

**PERPETUATION OF THE LATINO STEREOTYPE IN LATINO  
WRITING: ANALYSIS OF *DREAMING IN CUBAN* BY CRISTINA  
GARCÍA AND *HOW THE GARCÍA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS* BY  
JULIA ALVAREZ**

POR

MATÍAS ZITTERKOPF

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Profesor Guía: Gloria Carrozzo.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to study and show the effects of the overuse of the Latino stereotypes in Latino literature, which we believe does not deconstruct old conceptions and images but perpetuate them.

The subjects of this analysis are two literary works read during the course of studies: *Dreaming in Cuban* by Cristina García and *How the García Girls lost their Accents* by Julia Alvarez. These books helped us exemplify and support our ideas regarding the perpetuation of stereotypes since they use the common places of Latin America and the traits of its peoples.

Having supported the theory with examples of the literary works chosen and having also included a chapter on stereotypes in films and the media, it was concluded that in some cases the use of old images of Latinos imposed by colonizers serve only as a colorful detail in Latino writing but do nothing to deconstruct negative stereotypes.

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## Introduction

Is it possible that Latino stereotypes can be perpetuated in Latino writing by its authors? This thesis intends to analyze two books: *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) by Cristina García and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) by Julia Alvarez, where these stereotypes are maintained through the behavior of some of the characters.

Cristina García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* moves between Cuba and the United States, featuring three generations of a single family. The novel focuses particularly on the women, Celia del Pino, her daughters Lourdes and Felicia, and her granddaughter Pilar.

The novel's central themes include family relationships, exile, the divisiveness of politics, and memory. Cuban history and culture are important in the novel, including significant historical events and the elements of *Santería* that appear throughout the novel.

Julia Alvarez explores the theme of being caught between two cultures. She examines this in her first novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991). This story spans more than thirty years in the lives of four sisters, beginning with their adult lives in the United States and ending with their childhood in the Dominican Republic, from which the family was forced to flee.

The novel's major themes include acculturation and coming of age. It deals with the struggle to assimilate, the sense of displacement, and the confusion of identity suffered by the García family, as they are uprooted from their familiar environment and forced to begin a new life in New York City.

We will analyze both literary works from a methodological perspective which conveys colonial, post-colonial and Latino writing theory which is

vital to understand the development of this kind of literature. To select our research corpus, we have followed a thematic criterion which directed our attention to the way García and Alvarez deal with Latino stereotypes in their works. We will develop what a stereotype is and its effects in real life. This will help us understand and also support the aim of this thesis which is to show that sometimes instead of deconstructing an old vision of Latinos imposed by dominant groups since Colonial times, the authors just seem to perpetuate these old conceptions in their novels.

This thesis is divided into two parts which are formed by chapters. The first part contains a brief definition and ideas about Colonial, Post-colonial and Latino writing in order to situate the authors whose literary works we have chosen to analyze later on. The second part deals with the definition of stereotypes, the analysis of the literary works chosen and a final chapter that enlarges upon Latino stereotypes in the media and their effects on society. Finally, a conclusion will be reached.

## **PART 1**

### **Chapter 1: A Brief Definition of Colonial Literature, Post-colonial Literature and Latino Writing: Situating Cristina García and Julia Alvarez.**

#### **1.1 Colonial and Post-colonial Literature**

It is impossible to talk about Post-colonial literature without having a clear idea of where it comes from. Everything that is “post” has something that was before it; a stage that preceded it. In this case it is Colonial literature. A brief description will be included here in order to understand why Post-colonial literature came into being and what its purpose is.

Literature is intrinsically related to the historical period where it is developed. Therefore, a historical background is necessary to appreciate the influences of the world on the discourse used. We must not forget that Colonial Literature was born in a period of discovery and everything was new to the explorers who described the world under that light of wonder and the feelings produced by coming into contact with things unknown and new to them.

What is Colonial discourse? ‘Colonialist discourse can be taken to refer to that collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and, in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently unintelligible strangeness with which it came into contact. Its interpretations were an expression of its mastery, wonder, bewilderment, fear.’ (Bohemer, 1995: 50)

It is obvious to think that the representation of those new found lands and its peoples would be made from the colonizer's point of view. People

accepted what the travelers said and wrote about their discoveries. The word that spread and the descriptions of the new territories and the people who inhabited them were interpreted through the eyes and minds of European observers. Even though their accounts were not fictitious, these early chronicles are filled with cultural misunderstandings, exaggerations and preconceptions. The problem arises when we, nowadays and having lots of information about the world, continue to reinforce these old visions. We must understand that even if it was in old times, history tends to be written by the powerful; in this case, colonizers.

Elleke Bohemer in the book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, Migrant Metaphors*, claims that 'Always with reference to the superiority of an expanding Europe, colonized peoples were represented as lesser: less human, less civilized, as child or savage, wild man, animal, or headless mass.' (Bohemer, 1995: 79) And she also adds that 'the characterization of the colonized people as secondary, abject, weak, feminine, and other to Europe, and in particular to England, was standard in British colonialist writing.' (Bohemer, 1995: 79) Thus a power relationship is established and one of the sides, the colonized, will "lose" because as the cited author says, an image was established in European Colonial literature that represented these people.

Often, the description of the other made by the colonizer would have a negative result. 'The effect of their descriptions was to erase, either wholly or in part, the signs of other lives which had unfolded in that particular space.' (Bohemer, 1995: 13)

This thesis takes as its source or reason for being developed the previous points. Post-colonial literature was born to fight long held ideas or the old visions about the colonized peoples and lands that discoverers imposed and others accepted. It was also born to deconstruct a representation

where colonized people are seen as the subordinate or as Bohemer said: “lesser”.

Which period comprises Colonialism and Post-Colonialism? In his book *On Post-colonial Futures*, Ashcroft says that Colonialism ‘seems anachronistic, a fixation on a period of European power that climaxed in the nineteenth century, but is now long past. On the other hand, post-colonial theory has been accused of being the latest master narrative, the explanation of all forms of oppression.’ (Ashcroft, 2001: 8) Colonialism was marked by the Victorian era which were years of expansion and colonizing.

However, authors such as Childs and Williams in their book *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* propose the idea of a non-fixed period for post-colonialism. We do not have a clear idea when it began, even though we mentioned something above, or when it will end and we agree with that last part. There are still colonies in the world. Is their literature post-colonial if they are still colonies? Does the definition of post-colonialism apply to them? That is why we have to be specific and focus on the countries that are free from Colonial power for real. In the case of the countries where the authors we are going to study here were born or lived, we must say they were colonized by Spain and later the United States had influence on them too.

Having made the previous point clear we are going back to old representations. Most of the stereotypes we know today come from words used by the travelers and explorers to describe those new lands which they considered for example “exotic”.

The authors whose literary works we have chosen to analyze are part of the post-colonial period but they also belong to the Latino branch of literature. Latino countries have been the most colonized in history. So why would authors who belong to this group use those old stereotypes imposed by the

“superior” group in their books? We can understand that during the colonial time that was the only vision of the world they had but things have changed since then. Stereotypes can be used in order to be deconstructed, as a tool to fight old ideas but in this case, we believe they are just being perpetuated, not on purpose of course. It is what sells nowadays and it is being encouraged by publishing houses and universities in North America. Antonio Fuguet and Sergio Gómez discuss this in their prologue to *McOndo (Una antología de una nueva literatura hispanoamericana)*. ‘Lo latino está hot (como dicen allá) y que tanto el departamento de español, como los suplementos literarios yanquis, están embalados con el tema. En el cine del pueblo *Como agua para Chocolate* arrasa en la taquilla. Para qué hablar de las estanterías, atestadas de “sabrosas” novelas escritas por gente cuyos apellidos son indudablemente hispanos, aunque algunos incluso escriban en inglés.’ (Fuguet and Gómez, 196: 1)

These two authors make an interesting point in the previous quote when they mention that authors whose surnames are obviously Hispanic write in English. This is understandable as some writers moved to the United States when they were children or were even born there. But what is not easily understood is the reason they have to use the language of the colonizer to “fight” against old representations of their ancestors. Why using some sort of “Spanglish” in their books?

Bohmer claims, in the book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, Migrant Metaphors* that ‘Adopting English, the colonial tongue, writers even at this early stage sought to rework its meanings and structures. Yeats's belief was that Ireland heroic history should be sung in a tongue at least adapted to people's heritage, or in his words, 'in English, [but] with the accent of their own country'.’ (Bohmer, 1995: 120)

There was always resistance to colonization, but as most of the times it was impossible to defeat the colonizers, one of the most important weapons used for this was literature.

‘Many writers in English from the African and Caribbean colonies took up the call to include literature as a moving spirit in the nationalist struggle. (...) There was widespread agreement that the role of culture was to help transform social life, and that, in turn, social transformation had the potential to regenerate a marginalized culture.’ (Bohmer, 1995: 184)

‘The post-1945 movement of anticolonial and (usually) nationalist upsurge produced the first literature which unambiguously invites the name *postcolonial*: that is, a literature which identified itself with the broad movement of resistance to, and transformation of, colonial societies.’ (Bohmer, 1995: 184)

To change the old image, colonized writers had to begin to think the world from their own perspective. It was time they gave name to things and it was their job to name the world for themselves. Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe spoke of the ‘imperative need for writers to help change the way the colonized world was seen, to tell their own stories.’ (Bohmer, 1995: 189)

In the post-colonial era of literature, women play an important part. Some did and still do a lot to fight against long held ideas of the colonized world. Other authors just use the stereotypes to perpetuate them.

## **1.2 Latino Writing**

As it was mentioned before, Latino literature is characterized by several factors:

- a nostalgia for a fading past
- a critique of racial oppression and negative acculturation
- experiences in the fields, in the city neighborhoods, the schools, factories and homes
- bilingualisms
- schizophrenic goal conflicts and sex role confusions
- cultural tensions, affirmations and anger
- calls for reform, rebellion, revolution or other forms of opposition.

In an article published in the *Smithsonian Magazine* called *What defines Latino literature?* Ilan Stavans, a Professor of Latin American and Latino Culture at Amherst College and editor of an anthology called *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, talks about the themes that emerge in the anthology and agrees with the previous factors that convey Latino literature mentioned above.

First of all, he gives an interesting and important definition where he differentiates the concepts of “Hispanic” and “Latino”. Both terms ‘refer to people living in the United States who have roots in Latin America, Spain, Mexico, South America, or Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries. “Hispanic” is a reference to Hispania, the name by which Spain was known in the Roman period, and there has always been strong ambivalence toward Spain in its former colonies.’ (Stavans, 2010).

We consider it is important to make this distinction since the author of the article mentioned above says that sometimes newspapers or the media choose not to make a difference between the terms because both refer to the same language but there is a rather simple distinction that needs to be made. Hispanic people or the country itself, Spain, were never a colony, they were always the colonizer. Latino countries on the other hand were always the subordinated. Thus, the stories to tell in literature are

completely different because the historical background, roots and experiences differ. That is why we cannot generalize and call every Spanish speaking person or authors only Hispanic and forget about their ancestry.

The anthology that Professor Stavans has put together includes different pieces of writing such as short stories, poetry and novels. There are also memoirs and nonfiction books, logs, letters and types of music ranging from traditional Mexican ballads to pop songs, together with cartoons, comic strips, and jokes. All of these different types of literature share a common ground: the search for identity which we can claim, in the end, is one of the most important characteristics of Latino writing. Having read several books of this branch we can say there is always an underlying feeling of being lost and wanting to find oneself; an identity.

When asked in the interview article what themes are present in the anthology, Professor Stavans mentions several of the points enumerated in the first paragraph of this part of the dissertation. He talks about the idea of the search for a place to call home as an individual and as a group.

Another aspect which is important to this thesis is North America as the home of both of the writers whose books we analyze here. Professor Stavans has something to say about that. 'Are we at home in America? What does America mean to us? And what do we mean to America? This question of home results in tension between rebellion and consent. A current throughout the collection is frustration, anger and outright rebellion, particularly during the Civil Rights era, and the quest for validation.' (Stavans, 2010)

He also mentions other topics used as stereotypes that we will develop like 'the gender theme: How is gender dealt within Latino society? The works in the anthology also explore the impact of poverty and alienation on a person's mind and spirit. And then there's the theme of language: What are

our words? Are they Spanish or English? Or are they to be found in Spanglish?’ (Stavans, 2010)

But Latino stereotypes go beyond the stereotype itself. One of the most used stereotypes as regards the Latino community living in the US for example is the idea of being illegal. ‘Negative stereotypes often have some truth to them, but they simplify a lot of racial inequities and injustice. At the same time they challenge us to reject the shaming they are packed with, kick some serious knowledge about the systems at play and work toward justice. It’s not just offensive that people think Latinos in general are “illegal.” Or that Latinos are gangsters and criminals. What’s more offensive is the idea that any person can be considered “illegal” or be dehumanized in any way and treated unjustly. Language and stereotypes impact all Latinos because of a widely held bias against all of us. We have clarity about how non-Latinos think of Latinos. Let’s be equally vigilant about how we think of ourselves and our own communities.’ (Novoa, 2012)

The last phrase in this quote is an interesting one; it becomes the central matter in this thesis. Every Latino should be aware of the conception they have of themselves. That is why, in our opinion, Latinos who hold a certain “power” given by literature and words should give a real and updated concept of what being a Latino means. And that is exactly what called our attention while reading the literary works we are going to analyze later on. The authors just present the stereotypes as something colorful, images of a community that have been accepted and are thus perpetuated.

In the anthology *Women Writing Resistance* several Latin American and Caribbean women writers give their views and opinions. As regards the image of Latinos imposed by the dominant ones, we could use the words of Aurora Levins Morales. ‘We have always been here, longer and steadier, working, eating, sleeping, singing, suffering, giving birth, dying. (...) We

were not simple souls ready to dance and sing all day with innocent hearts. We were not lazy animals, too dull-witted to understand orders. We were not hot-blooded savages, eager to be raped. We were not impervious to pain. We felt every blow they struck at our hearts. We were not happy to serve. We didn't love our masters.' (Browdy de Hernandez, 2003: 18)

Women who have faced the problems of migration and the struggle to fit in a new and hostile society are the ones who write this book. The idea expressed by Levins Morales is important on the one hand because it recognizes the origins of Latinos, who were always there, living and working like anyone else on the planet. Her words take us back to a previous definition by Bohemer and the word "lesser". On the other hand the concept given by Levins Morales contradicts all the stereotypes imposed. Latinos, and specially Latino women, are not lazy savages, they are ready to fight injustice and oppression.

### **1.3 García and Alvarez: Life and Works**

**Cristina García** was born in Havana in 1958 to a Guatemalan father and a Cuban mother. In 1961, when she was two years old, her family was among the first wave of people to flee Cuba after Fidel Castro came to power. They settled in New York City where she was raised in Queens, Brooklyn Heights, and Manhattan, in predominantly Irish, Italian, and Jewish neighborhoods. Her family, however, communicated at home in Spanish and shared many stories about Cuba during her youth; and she says that she has always thought of herself as Cuban.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Barnard College, and a Master's degree in International Relations from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Her work has been

nominated for a National Book Award and translated into 14 languages. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Whiting Writers' Award, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University, and an NEA grant, among others. García has been a Visiting Professor at the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas-Austin and The University of Miami. She teaches part time at Texas Tech University and will serve as University Chair in Creative Writing at Texas State University-San Marcos from 2012-14.

She is the author of several books including *Dreaming in Cuban*. This novel tells the story of Celia del Pino and her family as they cope with the Cuban Revolution and endure the exile and emotional fallout that ensues. The story is deeply personal, focusing primarily on the lives of the women in the family.

Celia del Pino has to reinvent herself after she is abandoned by her Spanish lover Gustavo and marries Jorge del Pino. Jorge is jealous of Gustavo and wants to punish Celia for her passionate romance. She is already fragile from her love loss and Jorge leaves her alone with his psychotic mother and sister. Celia finally breaks down and Jorge commits her to an asylum where she endures hard therapies.

What Jorge gets in return is a broken wife who is emotionally distant from their child, Lourdes, and who spends much of their married life writing letters to her long-gone lover.

García weaves the stories of her children into this base storyline, flying across the ocean to include her daughter Lourdes' family in the narrative as well as a dying Jorge, who had traveled to Brooklyn to receive medical treatment for cancer.

Lourdes considers herself an American, she owns two bakeries and has a headstrong daughter named Pilar who hates everything that Lourdes and America stand for and desperately wants to return to Cuba to be with Abuela Celia, with whom she feels great sympathy and has mysterious telepathic communications.

Back in Cuba, Celia's daughter Felicia cannot save herself from anything. She is married to a hideous man named Hugo Villaverde who gives her twin girls Luz and Milagro, and a son called Ivanito. Felicia succeeds in getting rid of Hugo by setting him on fire, but she slowly descends into madness as she marries twice more and attempts to kill herself and Ivanito. Luz and Milagro fear and detest Felicia and wrap themselves up in their own world to protect themselves.

Felicia eventually turns to *santería* to find some peace, but the gods have it out for her. She returns home from her initiation rites and dies.

Jorge, who returns after his death to keep his beloved Lourdes company, informs her of Felicia's death and urges her to return to Cuba. She hesitates until Pilar reaches a kind of spiritual clarity about traveling to Cuba and sets the journey in motion. They return to find Celia in a sorry state, having just buried Felicia and lost her son, Javier.

Lourdes and Pilar spend time with Celia and Felicia's children in Cuba. Pilar receives her grandmother's unsent letters to Gustavo—essentially her repository of memories—and learns what life is really like in Cuba. Lourdes visits the places of her past and confirms every bad opinion she has ever had about the island of her birth. She decides to take advantage of the open emigration allowed through the Peruvian embassy to get Ivanito out of Cuba. Even though she knows it will destroy her grandmother, Pilar eventually goes along with the plan because she realizes that there is no future for her little cousin there.

Ultimately, Celia is left by herself in Cuba with very little more than her house by the sea, her poetry, and her trademark pearl earrings, which she drops into the ocean in the last moments of the book.

**Julia Alvarez** was born on March 27, 1950, in New York City. She was raised in the Dominican Republic, but had to leave the country when she was 10 years old. That is why the theme of being caught between two cultures can be found throughout her work. She explored this in her first novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991). Her reading audience continued to grow with her second novel, *In the Time of Butterflies*, published in 1994. Several more acclaimed works of fiction have followed.

Her family had supported an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Dictator Rafael Trujillo, and then fled to Brooklyn, New York. Struggling at first to adapt to her new home, Alvarez graduated from Middlebury College in 1971, and went on to earn a master's degree from Syracuse University in 1975.

A versatile artist, Alvarez has created books for children, including *The Secret Footprints* (2000) and *Tía Lola Came to Visit Stay* (2001), and a novel for young adults, *Before We Were Free* (2002). She also writes essays and poetry. Her latest volume of poetry, *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, was published in 2004.

In *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* the events happen in reverse order, moving backwards in time from 1989 to 1956. These years span the lives of the four García girls (Carla, Sandi, Yolanda and Sofía) and are divided into three sections. The first, from 1989-1972, portrays the García sisters as adults. The second, from 1970-1960, covers their adolescence. And the third section, from 1960-1956, explores their childhood in the

Dominican Republic, right up to the point where they must flee the country and seek exile in the United States. Each section is divided into five chapters, which are like short stories that focus on different members of the family.

In the first section, Yolanda explores an identity crisis by trying to see if she fits in the Dominican Republic. Fifi (Sofía) tries to make amends to her father for eloping by throwing him a birthday party that becomes awkward thanks to some games she prepares. We learn how fond the girl's mother, or Mami as they call her, is of telling stories, even if it means bending the truth a little. The first section features the mental breakdowns of Sandi and Yoyo.

Yoyo's breakdown has much to do with the end of her marriage to a man named John. The section ends with an exploration of Yolanda's sexual awakening and how it seems that her relationships have always been with idiotic men.

In the second section, which chronologically happens before the previous one the four García sisters get used to the American teenage life but are forced to spend their summers with their overprotective relatives on the Island. Fifi gets in trouble and has to live there for a while, but the sisters stage an intervention and get her back. Mami explores a brief stint as an inventor, but ends up passing the title of creative genius on to her daughter, Yoyo. Carla is harassed by schoolyard bullies and stalked by a pedophile, which really doesn't help her transition to a new country.

The third section, which has five chapters, happens in the Dominican Republic and should come before the two previous parts. It is the most political part and here we finally know the story about how Carlos or Papi as they call him, was almost arrested by Trujillo's secret police. He and his

family manage to escape to the US, thanks to the help of a State Department official named Victor Hubbard.

This section opens with an account of two of Trujillo's agents coming to the family home looking for Carlos, the girl's father. His revolutionary politics and work made the family a target, and this chapter explicitly details the danger of their situation. The family escapes persecution, but is forced to emigrate immediately, relocating to New York.

The second chapter in this part describes what happens to Munda, Yolanda and Sofia in the dirty shed near the house. Yolanda plays with her boy cousin, Munda, and in exchange for a Human Body doll and some modeling clay, shows him her genitals. Sofia also follows suit.

The narrative of this part switches to describing their upper-class life on the island, and filling details of the lifestyle the family was born into. The story of the voodoo practicing Haitian maid is also told.

In the last three chapters Carla, Yolanda and Sandra narrate stories from their childhood surrounded by the extended family, and the girls' relationship with the United States begins. The reader can appreciate through the girls' innocence what an idealized vision of the country they are going to live in they have.

## **PART 2**

**About perpetuating stereotypes in Latino Writing in Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban and Alvarez's How the García Girls lost their Accents.**

### **Chapter 2: Defining stereotypes**

Before we specifically go on to develop stereotypes in Latino writing and exemplify with quotes from the literary works we have chosen for this analysis, it is important to define what a stereotype is first.

In an article on stereotypes for the site *About News*, Race Relations Expert, Nadra Kareem Nittle includes a definition that says 'stereotypes are characteristics ascribed to groups of people involving gender, race, national origin and other factors. These characteristics tend to be oversimplifications of the groups involved, however.' (Nittle, n.d.) This idea of using a simple characteristic to generalize and perpetuate is reinforced later when an example is given. 'Someone who meets a few individuals from a particular country and finds them to be quiet and reserved may spread the word that all citizens from the country in question are quiet and reserved. A generalization such as this doesn't allow for diversity within groups and may result in stigmatization and discrimination of groups if the stereotypes linked to them are largely negative. That said, even so-called positive stereotypes can be harmful due to their limiting nature.' (Nittle, n.d.) Stereotypes are born when the most remarkable characteristics or traits of a group of people are accepted and spread but the problem arises when these generalizations are used for discrimination, most of them being the idea of other nations that the colonizer country imposed, thus becoming a negative stereotype.

In the concept above the author seems to make a difference between bad and good stereotypes and later on in the article she says it is possible that both types exist but even the latter can do some harm because they have a limiting nature and they leave no room for individuality. For example, when people say that all African American people are good basketball players or dancers they leave no room for any other appreciation. Are they not good artists or doctors? As regards this work which deals with Latino literature and thinking of the images they present in literature and television, it seems like Latinos are just exotic and hot, especially women, men are violent and they are involved in drug dealing, and they all live surrounded by palm trees. Is none of them good writers or teachers?

One thing we wondered while analyzing if this topic was correct for development was the idea of stereotypes having something of truth and if true, that would make our argument invalid. So is it possible that stereotypes are true?

Nadra Kareem Nittle gives an interesting answer to this question. 'It's said that stereotypes are based in truth, but is this a valid statement? People who make this argument often want to justify their use of stereotypes. The problem with stereotypes is that they suggest that groups of people are inherently prone to certain behaviors. Arabs are naturally one way. Hispanics are naturally another. The fact is, science doesn't back up these kinds of assertions. If groups of people have historically excelled at certain activities, social factors no doubt contributed to this phenomenon. Perhaps a society barred a group of people from practicing certain professions but welcomed them in others. Over the years, the group became associated with the professions in which they were allowed to practice. This came about not because of any inherent talent in these fields but because they were the professions that allowed them to pay for food, housing and other

necessities. In short, their survival depended on them excelling at the professions in question. Those who spread stereotypes, however, ignore social factors and make links between groups of people and certain skills, activities or behaviors where none inherently exist.’ (Nittle, n.d.)

We could claim that stereotypes would be some sort of accepted idea or belief; an opinion about a group of people who has become a generalization without taking into account some factors like the ones mentioned above. In the book *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance*, the author, Charles Ramírez Berg acknowledges there is ‘a body of literature that holds that stereotypes are not simply frames of mind, but actual beliefs. Gordon Allport, for instance, theorized that an attitude towards a group is usually bonded to a belief about a group. Of the two elements, the attitude is the most important, most lasting, and the most resistant to change. It is the attitude that fixes the belief, and not the other way around.’ (Ramírez Berg, 2002: 11-12) This supports our analysis and the previous author’s idea that stereotypes are beliefs and it depends on people’s attitude for them to become accepted or perpetuated.

To summarize and close her article, Nittle proposes a simple exercise to do if you are tempted to stereotype others. She asks people to think of what group they believe they belong to and list all the stereotypes known for that group. If you ask yourself whether each stereotype applies to you or not, it is more than likely that the answer will be negative in most cases because you will ‘disagree that all of the qualities commonly attributed to those of your gender, racial group and sexual orientation describe you.’ (Nittle, n.d.) Even if there is some truth in generalizations that become stereotypes it is important not to use them for discrimination and perpetuating them.

Most authors agree on the definition of stereotypes and talk about individual and group perception, calling the latter a stereotype. 'Without individuals there could be no society, but unless individuals also perceive themselves to belong to groups, that is, to share characteristics, circumstances, values and beliefs with other people, then society would be without structure or order. These perceptions of groups are called stereotypes.' (McGarty C, Yzerbyt, Spears, 2002: 1)

Stereotyping seems to be a characteristic of the Colonial period and the way people represented the other. Homi Bhabba, in his book *The Location of Culture* says that 'an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of "fixity" in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of historical/cultural/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise stereotype, which is its major strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...' (Bhabba, 1994: 66) He goes on to talk about duplicity and a process of ambivalence which we are not going to develop in this thesis.

Bhabba is interested in colonial discourse and the representation of others but most importantly in the mode of representation of the other; the way we represent or picture the other and the differences that exist between people and countries. We usually do that through stereotypes and he says there is a 'complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself.' (Bhabba, 1994: 70)

He also talks about relations of power. We have already said before that the colonizer imposed an image of the colonized and thanks to repetition those stereotypes have become a representation of the other which should not be that way. 'The subjects of the discourse are constructed within an apparatus of power which *contains*, in both senses of the word, an "other" knowledge – a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness that I have called stereotype.' (Bhabba, 1994: 78)

One interesting question to ask is why people stereotype. According to social psychology there are some aspects to take into account. The authors say that stereotypes are aids to explanation, energy saving devices and they are shared by groups. 'The first of these implies that stereotypes should form so as to help the perceiver make sense of a situation, the second implies that stereotypes should form to reduce effort on the part of the perceiver, and the third implies that stereotypes should be formed in line with accepted views or norms of social groups that the perceiver belongs to.' (McGarty C, Yzerbyt, Spears, 2002: 2)

To summarize, stereotypes are the perceptions we get from different groups that might be based in some truth; it is the way we define the other. The problem arises when a dominant group, colonizers in the past, gives a definition of the other making them look like lesser and generalizing. Those definitions or perceptions become stereotypes that are repeated, having negative effects and thus being perpetuated.

### **Chapter 3: Stereotypes in Latino Writing: Analyzing García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Alvarez's *How the García Girls lost their Accents***

To begin with we must make clear that sometimes there might seem there are mistakes in the quotes but they have been checked and copied exactly as they are in the books. These quotes serve a purpose here that might have a negative sense but we are not saying the phrases lack beauty or narrative quality.

We have already given a summary of both literary works above so we are not going to include them here. We are going to list the most common stereotypes that appear in the books and exemplify with just some extracts because the same type of stereotype can be found throughout both novels and otherwise the analysis would be endless.

Most of the stereotypes chosen have been mentioned before, there are connections between the two stories, and there will be an interesting list in the following chapter that deals with Latino stereotypes in television and the cinema. Not surprisingly, they coincide.

Before we start listing and developing our ideas we would like to say that we recognize that places and people like the characters described here exist not only in Latin America but in the rest of the world. We do consider the overuse of stereotypes and the exaggeration of some traits does nothing to change the harmful effect of old visions of the oppressed.

#### **1) The common places of Latin America**

We know the landscapes of countries in Latin America, maybe not in person but through pictures and movies. There is beauty in these lands and

descriptions of places we cannot deny because they are real. But there is some obsession with the word “exotic” to describe not only places but people when we deal with Latin America. Are Hawaiian beaches different from Cuban beaches? Do they describe them as exotic too? The issue here is that the description of the places is not done by a North American, English or European author who might still use some kind of old image of these places; it is done by authors who have roots in Latin America and in our opinion they just seem to use old stereotypes besought by colonizers.

‘Celia runs to the beach (...) There is a trace of tobacco in the air.’ (García, 1992: 5)

We cannot say there are not plantations of tobacco in Cuba, that would be incorrect, and this is a description of the setting but it is also the beginning of the book and things already start to get “colorful”.

‘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 sheddings from the sun. She imagines her granddaughter pale, gliding through paleness, malnourished and cold without the food of scarlets and greens.’ (García, 1992: 7)

Not only do we get an idea of how they see themselves here but also how they see others. In both books there are stereotypes belonging to other ethnicities. It is interesting to see how groups that are stereotyped also do a process of stereotyping with others.

‘They retreat to the mossy riverbank and make love under the watchful poplars. The air is fragrant with jasmine and myrtle and citrus.’ (García, 1992: 8)

Besides the description of the “exotic” flora of the place, this phrase is taken from a paragraph where the author describes Celia’s intimate

encounter with her Spanish lover. The scene is romantic indeed but all the stereotypes are there: the Spanish lover, a woman being wild because she is having sex outdoors and near a river, the smells of the place which are nothing but extravagant.

‘Celia notices their ungainly hands, *campesino* hands, stained with tobacco. She decides not to speak to them.’ (García, 1992: 92)

This remark seems to come from an outsider, someone who does not belong to the Latino community. However, it is Celia, a member of that community, the one who is stereotyping, using the word “*campesino*” which carries a negative connotation, emphasized by the use of the words “*ungainly*” and “*stained*” and her final decision not to talk to them. Stereotypes, then, can be perpetuated by people of the same community.

‘Yoyo climbing into an old *camioneta* with all the *campesinos* and their fighting cocks and their goats and their pigs!’ (Alvarez, 1992: 9)

In this quote by Julia Alvarez the word “*campesinos*” is used in the same way as in the quotation mentioned above. The mention of the animals in the vehicle gives the idea of disorder, a negative word.

It is worth mentioning that in both quotes code switching is used. This switching occurs to signal identity but it is another aspect we are not considering in this paper.

‘Piled high on wooden stands are fruits Yolanda hasn’t seen in years: pinkish-yellow mangoes, and tamarind ( ... ) Strips of meat, buzzing with flies, hang from the windows of butcher stalls.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 12)

Only rural areas seem to be described in these stories which make us wonder if there are not cities and civilization in these countries. We do know there are cities but, what would a non-Latino think? What image do

they get of this country when they read these passages? Certainly not a very positive one.

## **2) Women: madness, wildness and sexuality**

This is one of the most important aspects of these types of stories because women in this case, are connected to several other issues such as madness, wildness, and words like exotic and hot when sex is involved. At least in these two books they seem to be salient characteristics which present women as complex wild creatures with “fire in their wombs”. In our opinion, this vision does nothing but perpetuate the “exotic” stereotype and this idea of Latinos being passionate and almost wild when loving because there is something in the atmosphere or the place that makes their blood hot for some reason. And these stereotypes have been imposed by a dominant group.

‘La sociedad anglosajona ha creado un número de estereotipos sobre la mujer Latina y ha exagerado la existencia de otros que ya existían en la cultura latina originaria. Esta manipulación, la mera creación del estereotipo, responde claramente a la necesidad de la cultura dominante de mantener a minorías como la latina en la situación social que les corresponde y de poner énfasis en su diferencia. Las escritoras latinas constantemente cuestionan la construcción de estos estereotipos y el uso que se hace de ellos en la sociedad anglosajona. Muchas escritoras pretenden desterrar estas falsas representaciones.’ (Domínguez, 2001: 51)

In the previous quote the author mentions the idea of Latino women writers fighting against stereotypes through literature but in the case of the books chosen for this analysis is not that way. Stereotypes are used to tell a story but not in order to deconstruct them and that is why we think, given

the reach this type of literature has nowadays, these perceptions become accepted and perpetuated.

What are the stereotypes according to the author of the quote above? 'Entre los estereotipos más arraigados en la sociedad norteamericana sobre la mujer Latina encontramos aquellos que más ha difundido la televisión y el cine: la empleada doméstica latina ( ... ), la ardiente mujer latina que es capaz de provocar las pasiones más fuertes, y la mujer angelical resignada y católica que encarna a la imagen de la Virgen dolorosa como madre que sufre por la criminalidad y miseria en que se ven envueltos sus hijos, marido y parientes en los *barrios* de las grandes ciudades norteamericanas.' (Domínguez, 2001: 51) Most of these stereotypes related to women are found in the literary works and agree to what other authors have mentioned.

The following quotations exemplify stereotypes regarding women's sex and wildness:

'It is 4:00 A.M. She turns to her husband sleeping beside her. ( ... ) She has exhausted poor Rufino again.' (García, 1992: 17)

In this quote "she" is Lourdes, the typical sex driven and hot Latino woman who lives in the States now.

'She remembers how after her father arrived in New York her appetite for sex and baked goods increased dramatically.' (García, 1992: 20)

These lines talk about Lourdes too, who is presented earlier in the book as the "hot" Latina who had a great curvy body men admired when she walked in the street. 'Lourdes did not battle her cravings; rather, she submitted to them like a somnambulist to a dream.' (García, 1992: 21)

‘Gabriela, the beautiful young wife of Mundín ( ... ) With the pale skin and dramatic dark eyes of a romantic heroine, Gabriela’s face reminds Yolanda of the lover’s clutch of hands over the breast.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 8)

‘They were passionate women, but their devotions were like roots; they were sunk into the past towards the old man.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 24)

‘Her sister’s breathing in the dark room was like having a powerful, tamed animal at the foot of her bed ready to protect her.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 29)

Another aspect related to women in both books is that some of them seem to be mad; they are even treated medically and left in asylums. At times they show no love for their children.

‘They poison my food and milk but I still swell. The baby lives on venom ( ... ) If it’s a boy, I’ll leave him.’ (García, 1992: 50) And some statements are even tougher than this one. ‘I lie to the doctors. I tell them my father raped me.’ (García, 1992: 51)

It is not only one character presented as mad but several in García’s book and it is always women, never men. ‘I’ve made a friend here, Felicia Gutiérrez. She killed her husband. Doused him with gasoline. Lit a match. She is unrepentant. We’re planning to escape.’ (García, 1992: 51)

‘I’ll be a good mother this time.’ (García, 1992: 52)

‘Felicia remembers the moment she decided to murder her husband. ( ... ) She laughs when she recalls her husband’s screams, the way he bolted out the door, his head a flaming torch. (García, 1992: 81-82)

As regards wildness and sexuality there is quite a disturbing scene in *How the García girls lost their accent* by Julia Alvarez. It is the father’s birthday and they are playing a game at the party. He has got four daughters and a wife but there are other women there too. It looks like some traditional

game where women have to cue the man in some way for him to guess who the woman near him is. One of his daughters, the one who feels he never pays attention to her; as if she needs recognition from him, does something very strange. 'Quickly, she swooped into the circle and gave the old man a wet, open-mouthed kiss in his ear. She ran her tongue in the whorls of his ear and nibbled the tip. ( ... ) His face had darkened with shame at having his pleasure aroused in public by one of his daughters.' (Alvarez, 1992: 39)

This could also be part of the following category since it shows man as a king of a harem, particularly in this book where his wife and daughters are so devoted to him.

### **3) Men**

Men have varied representations in these books but we will consider the most predominant. Some of these representations have to do with the man being the leader of a patriarchal family and everyone following his lead and rules; others with the careless father; and last, with the man who cheats and is violent.

'Jorge had traveled five weeks out of six, selling electric brooms and portable fans for an American firm. He'd wanted to be a model Cuban, to prove to his gringo boss that they were cut from the same cloth.' (García, 1992: 6)

Here we can also see this idea of the submissive wanting to be like the dominant as if being what he is would not be enough and it is a shame for the family because he is the man of the house.

'In the hospital her father despaired at incompetences and breakdowns in procedures ( ... ) Once a nurse inserted a suppository to loosen his bowels

and did not return, although he cramped his finger ringing the buzzer.’ (García, 1992: 22)

This also adds to the idea of men being impatient and demanding.

‘Making ice cream from scratch is part of the ritual that began after her husband left in 1966.’ (García, 1992: 39)

There is no female character that has not been abandoned by her husband and left alone to raise her children in these stories.

‘Carefully, he sliced Lourdes’s riding pants off to her knees and tied them over her mouth. He cut through her blouse without dislodging a single button and slit her bra and panties in two. Then he placed the knife flat across her belly and raped her.’ (García, 1992: 71)

“He” is a soldier in this case. We accept the fact that military men in many countries all over the world have exercised power in an outrageous way but it seems too much here. Lourdes is happy that she is a citizen of the United States now and she wants no part of Cuba and this is one of the reasons for her to hate the country. If we add this quote to the previous ones, what is the image we get of Cuba? An image worse than the one we already have of it today.

‘The passengers see her only at the last moment, and all up and down her side of the bus, men poke out of the windows, hooting and yelling, holding out bottles and beckoning to her.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 13)

This is another type of representation of men in these stories. They all seem to be *campesinos* who just think about sex and the only way they can address a woman is by yelling at them or “flatter” them. Yes, we cannot deny this type of men exists nowadays but repeating this type of representation of a person creates a negative stereotype.

‘All the grandfather’s Caribbean fondness for a male heir and for fair Nordic looks had surfaced. There was now good blood in the family against a future bad choice by one of its women.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 27)

Here the man of the family, the patriarch, finally gets what he wanted, a male heir. This shows how being a man seems to be good blood and being a woman something wrong.

‘Since Clive left, Yolanda is addicted to love stories with happy endings.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 63)

This is another example of a man who leaves a woman. That is all there seems to be in these books. Either the man leaves or is weak or he is a tyrant. There is no in between.

Yolanda in Alvarez’s book had a boyfriend who said the following. ‘I thought you’d be hot-blooded, being Spanish and all, and that under all the Catholic bullshit, you’d be really free, instead of all hung up like these cotillion chicks from prep schools. But Jesus, you’re worse than a fucking Puritan.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 99)

It seems rather strange that the author uses a character to pinpoint a stereotype because throughout the book she does nothing but describe her female characters as exuberant, exotic and hot.

‘These Latin women, even when the bullets are flying and the bombs are falling, they want to make sure you have a full stomach, your shirt is ironed, your handkerchief is fresh.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 207)

This is the primary vision men have of women.

#### 4) Children and teenage life

Children are presented as wild creatures most of the time, they seem to raise themselves. If their parents have conflicts with their identities, children are even more complicated as regards this issue because they do not belong to any of the places they have lived in. They seem to be lost between two cultures. They tend to be witnesses of their parents mistakes and arguments and are treated as something that can be carried everywhere or even beaten.

‘My mother reads my diary, tracks it down under the mattress, or to the lining of my winter coat.’ (García, 1992: 26)

The previous quote shows how there is no privacy for children, no room for individuality. Even if their parents do not pay attention to them, when they finally seem to do it is to spy on them or force them to think like them and make choices.

‘I like to lie on my back and let the shower rain down on me full force. If I move my hips to just the right position, it feels great, like little explosions on a string.’ (García, 1992: 26-27)

This quote is related to a teenager discovering pleasure which has been quite awkward in both books.

‘When Mom first found out about me in the tub, she beat me in the face and pulled my hair out in big clumps. She called me a *desgraciada* and ground her knuckles into my temples.’ (García, 1992: 27)

This is the result of the previous quote but it also shows how an adult reprimands a youngster even if she is just discovering herself which is a natural process.

‘They called me *brujita*, little witch.’ (García, 1992: 28)

Pilar was believed to be an evil baby when she was born because her stare was too deep.

‘She’s seventeen and a half. Minnie says she’s going down to Florida to see a doctor her boyfriend knows and get herself an abortion.’ (García, 1992: 31)

Teenagers do not consult their parents in these books; they make the decisions either if it means escaping, as Pilar does, or an abortion like Minnie. There seems to be no trust between parents and their children.

‘The rustling leaves of the guava trees echo the warnings of her old aunts: you will get lost, you will get kidnapped, you will get raped, you will get killed.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 17)

Those are the fears children grow up with, encouraged by adults of course and we could comment again on how these ideas are spread by people of the same community not an outsider.

‘With four girls so close in age, she couldn’t indulge identities and hunt down a red cowboy shirt when the third daughter turned tomboy or a Mexican peasant blouse when the oldest discovered her Hispanic roots.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 41)

This supports the idea of a mother not knowing about her kids.

‘We began to develop a taste for the American teenage good life, and soon, Island was old hat, man. Island was the hair-and-nails crowd, chaperones and icky boys with all their macho strutting and unbuttoned shirts and hairy chests with gold chains and teensy gold crucifixes.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 109)

This quote represents the process of adapting to a new culture, the idea of moving and leaving the home country and how teenagers go through that stage.

‘And Manuel won’t wear a rubber. “He thinks it might cause impotence,” Fifi says, smiling sweetly, cherishing his cute male ignorance.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 123)

It is related to teenagers and sex and the lack of knowledge about it and how the woman thinks it is cute or innocent that he does not want to wear a condom thus allowing sex with no protection.

### **5) Superstition and religion**

It seems that the only spiritual world for Latinos is witchcraft and Catholic devotion. This is an ingredient that cannot be absent in this type of stories. They have some of the ingredients of Magic Realism as the appearance of the ghosts of their death relatives and some elements of *santería*. However, superstition seems to be just a mere fact to add scenes that make up to this idea of the Latino being exotic. Religion and praying to the saints is also present in these books. All of the quotes below exemplify this statement.

‘I told you not to bring shells into the house (...). They bring bad luck.’ (García, 1992: 11)

‘I’ll call La Madrina. We’ll have an emergency session tonight.’ (García, 1992: 12)

‘Four mulatas, wearing gingham skirts and aprons, kneel before the shrines, praying.’ (García, 1992: 14)

‘Felicia, reeling from the sweet scent of the blood and the candles and the women, faints on La Madrina’s saint-room floor, which is still warm with sacrifice.’ (García, 1992: 15)

‘Another woman, an elderly mulatta, claimed that her hair was falling out from the menacing stares the baby gave her. Lourdes fired her after she found Pilar in her bassinet smeared with chicken blood and covered with bay leaves.’ (García, 1992: 24)

‘They dug up the front yard for buried maledictions but found nothing.’ (García, 1992: 37)

‘Celia knows that good charms and bad are hidden in the stirred earth near its sacred roots.’ (García, 1992: 43)

‘A Creole woman spits out a curse.’ (García, 1992: 44)

‘In my *campo* we say a person has an *antojo* when they are taken over by *un santo* who wants something.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 8)

‘Just past one bad curve, a small shrine has been erected, La Virgen surrounded by three concrete crosses recently whitewashed.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 12)

‘Public schools, she had learned from other Catholic parents, were where juvenile delinquents went and where teachers taught those new crazy ideas about how we all came from monkeys.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 152)

‘... even a San Judas, patron of impossible causes, that Laura has tacked to the inside wall.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 196)

‘Yoyo knows she is casting a spell that will leave the men powerless, becalmed.’ (Alvarez, 1992: 200)

Our search for different stereotypes in the novels has been supported with examples from both books which surprisingly agree with most of the concepts developed.

## Chapter 4: Latino Stereotypes in television and the cinema

Even though this part does not deal with stereotypes in literature but with stereotypes in television and the cinema, we considered the development of this issue important and useful to support our ideas. Besides, most of the stereotypes observed in this context are shared with those seen in literature too and have a more instant impact on society. There is an interesting list of the common Latino stereotypes in television and the cinema in the book *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance* by Charles Ramírez Berg (2002). They are:

- 1) The bandido
- 2) The harlot
- 3) The male buffoon
- 4) The female clown
- 5) The Latin lover
- 6) The dark lady

Most of these stereotypes have appeared in the analysis we have done of the literary works in the previous part.

Moctesuma Esparza is an entertainment producer who has received a B.A. and MFA in Theatre Arts, Motion Picture and Television from UCLA. He is one of the producers who is said to have made some of the most lasting positive image of Latinos in film and television and he gives his opinion in an article called *Beyond Stereotypes* written by Bel Hernandez Castillo for the *Latino Magazine*. Esparza agrees with some of the stereotypes mentioned above too, recognizing that they exist in the collective imagination. As regards stereotypes he says that ‘stereotypes in the media

are simple, one-dimensional portrayals of a certain group of people, usually based on race, gender, religion, profession or age. ( ...) In Hollywood, filmmakers often use stereotypes to quickly establish certain characters like the Latino drug dealer, immigrant or gangbanger. (...) But ask any Latino who has grown up being marginalized by the portrayal of negative stereotypes and they will tell you it's not the occasional stereotype they mind, it's the constant barrage they object to. It's the images of mostly maids, illegal immigrants, gangbangers and drug dealers that their children are subjected to, that shape the image they have of themselves and these images are promoted worldwide.' (Hernandez Castillo, n.d.)

One interesting aspect of this article is to know the opinion of the Latino actors and actresses who play these roles on television and in the cinema. Some of their answers are really surprising and make us believe that as the Latino thing sells nowadays, they do it anyways. However, some of them do not agree with the image shown in the media.

Actor, producer, director and musician, Esai Morales has had to 'play roles that he calls the four "H" stereotypical roles for Latinos in Hollywood: Hostile ("I'll cut you"); Hormonal ("Ay Mamacita"); Humble ("No señor, we don't want no trouble"); and Hysterical ("Ay Lucy").' (Hernandez Castillo, n.d) Here we go back to our first idea of Latinos, in this case, not being able to be pictured as doctors, artists or teachers. Morales says that he is not mad about this issue but passionate and pissed because he thinks stereotypes have to do with ignorance and fear but then he goes on to mention something beyond that: white men; the ones who run the business and who always have. 'It's always someone's image of what reality should be.' (Hernandez Castillo, n.d.) Of course it is always the point of view of the powerful one. Not so different from colonial times when the image of the colonized was created and spread by the Europeans.

On the other hand there are also the Latinos or Latino descendants living in the United States who are convinced they are dealing with stereotypes to give a voice to Latinos but not perpetuating them such as actresses Eva Longoria (*Desperate Housewives*) and Sofia Vergara (*Modern Family*).

When some controversy arose because of the Latino maid in the show, Longoria defended it by saying that ‘When we get backlash [from the Latino community] saying ‘Oh they’re playing the stereotypical maids,’ my immediate response is ‘so you’re telling me their stories aren’t worth telling? That they have no complexity in their lives?’ That’s what angers me, especially in the Latino community. She goes on to say, “I played Gabrielle Solis, a very affluent Latina [on *Desperate Housewives*] and we got backlash on that from the Latino community saying ‘that’s not accurately reflected.” She cautioned, “Sometimes you can’t win and I think that people really need to look at the paradigm of television and realize this is a very powerful medium for Latinos to have a voice. Let’s support it so that they will make more.” (Hernandez Castillo, n.d.) What is the voice those Latinos have? What is the type of voice she wants them to have? A Latino maid and the hot wealthy Latina are stereotypes we have mentioned before when citing the theory.

Sofia Vergara has become very popular after signing up for the show *Modern Family* but she has been accused of ‘playing up her accent, drawing criticism from the Latino community and bloggers alike claiming she is perpetuating the “hot and spicy” Latina stereotype. “I don’t see anything bad about being stereotyped as a Latin woman,” Vergara countered in a recent interview with *The Beast*. “We are yellers, we’re pretty, we’re sexy, and we’re scandalous. I am not scared of the stereotypes.” (Hernandez Castillo, n.d)

In the article, Viviana Hurtado of the Wise Latina Club claims Vergara is playing up her “Latinaness” to “cash in on the stereotypes.” This makes us remember one of the quotations we included at the beginning saying that being Latin is hot and that is what sells so why not perpetuating this stereotype if it pays off? The problem is these actresses have a place in the States and a good position but the rest of the Latinos are not so fortunate sometimes and when they try to find jobs in that country they find it difficult because most of the time they are seen under the light of stereotypes and they cannot find a position outside the service field.

Could it be possible that some of us are wrong as regards stereotypes and the perceptions of these actresses are right? Award-winning cartoonist and political satirist Lalo Alcaraz says that he does not know if stereotypes can be better or improved but Hollywood is going to have to catch up to reality and stop using the old ones. He also explains that ‘as artists and writers, we have to cope with the responsibility of writing characters that represent what is actually happening in the world.’ (Hernandez Castillo, n.d) That is an idea we are going to repeat again; most artists and writers want to fight against old conceptions so it seems strange when one of them, who belongs to the community, uses these old visions.

It is also important to say that things have changed and are improving. ‘To say that the portrayal of Latinos in film and especially on television have not improved, at least in the past two decades, is disingenuous. What we can say for sure is that stereotypical roles in Hollywood will never completely disappear.’ (Hernandez Castillo, n.d.)

Going back to stereotypes in the literary world, something similar happened when the author of *Dreaming in Cuban* was interviewed at the end of the book. One would hope for a different answer from someone who seems to be fighting to change old ideas and images of Latinos or at least

defending their roots. The author is asked by the interviewer if it was hard for her to write the betrayal scene in the novel. Pilar, a young character in the book, betrayed her Cuban grandmother Celia, by sending her grandson, Ivanito to the US without her knowing. Cristina García says that at the beginning she was disappointed in Pilar for doing that. But she could not sacrifice her cousin because he did not belong in Cuba and it would have been criminal to force him to stay. (García, 1992: 253) The argument for her answer is hardly seen in the novel. She presents all the problems Cuba has, but it is still contradictory because Pilar, who lives in the US, went back to Cuba to find her roots and she finally did. We recognize that Cuba still goes through a tough situation but given the previous fact about finding home there, why would she decide for her cousin that the US is better when she found herself in Cuba? Even if there is some contradiction in her thoughts, it does not seem right for her to say where the best future for a little boy is.

‘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. ( ... ) 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?’ (García, 1992: 236) This example also reinforces the idea of Latino writing and the search for identity. Pilar had already escaped from New York where she did not feel like herself.

An issue we would like to bring back is the effect or impact of stereotypes that appear in literature or the media on real life. Even if it is focused only on Mexican women and not the rest of Latinos, this quote is useful to support the idea of the bad effects of stereotyping in real life. ‘Las

posibilidades que se abren ante las mujeres Latinas puede variar en gran medida dependiendo del grupo al que pertenecen y a su historia de residencia en los Estados Unidos. Por lo general, las mexicanas tienen menos oportunidades de encontrar trabajo fuera del sector agrícola o de servicios. Las razones son numerosas pero hemos de destacar el hecho de que un gran número de estas mujeres entran en el país ilegalmente.' (Domínguez, 2001: 53) This is a real issue for many immigrants in the States, the problem arises when every Latino is pictured as an illegal person because the rest of the community becomes stigmatized and most of the times that is the only image we get of them in literature and the media.

## **Conclusion**

Latino stereotypes were born with the coming of the European to these lands. Images of the new world and descriptions were established then and writers wrote down everything the discoverers said about the new world. Therefore, that is the idea they got of those people who were not like them but by no means lesser.

In literature, old conceptions can be used in order to fight for a deconstruction of the concept of the subordinated. To still believe in old ideas of the colonizer seems outdated in a world that constantly changes. However, these images created long ago can also be exaggerated and perpetuated for the sake of a story that sells nowadays; to make it colorful and entertaining for readers. Given this premise we wondered about the effect of the use of these stereotypes in real life. The answer is everything we have exposed above.

Not only theory and examples from the literary texts chosen show it but also stereotyping in the media proves the idea that stereotypes have a negative effect most of the time. This is because they are generalizations that leave no room for individuality and tend to portray people belonging to the different groups as obliged to follow an established pattern. For instance, saying that any Mexican immigrant in the States is illegal or a maid. That is the harmful effect of stereotyping and perpetuating the stereotypes in real life.

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