its ringside view of the sea. I’m afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I’d have to return to New York. I know now it’s where I belong - not instead of here, but more than here. How can I tell my grandmother this? (235-236)

At the end Pilar understands that it was not a matter of choosing to be a New Yorker or a Cuban. She sees that she belongs to both places, but the fact that she grew up in the States has conditioned her to be more from New York than from Cuba. Pilar has found a balance in her life, now she knows who she is and where she belongs, and comprehends that a combination of both cultures is possible. That hybridity of two cultures is typical of second generation or one-and-a-half immigrants, described by Pérez Firmat with the term “biculturation”:

In my usage, biculturation designates not only contact of cultures; in addition, it describes a situation where the two cultures achieve a balance that makes it difficult to determine which is the dominant and which is the subordinate culture. Unlike acculturation or transculturation, biculturation implies an equilibrium, however tense or precarious, between the two contributing cultures. Cuban-American culture is a balancing act. One-and-a-halfers are no more American than they are Cuban – and vice versa. (6)

Belonging to two cultures is to be able of taking the best elements of each one and applying them into your way of life. It is essential to live without barriers, to take advantage of the uniqueness of each culture and to use this to create your own personality. Gloria Anzaldúa described it beautifully in the last stanza of her poem, “To live in the Borderlands means you”: “To survive the Borderlands/ you must live *sin fronteras/a* crossroads” (217).

### **4.3 Living in America**

#### **4.3.1. Forgetting Their Uniqueness**

This part of the analysis will be focused on the Del Pino Family who had to emigrate to the States. Previously it has been seen, on the one hand, that Rufino feels homesickness when he thinks about Cuba and his old life, as he has not been capable of adapting himself to the new country and his desire of going back to the island is still alive. On the other hand, it has been explained the struggle Pilar has to deal with in order to discover where she belongs and who she is; there is a connection between the girl and the island but also between she and New York. Taking Rufino and Pilar’s situations into account it is clear that, although they are living in the United States, they have a bond with Cuba and also they have not forgotten their roots. M.C. García affirms that “the emigrés had to define what it meant to be Cuban within the context of exile in the United States” (83). However, Lourdes is a very singular case and she has got a hard story in relation to Cuba.

Everything started when Lourdes was born. Her father was very angry with her mother as a consequence of her past relationship with a Spanish man. For this reason he decided to travel a lot –business trips- and he left Celia with his mother and sister, although he knew they were going to mistreat, disrespect and disregard her. As Jorge himself explains to Lourdes:

After we were married, I left her with my mother and my sister. I knew what it would do to her. A part of me wanted to punish her. For the Spaniard. I tried to kill her, Lourdes. I wanted to kill her. I left on a long trip after you were born. I wanted to break her, may God forgive me. When I returned, it was done. She held you out to me by one leg and told me she would not remember your name. (195)

What Jorge did to Celia made her mad and that situation made her to create a feeling of rejection towards her own daughter. After that, Jorge left Celia in an asylum and then he placed her in a house by the sea. He continued travelling and Lourdes became his favourite child, he wanted to “own her for myself” (196). These events got Lourdes away from her mother, she

never felt close to her because of what Jorge Del Pino did and this is fundamental for her rejection of returning to the island.

Apart from that, during her last months in Cuba, Lourdes was raped and attacked by two soldiers. She was pregnant at that time and, as a consequence of the assault, she lost her child. This event is a turning point in Lourdes' life and in her attitude towards her motherland. Unlike Rufino and Pilar, Lourdes does not want to maintain her "Cubanness." Even though she is an exile she is not attached to her country, what she has experienced there has made her opposed to whatever is related to Cuba. It is not only the rape, but also the relationship with her mother what does not allow Lourdes to return to the island. There are various occasions in the novel in which it can be seen that, since Lourdes's arrival at the States she starts to feel as an American woman, she rejects Cuba and everything related to it:

Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention. Lourdes relishes winter most of all – the cold scraping sounds on sidewalks and windshields, the ritual of scarves and gloves, hats and zip-in coat linings. Its layers protect her. She wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her. (73)

Those bad memories and experiences related to the island have made her into a real American citizen. Lourdes has adapted herself in a perfect way into the United States, she has forgotten Cuba and its way of life and her main aim is to live and to act as Americans. She explains how she had to change her mind when she arrived to the States and also it can be seen the contrast between Lourdes and the Cuban lifestyle: "So Lourdes got a job. Cuban women of a certain age and a certain class consider working outside the home to be beneath them. But Lourdes never believed that" (130). Even before landing in the United States it is shown in the novel how different Lourdes was in relation to the traditional Cuban woman:

While it was true that she had grown accustomed to the privileges with marrying into the Puente family, Lourdes never accepted the life designated for its women. Even now, stripped of their opulences, crowded into two-bedroom apartments in Hialeah and Little Havana, the Puente women clung to their rituals as they did their engraved silverware, succumbing to a cloying nostalgia. Doña Zaida, once a formidable matriarch who ruled her eight sons by a resolute jealousy, spent log afternoons watching *novelas* on television and perfuming her thickening wrists.

Lourdes knew she could never be this kind of woman. (130)

Thus, Lourdes' abandonment of her motherland and everything connected to it is fairly obvious; moreover, it is not only the fact that she rejects everything related to Cuba but also

that she tries to influence Pilar and Rufino in order to make them as American as her. In Pilar's words:

I used to like the Fourth of July okay because of the fireworks. [...] But this bicentennial crap is making me crazy. Mom has talked about nothing else for months. She bought a second baker and plans to sell tricolor cupcakes and Uncle Sam marzipan. Apple pies, too. (136)

[...]

Mom makes food only people in Ohio eat, like Jell-O molds with miniature marshmallows or recipes she clips from *Family Circle*. And she barbecues anything she can get her hands on. Then we sit around behind the warehouse and stare at each other with nothing to say. Like this is it? We're living the American dream?

The worst is the parades. Mom gets up early and drags out on Thanksgiving Day loaded with plastic foam coolers, like we're going to starve right there on Fifth Avenue. On New Year's Day, she sits in front of the television and comments on every single float in the Rose Parade. I think she dreams of sponsoring herself someday. (137)

There is a twist point in the novel with respect to Lourdes' refusal to going back to Cuba: the moment in which her father, Jorge Del Pino, reveals her the background of her mother before she was born and also the disclosure of her sister's death. These situations, added to Pilar's desire of travelling to the island, make Lourdes return to her homeland. However, it is present since their arrival at the country that Lourdes is still against any Cuban element: "All Mom says is that the buildings in Havana are completely decayed, held up by elaborate configurations of wooden planks" (216). For her, America is and will always be better and more advanced than Cuba, and she express it, for example, making reference to the revolution:

Every way Lourdes turns there is more destruction, more decay. *Socialismo o muerte*. The words pain her as if they were knitted into her skin with thick needles and yarn. She wants to change the "o" to "e" 's on every billboard with a bucket of red paint. *Socialismo es muerte*, she'd write over and over again until the people believe it, until they rose up and reclaimed their country from that tyrant. (222-223)

Although there is a moment in which it seems that Lourdes is happy in Cuba, she is dancing with her nephew Ivanito and it is described as "her body remembered what her mind had forgotten" (224), the inner conflict that Lourdes has with her mother and with the revolution will never be forgotten. She even says that her mother "is a complete stranger to me [...]. Papi was wrong. Some things can never change" (223).

In this part of the analysis it has been seen that Lourdes is more an American than a Cuban woman, despite her travel to the island she will never make peace with her mother or with the revolution; her thoughts will always be in favour of America and its way of life. She sees the United States as the land of opportunities, a place where everything can be reached; that concept will be examined in the next section.



### 4.3.2. The American Dream

At the beginning of the socio-historical introduction it was said that some emigrants decided to move to the States because of their pursuit of the American Dream; that is, as it is stated in *The Cambridge Dictionary*, “the belief that everyone in the US has the chance to be successful, rich, and happy if they work hard.” Despite the fact that Lourdes has to emigrate because of political reasons, once in America she decides to forget everything about her bad experiences in Cuba and to adopt the new way of life, culture and traditions of the United States, including the desire of improving and being the best she can. Luis describes her transformation with the following words:

In the United States Lourdes becomes an active anti-Communist and an astute businesswoman, determined to live the American dream. Lourdes is a loyal American. She names her second bakery Yankee Doodle Bakery, to commemorate the Bicentennial. (217)

In the novel it can be identified in many parts Lourdes’ ambition to advance, to raise and to reach success, concepts associated to the American Dream and the belief of America as the land of opportunities:

Lourdes ordered custom-made signs for her bakeries in red, white and blue with her name printed at the bottom right-hand corner: LOURDES PUENTE, PROPIETOR. She particularly like the sound of the last word, the way the “r” ’s rolled in her mouth, the explosion of “p” ’s. Lourdes felt a spiritual link to American moguls, to the immortality of men like Irénée du Pont, whose Varadero Beach mansion on the north coast of Cuba she had once visited. She envisioned a chain of Yankee Doodle bakeries stretching across America to St. Louis, Dallas, Los Angeles, her apple pies and cupcakes on main streets and in suburban shopping malls everywhere.

Each store would bear her name, her legacy: LOURDES PUENTE, PROPIETOR. (170-171)

Lourdes is the owner of a bakery and in this moment of the narration she is remembering when she was going to open her second store. She is proud of what she has achieved and what she can accomplish in the future. Her dream is to open many shops all over the country, to be known by people, to have her own legacy. Following the belief of the American Dream she wishes to succeed, to have the same opportunities than American people have. Her father is the one who has supported her in her desire of improving herself. Jorge Del Pino thinks that Cuban people have to demonstrate that they can be as valuable as Americans: “Put your name on the sign, too, *hija* so they know what we Cubans are up to, that we’re not all Puerto Ricans” (170).

As it is going to be seen, the desire of achieving the American Dream can be appreciated not only in Lourdes but also in how she tries to impose it on her daughter Pilar or her nephew

Ivanito. During the organization of the opening of Lourdes' second bakery, she asks Pilar to do a painting for the store:

Mom has decided she wants me to paint a mural for her second Yankee Doodle Bakery.

[...]

"This could be a good opportunity for you, Pilar. A lot of important people come to my shop. Judges and lawyers from the courts, executives from Brooklyn Union Gas. Maybe they'll see your painting. You could become famous." (138-139)

Lourdes encourages Pilar to do the painting because she thinks it can be a great chance for her to be famous and successful, to achieve whatever she desires to. Lourdes strongly believes that everybody can reach their goals if they work hard and that is what she transmits to her daughter, the idea that she can be whoever she chooses to, she can reach as high as she wants to. It is in Lourdes and Pilar's trip to Cuba when the mother also tries to influence Ivanito with the beliefs of the American Dream:

Tía tells me stories about America, things she thinks I'd like to hear. Like the farm boy who grew up to be a billionaire or the paperboy who now has a dozen satellites in space. "Anything is possible if you work hard enough, *mi hijito*." Tía says she plans to open hundreds of bakeries from coast to coast. She wants to be rich, like her idol du Pont, but she needs help. (229-230)

Lourdes thinks that Ivanito will not be able to progress and prosper in Cuba, the Communists will not provide opportunities for everybody: "What, Lourdes asks herself, does the boy have to look forward to in this country" (224), so she thinks that the best for him is to escape from the island and to attempt to grow and improve in any other country:

Before dawn, Lourdes wakes Ivanito, motioning him to stay quiet. "Come, I've packed you a bag." Lourdes has laid out his new clothes from New York –jeans with cross-stitched pockets, a striped jersey, white canvas sneakers. She hands him a glass of watery lemonade. "This is all we have time for now.

[...]

Ivanito is silent as Lourdes hands him an envelope with two hundred dollars and a statement neatly printed in English: "MY NAME IS IVALLAN VILLAVERDE. I AM A POLITICAL REFUGEE FROM CUBA. MY AUNT, LOURDES PUENTE, OF 2212 LINDEN AVENUE, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, WILL SPONSOR ME. PLEASE CALL HER AT (212) 834-0471 OR (212) 63-CAKES."

"Try to get on the first plane out, Ivanito. Don't leave the embassy no matter what. When you get to Peru or wherever they send you, call me. I'll come pick you up, *mi hijito*. I'll bring you back to Brooklyn. We'll go to Disney World this summer." (238-239)

What Lourdes is trying to do by sending Ivanito abroad is to find a better future for him, a place where he can study or work, earn money and become whatever he wants to be. She knows that Cuba is not the land of opportunities and that there he will not be able of achieving

his dreams. Thus, and always pursuing the belief of the American Dream, Lourdes sends Ivanito to any country which can offer him more than what Cuba can.

As it has been examined in this part, the American Dream is an idea which can be followed by everybody, any race or nationality, and it is a way of thinking deeply strengthened in the United States. Maybe that is the reason why Lourdes is faithful to this belief. It has been seen in the previous sections how attached she is to America, its traditions and culture, so that is why the American Dream seems to her as the final step to be a real American citizen.

#### 4.4 “Cubanness”

##### 4.4.1. The Use of Language: English vs. Spanish

*Dreaming in Cuban* is a novel in which language plays an important role. It is not only the mixture of English and some Spanish words but also the fact that characters –as Pilar or Ivanito- deal with the issue of language in the course of the story. As it is known, Cristina Garcia belongs to a group of ethnic writers. She decides to write the novel in English but without forgetting her mother tongue. In relation to that, E. Martin states that: “Ethnic minorities and their languages are part of the social stratification of the United States, and therefore, a mixture of languages within a novel, and varieties within those languages, are a reflection of the dialogue that occurs regularly within the United States” (147). The condition of being an exile in the United States allows the author to employ terms from Spanish, as *gusano*, *yanquis*, *compañeros*, *finca*, *novelas*, or *santería*; apart from that, some characters are all the time living between two languages, as it is going to be analysed onwards.

The main character, Pilar, exemplifies the struggle that many exiles have to live: they have their mother tongue –in the case of Cuban American emigrants it is Spanish- and, moreover, they speak English. It is complicated for them to combine the use of both languages, so they usually tend to choose one of them over the other. Pilar lives in an American environment, so she is prone to generally speak in English and to utilize Spanish in more specific or familiar concepts. Celia is sorry about the fact that Pilar is losing her Spanish, as she express at the beginning of the novel:

Pilar, her first grandchild, writes to her from Brooklyn in a Spanish that is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw dice on green felt or asphalt. Pilar’s eyes, Celia fears, are no longer used to the compacted light of the tropics, where a morning hour can fill a month of days in the north, which receives only careless

shedding from the sun. She imagines her granddaughter pale, gliding through paleness, malnourished and cold without the food of scarlets and greens. (7)

What is clear is that Celia feels that Pilar is more an American girl than a Cuban one, she sees that her granddaughter is leaving her native Spanish behind and that she is using it as a foreign and Americanized language. However, and as it has been mentioned before, there are some events of the novel in which the context is more familiar and private and these are the ones where Pilar chooses to speak Spanish: “We speak Spanish when we make love. English seems an impossible language for intimacy” (180). Here Pilar is telling how she and her boyfriend choose Spanish when they are together, and that supports the use of that language in an intimate situation. This idea is reinforced when she goes to Cuba. The contact with her Cuban relatives –especially with her grandmother- has allowed her to know the Spanish language in a better and profound way: “I’ve started dreaming in Spanish, which has never happened before. I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible” (235). The transformation she experiences teaches her that Spanish has always been an inherent language for her, she does not have to choose if she must use one language or another but to take advantage of both of them. Aside from the conflict between English and Spanish, Pilar is an artist, -a painter- so she also thinks that painting represents an individual language, almost impossible to translate: “Painting is its own language, I wanted to tell him. Translations just confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English. I envy my mother her Spanish curses sometimes. They make my English collapse in a heap” (59). Saying that translating a painting just confuses its meaning is making a kind of comparison with translations from one language to another, as English to Spanish or vice versa, where there are usually mistakes and the meanings translated are not always the same ones. Pilar also points out the force that Spanish has in her family, the jealousy she has felt when she listens to her mother swear in her mother tongue, making her feel that, basically, English is not as rooted to her as she thought.

As previously seen in other sections, Javier Del Pino –Celia and Jorge’s son- decides to move to Czechoslovakia as a consequence of his disagreement with his father because of Javier’s support of the revolution. There he marries a Czech woman and she gives birth to a girl, Irinita. Celia feels glad when his son tells her he speaks Spanish to her daughter:

He didn’t mention his wife, not even in passing, but he wrote that he spoke Spanish to her little girl so she’d be able to talk with her grandmother someday. This touched Celia, and she wrote a special note to Irinita encouraging her to keep up her Spanish and promising to teach her how to swim. (118)

Celia sees in the Spanish language a connection between her and her 'lost' son, she has always been very attached to him and the fact that he has spoken to his daughter in Spanish is important for her to maintain a connection with Javier.

Lourdes is a peculiar case. As I have highlighted before, she fits in North American society really quickly, she has decided to leave behind her Cuban origins and to act and live as a citizen of the United States. Many examples have been seen of this adaptation and another one is the language: "Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention" (73). The possibility of communicating in a different language than their mother tongue is another point for her in her attempt of forgetting her roots, although, in familiar contexts she still uses Spanish, as Pilar mentions: "When I brought him around to meet my parents, Mom took one look at his beaded headband and the braid down his back and said "*Sácalo de aquí.*" When I told her that Max spoke Spanish, she simply repeated what she said in English "Take him away" (134). When Lourdes and Pilar go to Cuba, there is a moment in which they are in the street and Lourdes starts yelling at people, criticizing the cars that they have:

Look at those old American cars. They're held together with rubber bands and paper clips and *still* work better than the new Russian ones. [...] Then she turns to me, her face indignant. "Look how they laugh, Pilar! Like idiots" They can't understand a word I'm saying! Their heads are filled with too much *compañero* this and *compañera* that! They're brainwashed, that's what they are!" (221)

After that, Pilar adds: "I pull my mother from the growing crowd. The language she speaks is lost to them. It's another idiom entirely" (221). What can be extracted from this situation is that Lourdes has changed a lot since she lives in New York, she is so American now that even her compatriots cannot understand her. It is not, in my opinion, just a matter of language –because both Cuban people and Lourdes are speaking the same one- but something related with the different way of thinking and living that they have. On the one hand, Lourdes, as an anti-revolution woman, supports the United States and everything related to that nation; as a consequence, she is against communism. On the other hand, the Cuban people she is talking to are, in a way, absorbed by the revolution, so it seems, as Pilar says, that they and Lourdes do not understand each other, although they speak the same language.

Relating to what has been just mentioned above, and in order to finish with the importance of languages in the novel, it is going to be analysed Ivanito's experiences. As he himself explains:

I started learning English from Abuelo Jorge's old grammar textbooks. I found them in Abuela Celia's closet. They date back to 1919, the first year he started working for the American Electric Broom Company. At school, only a few students were allowed to learn English, by special permission. The rest of us had to learn Russian. (145)

As a result of the revolution, it was not allowed in Cuban schools to teach English to everybody, as Ivanito says, so they had to learn Russian. This exemplifies the struggle Cuban people lived because of the political conflicts and how it affected their academic formation.

All along this section I have studied the relevance of the languages in the novel. People are conditioned by culture, traditions and customs, where the language has a fundamental role. In the personal development it is important to remark how its use affects and influences the characters of the novel, because, as Pérez Firmat states: "A language shapes what we can and cannot say, think or feel in ways of which we are not even aware. In this deep sense, who we are is what we speak" (qtd. in O'Reilly Herrera, 173).

#### **4.4.2. When Magic Blends with the Ordinary: Cuban Culture, Traditions and Magical Realism**

The last aspects that are going to be analyzed encompass Cuban culture and traditions alongside with magical realism, which supposes an indispensable element in the novel. Cuban customs and culture are closely related with religion, as it was explained in the socio-historical introduction through the analysis of the main aspects of Latino culture, and in Cuban tradition what it has to be highlighted is the use of *santería*. *The Collins Dictionary* defines *santería* as "a religion of the Caribbean region that originated in Cuba, based on Yoruban deities worshiped as Roman Catholic saints in rites that sometimes include the sacrifice of animals." Heyck and Lynn affirm that "Religion is thus an intensely personal matter, involving a close relationship between [...] the African *orixás*, or gods, if one practices some form of *santería*" (94). Some *santería* ceremonies are portrayed in diverse moments in the course of the novel and through different characters. Felicia is the one who has the strongest and closest relation with these beliefs:

Against the back wall, an ebony statue of Santa Bárbara, the Black Queen, presides. Apples and bananas sit in offering at her feet. Fragrant oblations crowd the shrines of the other saints and gods: toasted corn, pennies, and an aromatic cigar for Saint Lazarus, protector of paralytics; coconut and bitter kola for Obatalá, King of the White Cloth; roasted yams, palm wine, and a small sack of salt for Oggún, patron of metals.

In the front of the room, Elleguá, god of the crossroads, inhabits the clay eggs in nine rustic bowls of varying sizes. The eggs have cowrie-shell eyes and mouths, and soak in an elixir of

herbs and holy water. Four mulattas, wearing gingham skirts and aprons, kneel before the shrines, praying. One man, a pure blue-black Yoruban, stands mute in the center of the room, a starched cotton fez on his head.

[...]

“Elleguá wants a goat” the *santero* says, his lips barely moving.

“Oh, no, not another goat!” Felicia cries and turns to her friend accusingly. “You promised!”

“You have no choice,” Herminia implores. “You can’t dictate to the gods, Felicia. Elleguá needs fresh blood to do the job right.” (13-14)

Here is the description of the house where Felicia goes to have a *santería* session with her friend Herminia, La Madrina -a kind of *santera*- and a *santero*. Felicia agrees to have this meeting because she wants to make peace with her father, who has just died. It is seen in this fragment different elements which were detailed above, as the appearance of many gods or the sacrifice of animals to gods. They really believe that they can have contact with another world, as Heyck and Lynn state:

Many religious Latinos, whether they are Catholic, Protestant, followers of the seven African deities, or members of some sect, believe in spiritualism. They accept the existence of the spirit world, and they trust that the medium can exert influence on that world, either to change events or to affect behaviour. (94)

Felicia is really attached to everything related with *santería*, as her friend Herminia affirms: “She had a true vocation to the supernatural” (186). Felicia’s connection to this matter is so big that she decides to become a *santera*. She has to follow various rites until the one called the *asiento*, which transforms her into a *santera*:

On the morning of her initiation, sixteen *santeras* tore Felicia’s clothes to shreds until she stood naked, then they bathed her in river water, rubbing her with soap wrapped in vegetable fibers until her skin glowed. The women dressed Felicia in a fresh white gown and combed and braided her hair, treating her like a newborn child.

That night, after a purifying coconut shampoo, Felicia was guided to a windowless room, where she sat for many hours, alone on a stool. La Madrina slipped the sacred necklace of Obatalá around Felicia’s neck. [...] After many more rituals and a final bath in the *omiero*, the *santeras* led Felicia to Obatalá’s throne. (187)

After her initiation, Felicia goes to the house on Palmas Street, carrying with her many *santera* elements, but neither her mother Celia nor her children are in the house. Felicia decides to not give up and to continue acting as a *santera*. However, things go wrong, as Herminia tells: “I’ve seen other *santeras* during her first year. They are radiant. [...] But Felicia showed none of these blessings. Her eyes dried out like an old woman’s and her fingers curled like claws until she could hardly pick up her spoon” (189). La Madrina and other *santeras* try to help Felicia to recover herself through many rites and offers to the gods, but it is in vain. Almost at

the end of Felicia's story Celia, her mother, appears. She blames La Madrina and all the *santeras* for her daughter's health condition, and decides to break everything related to *santería*:

Celia overturned the tureen with the sacred stones and crushed Felicia's seashells under the heels of her leather pumps. Suddenly, she removed her shoes and began stamping on the shells in her bare feet, slowly at first, then faster and faster in a mad flamenco, her arms thrown up in the air. (190)

In spite of everybody's efforts, Felicia finally dies in Celia's arms, and her death can be understood as a direct and fatal consequence of *santería* rites.

In Celia's story it can also be found some moments in which she has to go to the *santera* in order to find a solution to her problems. The first time is when Gustavo, her Spanish lover, leaves her and returns to Spain:

Celia took to her bed by early summer and stayed there for the next eight months. That she was shrinking there was no doubt. [...] Neighbours suggested their own remedies: arnica compresses, packed mud from a holy well, ground elephant tusk from the Niger to mix in her daily broth. They dug up the front yard for buried maledictions but found nothing. [...] Desperate, her great-aunt called a *santera* from Regla, who draped Celia with beaded necklaces and tossed shells to divine the will of the gods.

"Miss Celia, I see a wet landscape in your palm," the little *santera* said, then turned to tía Alicia. "She will survive the hard flames." (36-37)

In this extract it can be appreciated both *santería* rites and Cuban traditional beliefs. Celia's neighbours use some elements that they think that can cure her disease and pain, ingredients that they take from nature, but that do not work. Apart from that, the *santera* also employs her "power" to try to discover what happens to Celia, and she finally determines that Celia is going to survive, that is what really occurs.

When Celia's son Javier returns home he is sunk into a deep depression. He becomes an alcoholic and his mother does not know what else she can do to help him to recover, so she decides to visit the *santera* that had helped her with her lovesickness:

"I knew it was you," the *santera* says, clapping her hands with brittle twig fingers when she finds Celia on her doorstep. [...] She places her speckled hands over Celia's heart, and nods solemnly as if to say, "I am here, *hija*. Speak to me." She listens closely to Celia, and they decide to travel together to Santa Teresa del Mar.

The *santera* looks up at the brick-and-cement house, bleached by the sun and the ocean air, and positions herself under the pawpaw tree in the front yard. She prays every Catholic prayer she knows in quick, calm succession. [...] And then, as Celia watches, the little *santera's* moist eyes roll back in her dwarfish head until the whites gleam from two pinpricks, and she trembles once, twice, and slides against Celia in a heap on the sidewalk, smooking like a wet fire, sweet and musky, until nothing is left of her but her fringed cotton shawl.

Celia, not knowing what else to do, folds the *santera's* shawl into her handbag, and enters her home. (159-160)



As it has been clearly seen through these examples, Cuban people firmly believe in their culture and traditions as a way of trying to find a solution for their problems, and they find those rites as normal situations.

Apart from Felicia and Celia, Pilar also trusts on these traditional beliefs; an example would be when she enters in a traditional pharmacy and the owner offers her some instructions to know what she can do with her life, as it was explained in another part of the analysis. When she is in Cuba she also shows the family another kind of “belief,” as Ivanito tells: “Pilar has this book, a Chinese oracle, that predicts the future. Today, she gathers everyone in the living room and encourages each of us to ask it a question” (228). However, Lourdes is reluctant to this, showing her opposition: “Tía Lourdes gets upset and says it’s like a horoscope, that it means nothing unless you want it to, that it’s a complete waste of time” (230).

It has been examined that, in a way or another, the majority of the characters in the book believe in something and they try to live their lives according to these faiths. At this point, I have to mention again a literary element connected to Cubans' culture and traditions that is present in almost the entire novel: magical realism. It was studied in previous sections that magical realism combines both magic and ordinary worlds, as E. Martin declares:

Magical realism does not separate the magic and the ordinary worlds from each other. In fact, the magic often seems to be an extension of the ordinary. Unlike in fantasy where the character must often cross over (through a looking glass, trap door, secret tunnel, etc.) into fantasy realm and expects, at some point, to return to the ordinary, in magical realism, both worlds coexist within the same space and both are integral to reality. Characters who hold a magical real view of the world accept the intermixing of magic as part of their everyday lives. (23)

Following this, Cristina Garcia “plays” with this concept through different occasions in which the patriarch Jorge Del Pino, who dies since the beginning of the novel, appears to her daughter Lourdes: “ “Lourdes, I’m back,” Jorge del Pino greets his daughter forty days after she buried him with his Panama hat, his cigars, and a bouquet of violets in a cemetery on the border of Brooklyn and Queens” (64). At the beginning she is frightened by the situation, but as the novel advances Lourdes understands that is something normal: “Lourdes is herself only with her father. Even after his death, they understand each other perfectly, as they always have” (131). She assumes that her father is with her although he is dead and together they spend a lot of every day moments: “Her father visits her regularly at twilight, on her evening walks home from the bakery, and whispers to her through the oak and maple trees. His words flutter at her neck like a baby’s lacy breath” (170). That acceptance of the mixture between magical and

ordinary events that happen in the daily life is in what magical realism is based, according to what E. Martin affirms (24).

During this last point of my paper I have exposed various aspects of Cuban culture and traditions that are present in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Each ethnic group has a particular way of living, according to its faith and beliefs. It does not matter if they are not in their motherland; that is the point that can be appreciated in the novel that has been analysed, the fact that, even in a foreign country, a great number of the characters attempt to maintain their “Cubanness,” those aspects that make them unique and special.

## 5. Conclusion

In the course of this project I have studied the process of exile of Cuban people from their motherland to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s and how it is presented in the novel *Dreaming in Cuba*. As mentioned through the whole paper, the Cuban-American exile is a unique case because of its relation with politics, so it could be said that the emigrants were, the majority of them, political exiles. It has been clearly seen that it was complicated to arrive at a foreign country and to create their homes, as they did not want to lose those aspects that identified them, which have been referred to as “Cubanness.” Thus, their main aim was to preserve that “Cubanness” while they were trying to improve –both socially and economically– in order to return, someday to their country. The author, as a Cuban-American emigrant, has used her own experience to create an atmosphere that makes the reader understand what Cuban exiles had to overcome.

Among the most important cultural and traditional aspects that Cuban emigrants attempted to preserve during their exile, family relationships or religion could be highlighted as some of the most fundamental ones. Both of them are described in the novel, as it was studied, with Celia their daughters Lourdes, Felicia and their son Javier, apart from their granddaughters Pilar, Luz, Milagros and their grandson Ivanito. Alongside with the topics mentioned before I have analysed the intergenerational relationships, the eternal bond with the motherland, the struggle of not knowing where they belong, the desire of improving through the idea of the American Dream, the loss of their origins and roots through the adaptation to the new country and, finally, how traditions and culture are shown in different parts of the story.

The project has demonstrated that relationships between members of different generations are not easy because of the diversity of their ideas but that, against any prediction, a young girl and an old lady can connect in multiple ways if they share common interests, as it can be seen in the relationship between Celia and Pilar. It was exposed that being abroad does not mean to adapt yourself to the new land, something that is exemplified with Rufino Puente and Pilar; at the same time it was contrasted with Lourdes, who perfectly fits into American society and forgets everything related with Cuba. In her transformation the idea of the American Dream is essential, which she has really internalised and follows blindly; moreover, she tries to impose it to other relatives, as Pilar or Ivanito, showing with this how attached she is with American way of thinking and living. The question of language has had an important role in this study, too; the confrontation between English and Spanish through the use that characters make of

both languages has revealed that everybody is conditioned by the language they use. It constitutes a crucial part inside every tradition and cultures and, at the end, the decision you make is what defines you, as it was seen in Pilar or Lourdes. A travel between the magic and the ordinary was also studied with the investigation of Cuban culture, traditions and magical realism. These aspects have had an essential function in order to understand the different religious rites present in Cuban society and its relation with *santería*; Felicia has been the character who portrays traditions and culture in the best possible way and with Lourdes and her conversations with her dead father it has been possible to show how magical realism works in a literary text.

The concept of exile, the process of adaption, the struggle and moments of sadness in the new country and every unique aspect of Cuban culture have been illustrated in this study through Cristina Garcia and *Dreaming in Cuban*. It has been possible to summarize the Cuban-American exile and consequences and to portray them in the characters; this has permitted a closer understanding of Cuban-Americans' situation in the 1960s and 1970s. I must admit that writing this project has also allowed me to think as an exile, even to feel identified with them and, at the end, it has also made me “dream in Cuban.”

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