

HYBRIDITY IN ALVAREZ'S AND SANTIAGO'S LITERATURE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-IDENTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT:

This article elaborates on how hybridity is experienced and narrated under the conditions of exile through a critical engagement with Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* (1993). The research rationale derives from the fact that although hybridity has often been theorised in postcolonial studies as a space of cultural negotiation and creative possibility, it has mostly been treated in abstract or celebratory terms that tend to ignore its lived, embodied, and gendered dimensions. Hence, the problem addressed is the tension between the theoretical representations of hybridity, as fluid and empowering, and its literary representation as a condition marked by loss, alienation, and vulnerability. In this regard, the aim is to re-conceptualise hybridity as a contradictory and painful process defined by linguistic displacement, memory struggles, gendered hierarchies, and colonial imbalances. Drawing on postcolonial theory and feminist critique, attention is paid to how the main characters in both novels live in in-between spaces where their identities are continuously negotiated between their homelands and hostlands, past and present, belonging and exclusion. Based on this framework of analysis, the research questions posed are the following: i) how is hybridity represented as a lived experience of exile in Alvarez's and Santiago's narratives?; ii) in what ways do language, memory, gender shape the formation of hybrid identities in these texts?; iii) how does hybridity function both as a resource for survival and a source of vulnerability within diasporic contexts? The argument made is that hybridity in these novels constitutes an embodied struggle characterised by ambivalence, fragmentation and a sense of loss as the characters seek to create a stable sense of being through unequal power relations. Overall, the contribution of this article is that it reframes hybridity as a lived condition of tension and resilience, thus challenging theoretical approaches that reduce it to an abstract or purely emancipatory concept, therefore ignoring its contested nature.

KEYWORDS: Diaspora, Hybridity, Identity, Postcolonialism, Feminism.

1. Introduction

In a world shaped by a series of flows and interconnections across different cultural traditions it is indeed difficult to approach one's identity in monolithic or in static terms. Hence, considering the ambiguity that characterizes human experience in broader terms, the primary aim of this article is to elaborate on the complex process of identity formation and reflect on the nature of hybridity (i.e. the blurring of identities) under the particularly challenging conditions of exile. To this end, this work engages in a critical and comparative fashion with Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*.

Julia Alvarez (1950–), born in New York to Dominican parents and raised partly in the Dominican Republic before returning to the United States, has become one of the most prominent writers of Latin background as she has raised in her oeuvre questions pertaining to exile, memory, and

identity. Esmeralda Santiago (1948–), born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, migrated to New York City as a child and is also widely recognized for her autobiographical narratives that capture the tensions of life across and within different cultural traditions. The decision to focus on these two writers stems from the fact that they both share a diasporic background and a bilingual upbringing, and are driven by a shared commitment to reveal the struggles associated with identity formation across different cultures.

These common aspects not only justify the selection for a comparative analysis of their work but also highlight how their novels, regardless of their distinct characteristics in terms of form and prose, treat hybridity as an ambivalent and complex response to linguistic displacement and a fragile subjectivity (i.e. how the main characters define themselves).

Drawing primarily on Homi Bhabha's theorization of the "Third Space" (1994), the task is to critically explore how the formation of hybrid identities in these texts arises from the complex interplay between national traditions and

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transnational realities as well as between the past and the present. Indeed, according to Bhaba (1994, p.2) “[t]he social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation”. A careful reading of both novels reveals how hybridity emerges as a lived condition of ambivalence, fragmentation, and survival.

Far from depicting hybridity as an effortless blending or some kind of a liberating synthesis of cultural traditions and codes, both authors present how hybridity is tense carrying painful dimensions. Their protagonists, Yolanda and Negi, are not empowered cosmopolitans but young women grappling with the psychological, linguistic, and bodily consequences of forced dislocation that characterizes their daily lives. In simple terms, hybridity is defined by a constant sense of loss, dislocation, and contradiction. Namely, nostalgia for a homeland that no longer exists as it once did, an alienation in host societies that impose conditional belonging, and an internalized pressure to navigate in-between spaces without any stable point of reference.

In order to elaborate in hybridity in exile, this article is divided into six sections. In particular, section two refers to the symbiosis of exile and homeland within Postcolonialism as it engages with prominent theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak in order to highlight how displacement generates ambivalent attachments to memory and the sense of belonging. Elaborating further and narrowing down the scope of analysis the next section contextualizes the notion of hybridity within postcolonial, feminist, and cultural studies, offering a detailed examination of Bhabha’s (1994) work and extends it through the contributions of theorists such as Stuart Hall (1990), Carine Mardorossian (2002), John Hyland (2013), Paul Gilroy (2020), Gloria Anzaldúa (1995), and Gayatri Spivak (1988).

Section four focuses empirically on how Yolanda struggles to define herself in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* as she is trapped between English and Spanish as well as the present and the past. Attention is also paid to how the author uses a reverse chronological narrative to reveal the painful process of trying to acquire a new ‘Self’. In a similar tone, section five explores Santiago’s *When I Was Puerto Rican*, with an emphasis on Negi’s resistance to linguistic assimilation, the violence of institutional language regimes, and the emergent power of Spanglish as both subversion and survival. The final section discusses why and how hybridity in postcolonial literature, far from being a harmonious space, emerges as a terrain marked by contradiction, trauma, and transformation.

2. The symbiosis of exile and homeland in literature: a post-colonial overview

The themes of exile and homeland have acquired a prominent position in the corpus of postcolonial literature as one can notice a series of stories of displacement, migration, and the search for identity. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2003, p.2) refer in this regard to the term postcolonial as a concept that covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day”, thus revealing a troubled

co-existence/symbiosis between the colonial past and the postcolonial present.

In this literary genre priority is given to how physical dislocation brings about emotional and psychological dimensions of longing for a homeland that may no longer exist in its original form. Exile is basically portrayed as a condition of alienation and disconnection from cultural, linguistic, and familial roots.

Edward Said presented in his work, titled *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2000), exile in both literal and metaphorical terms. The argument advanced is that exile creates a sense of estrangement that can never be fully reconciled. Indeed, for those in exile, the homeland becomes an idealized space that exists more as a memory or a constructed fantasy rather than as a physical reality. As Said (2000, p.186) points out “[f]or an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment.”

In this context, the literature of exile often reflects the tension between memory and forgetting, between the past that is preserved in the imagination and the present that is being constantly displaced. According to Mardorossian (2002, p.16) this writing signals a shift “from a literature of exile, centered on loss and nostalgia, to a literature of migration that foregrounds transformation, hybridity, and relational identity.”

For instance, in works such as Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), the homeland appears to be in a state of flux as it is portrayed as an elusive and ever-changing idea/phantasy defined by the fractured identities of the characters. Rushdie’s idea of ‘imaginary homelands’ shows how the homeland becomes a place of myth, continuously reimagined by the exile who cannot return to it in the same way. As Rushdie (1991) explains, the exiled writer reconstructs the homeland from ‘fragments of memory’, creating a partial version of a past that is always impossible to reach.

Homi K. Bhabha, another prominent postcolonial scholar, contributes to this discussion through his concept of cultural hybridity, which he outlines in his work titled *The Location of Culture* (1994). According to Bhabha exile often produces hybrid identities as individuals are forced to live across and within different cultures, languages, and identities.

In this regard, the homeland does not emerge as a singular, fixed entity but as a space of negotiation, where the exiled individual must constantly mediate between the culture, she/he has left behind and the culture she/he now inhabits. Authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri who wrote *The Namesake* and Gloria Anzaldúa who wrote *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* also dealt with hybridity as they showed through their main characters how living in exile is shaped by alienation and a fragile belonging.

Derek Walcott in his epic poem *Omeros* (1990) further showed how the loss of the homeland is not limited to individuals as it is also a collective feeling shared by the colonized who live in the colony. What Walcott achieved basically was to show how colonialism changed different homelands leaving behind a fragmented cultural and social identity. Kincaid in *Lucy* (1990) focused on a Caribbean woman living in the US showing how this woman

nostalgia for her homeland is confronted by the realization that her own homeland is no longer the same after the colonial rule. The past is long gone and in the present the homeland has acquired a new form and nature.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, as one of the most important scholars in Postcolonialism, asked in 1988 the question of whether the subaltern can speak in both literal and metaphorical terms. This question and the way Spivak dealt with it paved the way for debates on how the marginalized can raise his/her own voice and assume agency (i.e. the capacity to act). According to Spivak (1988) in postcolonial settings the marginalized individuals are basically silenced and fail to be recognized and heard in the new postcolonial context .

This is how the process of writing, as in the two books under-examination, becomes a powerful act of not just speaking but also showing that the colonized can resist the burden of colonialism and reclaim their own past and identities. However, at the same time it is clear that this act of resistance is neither straightforward nor simple as the colonized have to confront the colonial hierarchies and the new power imbalances. As clearly depicted in the works of Alvarez and Santiago, the relationship between the past and the present, the colonizer and the colonized is fundamentally ambiguous and complex.

Basically, according to Postcolonialism, which “explores postcolonial discourses and their subject positions in relation to themes of race, nation, subjectivity, power, subalterns, hybridity and creolization” (Barker, 2003, p. 274), homeland and the way it is experienced and remembered is unpredicted as the homeland itself acquires new forms .

Indeed, what becomes evident is that the homeland emerges as a sites where new questions pertaining to identity, belonging, and memory emerge. The homeland is essentially reimagined and re-interpreted as a lost land but also a space that can lead to the emergence of new cultural norms, values, and perceptions. The importance of postcolonial literature is that it shows in an analytically persuasive manner how people in exile still search for new possibilities and realities in their new lives regardless of all the pain, suffering, and alienation. This is how hybrid identities come fruitfully into being in postcolonial narratives.

Overall, the contribution of postcolonial authors derives from depicting characters, who while living in exile, seek to re-imagine their homeland and address the burdens of emotional and psychological displacement. Influential scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, among others, have contributed to the literature by basically offering new ways of understanding what it means to live in exile particularly under post-colonial conditions. This is how the homeland, through the eyes of exiled subjects, is understood as a contested space defined by continuous negotiations of memory, language, and identity, and a constant struggle between the past and the present. It is these struggles that basically reveal the true nature of hybridity; not as an abstract condition or as a mix of different cultures but as something profoundly troubled that nevertheless can create new realities.

3. Hybridity: between dislocation and agency

3.1 From Colonial Classification to Postcolonial Re-appropriation

Hybridity is a contested and complex concept and its ambivalence derives to a significant extent from its historical ambiguity. In particular, originally it was employed as a tool of colonial classification before becoming a strategy of postcolonial resistance. It emerged in 19th-century racialised discourses where the term ‘hybridity’ was initially adopted to frame impurity, degeneration, and contamination, thus serving as a pseudo-scientific justification for imperial hierarchies. However, in the wake of decolonization, postcolonial theorists decided to radically re-appropriate/conceptualize the term, transforming it into a conceptual device with the intent to interrogate and challenge essentialist constructions of culture, nation, and identity.

One of the most influential re-articulations of hybridity comes from Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), in which he introduced the notion of the “Third Space” perceived as a liminal zone where the colonized subject disrupts the authority and coherence of colonial discourse through mimicry, irony, and subversion. This space is not merely a meeting point of cultural forms but a performative arena in which identities are re-signified. According to Bhabha’s (1994) hybridity exposes the ambiguity of colonial authority as the language of the colonizer, once an instrument of control, becomes contaminated by the voice and agency of the colonized. This is basically how hybridity challenges the idea that identity is fixed or pure showing that it is by definition disputed always open to change .

In this context, it is important to mention that Bhabha’s prioritization of language and symbolic practices in the construction of new identities has been criticized for offering an incomplete account of the postcolonial condition. Indeed, scholars such as Benita Parry (2002) and Aijaz Ahmad (1995) argue that this understanding/interpretation of hybridity theory ignores the material and structural dimensions of postcolonial subjugation .

Although hybridity may create the conditions for cultural negotiation, it does so within systems of inequality, including economic exploitation, racialized violence, and legal subjugation. As Ahmad (1995) argues there is a risk of detaching hybridity from the lived realities of oppression.

Stuart Hall’s work represents a valuable point of reference in this regard as he sought to anchor hybridity under the diasporic conditions of identity formation. In his seminal essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1990), Hall argues that identity should not be viewed as a fixed essence but rather as a “production” that is always in process that takes place in difference and discontinuity. As Bromley (2000, p.5) further points out “identity is interminably developed, and deconstructed, crosswise over contrast and against set inside/outside oppositions”.

According to Barker (2003, p.220), “[s]ubjectivity and identity are contingent culturally specific productions...That is, identities are wholly social constructions and cannot ‘exist’ outside of cultural representations”. In a similar tone, Hall (1989, p.10)

argues that “character develops as a sort of troubled space or an indecisive inquiry in that space, between various meeting talks”. Identity is basically about sameness and difference as it entails both personal and social features while it is positioned within a context of “living here” and “recollecting there” (Clifford 1997, p.255). Identity needs to be understood basically not as a possession but as a process of ‘becoming’ (Barker 2003, p.245).

In this regard, the diasporic experience is perceived as a terrain of negotiation, memory, and disjuncture. Cultural identity, according to this perspective, is not something to be recovered but something to be continually re-articulated. Hybridity, then, emerges not as an ontological state but as a temporal and spatial process that manifests itself across different times and settings. It is essentially a form of becoming marked by contingency, displacement, and relationality.

Further critiques of hybridity emerge from scholars such as Carine Mardorossian and John Hyland, who caution against the aestheticization of hybrid identities in literary and cultural studies. Mardorossian (2002) argues that migrant hybridity is often shaped less by agency than by trauma, marginalization, and the politics of survival. In addition, Hyland (2007), draws attention to the enduring operations of systemic power, in the overlapping/intersectional forms of racism, linguistic imperialism, and class exclusion that condition the formation of hybrid subjectivities from the outside .

Overall, an overview of the recent re-articulations of hybridity indicates that without a robust engagement with these social, cultural, political and economic structures, hybridity risks becoming a depoliticized and abstract signifier.

3.2 Feminist and Decolonial Reframings of Hybridity

Feminist and decolonial perspectives further elaborate on hybridity by referring to the importance of embodiment, gender, and affect. Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) introduces the concept of ‘mestiza consciousnesses’ as a hybrid identity forged in the cultural and psychological friction of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. According to Anzaldúa, hybridity is not a celebratory fusion but a painful negotiation, a psychic terrain of contradiction and exclusion. Yet, it is precisely from this wound that new epistemologies emerge that resist binary logic and affirm multiplicity.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), examines the discursive privileges embedded in the theorizations of hybridity. In this regard, the concept of “strategic essentialism” serves as a critical lens through which to assess the political uses of identity claims. Spivak warns basically that hybridity, when framed without attention to structural voice and visibility, may reproduce elite modes of representation that silence the subaltern. For her, the key question is not whether hybridity is present, but who is authorised to speak and under what conditions.

Paul Gilroy reframes hybridity in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) through the lens of transnational modernity as he conceptualizes the Atlantic as a counter-cultural space that has been defined by the histories of slavery, colonialism, and diaspora. In this context, hybridity reveals itself through different cultural channels, such as music, that

move beyond the boundaries of nation and the associated limitations of ethnicity, and language. Therefore, Gilroy rejects the notion of ethnic absolutism and refers instead to the presence of a diasporic consciousness based on different levels of interconnection, and improvisation.

Based on these insights it becomes evident that hybridity should not be viewed merely as a case of cultural mixture. Instead, it needs to be understood and subsequently analyzed as a deeply political and emotional state of being that is defined by the trauma of dislocation and language as well as gendered and racialized structures that create altogether an uneven terrain of living where the exiled are forced to develop a new sense of meaning and being. Hence, as it will be discussed in the forthcoming sections, hybridity entails a struggle over meaning, representation, and belonging.

It is in this context that the protagonists of Julia Alvarez and Esmeralda Santiago emerge as figures that embody the contradictions of hybridity as their identities are not simply mixed but they are rather to be found in-between different languages and imagined histories and geographies. They are basically at the crossroads of the traumas of the past and the struggles of the present life. Hybridity, in these literary works, emerges as space of negotiation and resistance, of loss and becoming.

4. Hybridity and Fragmentation in Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

4.1 Fractured Names, Language, and the Burden of Memory

Julia Alvarez in her novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* decides to avoid writing a story of assimilation as she adopts a reverse chronology that reflects the disorientation that characterizes identity in exile. Rather than presenting a journey of gradual and uninterrupted integration into the American society, Alvarez resists such teleological expectations. In this regard, the decision to write backward in time helps to unravel the García sisters’ gradual Americanization and reveal the importance of memory and psychological rupture. What is important to further note is that this is not simply a narrative technique but a perspective that reveals the temporal dislocation that characterizes diasporic consciousness and defines the novel’s core theme. This way Alvarez shows that a return to the characters’ origins is no longer feasible further claiming in an implicit manner how their identities and lived experiences are trapped within the fractured nature of hybrid subjectivity.

The examination of hybridity unravels primarily through the portrayal of the character of Yolanda as the most self-divided one of the García sisters. What is important to notice in this context is that the reference to different names (e.g. Yo, Yoyo, Joe, Jolinda) reflect not just linguistic but also psychological ambivalence. Indeed, who is Yolanda after all? Raising this question is not an exaggeration as one’s name is closely intertwined with his/her own perception both by the others and by themselves. Names are not neutral in cultural terms as they carry their own cultural connotations and reflect different traditions and understandings. This multiplicity confirms Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the “Third Space”, as the character does not correspond to a single cultural narrative but is instead forced to live in a liminal (i.e. in-between)

space where any sense of meaning and belonging is at flux. In this regard, the reader understands how Yolanda lives in a continuous state of translation, in literal and figurative terms, as her own identity and understanding of her selfhood are defined by the interplay of different and often competing codes of the Dominican and American cultural orders.

The reference to the word *antojo* plays a pivotal role in this context as it emerges at a moment where Yolanda cannot recall the Spanish word for craving, thus revealing a symbolic disruption in the character's language, memory, and in broader terms identity. *Antojo* reflects in this regard a culturally based desire that embodies the character's nostalgia of her own past. The failure to remember the word is important in the novel as it shows how Yolanda is disoriented in real life even in seemingly trivial instances such as this one. This basically show that language is not only used for communication. It is actually where people maintain their own memories and remember their pasts. It is basically how people create their own emotions. In this regard the 'loss' of the word *antogo* reveals the distance between the past and the present and this distance is not emotionally neutral as the remark by Yolanda's aunt carries a sense of moral condemnation as she is basically accused for betraying her own past and her own homeland. Losing her homeland language is basically portrayed as an act of betrayal of her own identity .

The situation becomes more emotionally complex when one notices how the use of the English language by Yolanda exposes the struggles of hybridity. Indeed, on the hand through the use of English Yolanda tries to position herself within the postcolonial setting and in broader terms define herself. On the other hand, though, this is perceived as a source of alienation from her own homeland. Calling her 'Americana' is essentially a speech act that causes her displacement from her own homeland while at the same time revealing that the process of assimilating herself in the postcolonial setting faces the struggle of defining herself without abandoning her past. Under these conditions, language both empowers and marginalizes. It basically emerges as a double-edged sword. English and Spanish emerge as identity markers that delineate the boundaries of particular cultural spaces and Yolanda faces the challenges of inhabiting a place in-between. This is exactly how Alvarez manages creatively through the references of two seemingly insignificant words (i.e. *antojo*, *Americana*) to show that bilingualism is not something to be celebrated as this linguistic hybridity reveals a struggle between the capacity to acquire a new identity and the desire to remain loyal to her family's and country's identity.

4.2 Embodied Hybridity, Gender, and Romantic Failure

Hybridity emerges in the most vivid manner through both language and her own body when at some point in the novel she responds to the word 'love'. In this occasion Yolanda in her effort to articulate her feelings in English she realizes that her own body reacts with an allergic rash as "her face is one itchy valentine". This reaction carries deeply symbolical meanings as it exposes the distance between linguistic expression and emotional truth. Love, as a word that entails cultural meanings and emotional

gravity, is a feeling that cannot be expressed through the linguistic codes that are available to her. Basically, it becomes evident that neither Spanish nor English can fully capture and reflect her own emotional experience, thus presenting how hybridity does not present itself in thought or language, but also in the actual body itself. This shows how cultural and linguistic in-betweenness spillovers to the body itself that appears as a new part of her own fragmented subjectivity.

Furthermore, hybridity is also associated with gender stereotypes, roles and expectations. In the novel Yolanda's struggle to develop a sense of being in the world is further challenged by the institution of patriarchy. Indeed, it becomes evident how Yolanda is trapped between her family's expectations of proper femininity and the promises of feminist discourse in the US. Under these conditions, she fails to develop healthy romantic relationships as she struggles to comply with the cultural contradictions that characterize her ambivalent cultural space between her family and the country she lives in. Not only her lovers cannot cope with her fragmented identity, but she is also not in a position to act as an assimilated American woman without experiencing a sense of loss. This is how Alvarez reveals the many faces and complex nature of hybridity that is omnipresent in culture and language, as well as in sexuality, embodiment, and emotions.

In this context, Alavarez's decision to adopt in the novel a reverse chronology presents in the aforementioned instances the temporal logic of trauma and the role of memory. Trauma emerges when the past intrudes the present and as a result identity formation is not linear as it is exposed to moments of disruption and a subconscious need for return. Yolanda's effort to reclaim her own past reveals this traumatic temporality. As Cathy Caruth (1991) points out the past is never fully integrated into the present but continually re-lived through traumatic disruptions.

Therefore, it can be asserted that Alvarez challenges the understanding of hybridity as an open multiplicity. Instead, hybridity emerges in her novel as a contested space, where identity formation take place under the pressures of exile as defined by the logic of patriarchy, the loss of language, and a longing for the past. Hence, the way Yolanda navigates her life should not be viewed as a case of cultural mixture but rather as a case of ontological disorientation as she struggles to balance the demands of family, nation, as well as her own desires.

Overall, hybridity in the novel is characterized by fragmentation rather than synthesis. It is a case of stagnation rather than resolution. Yolanda aims to discover meaning under conditions of cultural dislocation that result into a fragile positioning within her own world. A reading of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* shows basically how hybridity is a space where fragments of the character's identity are never fully coherent.

5. Hybridity and the struggle for visibility in Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*

5.1 Language, Resistance and Institutional Violence

The novel *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago provides a similarly nuanced interpretation of hybridity as it departs from simplistic conceptualizations and theorizations. Indeed, rather than treating hybridity as

a case of cultural pluralism, Santiago positions hybridity within lived conditions of racialization, gendered labor, and linguistic subjugation. This work can be read as the coming-of-age memoir that portrays Negi's (i.e. Santiago's childhood nickname) troubled journey to American adulthood as she experiences misrecognition, exclusion, and a sense of belonging that is always in doubt. This way Santiago presents in literary terms hybridity as a highly ambivalent and contested process that is defined by fragmentation, surveillance, and negotiation rather than an unproblematic, or even fruitful, fluidity.

In the novel Negi's statement "I'm not going to learn English so I don't become American" shows the character's effort to avoid her integration into the American colonial-linguistic order. This way fluency in English is presented basically as an act of treason to her Puerto Rican cultural identity. This moment corresponds to Judith Butler's (1990/2006) concept of "performative dissent" described as an act of resistance against regimes that aim to normalize bodies and behaviors. In the context of the novel this symbolizes Negi's effort to defend her Puerto Rican heritage against colonial hegemony.

Under this condition language is not simply an instrument of communication but a site for ideological struggle. In Negi's eyes English is essentially a form of disciplinary power that as it being exercised through disciplinary institutions, to adopt a Foucauldian perspective (1982), such as public schools and medical bureaucracies, it aims to 'normalise' non-English-speaking migrants and punish them if they are deficient or deviant.

This disciplinary attitude becomes evident when Negi's schoolteacher states that she has to repeat the seventh grade until she improves her English language skills. This pedagogical decision, under the disguise of a benevolent paternalism, replicates what Frantz Fanon (1967) described as the "epidermalisation of inferiority" referring basically to the internalization of colonial value systems that reduce the agency of the colonized. For Fanon, language is in this context a conduit of racial ideology, an instrument through which the colonised is rendered transparent to the gaze of the coloniser. To use his own words "[e]very colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country" (Fanon, 1967, p.9). In Santiago's memoir, this operates not as abstract theory but as lived trauma as Negi's sense of self is subordinated to her perceived linguistic inadequacy, and her educational trajectory becomes contingent on her assimilation into English linguistic norms.

Her hybrid performance at the welfare office, when she says "My mother she no spik inglish", is an instance that reveals (linguistic) hybridity and its meanings and connotations in an actual setting. In particular, although the use of Spanglish is grammatically incorrect, it plays a vital communicative role as it gives her the ability to be understood while at the same time asserting her presence in a bureaucratic space that is by definition designed to marginalize non-English speakers. In doing so, Negi resists her exclusion by making her bilingual identity visible and audible.

This incident corresponds to what Walter Dignolo (2009) "epistemic disobedience" that refers to the use of alternative, subaltern languages and grammars with the intent to challenge colonial forms of knowledge and authority. Hence, the use of Spanglish is both an efficient tool of communication and an instrument of defiance. This way the author presents an embodied act of resistance to the linguistic hegemony. This episode challenges basically the idea that only "proper" English have legitimacy, thus further showing the creativity and resilience of those living at the margins.

5.2 Family, Gender, and the Fragility of Belonging

A key characteristic of hybridity, as already implied, is its omnipresence. In other words, it appears in both the public and the private space in different forms. In this regard, it is important to note how hybridity in Santiago's novel acquires emotional significance in the context of the family. In particular, Negi is criticised by her mother for speaking English accusing her essentially for betraying her own roots and act with arrogance, her own family become a site of linguistic contestation. This is how hybridity basically serves as a force capable of undermining even family ties.

Language in this context has a dual nature. On the hand it used by Negi as an instrument to acquire agency and position herself within the US but on the other hand it causes a distance from her own mother. Learning English is perceived in this context as an act of Americanization and Americanization is subsequently viewed as an attack to the norms, values and perceptions of her own family and her homeland. Hybridity becomes even more complex as it not only associated with language but also with gender-based representations and roles. In particular, learning English does not signal only a departure from her mother's world and her homeland but also a departure from the traditions and expectations of patriarchy and more precisely of how Negi should act as a daughter.

Nevertheless, Santiago manages in a nuanced manner to avoid the victimization of Santiago. Indeed, to refer to Spivak's (1988) reference to subaltern's capacity to speak, Negi through the use of an English/Spanish hybrid displays the ability to resist the structures of colonialization. The use of Spanglish is not a sign of inferiority in this context but it is instead an instrument employed that helps Negi to speak, in the deeper sense of the word, by maintaining the oral tradition of her homeland while showing the ability to improvise and perform this way an act of both resistance and assimilation. The use of Spanglish basically reveals how people living in exile can actual preserve fragments of their identities, maintain ties within the Spanish-speaking community, reproduce cultural memory, and act against the dominant structures of the colonizer.

This literary construction corresponds basically to Glissant's (2008) concept of *créolisation* that basically show that the mixture of different cultures not only is a dynamic process but can also lead to unexpected outcomes and forms of assimilation. In this regard, Santiago constructs a character that resists the hegemony of the hostland and at the same time acquires presence in this context.

However, in the book it becomes evident that exile is not solely about resistance or assimilation. In particular, there is an episode where a white woman falsely claims to be from Puerto Rico in order to receive welfare benefits in the US as she states "They [the US authorities] can't tell the difference". This shows another layer of discrimination that derives basically from ignorance. In the eyes of the US authorities Puerto Rican identity becomes homogenized. This reveals how in exile both manipulation and control are omnipresent and can create new forms of vulnerability. Indeed, instead of fostering recognition, this fluidity is turned against the community, producing erasure and reinforcing the marginal position of Puerto Ricans within the social order. In this sense, hybridity functions not as a space of transcendence but as a terrain of risk. It emerges as a condition in which visibility is always mediated by proximity to whiteness and linguistic conformity. Santiago's narrative thus reframes hybridity as a condition of conditional legibility. Hybridity basically becomes a performance that must be continually adjusted to align with shifting institutional and cultural expectations. According to Baumeister and Muraven (1996, p. 405) "[h]istory, culture, and the proximate structure of social relations create a context in which the individual identity must exist. People have individual wants and needs that must be satisfied within that context. Individuals actively choose, alter, and modify their identities based on what will enable them to get along best in that context". It is not a stable identity but a fragile negotiation between shame and pride, between the memory of Puerto Rico and the demands of U.S. assimilation. Negi's journey is one of survival, not synthesis. Her hybrid identity is shaped by migration, institutional violence, maternal loss, and adolescent desire. It is lived through contradictions and forged through struggle.

Overall, the novel contributes to a decolonial rethinking of hybridity. Santiago dismantles the romantic versions of hybridity found in some strands of postcolonial theory and replaces them with a grounded, embodied account of what it means to live between languages, between nations, and between selves. What the novel reveals in literary terms is hybridity should not be viewed as a reflection of freedom, but as a constant struggle defined by racialised norms, gender stereotypes, class inequalities, and power imbalances.

6. Conclusion

An in-depth reading of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *When I Was Puerto Rican* indicates that hybridity is not portrayed as a harmonious space of reconciliation or a form of cultural synthesis, but rather as a condition characterised by a series of tensions that derive from a sense of dislocation and a continuous negotiation. To refer to Morgan's (2001: 17-8) argument "[e]xiles, unlike travelers, bear the mark of history in their personal narratives of loss and thus desire the stability of belonging, but that belonging must come as the result of critical, affiliative efforts to participate in collectivities."

Hence, rather than presenting hybridity as a creative *mélange* of different cultures, both authors manage to reveal through the art of writing how it is an embodied and historically situated process that is defined by the weight of the past and by the persistent hierarchies of the host

society as they emerge in daily life through different mechanisms and across different sites. Within this context, it becomes evident that the main characters struggle to rediscover and position themselves within the different crossroads of languages, temporalities, and social, economic, and political traditions that never fully align or converge.

It is basically through the nuanced and honest portrayal of everyday life in exile that Alvarez and Santiago present an understanding of hybridity that is painful, deeply intertwined with gendered and cultural power relations and constantly at flux. This contextual representation of hybridity shows that it is not an abstract theoretical concept but a lived experience that unfolds in ordinary moments as the characters confront language shifts, bodily reactions, institutional encounters, and interpersonal conflicts. The integration of hybridity into the daily routine and in particular within the seemingly mundane moments of daily life, reveals its multifaceted nature as both a site of vulnerability and a source of resilience, thus presenting why and how identity formation needs to be understood as an ongoing struggle that takes place within a discourse of inequality and as Foucault (1972, p.49) eloquently points out "[d]iscourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention".

In both novels the main characters are basically forced to experience alienation, fragmentation, loss, amid a persistent search for belonging and a sense of being. More precisely, in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Yolanda's journey across time and space, as reflected in her multiple names, linguistic struggles, and even psychosomatic responses, reflects vividly the emotional burden of living in-between cultures that constantly fail to reconcile themselves. In this context, and reflecting on Stuart Hall's work, hybridity does not acquire the form of a stable identity. Instead, it emerges as a process of becoming that remains continuously unfinished and ambiguous. The nostalgia for a past that is long gone and the pressure of the present expectations clash, thus resulting into the emergence of a pathway without a clear end in sight as the boundaries between who Yolanda was, who she is, and who she is expected to become remain constantly ambivalent and blurred.

In a similar tone, in *When I Was Puerto Rican* hybridity is portrayed both a process and an outcome defined by the disciplinary institutions (e.g. school) that regulate, monitor, and normalise the life of the immigrant. In this context, it becomes evident how schools, hospitals, welfare systems, and bureaucratic procedures are not simply public institutions that provide public goods and services. Instead, they serve as mechanisms of power that create both the conditions and the limits of belonging. Under these conditions, Negi's resistance to fully embrace English should not be interpreted as a failure to integrate into the US but should be understood instead as a deliberate effort to maintain her linkage with her homeland and preserve a sense of self in a world where language is not only an instrument of communication but a defining feature of social legitimacy and human value. Indeed, her Spanish accent is not a sign of weakness but a way to project self-assertion and declare implicitly and

symbolically her refusal to 'surrender' to the predominant norms of the US.

Indisputably, hybridity emerges in both novels as a complex and multifaceted condition where the internal struggles of the main characters co-exist in tensions with the external pressures of the social and political apparatuses of the US. This is exactly what causes a ubiquitous tension in the characters' lives between "living here" and "remembering there" (Clifford, 1997, p.255) as they are forced to address contradictory demands and challenging realities. In this context, instead of inhabiting without any difficulty multiple cultures, the main characters are constantly compelled to confront conflicting expectations and to perform different identities that often appear fragmented, incoherent, and conflicting. A key insight in this regard is that hybridity is essentially an imposed condition; a forced way of seeing, understanding and interacting with the social world.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to suggest that Alvarez and Santiago portray hybrid in monolithic terms reducing it to some kind of passive victimhood. Throughout the novels there are instances, where even amid a sense of dislocation and loss, the characters display the ability to be creative and resist the pressures they experience. In particular Yolanda writes whereas Negi speaks Spanglish. Although these actions do not resolve their identity crises or somehow stabilise the condition of hybridity, they do lead to the construction of creative spaces of expression thus showing that in different ways the subaltern can indeed speak to refer to Spivak's work (1988). This way the authors demonstrate that hybridity has an ambiguous nature as it can both constraint and enable as it carries with it not only loss but also the potential for a re-articulation of the 'Self' beyond the binary choices of assimilation and/or rejection.

Both authors, by abolishing the "here vs. there", "native vs. foreign", and "past vs. present" binaries, manage to shed light on the complex nature of life in exile, as experienced in terms of hybridity, and contribute to a broader postcolonial reconfiguration of the representations of diasporic identities in literature. The main achievement is that Alvarez and Santiago managed to move beyond simplistic depictions and representations of cultural fusion by shedding light on the multi-layered experience of estrangement, longing, and the quest for belonging. Hybridity is basically portrayed as a series of practices of living in and with contradiction. Namely, of learning to live within it, speak from it, and create through it. As Morgan (2001, pp. 17–18) points out, the condition of exile entails loss and a struggle for a sense of belonging that is not a given as it emerges as the outcome of critical and affiliative engagement with collective identities.

To conclude, the actions and voices of Yolanda and Negi need to be viewed as a tell-tale sign of what hybridity entails. What becomes evident in these novels is that to live in exile does not mean to lack agency, but to articulate the 'Self' in ways that resist complete assimilation and insist on being heard even partially and often, literally and figuratively, in translation. In this sense, the overarching message of both novels is that hybridity not as a destination but as an ongoing struggle. It is essentially the space where identity is continuously negotiated at the

intersection of memory, language, and under the overarching structures of power.

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التهجين في أدب الفاريز وسانتياغو والصراع من أجل تحديد الهوية الذاتية

الخلاصة:

تتناول هذه المقالة مفهوم التهجين كما يظهر في المنفى، من خلال تناول رواية "كيف فقدت فتيات غارسيا لكتنهن" (1991) لجوليا ألفاريز، ورواية "عندما كنت بورتوريكية" لإزميرالدا سانتياغو (1993). ويكمن السبب في أنه في كلتا الروايتين يمكن للمرء أن يلاحظ كيف أن أصوات الشخصيات الرئيسية وذكراياتها وهويات الشخصيات الرئيسية محاصرة بين عالمين: عالم الوطن وعالم الوطن المضيق. هذا الوضع الغامض يثير حتماً سؤالاً مزدوجاً: لماذا وكيف يُمكن أن يُصبح التهجين قوة للبقاء ومصدراً للضعف؟ في هذا السياق، يستند إطار التحليل إلى كلٍّ من ما بعد الاستعمار والنسوية التقاطعية، بهدف فهم كيفية تعريف الحياة في الشتات من خلال التسلسلات الهرمية والاختلالات الاستعمارية والجنسانية. في الواقع، يتضح في كلتا الروايتين أن الشخصيات الرئيسية تُكافح لتعريف نفسها في بلدانها الجديدة (أي الولايات المتحدة) حيث تواجه حواجز مختلفة، وتشعر في الوقت نفسه بأنها عالقة بين الماضي والحاضر. لذا، فإن الحجة الرئيسية للمقالة هي أن التهجين ليست نوعاً من الاختلاط الثقافي الذي يُمكن الفرد من بناء هوية مختلطة جديدة. بل على العكس، يُفهم التهجين باعتباره عملية مؤلمة تتسم بالاغتراب، والخسارة (للماضي والوطن)، والنضال من أجل تحديد الهوية الذاتية. بشكل عام، تكمن مساهمة هذه المقالة في وضعها للتهجين ضمن نقاشات أوسع حول الشتات والعرق والجنس، مُبيّنةً بذلك كيف تعمل كمورد وعبء في آن واحد. أُعيد صياغة التهجين بشكل أساسي كتجربة مُجسدة/مُعاشة للنضال في ظل ظروف المنفى غير المتكافئة، مما يُشكل تحدياً للتفسيرات التي تُعاملها بشكل مُبهم على أنها مجرد حالة مُتغيرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشتات، التهجين، الهوية، ما بعد الاستعمار، النسوية

دوورمگبون د نهدهبی فاریز و سانتیاغو و ململانی ژبو دهستیشانکرنا ناسنامهیا خویهتی

پوخته:

ئەف گوتارە تێگەهێ دوورمگبونێ یە وەک یا دیار د دوبرنێخستنییدا (چەوا کچین غارسیا شیوازی زمانی خو ژ دەستدانیە (1991) یا جولیا فاریز، و رومانە (دەمی ئەز یا بورتوریکی) یا ئەزمیرالدا سانتیاگو (1993) ئەگەر ژێ بو وئ چەندێ فەدگەریت کو د هەردوو روماناندا مەژۆف دشتێ تێبینی بەکەت چەوا دەنگێن کەسایەتیی سەرەکی و بیر هاتنێ وئ و ناسنامەیین کەسایەتیی سەرەکی د دورپێچدانیە د دوو جیهاناندا: جیهانێ نیشتمانی و جیهانێ نیشتمانی مێهفاندار. ئەف رهوشا نەدیار پرسبارەکا دووانی د ئازرینیت: بوچی و چەوا دوورمگبون دبیته هێزەکا بو مانی و ژێدەرەکا بو لاوازبوونی؟ ب فی چەندێ، چارچۆفی شروەفەکرێ پشەت بەستنی دکەت ل سەر هەر ئێکی پشەتی داگیرکرێ و ئافەرەتێن ژێک دوبرکەفی، ب ئارمانجا چەوانیا نیاسینا ژیانێ د ئێک بژاڵبوونییدا ب ریکا ریزبەندیا هەرمەکی و داگیرکرێن داگیرکەرەن و رەگەزایەتی. ب راستی، د هەردوو روماناندا دیاردبیت کو کەسایەتیی سەرەکی بزانێ دکەن کو ل وەلاتی خو یێ نو خو بدەنە نیاسین (نانکو ویلایمتین ئیکگرتی) کو بەرەستێن جیاواز دکەفە د ریکا واندە و هەر ل وئ دەمی هەست دکەن کو یێن مایەنە هەلاوبستی دنەفەر دەمی بوری و نوکەدا ئەفجا بەهانا سەرەکی بو گوتارێ ئەو کو دوورمگبون جۆرەکا نینە ژ تێکەڵبوونەکا رهوشەبیری کو مەژۆف بشتێ ناسنامەکا نوێ یا تێکەڵبوونی چێکەت، لئ بەروفاژی وئ چەندێ، دوورمگبون دەیتە تێگەهشتن کو پروسێسەکا ب ئازارە و هافیبوون و ژ دەستدانا (رابردووی و نیشتمانی یە) و خەباتکرێ ژبو دەستیشانکرنا ناسناما خۆیەتی، ب شیوەکی گشتی، ئارمانجا فی گوتارێ ئەو کو دوورمگبونە بکەفیتە دگێگەشین بەرفەرەهتر لدور ژێک بژاڵبوون و نفس و رەگەزی، ب وئ چەندێ دئ دیارکەت چەوا کاردکەت وەک داهاات و بارگرا نیەکا د ئێک دەمدا، جارەکا دی دئ ب شیوەکی سەرەکی دوورمگبونێ دارژمەفە وەک تاقیکرنەکا بەرجەستەکرێ و هەفژیان بو خەباتی د کاودانێن دوبرنێخستنی یێن نەهەفەسەنگ. ئەفەژێ دبیته بەر هەنگاریەکا بو وان راقەکران ئەوین ب شیوەکی نەدیار سەرەدەری دگەل دکەن کو تنی حالەتەکا گۆهورینییە.

پەیفین کلێنی: ژێک بژاڵبوون، دوورمگبون، ناسنامە، پشەتی داگیرکرێ، ئافەرەتە.