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Mapping Memory: Locational Memory in The First-person Narrative of Three Latinx Writers

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MAPPING MEMORY: A STUDY OF LOCATIONAL MEMORY IN THE FIRST-
PERSON NARRATIVE OF THREE U.S. LATINX WRITERS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of
Kentucky

By

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Chattanooga, Tennessee

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2022

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

MAPPING MEMORY: A STUDY OF LOCATIONAL MEMORY IN THE FIRST-PERSON WORKS OF THREE U.S. LATINX WRITERS

Locational memory, which relies upon our natural inclination to store and recall images, adds spatial orientation to a narrative, and provides an accessible framework for the recreation of the past in first-person narrative. The power of locational imagery as a device of memory is both historically and scientifically supported. It is essential to the system of artificial memory that the ancient Greeks called a memory palace, described by both Mary Carruthers and Paul Ricouer. Scientifically, studies show that the strongest autobiographical memories are based on visual imagery and that recall of specific locations provides a cognitive basis for the recreation of episodic memory.

The mapping of memory is of particular interest in Latino narratives because they often involve repeated border crossings and the conveyance of memories from one geographical context to another. The shifting of spatial context opens new perspectives on and new interpretations of those memories. This dissertation is an examination of the first person works of three U.S. Latino writers: Judith Cofer, Junot Diaz, and Sandra Cisneros. Memory mapping reveals how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender are reflected in the spaces the characters inhabit and how they interact within them, both in the diegetic present and in the remembered/recreated past.

KEYWORDS: Locational memory, Mapping memory, Intersectionality, U.S. Latino writers, First-person narrative

Stephanie Beasley
24 October 2022

MAPPING MEMORY: A STUDY OF LOCATIONAL MEMORY IN THE FIRST-
PERSON NARRATIVES OF THREE U.S. LATINX WRITERS

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Dedicated to the memory of my father, Robert Beasley, and to the memory of
my two grandmothers Lecil Thurman and Tennie Beasley

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MAPPING MEMORY: A STUDY OF
LOCATIONAL MEMORY IN FIRST-PERSON LATINX NARRATIVES:
JUNOT DIAZ, JUDITH ORTIZ COFER, SANDRA CISNEROS

INTRODUCTION

Locational memory, which relies upon our natural inclination to store and recall images, adds spatial orientation to a narrative. In first-person narratives, locational memory provides an accessible framework for the recreation of the past in first-person narrative. The power of locational imagery as a device of memory is both historically and scientifically supported. We know that the ancient Greeks considered it be essential to the system of "artificial memory." The Greek system was further developed throughout the Middle Ages, when it was commonly referred to as the "memory palace." Francis Yates, in his book *The Art of Memory*, describes locational memory as an almost physical storage system: "[One] must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places...." (17) On the scientific front, studies show that the strongest autobiographical memories are, in fact, based on visual imagery (Rubin 79), which is often tied to geographical sites.

The mapping of memory is of particular interest in U.S. Latinx¹ narratives because these stories often involve repeated border crossings and the

¹ This dissertation studies the work of a Puerto Rican writer, a Dominican American writer, and a Mexican American Writer, and does not presume to conflate them into a single homogeneous ethnicity. However, due to their similar status as underrepresented and brown or black Americans with some broad shared frameworks about migrations and intersectionalities, I will

conveyance of memories from one geographical context to another. The shifting of spatial context opens new perspectives on and new interpretations of those memories. A memory of familial pride may later become the object of scorn, for example, when viewed through a different cultural lens; and, in turn, a memory of living in utter poverty may later be reinterpreted as a time of freedom. This dissertation will examine works by three Latinx writers -- Judith Ortiz Cofer, Junot Díaz, and Sandra Cisneros -- from the vantage point of locational memory, in order to demonstrate how memory, imagination, and narrative are governed by experiences of prejudice or otherness based on race, class and gender, and how these located memories are constructed across time and distance.

While these works are first-person narratives that fall into the category of life writing, they do not share a single genre. Cofer's two included works are an autobiography (*Silent Dancing*) and a novel (*The Line of the Sun*), while from Díaz there is an interconnected collection of short stories (*Drown*) and a novel (*This Is How You Lose Her*), and finally from Cisneros are a collection of interconnected vignettes (*The House on Mango Street*) and a novel (*Caramelo*). In spite of this range of genres, all six works share the literary device of first-person narration, and it is through that lens that this dissertation explores the construction of memory and the exploration of identity – in terms of gender,

occasionally use the term "Latinx" in reference to them or their work. No term is without its dangers; I acknowledge that and use the words as sparingly as possible, opting generally to use more specific terms to reference the ethnicity and/or heritage of each writer.

ethnicity, age, geography, and socioeconomic class – across these three writers' works.

THE PHANTASM

Within this context of locational memory, the presence and influence of other types of memory will also be examined. Family secrets are a form of concealed memory that is passed from one generation to the next. Using the psychoanalytical theories of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok and the studies of Esther Rashkin, I will apply cryptological analysis to uncover and investigate familial spectres and the unconsciously transferred secrets that create them. Within these Latinx narratives, the references to ghosts signal the existence of secrets sealed within a psychic crypt. The crypt is formed to contain unspeakable memories, but in spite of the attempt at containment, the ghost of a secret may – and often does – escape to haunt not only the holder of the crypt but also other members and future generations of the family. The phantom is a gap in memory around which particular words or actions may accumulate. Those words and actions are the key to identifying the ghost and perhaps learning the secret.

The crypt and its ghosts are created in particular places, but they not only move with the people they haunt, they also carry that origin place with them. A phantom may manifest differently in a new place, because of cultural and linguistic differences, but the secret it simultaneously conceals and reveals is the same. For example, in her memoir *Silent Dancing*, Cofer recalls her

grandmother's stories as a constant haunting presence in her family's circular migration between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Yunió, the principal narrator of Díaz's *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her*, experiences his father's alternating presence and absence as hope and longing in the Dominican Republic, and as fear, relief, and anger in the U.S.

Celaya, the narrator of Cisneros' *Caramelo*, repeats the mistakes that her grandmother made as a teenager, but because of her different place and culture she seems to be acting out of rebellion instead of desperation and ignorance.

MEMORY AND FORGETTING

In addition to remembering, forgetting is also an important aspect of healthy and functional memory. Remembering everything all the time is just as horrifying and disabling as forgetting everything², but forgetting, like memory itself, can be manipulated by the story's holder. Paul Ricoeur discusses the usefulness, the abuses, and the manipulation of personal and collective forgetting in his book *Memory, History, and Forgetting* (2006). His discussions of trace and blocked memory will be an essential complement to the cryptological analyses in this dissertation. When Ricoeur asks "Could a memory lacking forgetting be the ultimate phantasm...?" (413), he clearly shows us that one horror of the crypt is that it does not destroy the memory but only holds it

² The horror of not being able to forget is most notable represented in the short story by Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes el memorioso" (*Ficciones*, 1944)

in waiting. Even memory that is blocked or locked away leaves a trace; the absence itself inevitably becomes a presence.

Obviously, a crucial part of any autobiographical work is memory. What then is the role of forgetting in a first-person narrative, and how is it expressed, if not in words? The answer to both questions is the same: space. Forgetting opens up the space for the imaginative recreation of the past. Both author and reader must engage together in the creative reconstruction of a past that is perhaps only recalled narratively in brief images and impressions. The empty spaces of a story become evident when obvious questions remain unanswered: for example, a young mother dies, but the cause is never revealed. Ricoeur shows us some of the narrative strategies of forgetting: "[O]ne can always recount differently, by eliminating, by shifting the emphasis, by recasting the protagonist... in a different light along with the outlines of the action." (448) All three authors – Cofer, Díaz, and Cisneros - take advantage of these narrative strategies to alleviate their narrators of the burden of perfect recall and historical accuracy, as well as to underscore the haunting nature of the past.

Memory and forgetting are two sides of the same coin, and the balance between them is crucial to our sense of identity. In his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1970), for example, neurologist Oliver Sacks describes two cases of imbalance, one of excessive memory and the other of excessive forgetting. The first patient is overwhelmed by unrelenting memories and the second, a man in his sixties, remembers nothing past the age of

nineteen (28-44). The mnemonist originally described by Alexander Luria, was constantly engaged in a battle "between an 'It' [mind] and an 'I' [self]." (Luria as qtd by Sacks, 83) In contrast, the man who has forgotten most of his life still clings to the identity of his nineteen-year-old self. Against such a backdrop of memory and forgetting, the following sections of this introduction outline some of the theoretical perspectives that will prove useful in a discussion of narrated memory, followed by a brief summary of the dissertation chapters.

Literary scholar Cathy Caruth, in her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), points out that what constitutes a trauma is determined individually, and not every person who witnesses or is involved in a trauma experience it in the same way. Some process it successfully while others might not. The latter group all have in common an inability to express their experience through language (1-7). A successful "working through" requires the sufferer to be able to speak the experience, out loud or in writing.

In an interview with Salon magazine, Junot Díaz explicitly affirms that his stories are based on trauma. The traumatic experiences suffered by his protagonist Yunior, in *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her*, are at once sexual, physical, and racial. Yunior has not forgotten his traumatic experiences, but he expresses some of them so briefly or elliptically as to make it apparent that Yunior's working through is partial at best. Thus he continues to be haunted by the unspoken part of those memories.

The protagonists of both Cofer's *Silent Dancing* and Cisneros' *Caramelo* have to work through borrowed memories as much as their own personal ones, but their acceptance of the fact that their lives are inextricably entwined with those of their family, past and present, allows them to own those experiences as part of themselves and come to a more acceptable resolution than does Díaz.

Philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs theorized in *On Collective Memory* (1925) that collective memory is more reliable than individual memory because memory is naturally constructed and recalled in groups. When more people are involved in these processes, accuracy presumably increases because one person can fill in what another has forgotten, and individual recall can be checked against that of the group. Assuming this to be true, collective memory may serve as an aid and complement to individual memory; but, in fact, collective memory is susceptible to some of the same downfalls as personal as personal memory. Ricoeur shows how an official narrative of the past may be imposed by higher powers, for example, resulting in a collective amnesia. It is a semi-passive form of forgetting by avoidance; no one wants to know or acknowledge the memory (448-449). Social and cultural trauma may thus be as unspeakable as individual trauma. These types of trauma are intertwined in the narratives of all three writers studied in this dissertation.

Díaz calls Yúnior a "child of Trujillo", one of a generation still directly affected by the Dominican dictator, yet under the spell of a collective forgetting.

Forgetting seems to be the only collective memory practice that Yunion engages in as a first person narrator. The memories of family members and their personal connections are completely set apart in separate chapters with very little apparent interaction between the memories of others and his own.

Cofer's and Cisneros' protagonists operate in a completely different manner. They actively engage with family histories and memories and see themselves and their own narratives as a continuation of collective memories and stories. Both narrators invoke the metaphor of a woven tapestry to represent the relational aspect of all of their family history and memories, with a particular emphasis on the continuity of memory among generations of women in the family.

FIRST PERSON NARRATION AND MEMORY

All three authors to be examined in this dissertation convey at least part of their memories through narration in the first person. First-person narrative is an expression of identity and of the experiences and places that form the basis of that identity. Straying too far toward either extreme of forgetting or remembering would derail the narrative project. Conversely, the writer may use the narrative as a way to find a balance between lost or inaccessible memory and total recall. The former can be remedied with, borrowed memory, inventive reconstruction, and ultimately an acceptance that total recall is in fact impossible. Spatial orientation is an important part of this balance. Knowing where the narrators are, both figuratively and geographically, and recalling how

they arrived at that place, may remind both the authors and the readers of who the narrator is. Of the three protagonists, it is Díaz's Yuniors who seems most disoriented in his identity. Although he is able to trace a path to his present circumstances and identity, he gains no insight into how to change his life's course. Cofer's narrative is the most spatially structured; it uses a pattern that best reflects her memory of the past and allows her to confidently imagine and reconstruct her own historically and locationally based imagery. Cisneros' protagonist Celaya also constructs her narrative on a spatial pattern that frees her from the constraints of chronology and enables her to understand and express a personal identity contextualized within her family, past and present.

A first-person narrator is by nature unreliable, because such a narrative provides not only the opportunity advance a personal agenda but also the ability to veil the effort. A narrator may tell her story in such a way as to make herself seem more sympathetic or more powerful than she truly is or was. The malleable nature of memory itself, paired with the ability to change the story of the past, only serves to further diminish reliability. Memory of our past shapes our sense of identity, of who we are, but the converse is also true, that who we are - or who we want to be - influences the way we remember our past.

Drawing upon collective memory and the consciously borrowed memories of other individuals may add a stronger dimension of dependability to a personal narrative, but families pass on lies as well as truths. They also unconsciously pass on phantoms of memory. Conflicting memories then require the narrator,

and then the reader, to judge whose memories are trustworthy. Part of the work of this dissertation is explore the gaps, ghosts, exaggerations, and discrepancies within the first-person narratives in order to provide a more complete understanding of the stories and their construction. Analyzing the spatial structures and the types of recall each narrator employs, consciously or not, opens the opportunity for insight into the authors' intentions – both the impetus for their narrative, and the reason for the first-person structure.

Cisneros' *Caramelo* has two first person narrators - Celaya and her dead grandmother - and although Celaya dominates the novel, her story is both informed and challenged by Soledad, her grandmother. There are several factors here that beg the question of reliability, but more importantly the dual narrator approach allows for one of the stated goals of Celaya's narrative, to understand herself within the larger context of her family and their history. This is also an objective of Cofer's memoir, and while there is only one narrator in memoir, she explicitly brings in other voices, especially those of her parents and her grandmother.

In Díaz' narrative, Yunion offers no one else to corroborate his account of family and personal history, but rather appeals directly to the reader in the beginning of *This Is How You Lose Her*, claiming that he really is not a bad person. Of course, this sort of appeal only causes his version of events to be more suspicious. His narrative isolation emphasizes his personal isolation.

As we have seen, first-person narrative, based on memory and aided by imagination, may be used as a working-through of family or personal trauma. All three writers selected for this dissertation create narrators who are attempting that process. Their efforts are made more difficult by the fact that in each case the trauma was experienced by a parent or grandparent and is to some degree now hidden or misunderstood. Some memories are blocked by trauma, some are hidden away out of shame, and others appear to be inaccessible because of emotional and/or physical distance between the narrators and their relatives. Although the trauma happened to someone else, it also belongs to and affects the narrators because they have inherited the buried memory. This effect is often referred to as post-memory³, a concept that generally involves the same causes and effects as haunting and the crypt. Each narrator uses various strategies of memory and imagination to go back in time, at the very least to their own childhood, in order to map the events, relationships and paths that brought him to the present moment.

The memory, imagination, and narrative of these three contemporary U.S. Latinx writers are marked by migration and experiences of prejudice or difference based on race, class, and gender. Cofer's early years are not only physically divided between Puerto Rico and the United States, but she is also torn between these two different cultures and the different ways of dealing

³ According to Marianne Hirsh "Postmemory describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up." (cup.columbia.edu)

with the constant shift between the two. One way is her father's and the other her mother's; one is to counter and overcome prejudice by embracing the culture that produces the prejudice, and the other is to avoid the same prejudice by remaining safely enclosed within the U.S. Puerto Rican community. Cofer is given two different maps as a child, but her memoir shows how she navigated a third course involving aspects of both of those offered by her parents. It was not a conscious strategy, but it is one that she (and we) can now see clearly through the imagined and remembered scenes of her memoir.

In Díaz' narrative, Yunior's experiences of racial prejudice begin in the Dominican Republic before his migration to New Jersey, but they are intensified dramatically in the U.S. The English n-word⁴ becomes part of his vocabulary, and he applies it to himself and others. At times his use of the word seems casual, without much emotional weight, but this is an affective lie, revealed most obviously when he states, "It was the way we all were back then. None of us wanted to be [n-word]. Not for nothing" (39). Yunior's geography as he roams seems a bit chaotic until we realize that he is mapping nodes of pain as much as places.

As with Cofer, the experiences of Cisneros' narrator, Celaya, between the U.S. and Mexico are not just geographical, but also familial, cultural, and everyday. Her family life is a borderland between a Mexican father and a

⁴ While Díaz uses the offensive term purposefully throughout his writing, I have chosen to redact the term in this chapter, not to sanitize his text, but due to the injurious impact of the word and in solidarity with other critical race scholars who have chosen to do so.

Mexican American mother. The racial, gender, and class prejudices of the paternal Reyes family are not shared by Celaya's mother, who berates her daughter for believing the family lies about their noble origins and even more for believing that those origins make her superior to her classmates. The most notable experiences of prejudice in the novel are directed against fellow family members. Soledad's pathological need to belong drives her to try to restrict "membership" to the Reyes family, because she has fully internalized this hierarchical prejudice: if just anyone can belong there must be no value to it.

These three authors show us that facts and events of the past themselves are not as important as how we remember them, just as an event itself is not as important as how we experience it. It is through memory that a person interprets and carries an experience. We store an image, and later we take it out and use it to recreate the experience. Sometimes the image has lost its connection to time or events, but still imagination allows us to invent a coherent and plausible memory; once that happens it may be impossible to distinguish the "real" memory from the imagined one. They become equally real and equally imagined, and they both help us to trace a path from the past to the present. But the work of memory in the narratives chosen for this dissertation is not just to draw lines between then and now but also to understand the reasons for the crooks and turns and gaps in the paths. In the mapping of memory, none of the narrators simply starts at the beginning and

works forward in time. Each narrative is created from a different style of mapping, but they all of them value space and place above chronology.

I believe all the authors embrace the concept of their stories as "healthy lies," which rely on imagination to fill in the gaps and (re)create a coherent narrative. The concept of truth as an accurate record of facts and events is not always useful, but there is also the idea that larger, more relevant, truths that can be found by following the path of those "lies." That does not mean that memory is irrelevant, but rather that it is inadequate to the task of building a full understanding of the past, present, and perhaps the future.

SANDRA CISNEROS

Cisneros' novel, *Caramelo*, begins with a disclaimer, advising the reader that the story that follows is just that, a story, a mixture of memory and invention. The first-person is simply following the "family tradition of telling healthy lies" and asks forgiveness if she may have "inadvertently stumbled on the truth" (n.p.). Within any family there are always secrets and lies. Some are indeed healthy, motivated by a need for privacy or the protection of someone for whom the information may not be appropriate. However, there are other types of family lies that may be emotionally, mentally, and even physically damaging. A family's lies often become its most sacred truths and are fiercely protected. Secrets, repressed memories, and denial are passed to subsequent generations by various means and with myriad results. In her book *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative*, Esther Rashkin contends that

these secrets generate ghosts that can haunt family members for generations to come. Because the secrets are stored unconsciously within a psychic crypt, their phantom impacts are the only evidence of their existence and the only means to their discovery.

Like Rashkin, I will be seeking linguistic and rhetorical manifestations of haunting in *Caramelo*, but I will also examine the characters' behavior for the same reasons. I am also pursuing an explanation of how first-person authorship of the family/self-story, in conjunction with personal memory and imagination fill in the ghostly gaps created by the locking away of secrets inside the crypt. In my investigation, I intend to show how the novel's narrator, Celaya, exorcises the family ghosts by owning and telling the family history as her own story. Through memory, artifacts, imagination, and the spectral aid of her grandmother, she reconstructs the past, identifies the ghosts, and takes on their power by exposing the secrets that created them.

Celaya Reyes, also known as Lala, is the principal character and narrator of *Caramelo*. The novel is divided into three parts: 1) the narrator's early childhood memories of a summer in Mexico, 2) a dual and dueling narrative of the Awful Grandmother's childhood and young adulthood, told and fought over by Celaya and the ghost of Soledad, the Awful Grandmother, and 3) the narrator's memories of her teenage years and the appearance of Soledad's ghost, which appears exclusively and repeatedly to Celaya. After the narrator, the ghost of Soledad is the most central character both in the lives of the Reyes

family and in the text. The centrality of Soledad's ghost is not the result of her having been well loved by the whole family, but of her having been so very *metiche*, more than even she realizes, because she is the crypt keeper. There are undoubtedly other, older crypts in the Reyes family, but Soledad's is the most accessible to the narrator and the reader.

The secrets we find are based upon clues left for us by a narrator who has also explored a past, and performed many of the same searches for answers. There are no doubt many gaps that have been filled by the narrators' connect-the-dots family history, drawing from personal and borrowed memory, artifacts such as the rebozo, and imagination to fill in the gaps and create a story that has enough truth about it to dispel some of the ghosts that haunt the Reyes family.

JUNOT DIAZ

In the stories in Junot Díaz's collection, *Drown*, the main narrator, Yunior, shows a high degree of awareness of both the public and hidden transcripts of skin color (Scott 1-5). He is more than an observer; he is, willing or not, a participant. His position in the dynamic changes, depending upon his location and situation. Like other people in the Caribbean (and elsewhere), Dominicans possess many shades of skin and all sorts of hair types. Even within a single family there can be a lot of variation; however, lighter skin and European features have often been considered to be more desirable. Part of the public transcript on color in the much of the Americas is that people with darker

skin and African features are really not from "here" (where the rest of us are from). In Costa Rica they are from Panama; in Uruguay those people are supposedly Brazilian, and in the Dominican Republic, where Yunior and his family are from, they are assumed to be Haitian. As a child, Yunior is often the object of his brother's taunts: "Most of them had to do with my complexion, my hair, the size of my lips. It's the Haitian he'd say to his buddies" (5).

Yunior's experience's in the United States show that performance of race is not deferred into presumed nationalities, but is more direct, marked by references to relative darkness and lightness, racial slurs, and inferences about the effects on romantic and/or sexual relationships. Referring to Yunior's ex-girlfriend and her current Anglo boyfriend, a friend remarks, "Look how light you are - no doubt she was already shopping for the lightest" (115). The narrator also discovers that the performance of race can change over time or can be misread. When Yunior learns an ex-girlfriend, Loretta, is dating an Italian man who works on Wall Street he mentally responds: "I used to think those were the barrio rules, Latinos and blacks in, whites out... But love teaches you. Clears your head of any rules" (114). That wispy line between public and hidden transcript almost disappears with two sentences from Loretta about her new Italian boyfriend: "I like him. He's a hard worker" (114).

Translation - not like you, not like Dominicans.

Why does Díaz focus so strongly and consistently on the performance of race? Is it necessary for Yunior to tell often unflattering stories about himself,

to reflect and co-opt the strategies of the public racial transcript in his own life? Yes. Instead of backing away from the issues of race, he comes very, very close to it, and through the narrator's own voice and eyes he makes the reader see beyond his own confounded transcripts of avoidance and denial the continued cultural construction of race as a biological category instead of an historically performed drama of power and resistance.

The imprint on Yunior's painful memories is not only racial, but also national. He is the unknowing victim of a collective Dominican trauma. In a 2012 interview, Díaz comments on the legacy of Trujillo's dictatorship, its continuing effect on Dominicans. He refers to Yunior as a "child of Trujillo," and at the same time acknowledges that his own control in and over the narrative is often dictatorial. Like many young Dominicans, Yunior either does not know, does not remember, or refuses to recall the past. Díaz observes: "As we all know history often does its best work on us when we don't know a thing about the past." My primary focus is not only the narrator's ignorance of the national history, but also of his own family history. It only seems strange now, after studying Cisneros's *Caramelo* and Cofer's *Silent Dancing*, that there is so little family memory included in *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her*. The reader knows almost nothing about Yunior's parents' past; there is almost no pre-Yunior history (inherited or imagined). Much like a dictator attempts to erase the past and write history in his own image, Yunior's life is presented as having no past and no future. The memories he shows us represent a life of isolation

from family, friends and lovers. There is little motivation to maintain strong family ties; shallow friendships are safer; and sabotaging his love relationships is a pattern he cannot seem to break. Distant and broken relationships allow him the control he seems to need in order to protect himself.

The narrative relationship with the reader is very similar. Yuniors does reveal some of his traumatic past, but only enough for us to know that it exists. Traumas are referenced quickly, in a matter-of-fact manner, and then never touched again.

I believe that the exploration of the interaction between trauma and memory, and the resulting repression of recall and/or testimony, holds the most promise for a memory-based analysis of Díaz's works.

JUDITH ORTIZ COFER

The stated goal of Cofer's memoir *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* is for the author to understand herself within the context of her family and their shared history. In this chapter I will apply the principles of locational memory to Cofer's memoir in order, first, to understand the attention paid to place, and second, to explain the construction of her autobiography. The book seems to be a simple collection of memories and tales of childhood, but this analysis will show that it is also an exorcism of inherited pain and loss.

In *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400 - 1200*, literary critic Mary Carruthers posits that memory sites,

which can be real or wholly imagined, function not only as repositories of memories, but also as places of invention. Thus, although memory is not static; the act of recall, especially in the form of narrative, is one of re-creation and composition. Although memory is not static, the location it is tied to allows it to be stable. Although Carruthers' study is about the artificial system of memory practiced by particular groups of monks during the medieval period, the concepts of inventory and invention are still valid and extremely useful in the analysis of all memory-based narrative. The concepts of invention and imagination offer as many possibilities for exploring the past as does memorial inventory. Cofer states in the prologue that she has no interest in writing a chronicle, but rather she uses memory and imagination as a way to explore and understand the relationships in her family.

Cofer says that she is no slave to memory (12), but the trace of locational memory is evident in the content and structure of her memoir. The chronological structure is imprecise, but the location of each chapter is always clear and is inextricably connected to the type of interactions recounted. The use of locational memory allows Cofer to accomplish her task of "connect[ing] myself to the threads of lives that have touched mine and at some point converged into the tapestry that is my memory of childhood" (13). The interaction of memory (inventory) and imagination (invention) produce something new: the autobiographical tapestry and the comprehension and acceptance of those threads that form it.

Cofer, Díaz and Cisneros all use locational memory to anchor their narratives, creating maps of the past to explore their relationships, their family, and themselves. By looking through the photographs of memory and using imagination, the narrators reconstruct the paths they have taken in order to understand how they arrived to where they are, who they are, and how they fit in with their families. Some are more successful than others.

CHAPTER ONE: GEOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY: JUDITH ORTIZ COFER'S *SILENT DANCING: A PARTIAL REMEMBRANCE OF A PUERTO RICAN CHILDHOOD* AND
THE LINE OF THE SUN

As an adult, Cofer worked as a teacher and then earned her MA in English literature, eventually becoming a faculty member at the University of Georgia until shortly before her death in 2016. A poet and short-story writer as well as a novelist and memoirist, she won several literary awards, including the O. Henry Prize (1994) for a short story. Her memoir *Silent Dancing* was recognized with a Best American Essays award in 1991. Overall her work focuses on language, memory, and the intersection between the two. In this chapter I will explore her use of memory maps to reconstruct her multicultural childhood and family networks, in *Silent Dancing* and in *The Line of the Sun*.

Silent Dancing is a memoir, and *The Line of the Sun* is a novel, but they both create maps of lives based on memory and invention. In each text, the narrator relies on borrowed memory, personal memory, and imagination to construct a map that will aid in understanding the life that is charted there. In the memoir and the novel, both memory and imagination of the past are marked by experiences of prejudice or otherness based on race, class, gender, and culture. Thus the narrative (the map) that is formed from memory and imagination must also be equally marked.

Cofer states that her purpose in writing *Silent Dancing* is understanding herself within the context of her family and their shared history, and her statement is borne out in tone of the work. She is not defensive or apologetic about the contents, neither is she pushing an agenda; she simply lays out the people, places and events as she remembers them. I refer to *Silent Dancing* as a memoir because it considers a specific period of her life and refers to her adulthood only briefly. Her goal, and work, also fit within Francis Hart's definition of a memoir, as laid out in his essay "Notes for an anatomy of Modern Autobiography" (1970): "[It] is a personal history that seeks to articulate or repossess the historicity of the self" (491).

SILENT DANCING (1990)

Silent Dancing tells the presumably true story of the Puerto Rican-born author, her younger brother, and her parents, as her Navy father was deployed variously in New York and abroad. When he was away, his wife and children lived with the extended family in Puerto Rico; and whenever he was based in New York, the family would move to a largely Puerto Rican neighborhood of Paterson, New Jersey. The same four characters (with different names), their extended family, and the two locations appear in the fictional *The Line of the Sun*, along with occasional plot elements; but the novel imaginatively fills in some of the memory gaps that were traced in the earlier memoir, in ways that allow for a more nuanced exploration of how issues of race, class, and gender intersect with those of individual motivation and identity.

General consensus holds that the primary rule of autobiography is to tell the truth. While, as Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa has noted, the fiction writer has privilege of filling the gap between reality and desire (Archive.NYTimes.com), but the autobiographer is expected to stand firmly on the side of reality. While a memoir may have a more personal and focused approach than an autobiography, it too is expected to reflect what "really" happened. Both genres rely on memory to produce this truth. But memory - a dynamic process that both reveals and protects us from our past - is just as likely to fill that gap between revealing and protecting, or even to leave us with nothing but gap. Judith Ortiz Cofer acknowledges this complexity in the preface to her memoir *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* and, following the example of Virginia Woolf in her "Sketch of the Past", she "accepts the fact that in writing about one's life, one often has to rely on that combination of memory, imagination, and strong emotion that may result in 'poetic truth'" (Cofer 11).

Poetic truth is enough for Cofer, whose stated aim for *Silent Dancing* is to work through and document her own reconciliation of the different threads of her past that form her present identity and place within her family. In order to do this, she does not need to resolve disputed accounts of past events, but rather to reconcile two competing geographies of memory and identity. The spatial organization of memory becomes the ordering device for understanding her own identity. It allows her to blend inherited memory, distant childhood

memory and a broadening arena of personal experience that together form her sense of self. Through spatial ordering she creates overlays of maps through which the reader navigates to understand a complex, sometimes conflicted personal identity.

Cofer creates these overlaying maps of memory by recreating, through multiple points of view, the places of her youth and the paths between them. Her partial remembrance of childhood is divided between two principal spaces: Puerto Rico and Paterson, New Jersey. The first memories of those two places are borrowed from her mother, grandmother and father, and her own early memories of them are dominated by those borrowings.

The reader cannot understand this book fully without understanding a bit about how memory works, particularly how memory is tied to place and visual image. Neurological studies show that the strongest autobiographical memories are stimulated by visual images (Rubin 79). These images can be photographs and artifacts, but they can also be pictures in our minds. The memory of a place triggers further memories of the people and things that were/are a part of that place. The Greeks recognized this strong link between memory and location and were able to devise a system of memory that exploited the link, a way to remember accurately remember enormous amounts of information (Yates 17-19). As noted in the introduction to this study, various groups and individuals throughout history have practiced this locational system of memory, often called the *memory palace*. It is not my contention that Cofer is necessarily

a conscious practitioner of this method, but rather that she has taken advantage of the natural mental capacities upon which that system is based. Applying the principles of locational memory to *Silent Dancing* provides, first of all, an opportunity to understand Cofer's attention to place as something more than nostalgia, and secondly, an explanation of the creation of the memoir, or perhaps the ability to create it, as a function of locational memory.

In her discussion of locational memory in *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400 - 1200*, Mary Carruthers, a professor of literature whose studies have focused on memory, rhetoric and mnemonic techniques, employs the term *inventio*. She explains that the Latin word has two derivatives in English - *inventory* and *invention* (11); both uses are important in comprehending locational memory as valuable tool of thought. The first points to a careful, orderly manner of storing and retrieving memory by "placing" memories in a discernable spatial pattern as part of a mental construct (11, 35) - a house, a palace, a cathedral.

The second term, *invention* (making something new), can also be understood as composition (11). It refers to the ability to make site-based memories that provide their own geographical point of reference, "material clues for remembering." Carruthers even uses the term "compositional places," which work "not in the abstract, but with the specific sensory, experiential quality that topical invention should have" (39). What someone takes away

from a place, especially a place of significant shared meaning, does not remain static, but rather becomes a viable, shareable part of the self.

That ability to share memory and meaning plays a significant role in *Silent Dancing*. The first memories Cofer writes about are not hers at all, but rather her recreation of the memories shared by her mother and grandmother. Her first house of memory is thus inherited, fully furnished, and still occupied. Her challenge is to take the borrowed memories and their places and find her own meaning within them. She imagines and invents them as part of her own story, her own identity, throughout *Silent Dancing*.

Silent Dancing then explores Cofer's memories of her childhood in Puerto Rico and in Paterson, New Jersey. She realizes that she is the child of two cultures and eventually must choose to belong more to one than the other, if she is to find any sense of belonging at all. Her narrative explorations are site-based, and as she begins with those spaces that are memory warehouses for her - most of them in and around her grandmother's house - each part holds memory and meaning for her. Gradually she creates a map of the places and people that have influenced her life, beginning—as so many genealogies do—with her grandmother's house.

LA CASA DE MAMÁ

In Cofer's memoir, the house of Mamá (the narrator's grandmother) is more important than any other place, and it demonstrates both the inventorial and compositional aspects of locational memory. Within her narrative, Cofer

describes her grandmother's house in the following way: "To all of us in the family it is known as *la casa de Mamá*. It is the place of our origin; the stage for our memories and dreams of Island life" (23). The house is thus a memorial storage place (inventory) and, as the word *stage* indicates, it is also a performative space for those memories (composition). In rhetorical function, it is very much like the Vietnam Wall, as described by Carruthers. It "is a collective common place in the most literal sense: it has 'located'," as a collection, the *res* (the materials) for making memories... [a]nd in so doing, it provides each individual who looks at it with an occasion and with material clues for remembering" (37).

Mamá's house started out small; her husband had built it before they were married. It grew with the family and every room had a history, a story to tell, and Mamá was both the architect and interpreter. Every time she became pregnant, she would demand that her husband give her more space. Eight bedrooms, constructed one after another, held the memory of the birth and childhood of a son or daughter, then of grandchildren. Since the rooms were added over a long period of time, the materials did not match, so that the physical appearance of the house itself became a guide to the history of the family. The final addition, the ninth bedroom, was at the back of the house. When it was done, Mamá announced that that room was for Papá, took over what had been their shared room, banished her husband from it, stopped having babies, and devoted her enormous energy to her large family rather

than her husband from that time on. This was the final step in creating a house that was an accurate inventory of family memory. Mamá's private bedroom was now at the center of the house, the layout reflecting the new center of power in the household (23-27).

The pages devoted to Mama's bedroom read like an inventory, but the narrator's discussion of the various items shows not a documented memory but rather her own imprint of the memories represented there. Like the rest of the house, that central bedroom is both a real room and a place of memory for the whole family. Although Cofer has seen the room as an adult, she recounts the images from a child's imagination and perspective. She describes the room as "a throne-room with a massive four-poster bed in its center which stood taller than a child's head" (24). Knowing her chosen point of view is important to understanding how she interprets and re-creates the image. The context of her memory is early childhood in a home and family where the dominant figure is her grandmother, Mamá. This demonstrates the principle posited by Sturken and Cartwright that, among other things, the meaning of an image depends on "1) how viewers interpret or experience the image and 2) the context in which an image is seen." (45) The adult author is able to use those remembered artifacts and images to imagine her childhood self and the people that surrounded her, and thus to explore and reimagine the formative influence of those artifacts.

Sturken and Cartwright remind us that photographic images are usually assumed to be factual representation of places and events (23), but like spaces, their interpretation can change, depending on the intent of the photographer and the context within which they are viewed (23 - 25). We can clearly extend that idea to recalled images and artifacts. In this case, if the imposing images and descriptions outlined above were the only ones the reader encountered, she would probably assume that Mamá was a harsh or heavy-handed woman; but context includes not only space but also other nearby objects. The interpretation of the first images and objects is softened by learning what other items share the context of the bedroom space. There is a rocking chair "where generations of babies had been sung to sleep." (24). This maternal reference, and the soothing effect of a rocking chair, counterbalances the imposing feeling of the other furniture. Mamá has also covered three of her walls with pictures, postcards, and other mementos that her children have sent to her over the years. These objects also support the narrator's memories of her grandmother as a beloved and kind.

Mamá's room is not only the center of the house, but also the center of the Puerto Rican part of Cofer's map of memories. The remembered majesty and mystery - the huge bed, the jewelry, the locked chifforobe, and the somewhat scary crucifix - are images that represent Mama's power in the family and, more importantly, her influence over the author's formative years. Those images are also attached to particular memories and serve as prompts for

recall. The crucifix over the head of the bed brings up the memory of lying in the middle of the bed and feeling the dip in the mattress left by her grandmother's sleeping body. The jar of herbs makes the author think of the remedies and teas given to sick or malingering children. The image of the chifforobe and its key hold the memory of all the wild theories she and her cousins had imagined about what was inside. Mama's room dominates the house, which in turn dominates the landscape of Cofer's memories. Both are places of privilege for women and children; the men are figuratively and literally marginalized.

In contrast to the centrality of the grandmother's bedroom to the house and the family, the grandfather's room is now an addition to the back of the house. He is loved and wanted as a part of the family, but his presence, like his room, is peripheral to the daily operations of the household. He appears much less frequently in the memoir than does the grandmother or mother. This is also true of other men in Cofer's story; there are uncles and a brother, but most play tiny roles. In the house of the author's memory, they are tucked away in little-used cupboards. Although her father is the exception to this rule, in Puerto Rico, specifically in Mama's house, his presence is barely felt.

The part of the house where one can most easily observe the cyclical process between inventory and composition is the parlor. Cofer introduces this part of the house in the first chapter and describes the layout, solar orientation, and furniture, specifically the rocking chairs where the women of the family

would sit to tell true stories and fictional tales (14). The girls would sit on the floor, not understanding that, in spite of appearances, many of the stories were told to teach them the lessons that a woman needed to know (15). The description invites us as readers generally to take a few steps into the house of memory, but the inclusion of one of the cautionary tales, "María la Loca," contains a more foreboding invitation to take a seat and listen: "'María la Loca was only seventeen when *it* happened to her'" (17). The blend of stories told in the parlor adds to the weight this room carries in Cofer's memory. There are two levels of reading here: observation of the process and/or the invitation to participate in it.

The most notable physical feature of the parlor is its separation from the rest of the house. Although the room is attached, it can only be entered from the outside. No one just wanders into the parlor; like Mama's bedroom, it is a site dedicated to women and children and the art of storytelling. The room is literally set aside for this purpose. Its special status shows the value that is placed on women's voices, and it is the place where the narrator's own identity as a storyteller begins. It is the logical place for Cofer to begin her autobiography, a story that began with those other women. Sharing her own story, her own memories of this place, with us, affirms her own personal claim on it. She is more than the passive recipient of a tradition; by including this room in her autobiography, she writes herself into it, and makes this storytelling space the first plotted point on her map of memory.

The simple image of the parlor carries a complex meaning. It is a space for listening and for remembering aloud, but at the same time it is a catalyst for invention - thus the inclusion of the "María la Loca" story in Cofer's text. With these stories, the narrator adds the memories and wisdom of her elders and ancestors to the collection in her own house of memories. The relationship between signifier and signified is further complicated when the adult narrator remembers how the adolescent Cofer begins to perceive something more within these stories: "... I was beginning to recognize the subtext of sexual innuendo, to detect the sarcasm, and to find the hidden clues to their true feelings of frustrations in their marriages and in their narrowly circumscribed lives as women in Puerto Rico" (142).

This evolving interpretation of the stories stands out because of its coincidence with the author's *quinceañera*. The women of the family constantly remind her of her new responsibilities and limitations. They consider her to be "a fifteen-year-old trainee for the demands of womanhood and marriage" (141). She is supposed to prepare herself for her own "narrowly circumscribed life"; but she realizes already that she does not want that life. This is a point of separation from her family, especially from her mother. Puerto Rico is no longer the idyllic island of her childhood; it represents a life, and a social space, that she can visit but not live. She will take the stories with her as a part of her family, her culture and her past; but she will make them her own by retelling and recreating them, not by living them as a character. The stories in which she

will star will be more than embellished repetitions of old inventory; they will be her own inventions. Her stay in Puerto Rico that year was the last of her youth, and she did not visit again for ten years. If we return then to the image of the parlor filled with the women of the family, we can see that not much has changed, but now it carries multiple meanings: innocence, diversion, inclusion, disillusionment, separation, and finally -- through *Silent Dancing* -- reconciliation.

THE MANGO TREE

Cofer's map of Puerto Rico includes areas outside of Mamá's house: sugar cane fields, the refinery, the field and tree next door, the roads, and a very small bit of town. The most important of these outdoor spaces is the mango tree, also known as the storytelling tree. It is the most vividly described of the outside areas, because it shares its function as a narrative space with the parlor. In contrast to the adult-focused parlor, the most emphasized audience under the mango tree is the children; and this space, like the parlor, is strictly feminine. We see the tree through the eyes of the child that Cofer recreates: "I remember that tree as a natural wonder. It was large, with a trunk that took four or five children holding hands to reach across" (74). There was one branch that could hold three small children, and it was called 'the ship' because when the other children sat on the part that was close to the ground the whole thing rocked like a ship. It was the balcony of their theater; everyone else simply sat on the ground. The most notable part of the tree was 'the throne', a natural

seat in the trunk where Mamá sat to tell her stories. The memory of Mama's storytelling throne reaffirms her place of power within the family. Unlike the communal storytelling site of the parlor, the tree is indisputably, the locus for Mama's stories.

With such vivid images, the emphasis on children, and the inclusion of one of Mama's tales, it is obvious that the site functions as a place of inventory, but as with the parlor, the function of this inventory is to facilitate the use of imagination and invention. According to Cofer: "It was under that mango tree that I first began to feel the power of words" (76). The chapter that first presents the mango tree begins abruptly with one of Mama's stories, detailing the adventures of María Sábida, a very clever and brave young woman. The story is both a memory and an invention; it has come to Cofer's text by means of an oral tradition that began before the birth of her grandmother. Like memory, from which it comes, the story is mutable; each time it is told it is reinvented in the telling. We are reading Cofer's version of the story, but her version grows out of the memory of her grandmother's version. Cofer's inclusion of the whole story makes it her own, but it is also the layered result of generations of tellings by generations of women. It is a memory of origins that helps her understand how she became the woman she is now. She remembers identifying with María Sábida, a smart capable woman who does not allow the rules of tradition, race, or class to define her. Like many of the memories in this

book, the story is borrowed, yet also fully owned and reimagined by the narrator.

The acts of mere recall and recounting do not satisfy the narrator, because even as a child she begins to imagine and compose new adventures for the fictional María Sábida. She has her grandmother's tales stored in the memory site represented by the mango tree. Through those stories she already knows María Sábida's characteristics and abilities, so she has everything she needs to imagine/invent new stories. Those new stories also become inventory in her mango tree memory site, and from that inventory she takes them and reinvents them for the reader of her autobiography by including them in her text, in the same chapter, "Tales Told Under the Mango tree." When she tells these tales in her head, the voice she hears at first is that of Mamá, but gradually, Cofer tells us, "[T]he voice telling the story became my own." (85) She thus includes one example of her early voice by integrating one of her own original María Sábida stories, thus laying claim to her lifelong and inherited vocation as a storyteller in her own right.

There is a transitional space that is both part of Mamá's house and the outdoors, and that is the front porch. It is both public and private, making it the perfect space, according to the Island's traditions and mores, for young women (15 and over) to begin the process of courting. It is the place where young women can see and be seen by the young men, yet still remain under the protection of family. The porch and the chapter are also transitional spaces of

memory and identity. This marks a critical point of individuation. For Cofer, recalling the image of the front porch brings memories of rebellion against family and island traditions. She breaks the courting rules by leaving the porch and kissing a boy. This tradition seems very old-fashioned in comparison to how dating is done in the next phase of her life, in Paterson, New Jersey. By the time she is supposedly narrating, she has become more accustomed to social and dating rules of the U.S. This juxtaposition of two very different spaces of her past - Puerto Rico and New Jersey - clearly shows the pattern of choices she begins to make as she navigates her way into adulthood. As a fifteen-year-old in Puerto Rico, she is considered now to be a woman, and is expected to learn and participate in "women's work" such as cooking, cleaning, and ironing. But she has also lived in the U.S., so she rejects the idea of being a traditional Puerto Rican woman like her mother and grandmother. She does not wholly reject her family or ethnic identity, but instead chooses to extend her potential as a woman of two different cultures, one of the U.S. and one of Puerto Rico. Unlike her mother who, as we shall see, carries her island with her so that she remains thoroughly Puerto Rican, the narrator extends her cultural map to match her geographical one; one map suffuses itself into the other. Although she is at Mamá's house, she decides to act according to the norms of dating in Paterson. Her otherness is sharply felt when she scares away her admirer. It is not coincidental that the influential adults in her life are neither present nor aware of the author's trespasses, in stepping down from the porch.

Given that there are no witnesses to these incidents, the reader knows that this passage is not based on borrowed or shared memory. This small path on the map is completely her own.

Cofer's memories of the porch are from her last trip to Puerto Rico as an adolescent. This chapter is the culmination of her childhood memoirs, but not the end of the book or the memories. While the map of youth in Puerto Rico does not extend very far beyond Mama's house, her subsequent adult memories show us a little of the town and area around it. The two final chapters of *Silent Dancing* are framed by memories of time spent there as an adult, visiting her mother. The heart of each of these chapters, however, continues to be based on memories from Cofer's childhood. The story she narrates in the penultimate chapter was originally told by her grandmother, and in this chapter, it is retold as a reminder by her mother. Of course, what we read in the book is also Cofer's version, given that her mother's version of her grandmother's story only comes to us through Cofer's writing. This supposedly true story of a river, and a beautiful girl who was actually a beautiful boy, is based on Mamá's memories of her own childhood, but it has been recalled, reimagined, and retold by three generations of women. This is a perfect example of borrowed memory that is accepted without dispute because the author has no access to the original events. Even though the memory is not hers, the story of it is, and she lays claim to it here by including it. She may have no personal memories of that river, but its image is still on her map

because it is still a part of family history, and Cofer thus demonstrates that those who came before her and who surrounded her in the past are important elements of who she became.

The final chapter revisits the narrator's earliest memories, her father's homecoming, and the first time she met him, when she was a very small child. An earlier chapter had already recounted the events of that day. That chapter was a mix of personal and borrowed memory, but both accounts seem to mesh with one another. The narrator, at age two, had escaped from her new iron crib, made her way through the crowd at the party, fallen into the edge of the fire and was rescued by her father. In this final chapter, however, who or what fell into the fire is in dispute. The narrator remembers the account given in the earlier chapter, but her mother remembers the two-year-old throwing a large dictionary into the fire. Neither completely persuades the other of their "truth." Why include the two different accounts? Cofer allows for two possibilities in order to emphasize that, as she states in the preface, it does not matter what the truth is. What matters is the impression, the memory, because that is what informs our understanding of who we were and who we have become.

NEW JERSEY

Compared to Puerto Rico, the first impressions of Paterson, New Jersey are dull and monotone, but in this case the first impressions obscure the importance of the place in the author's development of her individual identity. The narrator begins to see her life and family through her own eyes, not her

mother's. It is in Paterson that Cofer begins to use her inventory of borrowed memories and her own experiences, plus her imagination, to create the spaces of memory and the stories that connect them. She will not simply warehouse her memories, but rather will return to them repeatedly and use them for invention and, ultimately, understanding of her family and the larger forces - race, gender, and socioeconomic status - that shaped her childhood.

Until now, this study has focused on the spaces of memory that correspond to places on the island. There are two reasons for this focus: the first is that, in Cofer's narrative, her mental constructions of places in Puerto Rico are stronger and much more vivid. In contrast, there is very little visual separation between the various apartments in Paterson, New Jersey. The only way to differentiate one from another is through reference to the neighbors. Cofer describes the first few years in New Jersey this way: "My memories of life in Paterson during those first few years are in shades of gray" (87). The other places are schools and supermarkets that are barely described. I suspect that to a certain degree, the sites of memory from New Jersey are all mixed together to form one apartment. Her memories of that time are filtered through the sense of difference and otherness she experienced more powerfully in New Jersey. In place of landmarks and buildings, Cofer presents a map of memory dotted by the images and impressions of people. El Building and Vida, a wild and beautiful Chilean girl (100-103), stand side by side. Providencia, a promiscuous and fertile neighbor (111-113), stands in for a nameless

apartment building. Salvatore, the generous and funny superintendent who fell in love with and was rejected by her uncle (who eventually realizes that Sal is gay), takes the place of yet another generic residence. Complementing these fusions of spaces and neighbors, many of the people on Cofer's map are further inscribed with poetry, reflective and well-crafted markers to remind her of how her own paths are crossed and usually affected by those of others. In one poem she says of Providencia:

No husband, but many men
climbed the steps to Providencia's place;
a loft in an old building, filled with children
hanging from her skirts, one at her breast,
and another always on the way.
She was the welfare Madonna on our block,
and the women's joke
I didn't get for many years.

In addition, the relative austerity of Paterson, compared with her remembered Puerto Rico, reveals some of the more emotional and painful aspects of her U.S. family life. The repeated migration between Puerto Rico and the United States occurs because the author's father is a member of the U.S. Navy. He wants his children to be raised and educated in the U.S. so that they might have more opportunities than he did, and so that they might avoid the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic prejudices that he suffered (88-89). His

permanent station is the Brooklyn Navy Yard, but he has deployments in Europe and other places that normally last about six months. Although he never plans to return to live in Puerto Rico himself, when he goes on deployment, he sends his family to the Island to live with his mother-in-law. The travels back and forth between the Island and New Jersey involve much more than just changing locations every so often. For Cofer, it is an alternation between two lives: "Our gypsy lifestyle had convinced me, at age six, that one part of life stops and waits for you while you live another for a while -- and if you don't like the present, you can always return to the past" (52). Her mother loves returning home and living with her family, and the way she copes with going back to the States is to retreat as much as possible back to that island life: she cooks the food of her home, decorates the apartment with the colors and fashions of a Puerto Rican house, and listens to Daniel Santos records (126-127). For the author, the transitions between locations, languages and cultures were more difficult, and became increasingly complex over time. Just as she would become accustomed to Spanish again, they would return to Paterson, where she had to re-acustom herself to an English-speaking environment, and gradually she understood that she was always a little different from the people around her no matter where she might be. Her experiences of one culture were always colored by experiences of the other. Her brown skin and very traditional background set her apart in the US, and her English abilities and more liberal notions set her apart on the Island. Cofer remembers a life divided and

understands that it is impossible to be fully a part of both cultures. The cultural transitions were not limited to actual moves between the two places but were a phenomenon of everyday life: "Every day I crossed the border between two countries" (125). Simply going from school to home required Cofer to be bicultural and bilingual. As the older of two English-speaking children, she was also tasked with being the family representative for any business or needs outside of the house, a role which she alternately resented and resented giving up when her father returned to take over again. Her mother refused to learn anything except the most basic survival English and her father was away with the Navy much of the time. Her locational denial makes her daughter's life more difficult. Cofer's forced role of picking up the slack kept her always at the cultural borderlands between the two worlds:

I knew at an early age that I would be the one to face landlords, doctors, store clerks, and other 'strangers' whose services we needed in my father's absence.... As long as she [the author's mother] lived in her fantasy that her exile from Puerto Rico was temporary and that she did not need to learn the language... then I was in control of our lives outside the realm of our little apartment... (104).

The recollection of how her mother had recreated Puerto Rico inside their apartments is her most detailed description of any site in Paterson, and that site functions as a house of memory with one specific objective: to retain and recall memories of her mother and herself in the out-of-place context of

New Jersey. The images and descriptions recreate the memories of her mother's homesickness and denial, as well as her own dismay and rejection of her mother's attitudes. Cofer calls it a "twilight zone of sights and smells that meant *casa* to her" (127). This space is another marker on Cofer's map of memories - this text - that again shows the widening gap between her mother's identity and her own, the divergence of their paths both as women and as social and cultural beings.

Paterson, like many U.S. cities of the time, was undergoing an out-migration of whites and established descendants of immigrants from the city to the suburbs. Puerto Ricans, as the relative newcomers, were gradually filling in these emptied places. Like most immigrants, they congregated together in particular areas to form neighborhoods and communities in their new home. Regarding these two tendencies, Howard Stein, in *Developmental Time, Cultural Space* (2012) states that "Humans insist upon, psychologically speaking, possessing a mistaken identity. We first confuse our 'whoness' with our 'whereness,' and then invest our whereness in our very definition of whoness." (22). We are comfortable around people like ourselves, and we become uncomfortable, even angry, when people who are different – race, language, lifestyle – invade our space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), French scholar Michel de Certeau discusses the dynamics of groups finding and controlling their own space. Those without power have no space of their own (xix), so grouping together in one space means having some power, while

those who do not identify with the new group, and therefore the space they occupy, seek out a new territory of their own.

The center of the Puerto Rican community in Paterson is referred to as El Building, and when the family moves to Paterson for the first time, this is the complex where they live. The mother loves having an apartment there because the smells of the food and the sounds of Spanish make her feel less homesick for her island. In fact, El Building and the surrounding neighborhood create something of an island within the city. There is little description of places beyond, and even those few places give the impression of being tiny islets. Cofer's memory maps of Paterson in general consist of small areas with only blank space in between.

Cofer's father views their residence at El Building as a temporary situation until they can find somewhere better, somewhere more diverse, somewhere his family's opportunities will not be limited by ethnicity, somewhere that English is the dominant language of the neighborhood. He wants his children to be educated and to speak English correctly, with an American accent. His desires and subsequent actions regarding his children's educations and living situations are guided by his own experiences of prejudice that were both painful and limiting. He was an intelligent man, an avid reader and learner, but was limited in his career choices by poverty and prejudice. The Navy would not have been his first career choice but being a member of the U.S. armed forces appears to lend a certain respectability that another Puerto

Rican person might not receive. The status conferred by his uniform was referenced by Cofer as an important factor when he moved the family away from El Building. He eventually found a landlord who would give him an opportunity in spite of his ethnic origins. As a man navigating between cultures, he did find a career that, according to Cofer, allowed him access to respectability and security in the Anglo world. Cofer's father passes on his ways of dealing with his social situation to his children, insistent that they speak English when in the United States. Cofer clearly listened to her father; while the memoir contains Spanish words and expressions appropriate to their context and often explained in English, it also lacks the type of slang which permeates the books of other bilingual writers such as Junot Díaz (see chapter 2 of the present study).

Cofer's childhood view of her father is one of mystery, admiration, and sometimes a bit of resentment, but the book clearly shows the threads that connect them. The choices he made, for himself and his family, opened up for his daughter the possibility of navigating a much wider range of choices. His own experiences of racism motivate him to ensure that his children would not face the same. His memories are passed to Cofer as a type of post-memory, different from the many borrowed memories from her mother because he seems to do very little direct sharing with her. His outward masculine focus, towards the Anglo world and his career, contrasts sharply with the inward-focused spaces in which the

women and children circulate. Because of this difference, the narrator's recollections of her father are passed and received through actions and attitudes that are most evident in his desire to move his family out of El Building and into an area of the city where his children will hear English on a regular basis and will not be judged by where they live. The narrator's father is no storyteller, but she learns from him the importance of choosing her own space as a part of defining her own identity. She comes to understand and empathize with his desires, and she fulfills some of them for herself.

The difficulties created by the prejudice Cofer's father suffered are never explicitly spoken, so Cofer, and we, are left entirely to imagination, with no memory to back it up. Although minor, it is a narrative gap that remains unfilled. In her book, *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative*, Esther Rashkin, speaks of rhetorical concealments, the simplest of which are gaps or secrets, as an indication of a ghost (26 – 29). Cofer's father survived the prejudice, but his attitude and his instruction for his children clearly show that it still haunts him. To him, his past is unspeakable. How much of this is owed to his ideas about men being strong and silent and how much is due to trauma is unknown, but the gap and its phantasm remains.

The most interesting question is this: within her imagined adult self, how does Cofer use the constructions and powers of inventory and invention in order to shape her experiences of race, culture, class, and gender? When her father died, the author's mother returned to Puerto Rico, her island of dreams.

She lives surrounded by family, with Mamá at the center of it all, and is frustrated when her own daughter refuses to live there as well. In reality, now that the narrator has circulated so freely in the Anglo world, the two women no longer share the same culture, and they each interpret the family history through their different experiences. The distance between them is not only that of physical geography, but also one of mental geography. They are working from different maps of memory, and the distance seems to be widening. But instead of accepting that distance, Cofer looks for common ground, both to maintain some closeness to her mother and to knit their maps together. Perhaps if they overlay those different maps, they may find spaces of a shared past. In the last chapter of *Silent Dancing*, as we have seen, the author asks her mother about the first memories of her (Cofer's) father. It turns out that the two have very different versions of the occasion, the party celebrating her father's return from a long deployment that had been re-told in an earlier chapter. Although each woman believes that her own version is a true memory (inventory) and the other's is pure invention, Cofer decides that knowing the complete truth of the past is probably impossible and, in the end, not as important as her relationship with her mother. She can accept, verbally, her mother's version of history without agreeing completely. Reconciliation with her mother supposes reconciliation between the past and the present and a mutual acceptance of two culturally and personally different visions.

The use of locational memory - visual memory – thus allows Cofer to fulfill her goal of "connect(ing) myself to the threads of lives that have touched mine and at some point converged into the tapestry that is my memory of childhood" (13). The interaction of memory (inventory) and imagination (invention) produces something new: an autobiographical tapestry and the understanding and acceptance of those threads of lives that form it, across the places that incarnate the identity threads of culture, age, and gender.

THE LINE OF THE SUN

Although *The Line of the Sun* (1989), Cofer's first novel, is a work of fiction, the similarity of the family members and their characteristics to those described in her subsequent memoir *Silent Dancing* is striking. The novel is not a memoir in disguise—the storyline is fictional-- but many of the people who populate the novel are obviously modeled on, though not copied from, real family members and relationships that also figure prominently in *Silent Dancing*.

The Line of the Sun tells the story of Guzmán, the narrator's uncle, who is the black sheep of the family. To much of his hometown he is an outcast because he does not try meet social, moral, or familial expectations of Puerto Rico's traditional culture. As a young adult, he moves to the United States, only to find that he is still an outcast because of his language, the color of his skin, and his low socioeconomic status. When the narrator and Guzmán meet, she is inspired to tell his story, and eventually uses borrowed memory, personal memory, and imagination to do so. French philosopher and sociologist Maurice

Halbwachs, in the book *On Collective Memory* (1925), contrasts the greater reliability and completeness of collective memory with the mutability of personal memory. Marisol takes advantage of relying on multiple sources of recollections, thus she is able to create a more complete picture of Guzmán's life. She fits together all the different versions of his past to create a map of his life so that she and others can better understand the man she saw as a hero.

The differences between the two works are emphasized by the use of names. While the relatives in *Silent Dancing* are referred to only by their relationship to Cofer (Mamá, my mother, my father), those in *The Line of the Sun* are consistently referred to by their (fictitious) names ('Ramona,' 'Rafael'), even when it might have been more natural for the narrator to call them by relationship. The use of names adds a distance not only between Cofer's real family and the fictional family of the novel, but also between the narrator and the other characters. In addition, this technique serves to create a fictional world aligned with novelistic narrative traditions, instead of having a self-referential memoirist step in and out of the stories as she does in *Silent Dancing*. The novel's epilogue clarifies explicitly that Marisol, the narrator, sees herself more as a storyteller and author than a participant. Much of the novel predates her birth and her meeting with the central character, Guzmán. She is mapping Guzman's past, as well as that of his brother-in-law Rafael, and to a lesser degree that of his sister Ramona. To do this, the narrator depends mostly on the borrowed memories, oral and written, of Ramona, her mother,

and Mamá Cielo, her grandmother, and of Guzmán himself. The map that she creates of Guzmán's life is formed by the inseparable, and often indistinguishable, layers of those memories; but there are still gaps. The narrator, in her epilogue, admits to filling most of those in herself: "...I concluded that the only way to understand a life is to write it as a story, to fill in the blanks left by circumstance, lapses of memory, and failed communication" (290). Some of those overlapping layers of the map, then, are the inventions and imaginings of the narrator, to understand not only Guzmán's story but also her own. It is Marisol's story because she has written it, not because it is about her, except in the sense that everyone's history begins with his or her predecessors. In addition, it is Marisol's history because she sees some of Guzmán's otherness reflected in herself, and by narrating her own part in the story she is able to redeem Guzmán and justify both of their actions and attitudes toward the cultural, racial, and socioeconomic restrictions they each face.

There is a short episode in *Silent Dancing* about Cofer's uncle Hernán traveling to New York for work, and the family losing contact with him. This uncle is merely a character of a story in *Silent Dancing*, but he, referred to as Guzmán in *The Line of the Sun*, is a three-dimensional protagonist and a real person in Marisol's narrative.

Marisol recalls her grandmother, Mamá Cielo, telling stories about this absent uncle. For the narrator, then, Guzmán was a character before he was a

person, and as a young teenager, she identifies with the tales of his rebellion and independence. After she meets him in person, she decides that she will serve as his "secret biographer" (282), because his story belongs to her, both as it was passed down from Mamá Cielo and as it was handed to her by the man himself. In spite of his independence and rebellion, then, Guzmán's story - the map of his life - is constructed mainly by other people, by their memories and imagination. Those memories, and therefore his story, are geographically defined. As in *Silent Dancing*, the places on Guzman's map represent more than simple memories of the past -- they plot out his relationships, and the emotions that were read into those relationships. Almost all of Guzmán's relationships are colored by the disappointment and anger of others because he does not live to their social, economic, racial, or cultural expectations. As prominent as these sites are the unmapped "between spaces" – the gaps in the story - belong solely to Guzmán; and they remain a mystery to his narrator-confidante, and to us.

MAMA CIELO'S HOUSE

As Marisol tells us, Guzmán had vexed his mother since before his birth, when she had already lost her patience for him. In a way that undermines traditional maternal images of unconditional devotion, she thought of him as a "bouncing ball in her belly" and a "monkey... climbing her ribs" (1). Her womb was the first feminine space from which he was expelled, but not the last. He showed his restless nature very early and continued to resist any sort of

confining spaces, rebelling against any boundaries created by walls, rules or expectations. For the young Guzmán, those spaces are usually feminine spaces, places controlled by women, and that definitely includes his mother's house. The places in which he feels most comfortable are masculine (the cane fields), neutral (nature), or dual-gendered (the domino hall) in some sense. Mamá Cielo's house falls into none of those categories. She is the ruler of her house and family, just as the grandmother is similarly represented in *Silent Dancing*. In another echo of the memoir, Mamá Cielo pushes back against patriarchy in mapping her house: her husband, Papá Pepe, is relegated to the back of the house and makes none of the important decisions (again paralleling the representation in *Silent Dancing*). He is a timid man, and this trait allows him to cohabit peacefully with his wife. His son Guzmán, however, did not inherit this characteristic from his father.

Unlike the rest of the family, Guzmán does not conform to Mamá Cielo's standards for a good child. She in a sense disowns him when she calls him the "devil's child," and allows her friends to do the same. This distancing becomes physical as well as emotional; Guzmán spends as much time away from home as possible, and the family and neighbors have to search for him on a regular basis to bring him home at night. As a child and as a young adult he endlessly frustrates and infuriates his mother until he trespasses too far over the line of her tolerance: first by preferring to live with Rosa "La Cabra," a practitioner of herbal medicine, fortune-telling, and prostitution; and later, by being accused

of trying to enter a young woman's window to steal her jewelry. After his first adoption of a new home, Mamá Cielo is heartbroken by what she perceives as the loss of her second son, and barely acknowledges his presence when he returns home. After the second (rumored) trespass, she is enraged and exiles him from her home, before he can leave it again himself.

The only time he is treated kindly in his mother's home is when he is sick or injured. After fifteen years in New York and New Jersey, he returns to Puerto Rico, broken in body and spirit. Ramona and Mamá Cielo nurse him back to health, as much as possible. Mamá Cielo thinks of him as "her broken sparrow" (287), returned to her nest. The space that was once considered confining now becomes his refuge, when the outside world of adventures proved to be more damaging than he had anticipated.

While in *Silent Dancing* the grandmother's house was the source of feminine creativity and strength, in *The Line of the Sun* it represents Guzman's failures. It signifies loss of independence, disappointment to his family, failure of mutual understanding, and the hero's eventual surrender to the structures against which he had once fought.

MEMORIES OF SALUD

As a child and adolescent, Guzmán feels more and more isolated from the so-called normal people of his town. Many of the places in his hometown of Salud appear to be comforting or even liberating for other characters but represent only alienation for him: home is not a place of comfort and love;

there is no sense of transcendence within the walls of the church; school is boring; and, overall, any one place is too confining. The rejection usually is or becomes mutual. Some places are forbidden to polite society, or at least objectionable: Guzmán is drawn to the transgressive sites of the domino hall and bar, and most of all to Rosa's house and its isolated valley. In mapping his own route, he thus rebels against the norms dictated by his parents' socio-economic status. He is accepted at the home of his friend and, later, brother-in-law Rafael; but that family is clearly of a different social class. Don Juan, Rafael's father, is known to be an alcoholic; his drunkenness and temper, and then the illnesses of both parents (clearly a consequence of the father's objectionable lifestyle), makes the house an undesirable location, even for Guzmán, who gradually spends as little time as possible there. Thus, while Guzmán attempts to find places that will suit him, they prove to be no better suited to him than Mamá Cielo's own home, forcing him to continue his restless quest for his own place in the world.

A) THE CHURCH

The relationship between the church and Guzmán is largely one of mutual rejection. The old priest, don Gonzalo, never expresses an opinion, but that is because he serves only as a distant figurehead, preferring to avoid the responsibilities and politics of entangling in the daily lives of his flock. The traditional male dominance of the Catholic Church is only a transparent veneer in Salud. Women of his mother's socio-economic status, who unite to form the

Holy Rosary Society, fill the male authority gap by policing the flock according to their own standards. For example, their disapproval of Rosa "La Cabra" turns into physical force, when they storm her home and run her out of town, an act for which Guzmán never forgives them. This omnipresent policing force turns on all who are different; for example, these faithful church-going women also target Guzmán's sensitive older brother Carmelo, deciding that his close relationship with the younger priest (el Padrecito) discomfits them. The women spread rumors about Carmelo and el Padrecito, to the point that both men are expelled from the town. In resentful response, Guzmán transgresses their own holy site to show his rejection of their punishing control: standing inside the church, "Guzman spit on the ground and said, 'Bitches'"(51), showing his contempt for the gossipers. Unlike his sister, Ramona, he was not bothered by the fact that they were on sacred ground. Carmelo eventually enlisted in the Army to escape the harassment; he was then killed in Korea, and it is clear that both Guzmán and his narrator assign blame to the confining space of the ironically named hometown, Salud. The church's site on the map of memories is thus another locus of bitterness and resentment, and although the manifestations are different, it is an echo of Mamá Cielo's house where a censoring feminine power seeks to control and homogenize other people, expelling those who are different. The greatest difference between the two sites is that Guzmán does love his mother and other family members, and he continually returns to his mother's house; but after the eviction of Rosa and

expulsion of his brother, the church and its Holy Rosary Society never show up on Guzmán's map again. The memory imprint of both sites is powerful, but that of his mother's house is indelible because of repeated experience, like an etching traced over and over again. The church's imprint is more like a scar; it fades but never goes away completely.

The narrative exploration of these sites of feminine power allows the narrator to accomplish two purposes. The first is the ability to generate sympathy for her protagonist. She offers no outright opinions, no narrative commentary, but rather acts as a presumably objective tour guide, showing visitors the sites on a battlefield. The details themselves are moving, and as we survey the sites in the novel, our map, we are clearly invited to side with the main character. The narrator then openly admits that she identifies with her uncle/protagonist, especially his rebellious traits, thus tracing her own story by mapping his.

The narrator's second accomplishment again reflects the identification she feels with her character's rebellious nature. While Guzmán has specific reasons for his rejections of these women-controlled sites, Marisol's rebellion is directed against the power of traditional island roles rather than against gender. Hers is a rejection intimately tied to her preference for U.S culture over the more restrictive mores of Puerto Rico: "At thirteen, I was being counseled in humble acceptance of a destiny I had not chosen for myself" (177). Her words reflect that she is able to insert her own ideas and feelings into a

supposedly separate narrative. In reality, she is increasing the reach of her ownership of the story and turning the story of a rebellious individual and free spirit (Guzmán) into a broader narrative of cultural restrictiveness.

While Guzmán's childhood home and the church are easily detected sites on the map of Salud, his school—which looms large in most narratives of childhood and in Cofer's *Silent Dancing*--is barely visible. The most notable mentions of school are those that refer to his avoidance of it:

He had to be walked to first grade every day or he would wander off to the river, where he could catch tadpoles... worse, he would go into people's houses uninvited, usually old or crazy people who gave him candy and money (2).

This reinforces the coercive nature of authoritarian spaces in Salud, and Guzmán's preference for the periphery. His wandering began early and became a lifetime pattern, as he sought spaces that allowed him autonomy.

B) WANDERING

From the narrator's point of view, Guzmán's value as a protagonist lies in his adventuresome mobility, not in his suitability as a role model, and although she does not follow his example geographically, she is able help recreate and follow his map of identity formation. Another way to view his wanderings is that he has no group; he is not accepting in the local territory, so this is his tactic in response to his rejection. (Certeau xix) In this way she is able to indulge her

own passion storytelling, becoming a virtual wanderer, and to critique the cultural frameworks of expectation, authority, and identity imposition.

One of the places to which Guzmán's wanderings take him, instead of to class, is the cane fields, not incidentally a completely male environment. Even as a child, Guzmán fits in here. He admires the cutters' strength, toughness, and sense of humor, and they liked his energy and willingness to distribute their lunches, pour drinks, and light their cigarettes. They accept him for who he is and do not ask for more. Instead of being biased by socioeconomic status, the men of the cane fields only measure their fellow workers by character and work ethic. There are no walls here, no rules except to get the work done. The fields are a bright point on the map, but even that space does not offer the kind of future he envisions for himself. Guzmán is restless, and the easy acceptance of the cane fields is not enough to hold him. This demonstrates that it is not only rejection and authority that drive him away from places, but rather his innate inability to stay still. Even when he feels accepted, he can only be happy for a short time in one place. As Guzmán gets older he returns to same places less and less often (although eventually this pattern reverses), always moving on and adding more sites to his map of memory, never finding the place where he might "fit."

C) LA CABRA/ROSA PURA

Two happy and brief periods of young Guzmán's life on the island were spent with "la Cabra," whose full name is Rosa Pura -- an ironic name since she

is a prostitute. She also has a side business as an herbal healer and spiritist, thus linking sexuality to a realm beyond that of the town's authority structures. Her house is at the town's periphery -- on the edge of the Red River, in a small and isolated valley. Guzmán is introduced to this place at the age of twelve or thirteen, when a desperate Mamá Cielo, not realizing that Rosa's main business is prostitution, takes the boy to her house to try to rid him of his independent spirit, which she calls "the devil." Rosa recommends that the boy stay with her, demonstrating the immediate affinity between these two rebellious spirits. He spends a few days there helping with the gardening, watching TV, and beginning his lifelong attraction/obsession with this beautiful woman. When his brother comes to get him, he does not want to leave. A few years later he goes to live with her again, staying for a few weeks until he is once again pulled away by his family; and before he can decide to return, she leaves town, driven away by the threats of Doña Tiña, head of the Holy Rosary Society. Guzmán's transgression from respectable society to Rosa's house has awakened the Society's protective instincts, and they respond to the threat that this represents to the town of Salud, by blackmailing Rosa into leaving town. Thus, the society of powerful women restores homogeneity, order, and discipline to the town. In spite of Mamá Cielo's distaste for Doña Tiña and her meddling ways, Doña Tiña is in this instance Mamá Cielo's ally, and thus extends the iron hand of Guzmán's own home, to the town in general.

In contrast to Salud's vision of Rosa as a threat, Guzmán regards his stays with Rosa as idyllic, viewing the valley as a kind of Eden. "This was the beauty of the Island all concentrated into a few acres with river, valley, hill, and turquoise-blue sky" (91). It is obvious that valley has almost as much draw as Rosa herself, but despite the paradisiacal space and the gorgeous woman, Guzmán acknowledges that his restlessness has not subsided. Still, Rosa and the valley remain in his mind as a paradise lost; it is present memory and desire. The valley will always remain as the geographical center of his map, the only place to which he truly would like to return.

Guzmán had only told part of the story to Marisol; and he only told part of the story to his sister Ramona, who passed it on to Marisol. Ramona herself had never been there and would only know what her brother told her. Mamá Cielo had been to the valley, but was preoccupied by her worries, never noting the beauty of the place. Marisol's father Rafael had known the valley himself but would never pass that information on to his daughter. The only recourse for the narrator to fill the gaps, but the best recourse for a storyteller anyway, is imagination and invention. Marisol takes what inventory of borrowed memory she has and combines it with imagination to invent the rest of the valley. "Guzmán told me about his childhood on the island in general terms, leaving out things he did not think I would understand, but his silences and omissions were fuel to my imagination and I filled in the details" (220). In so doing,

Marisol strengthens her own identification with that site of freedom, which at least for a time existed beyond the confines of Salud.

For Guzmán, one of the key attractions of living with Rosa is her acceptance of who he is. Her house is a feminine space, because a woman controls it, but it is also a space designed to make her male clients comfortable. The lack of moral judgment is a trait common to the places that Guzmán favors, and it is a trait that he finds most often in masculine, bi-gendered (overseen by a woman, but designed for men), or neutral spaces. A similar site that stands out on his memory map of Salud is the domino hall and bar owned by Doña Amparo, the wealthiest woman in town. She owns more properties and businesses than any woman, and most men, in town. Like Rosa, she is on the periphery of society's dominant stratum, and like Rosa, she is a powerful woman who uses what she knows about men to make them comfortable enough to spend their money and spill their secrets. While Rosa takes care of their sexual desires in her home, Amparo provides them with pleasures of the gambling and drinking variety. In both cases the women's power is derived not only from what they do, but what they know. For Guzmán openly, and for the town's other men covertly, both places also function as a refuge from the iron-fisted and conservative women of Salud.

D) THE GAMBLING HALL AND BAR

Although Amparo is fond of Guzmán, her aid to him is not strictly selfless. She sees in him someone who could help to run the businesses:

"Guzmán was the image of the son she would never have. She could have conquered the world with such a son" (127). However, as with every other agreeable space he has mapped out, Guzmán sees his sojourn at the bar as a temporary arrangement. For the first time in his life he has a plan: he is going to the United States and does not plan to return until he has made his fortune. It is really only another escape, from Mamá Cielo's wrath, from his reputation, from a town he has wandered from end to end. He needs a new and bigger space, a bigger map to navigate; his feet need new places to wander. At this point in his life Salud itself feels like a prison, and Guzmán never did like the walls that always seemed to be limiting the course of his life.

The map of Salud the narrator is drawing, through the memories of Guzmán and her other family members, is largely filled by spaces dominated by strong women. It is important to remember here that Marisol not only identifies with her real uncle, but also with her uncle as a created protagonist. She confesses in the epilogue that she is now writing his life for him, and while her views may not differ from those of Guzmán, it is logical to assume that her own beliefs and opinions are well represented and take precedence. The women that she puts on the map all reflect her perspective on the inseparable gender and cultural roles she observes as integral to Puerto Rico's dominant cultural paradigm. Mamá Cielo's domain is the house, and although the power dynamic between Papá Pepe and her may be non-traditional, all other relationships and roles within that house are aligned with the traditional and restrictive culture of

Puerto Rico in the 1950's and 60's. This is the reason for the conflict between Mamá Cielo and Guzmán: he does not fit in with external traditions; he is the proverbial square peg expected to fit in a round hole. The narrator admires his cultural non-conformity and wants to emulate it. Writing the uncle as a benign entity within a hostile environment serves her own purpose of breaking out of the confinement she feels within the transplanted culture of her own household and neighborhood. Guzmán always tries to free himself from physical walls, but Marisol's walls are the barriers of cultural and social expectation.

Rosa and Amparo represent the "indecent" women of the town, the ones who dare to assert their own identities and resist, at least for a time, the threat of conformity at the hands of the Holy Rosary Society. Amparo owns a space that, according to the sociocultural norms of her time and place, should be off limits to her. Her bar and gambling hall are considered male spaces; they are no place for a decent woman. But Amparo's greatest transgression is not just that she owns the place, but that the Holy Rosary Society women's own husbands provide her with the money and power to live her life independent from any one man.

Similarly, Rosa's role as the sexual temptress for unmarried and married men has always existed, and has always been taboo, but like Amparo she controls her own environment and gains her wealth and independence from the men to whom she provides pleasure and escape.

The narrator is not holding up these two women as role models, except in one sense: they carve out their own defiant space, live according to their own rules and have achieved a level of independence that their culture judges to be beyond female capability -- and forbidden besides. Marisol's narrative strategy of holding up their spaces as welcoming to Guzmán, the hero of this story, reflects the narrator's own regard for living beyond the narrowly defined roles of gender, class status, and culture. It is not a complete rejection of her roots in Salud, only a desire for the broader possibilities that she sees for herself. She knows she will always live between two cultures, but she is not willing to give up the opportunities of one for the limitations of the other: "[T]hough I would always carry my Island heritage on my back like a snail, I belonged in the world of phones, office, concrete buildings, and the English language" (273).

THE SPACE BETWEEN

From childhood on, Guzmán is a wanderer. If the paths and places on his map seem unplanned, that's because they are. Certeau asserts that even under rigid control, people will manage to make their own space, just as children will always color something they should not (31). This is what Guzmán does; he colors outside the lines, so to speak, and gets in trouble for it, but his response is to continue making his own space. His unconventional habits and interests mean he does not conform to the rigid social landscape of Salud, so he makes his own space by wandering the fields and visiting with others who

do not fit in. He does not go on journeys; he just moves forward in whatever direction his feet are pointed, practicing his own particular brand of *flânerie*⁵. He does not wander unaware, but rather observes as he meanders, and sees and understands things in ways that others do not, or in ways which are frowned upon. Unlike the traditional *flâneur*, he does sometimes stop to interact or to bring others along. For example, when he visits the odd home of another peripheral town dweller, Franco el Loco, he sees more than broken glass embedded in the crazy old man's wall; instead he sees the beauty of a mosaic. On another occasion he spends time with another outcast, and although he fails to understand why he and the little hunchback girl shouldn't be sitting naked in a field, he does understand that she shares the loneliness he feels, since she is confined to her mother's house all day. In this embrace of the town's othered residents, he feels comfortable. There rest of the town ignores their existence as much as possible because, like Guzmán, they do not fit in with social and economic expectations of the culture. Guzmán's memories assure that they are remembered as more than crazy or deformed.

Guzmán's eventual departure from the Red River Valley and the accompanying separation from Rosa fuels a more intense period of wandering than ever before. Taking on the habits of a nocturnal *flâneur*, he begins to wander the streets every night, alone, just watching the people of the town,

⁵ The *flâneur*, a concept Walter Benjamin borrowed from Baudelaire and introduced into critical studies, is a wanderer and an observer, but not a participant. For cultural geographers, this figure represents transcendence over the barriers that a city or town constructs to control and homogenize its inhabitants.

and realizing this is the beginning of the end of his time in Salud. Wandering the town, he is retracing the map of his memory, and realizing that his future nostalgia will exceed even his frustration at the various internal exiles he has experienced:

There were still others whose memory he would take with him, so that in the cold rooms he would occupy for many years the remembrance of these lives would eventually guide him back to his birthplace like a beacon in a foggy night. This he knew: he loved this place that did not love him. And he knew that he would leave it and come back. (111)

The layering of the narrative, like the layering of the map it draws, is nowhere more obvious than in the passage above. Although the text communicates Guzmán's memories and feelings, they are filtered through a layer of multiple sources and spoken in the voice of the narrator, who is looking both backward and forward through time, imbuing his thoughts with a significance they could not possibly have had at that time and place. The narrator is able provide us with a glimpse of how the map will look in the future, but that glimpse is based on memories from an even further future — Marisol's rather than Guzmán's.

Guzman's wanderings remind us that as much as the novel is a map of memory sites, it is also a map of movement between those sites. Sometimes we only see point A and B, leaving us to imagine the route between, if the

narrator has not already done so. We know about events that occurred during the journey from Puerto Rico to New York only because Guzmán tells his sister and brother-in-law, and they are overheard by Marisol, who later writes it down for us. After he escapes from the farm that had imprisoned him as a migrant worker, and he subsequently disappears into New York's subway system for several years, there are more gaps than information about the spaces he occupied or the paths between them. The best visual presentation of these years would simply be an inset map of the subway system. From the little that we do know about the long period between the prison-like farm until he arrives at El Building where the narrator lives with her family - Rafael, Ramona, and younger brother Gabriel - it is obvious that the motivation for movement has changed from an internal wanderlust, into a set of external needs that now drive him from one place to another.

It is interesting that the narrator does not attempt to fill in all of the gaps of those missing years. She has listened in on many late-night conversations about his experiences and has spoken with Guzmán himself, but the latter conversations were mostly limited to talking about Puerto Rico. Marisol recalls how her eavesdropping blended with her own imagination; as Guzmán tells his story to her parents, she recounts, "Though I drifted in and out of sleep, I heard Guzmán's story, or I dreamed it" (191). She then tells the story of his work on the farm and his escape. But when it comes to his time in New York City, she appears not to have the needed inventory of memory to

invent that part of his past. Invention of any sort requires raw materials, and Marisol had nothing to work with. This is the only probable explanation, given that at other moments the narrator shows herself capable of imagining parts of conversations that she missed, and includes them in the novel as a way to introduce newly invented information: "'What happened after you left the farm, Guzmán?' This is what Ramona would have asked Guzmán. And he would have answered: 'When we arrived it was dark...'" (191). In this case, Marisol could fill in the gaps, since she had the advantage of letters from Mamá Cielo and of having heard the previous and subsequent conversations. She had context and the inventory needed to invent the pieces she missed, and to (re)construct his memory map.

NEW YORK

Guzmán's American Dream turns out to have been a scam. All critical sources agree that the first site on the American map is a nameless farm in upstate New York. This farm where he and other men from the Island were taken was more like an outdoor prison, complete with high fences and armed guards. Bad food, inadequate clothing and fourteen-hour workdays were more than enough reason for him to start looking for an opportunity to escape. Obviously, this involves more than feeling restless and confined, because now he truly is walled in by hostile strangers. The narrator offers us two versions of his escape, but often there is a strong motive for unreliable memory. The first version, that he had hidden in the trunk of the cook's car, is the quick and

uncomplicated explanation that was given to Mamá Cielo and Papá Pepe. Ramona asks Guzmán about it because she has already gotten that version from her mother, but then he gives her another, more complicated explanation. How much of that version comes from Guzmán and how much comes from the narrator is impossible to say.

In the newly elaborated version of the memory, the cook does help him escape, and she (running from her boyfriend) and he make it to New York City together. They share an apartment for a short time, but she is an addict and a general mess. When the cook's boyfriend and a guard from the farm come to repossess her, he again moves on: he has no money and no place to live. His wandering in New York City is not *flânerie*; it is a requirement of survival. After the cook is gone, Guzmán finds an off-the-books job running errands on the subway, spending almost all his time in the "between" of narrative silence. There are flashes of rooms and rats' nests, but these occasional references have no context and are essentially unmappable. Even though he presumably spends several years in the city, there is almost nothing on the memory map - few sites and no paths. It is remarkable for its emptiness. Guzmán has locked the memories away, perhaps out of trauma or simply denial. There is not even enough for the narrator to invent a path or place. Doubtless, there were few witnesses to Guzmán's circulation through the subway system: his otherness -- specifically his race and low social status -- make him unmemorable and invisible.

EL BUILDING

When Guzmán leaves Salud for the United States, the novel suddenly transitions to a focus on Marisol and her parents, in New Jersey. This leads us to a more traditional first-person narration, rather than just a first-person framing. The focalization changes from Guzmán to Marisol, but the perspective has always been and continues to be hers. We have already seen examples of how the narrator inscribes her own perspective onto the memory map that is ostensibly Guzman's, but in reality has been created by multiple people, and ultimately fixed by the narrator. When it comes to El Building, the memory map becomes Marisol's, and Guzmán introduces himself into that map.

El Building, a high-rise tenement in Paterson, New Jersey, appears on the memory map before Guzmán ever sets foot in it, because the narrator and her family live there. As we see in *Silent Dancing*, almost everyone who lives there is from the Island, and it functions as the center of the Puerto Rican community in Paterson. Among the family members, the apartment and the building mean very different things, again with strong echoes of the family situation in *Silent Dancing*. In *Cultural Geography* (1998), Mike Crang explains that subjective experiences of a single space are a part of human geography (43-44). For Marisol's father Rafael, this single space he seeks as an anchor is a decent place for his family to live until he can save enough to move out of the city and buy a house. To her mother Ramona, it is a refuge from the English-speaking American culture that surrounds them. It is not her island, but the

sights, sounds, smells, and people in and around El Building make her a little less homesick. For Marisol, El Building houses one half of a life divided between U.S. culture - her future - and Island culture - a past she only remembers through her mother. (This represents a contrast with *Silent Dancing*, where the narrator clearly remembers the moves back and forth between Paterson and Puerto Rico.) Not long after Guzmán comes to stay with the narrator and her family, El Building becomes a place of intrigue and suspicion. From the perspective of younger brother Gabriel, the apartment itself is a safe place where he can read and play, but the rest of the building is a dangerous world where the kids play rough and bully the ones like him who do not fit in. When Guzmán first comes, the apartment and El Building are a place to rest and reunite with his sister, Ramona and his island friend, Rafael. When Rafael asks him to stay with the family during his deployment, Guzmán now has a purpose in being there; El Building becomes a site of acceptance and willing responsibility. His job is to take care of his sister and niece and nephew, to make sure they are safe, but that job becomes more and more difficult as tensions rise inside and outside the apartment. In the end, El Building becomes a place of fire, pain, and tragedy. Rafael no longer has to convince Ramona to move because there is no El Building to which they can return. El Building is intended to encompass the situation of recently arrived and relatively rootless Puerto Rican immigrants, locked into an undesirable situation due to their socio-

economic and cultural status, and negotiating their place within these insecure arenas.

At first El Building seems to break the pattern of the last few years for Guzmán, the years during which he was running instead of wandering. He is now able to stay long enough to settle in and then, predictably, to get restless. He takes long walks, goes out at night, and makes some money by gambling. The return to his old habits does not last very long, due to the risks of the circles in which he navigates, for example, after an undisclosed incident, he is stabbed by one of the other men living in the building. He is then trapped inside El Building and healing poorly; but for Marisol this creates wonderful opportunities to talk to him, and to merge her imagination with his recollections to create a more complex memory map. She also brings him news, gossip, and eventually becomes his news-bearer, telling him about the unrest and increasing tension caused by unemployment and threats of a strike at the factory where many are employed. The African American residents and the Puerto Ricans resent each other, each fearing that the other group is taking jobs from the other. Racial tension only adds fuel to the fire. The socioeconomic and racial tensions are turned inward toward the community, dividing the residents into factions. El Building changes from a place for community to a place holding people now divided against each other. What was territory, where the inside should be safe for those who belong, becomes a contested space, all sides vying for power. When El Building burns down, they all lose. With the gift

of hindsight, the narrator uses the fracturing of the community to foreshadow the destruction of El Building, using memory to recreate the last weeks of El Building and the community it housed.

For a while the narrator becomes excited by the intrigue of secret meetings and spying on the conversations of her neighbors so she can keep Guzmán informed about what is going on. She becomes wrapped up in the drama and begins to ignore her school friends and activities. However, Guzmán knows, and Marisol eventually realizes, that the situation of the Puerto Rican community is growing too volatile, and that the family should leave in order to be safe.

Ramona is unwittingly one of the people driving tensions higher by participating in the planning of a big spiritist meeting. She is in deep denial about the threat to her family and everyone in El Building, because her insistence on maintaining the cultural mores of the island blinds her to the socio-economic and political realities outside her walls. The more Guzmán warns her about El Building's volatility, the angrier she gets, until she accuses him of being the problem and throws him out. The intersection of their current lives and their memories turns into a recurrence of the past; Ramona becomes a substitute for Mamá Cielo as she echoes her dominating mother's words and actions. Her disapproval pushes him into the first few steps on the path that will lead him back to the Island, where wandering will turn into simple repetition. In truth, the repetition had begun before he came to El Building. Not long after he

comes to Paterson, he tells his sister about the feeling of simply repeating the past, as a subordinate to stronger social forces, instead of being able to move forward: "...it seemed to me that I was back where I had started in Salud, running errands for the American" (200). One part of the map is superimposed on another, with socio-economic status at the heart of both, but with the added overlay of ethnic prejudice operating in the US memory map. The official geography has changed, but the terrain is the same. He has wasted so much time and effort on all that movement, only to find out that he is still in the same place, at the mercy of stronger societal barriers.

El Building, and the emotional and social health of its community, are mirrored in Guzmán's health and wellbeing. They decline at the same rate, and during the night of the fire, when the building is destroyed, Guzmán's already damaged body is also broken during his valiant rescue of Gabriel. After his release from the hospital, having not found a place for himself in the US, he returns to Salud and to Mamá Cielo's house, to be nursed back to health.

SALUD, AGAIN

Perhaps the repetitions of history and memory and geography affect his mind when he encounters Sarita, Rosa's daughter who was raised by nuns and who now lives an ultra-pious life: "Guzmán's feverish gaze rested on the feminine form that he knew so well from his memories and his dreams. To him it was Rosa..." (289). His memory of the past blinds him to the reality that Sarita now incarnates the very forces that had pushed him out of Salud to

begin with: in the words of the narrator, "such a shrew and moralizer the town had never seen" (287). Marrying Sarita and moving back to the valley is not an exact repetition of the past, except in Guzmán's addled mind. He sees his memory in the present and returns to idyllic space he has longed for, still the center of his personal geography. The narrator, however, continues to complicate the story, knowing more than Guzmán knows about his own life. When Sarita forces Guzmán to kneel at the riverbank and "swear to him that he will never sin again" (291), Marisol fuses her perspective with his and says that, at that moment, "he and I tell our best lie" (291); there the story ends.

Marisol's memory map thus represents a complex fusion of geography, personal memory, and borrowed memory. The novel allows Cofer to explore not only her family's travels but the artistic process of invention. Places represent power, and the novel's dynamism comes from the rebels of each generation who push against those boundaries. In the end, the literal fire as well as the open ending create the possibility for the creation of new maps that, perhaps, will allow for greater freedom.

CHAPTER 2: MAPS AND MIRRORS: JUNOT DIAZ'S DROWN AND *THIS IS HOW YOU LOSE HER*

Junot Díaz⁶ is the author of three novels and one children's book, *Island Born / Lola*. His novel, the *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He is the recipient of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize and the PEN/O'Henry award. Díaz is currently the Rudge and Nancy Allen Professor of Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the fiction editor at Boston Review. He is also the cofounder of Voices of our Nation Workshop (junotdiaz.com).

Junot Díaz's three novels: *Drown* (1996), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012) share the same first-person narrator, Yunior, whom Díaz identified as his alter ego in an interview with Greg Barrios. As the title indicates, the second book focuses on a character named Oscar, but *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her* tell the story of Yunior and his world. Both of these novels are structured as a series of stories that can stand alone (many have been published as freestanding short stories in journals

⁶ This chapter explores the first-person narratives of a character who sometimes treats women poorly, in part as a result of his own upbringing and trauma. These narratives generated much speculation when, in 2018, Díaz was accused of sexual harassment. The accusations surfaced shortly after Díaz had published an essay where he came out as a rape victim and acknowledged having had multiple problematic relationships with women, in part as a result of this trauma (*New Yorker* 4/9/2018). However, subsequent investigations by MIT (where he was a professor) and by a Pulitzer committee cleared him of the allegations of forcible harassment. Indeed, the *Boston Globe* interview where he denied the allegations is titled "Junot Díaz case may be a #MeToo turning point," given that, as Díaz says in that interview, "There is a line between being a bad boyfriend and having a lot of regret, and predatory behavior" (6/30/2018). The discussion around the case has been deeply divisive, pointing to the complexity of defining the line between mistreatment and criminal behavior, as well as distinguishing between first-person narrative and autobiography.

and collections), but they are interconnected by the consistent frame of Yunior's experiences, memories and imagination. Some depart from the predominant first-person narration and tell adjacent stories that are a part of Yunior's history, but to which he could not have been a witness. In both works, those stories fill in the gaps left by his father's absence, and his own haunting questions about a remembered boy with no face, back in the Dominican Republic.

DROWN

In *Drown*, Yunior narrates the experiences of his early years, from approximately nine years of age to his early twenties. Geographically, the story traverses the countryside and the cityscape of the Dominican Republic and then follows the family's migration to the United States. The characters transition from impoverished citizens of Santo Domingo to lower working-class immigrants in New York and New Jersey. In the move Yunior gains a strict and hard father he has never known and later loses him again when the man abandons his family a second time. Even though the narrator spends the better part of his youth in the U.S., in his family and his community he is still surrounded by Dominican culture. The racial and gender-based prejudices he encounters in the U.S. only add to those within the Dominican community. The definition of what it means to be a real man remains the same as it was on the island, as do the racial prejudices. *Drown* lays out the first maps of Yunior's memories, dotted with sites imbued with the fears and hatred that always

accompany those prejudices. As we saw in the previous chapter about Judith Ortiz Cofer's memory maps, Yunior's understanding of and insight into his maps determine his understanding of the world and his part in it. Unfortunately, his memories and the way they color his maps often portray a bleak landscape where he bends to the idea that his own value is determined by the color of his skin, his projection of Dominican machismo, and his apparent talent for getting what he wants without applying too much effort.

Chronologically the story follows Yunior from childhood to early adulthood, but the narrative jumps from one time to another, sometimes backward and forward. At times Yunior's age is unclear, whether he is still in his late teen years or in his early twenties, but the chronological haziness never bleeds into narrative ambiguity. Yunior's location and surroundings, including people, are much more important than his age. He prefers to inhabit spaces where he blends in or where he can control the environment and exercise limits on those that are allowed to share the space, including the reader. The narrative maps he creates are strategically constructed to achieve that control.

The novel begins in Ocoa, Dominican Republic, where Yunior and his older brother Rafa are staying with their uncles for a few months. The two boys are sometimes farmed out to other relatives who are financially better able to care for them than their mother. Their father went to the United States to make his fortune several years before and has not been back to the Dominican Republic for several years. Not long after the boys return to Santo Domingo,

their absent father reappears and takes the family back with him to New York. Both boys chafe under their father's absolute rule, especially Yunior, but both are also desperate for his approval. Rafa is more successful at gaining this approval than his younger brother, so Yunior tries to emulate both his father and brother in spite of the fact that he dislikes how they act and how they treat other people, including his mother and himself. As he gets older, he models his behavior to resemble theirs, especially in how he speaks about and acts toward women: women are called "bitches", good for sex and getting high with, but not for any substantive relationship. After he finishes high school, Yunior supports himself with various part-time and contract jobs, supplementing his income by dealing drugs. Throughout *Drown* he creates cognitive maps of his locations, primarily restricted to the apartments he lives in and the routes he takes from place to place. Yunior's focus is on the road and the destinations, but the scenery along the way seems unimportant.

Díaz wrote *Drown* in English - though it has been translated into Spanish as *Negocios* - with some code-switching included. Yunior's speech register is modeled after Rafa's and tends to reflect the attitudes of his brother and friends who mainly value having enough time and money to have a good time - getting high and getting laid. Curse words, racist terms, and misogynistic language abound.

Yunior is careful about what parts of and how he shares his life. He is ostensibly honest, but not generous with information. Events in his life that

must have been traumatic, or at least distressing, are given short treatment and then never written about again. The focus is on beginnings, destinations, and the routes, but it is evident to the reader that the depth of experience of the journey extends to all aspects of his life and, influences the memories he chooses to share.

The traits mentioned above are exemplified throughout all the first-person chapters of the novel, beginning with the opening chapter where he is nine years old, and still in Ocoa with his brother. He describes the house, their chores and the pervasive boredom of living in the country. One of the ways that he and Rafa alleviate that boredom is by taking a trip to see Ysrael, a boy who wears a mask because of the severe disfigurement caused by a pig attack when he was a baby. Yuniór narratively maps the trip from their uncles' house to the village where the boy lives: the bus stops, the buses, his molestation by a man on the bus, and jumping from the bus without paying. The third item on that list, the molestation, is given less attention than deciding what to eat or drink at a roadside stand. Less than half a page is devoted to the incident, and it is intermingled with Rafa's argument with the *cobrador* about their failure to pay the bus fare. The only reaction of nine-year-old Yuniór is to briefly cry and then stifle his emotions when Rafa calls him a "pussy" (12). That particular term as well as the abuse itself detracts from the narrator's image of himself as a strong man, an ideal to which he is already sensitive. No further mention of the molestation is made; it becomes just another part of the route from one

destination to another. The fact that it is mentioned at all may be due to Yuniór's desire to destroy the power the memory has over him. Cathy Caruth, in her discussion of how the mind deals with traumatic memories, writes that "the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated... may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall" (153). Yuniór's trivialization of the incident may also owe something to the transformative power of memory: "...the capacity to remember is also the capacity to elide or distort, and in other cases... may mean the capacity simply to forget" (153-154). This would also explain the one-time and telegraphic revelation, and lack of further discussion, although the importance of controlling the narrative through Yuniór's careful selection of shared memories and strict map-making should not be disregarded. If, as Luis Buñuel asserts in his memoirs, "...memory is what makes our lives" (5), and identity is strongly influenced by the remembered past, then it is essential to either deal with or forget/deny painful or shameful memories in order to achieve an acceptable vision of self. Yuniór does a little of the former and a lot of the latter.

AWAY FROM HOME

The first chapter reveals the pattern of Yuniór's map-making and the first glimpse of his personalized geography of the Dominican Republic. During the period of his childhood the narrator orients his maps according to the binary division of home and not-home. Yuniór's memories of summers in Santo

Domingo are of being “shipped” to the countryside every year, and when money and food are especially scarce, he is sent to stay with his godmother, Tía Miranda, who can provide more and better food, as well as a nicer house and neighborhood. Both his uncle’s house and his godmother’s are much sounder and more comfortable than his own home, which is little more than a shack. Even so, his maps of the locations away from home – his uncle’s house in Ocoa and his godmother’s home in Boca Chica – are colored by a state of boredom and the emotion of longing to be home with his family and friends. The description of playing at the beach near Tía Miranda’s house is lacks any colorful details, and he is uninterested in trying the new and varied foods that she offers him. At this age, he places little importance on the state of the dwelling, but rather values being with family, specifically his mother and brother. Although he shows an awareness of his family’s poverty and their low social status, those things are at this point insignificant to his view of the world and of himself. Throughout *Drown*, Yuniors continues to show an increasing awareness of socio-economic class, especially as it intersects with issues of race in the United States, but of all the aspects of socially and culturally determined identity, it seems to be the one that troubles him the least. He never avoids sharing memories – no matter how bad – of his living and working circumstances. Those locations are included on his maps, indicating he accepts that part of his identity that was characteristic of his early years.

While the images of being at his godmother's house recreate the memory and emotion of lack and longing, the description of his uncle's house not only contains more details of the location, but also reminds him of the bus trip and subsequent encounter with Ysrael. Yuniór still remembers the boredom and the desire to return home, but the sites of Ocoa function much better as personal *lieux de memoire* than does Tía Miranda's house. Yuniór recalls specific images of the near and far landscape around his uncle's house: the rose bushes, the river, the mountains, and the room he and Rafa shared. All these images bring to mind the heat of the days and nights, conversations with his brother, and Rafa's "dating" activities. (3-4). The difference between these two places is the presence, or absence, of his brother in almost every scene. Rafa himself is a mobile site of memory for Yuniór; his image recalls physical details as well as insults, bullying, and family interactions, and shared experiences. His brother is also a source of borrowed memories about their father, who was gone so long that Yuniór had no memory of him during the first nine years of his life and was unable to recognize him when he returned to Santo Domingo to take the family to New York.

While Rafa's image recollects some positive experiences, it is also the link to hurtful memories. Yuniór describes the difference between himself and his brother geographically: "In the campo we were friends" (5). When they were home in Santo Domingo, their relationship had been different. Rafa was around his own friends, he either ignored Yuniór or made fun of him by calling

him “the Haitian,” and remarking on his hair, skin color, or facial features (4). Being called Haitian in the Dominican Republic is a racial slur, with additional connotations of being an illegal immigrant as well as being poor, uneducated and worthless (UN News Centre, 2007). Being made to feel ashamed of his appearance because he has African features is an ache that he will carry into adulthood, beginning in the Dominican Republic and continuing into his life in the United States. Yuniór’s geographical situation changes, but the ugliness of racism, classism, and genderism follow him and continue to mar his map of memories.

AT HOME IN THE CAPITAL

Yuniór’s memories of his childhood home in Santo Domingo are strong, but like the house, sparse in detail. The wooden house with a leaky zinc roof and no indoor plumbing is divided into six main areas – his mother’s sleeping area; the communal space for cooking and any other family activity; the boys’ room, which is simply a space set apart by planks of wood; the patio and the guanábana and the mango trees; the latrine; and a part of the home area but not part of the private family area, the street and gutter outside. The memory of these spaces allows Yuniór to reinvent the people and items inside the house, as well as routine activities and particular incidences.

The main room recalls most strongly his mother cooking supper, boiling almost everything – plantain, banana, yucca – because of the family’s poverty. Water was free, but oil for frying was a rare treat. “On the best days the

cheese and the platanos [sic] were fried" (70). Even saving money by boiling was not enough to stretch his mother's pitiful wages to cover special expenses such as medicine. In those cases, the family simply had to eat less than their normally meager diet afforded, and when the money ran out, Rafa and Yunior were shipped off to relatives who could feed and shelter them.

Everything about the house, and the neighborhood, indicates the extreme poverty in which Yunior and his family lived: the leaky roof, the cheap furniture, the make-shift partitions, the water drum instead of running water, and the latrine instead of indoor plumbing. Other than beds with mosquito nets and clothes that, like everything else in the leaky house, are water-stained, the boys' bedroom contains only an altar kept by the mother. In spite of being able to recall all the items on the altar – candles, mortar, cigar, glass of water, and two toy soldiers – the narrator seems to feel no personal connection to it, and the only memory it conjures is a prohibition on touching the toy soldiers. The memories it calls to Yunior's mind revolve mostly around his brother and their relationship, but it also acts as a repository for the borrowed memories of their father. This is where Rafa tells his younger brother about Ramón, the father he does not remember, where he explains the letter their mother got from the absent man, where he predicts, correctly, that their father's promise to come for them is a lie, and where he tells Yunior to leave Mami alone when she is overwhelmed. The bedroom is, according to Rafa and their mother, also the scene for a few clothes-ripping tantrums by the child Yunior. Yunior as narrator

does not remember those fits of juvenile rage, not does he remember his obsession with pictures of his absent father that had caused them. To the adult narrator this obsession seems inexplicable: "I am told that I wanted to see his picture almost every day. It's hard for me to imagine myself this way, crazy about Papi" (82). He does remember the photographs, protected from the pervasive moisture by a plastic sandwich bag. Aside from the bits of information that Rafa told him, his only knowledge of his father came from those photos. The images act as a form of borrowed memory, what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory in her discussion of family photographs and memory (127). They feed the need that Yunior has for "the memory of normalcy, of a 'before'" (127), but the photographs cannot completely reinforce a belief in the happy 'before,' because they also emphasize his father's absence in his life and in his memory. Although "[p]hotographs can be primary documents of postmemory, structuring its shape and its content," (Hirsch 127) the images of Yunior's father, as he describes them, almost completely lack narrative or locational context, and have the effect of underscoring the paternal absence from the narrator's short life. They are images without referent, ghostly traces of a man who, at that time, did not exist in the life of his son. Yunior's childhood recollections contain no mental images of his father as a person, but rather pieces of paper showing the image of his father. Memories of the house in Santo Domingo do not evoke recollections of his father, but rather his absence, and his presence on Yunior's map of Santo Domingo is barely more than a

trace. The fact that Yuniór's fixation is a borrowed memory about a borrowed memory emphasizes the physical and emotional distance from his father, but he works it into his narrative because it partially fills the empty space in his memory, even though, ironically, it also highlights it.

Of the other home spaces that spark Yuniór's recollections, the patio with its trees is of equal importance to the bedroom and the living/cooking area. Most of the memories that it evokes are happy ones of everyday life with his family, especially his mother: climbing the tree and dropping twigs on his mom to nudge her out of her solemn mood; watching her peel potatoes; listening to his grandfather ramble; or watching him work on his homemade killer rat trap. Even being forced to kneel on the grate as punishment is not so bad because his grandfather does not watch the time and lets him go early. The scenes of anger, disappointment, and resentment that play out on the patio are mostly outside of his presence, because his mother tells him to go away. He is only on the patio long enough to recognize the negative emotions from his mother and grandfather. The only hurt feelings are from being sent away and not being informed about the cause for his mother and grandfather's upset. He later learns from Rafa that his mother had received a letter from their father, informing the family that he is coming home. Rafa is old enough to remember that this promise has been made and broken several times in the past. To Yuniór this is merely information about his father, separated from any sentiments for a man who is a stranger, a photographic image with no

substance. The patio is a place for adult troubles and blissful childhood ignorance. Like other places on the map of Yuniór's early memories, the house is poorly defined. Yuniór's only attempt at a real description is this: "We lived south of the Cementerio Nacional in a wood-frame house with three rooms" (70). He speaks of other items in the house, but he provides very little descriptive context. The recollections of the house and the memories it carries are mostly impressions, punctuated by sharp and clear moments of time and place. Those individual memories define the trajectory of the narrator's movement on his map.

Beyond the house itself, the street and even the gutter are part of Yuniór's home territory. It's where he plays and where he and his friend, Wilfredo, race paper boats. On the narrator's map the street is labeled as freedom and friendship. Aside from the happy memories, it's the street where he sees and then follows the first clue to understanding what kind of man his father is. The motorcycle messenger entering and leaving the house leads Yuniór inside to his angry grandfather and upset mother on the patio. His presence is unwanted, because the adults do not wish to share the news, and their reaction to it, that once again Ramón is promising to come see his family, a promise that has already been made and broken several times. The empty space that marks his father on Yuniór's map is further emphasized by the latest aborted trip home. Ramón is a symbol of deficiency: lack of financial support, lack of emotional bonds, lack of parenting, lack of reliability, and lack of marital

fidelity. Although he is alive, he is the family ghost, haunting them through personal absence, poverty and faithlessness to his responsibilities as a husband and father. It is a substantive absence that interferes with the family's financial and emotional wellbeing. The emotional stress on Yuniór's mother causes her to leave the two boys with their grandfather. It seems to young Yuniór like a long time before his mother returns. Upon her return, her friends come over to cheer her up, but when "Papi's name was mentioned, her eyes dimmed" (Drown 84).

Another place that appears on the map of Yuniór's memory is the Mauricio Baez school, although most of the school memories relate to the improvisation that his mother did at home to make their appearance acceptable, even though they were unable to afford uniforms. "The uniforms Mami could do nothing about but with the mascotas she improvised, sewing together sheets of loose paper she had collected from her friends" (71). If one of the boys lost their pencil, they had to stay home until their mother could borrow one. It would have been obvious to the other children that the lack of a real uniform and the possession of only one pencil was due to the family's poverty, highlighting the inequality of their position in society. School becomes a site of classism on Yuniór's map, one whose effects are felt at home, the place that he values most. In every way the description of school life reinforces the poverty that colors Yuniór's entire map of memories from the Dominican Republic. It also reiterates his apparent lack of concern for his family's poverty

and low socio-economic position within Santo Domingo society. His difference was supposed to be shameful, but his manner of narration pushes the reader to believe that it did not bother him. His indifference toward wealth and lack thereof also acts as a good defense mechanism – both in the past and present – toward hurtful words or actions of others, such as those “kids [who] wouldn’t look at [them], tried to hold their breath when [they] were close to them” (71). This fits with the narrative tactics Yunió employs throughout *Drown* to hide and protect himself: the passing mention of molestation in Ocoa, the use of insignificant, atypical landmarks in New York, and the switch from first-person narration to a more removed third-person telling of his father’s story. Though these tactics have other effects as well, they all serve the narrator’s need for self-protection and control.

The Malecón, Santo Domingo’s seaside boulevard, is a landmark on Yunió’s map with dual meaning and purpose. On the happier side, it is one of the places they went when his mother declared a family day. On those days, his mother indulged her father and children with little extravagances that were not in the budget: taking a taxi instead of the bus, going to see a movie, spending time off from working. It was a day off from feeling poor, from thinking about what they didn’t have, from Mamí being worn out by ten or twelve hours at the chocolate factory. The Malecón represents a day when socio-economic reality did not completely rule their lives.

On the darker side, the Malecón is also where Yuniór's mother sometimes went to be alone, to be away from her family during a period of extreme emotional turmoil over her husband's absence and lies. It is a place where she can escape the pressures of motherhood. In Yuniór's mind, she goes there specifically to escape from him. Like many sites on the maps of his memory, this one is a disappointment and a reminder that he is a person of little value; even his mother had withdrawn her affection from him.

The last place on Yuniór's Dominican map to be noted is only mentioned in passing, but its relationship to his father and mother is significant in the comparative irony. The place on the Malecón where his father and mother met has been destroyed. Only the memory persists, but even that is available to the narrator only through borrowed memory. Like his father, the place that signifies the relationship with his wife, is merely a recalled absence. His mother remembers the place, just as she remembers her husband, but they are both gone. The place that existed in the past is a real place on her memory map, but Yuniór can only borrow the space where it was. It seems his father has only left empty places in the landscape of Yuniór's life.

NEW JERSEY AND NEW YORK CITY

When Yuniór and his family move to the United States, he adds a map – eventually several maps – to navigate the memories of a different country and culture. His world expands, but not everything is different. Some parts of the new map look very much like the old one. The geography is different, the

housing better, and the sites upon which he imposes memories have changed, but the actions of racism, classism, and hyper-masculinity are embedded as deeply in the new social and cultural landscape as those he experienced on the island. The scenery and language are different, but the drama is the same. Hate and prejudice make the same lasting memories, no matter where they happen.

Paradoxically, the most significant change is one that reinforces one piece of the unrelenting triad of intersectionality: The presence of Yunior's father intensifies the machismo that was so typical of Dominican culture. The sudden appearance of the father on the narrator's map made the family's financial situation better, but his presence – and later his permanent absence – overshadows so much of the new map and strongly influences Yunior's navigation of the North American social landscape.

The very first sites of memory the narrator establishes in New Jersey and New York are dominated by his father's power over his family. Oddly, the first is mobile lieu de memoire: a Volkswagen van that Yunior hates because it makes him carsick. No matter where the van is on the larger map, it is its own place, just as the apartment or the street outside is, a memorial to disappointment, inadequacy, and punishment. Although this does not happen in other vehicles, the father views his son's nausea and vomiting as the first manifestation of an unmanly weakness that needs to be controlled and eliminated. Yunior's memories of this vehicle are of nausea and his father's anger and

disappointment. He remembers the feeling of failure, because he wants his father's approval, and he also remembers his own disappointment in his father when one of these enforced journeys leads to the residence of his father's mistress.

Although he only visited a few times, the memories of her house are more detailed than those of his family's apartment during the same time period. Her house was blue on the outside, had two floors, lots of books and a TV, but none of these things have any specific meaning. They all connect to the same impression of dread and shame while waiting for his father. The narrator recalls that the first time his father brought him there he "just sat there, ashamed, expecting something big and fiery to crash down on our heads. I watched a whole hour of the news before Papi came downstairs and said, Let's go." (36) The house is not a palace of memory at all, simply another lieu de memoire, dedicated to his father's infidelity. His own home is described in the same parsimonious way the same; the only descriptions that even approach what one could call detail is that it has two, maybe three, bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, and a communal laundry room in the basement. The only true spatial description of this place is metaphorical and relates to the invisible fissures in the parents' relationship, caused by the father's affair. "The affair was like a hole in our living room floor, one we'd gotten so used to circumnavigating that we sometimes forgot it was there" (39).

Oddly, the building's basement has more memory attached to it than the apartment itself. It is the place where he and Rafa share their knowledge of the mistress, aka "the Puerto Rican woman." with one another. Strangely enough, a communal basement signifies privacy and the sharing of secrets, because it is not dominated by their father, Ramón.

There is no precise number of apartments that Yuniór shares with his family before and after his father left. There are three definite family moves, from the Dominican Republic to New York, and from New York to Paterson, New Jersey, and from Paterson to another nearby city in New Jersey, perhaps Edison, but that, as well as the total number of moves, remains unclear. Beyond that it is unclear how many apartments the family shared as a two-parent household and then a single-parent household. The one identified above is the New York City residence. The place they moved to in New Jersey is identified by name, London Terrace, and is located in Paterson, New Jersey. This move not only puts them in bigger apartment, but also places them in a neighborhood that is rapidly becoming dominated by Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. The apartment Yuniór later shares with his friend, Cut, is also in New Jersey, but it is unclear if he remains in the same city as his mother.

Again, there is very little description of any of the apartments. The place Yuniór shares with his mother sometime after his father leaves again is only described as having "cracking plaster walls [and] stained cabinets." (94) The place also has high window latches that Yuniór's mother cannot reach, and that

she insists he check, so that they will not be robbed. This is the only memory with any emotional context, his mother's fear of what is outside and might try to come in, and her desire to create a safe space. There is a sharp contrast between the places called home in the United States and the one in the Dominican Republic. Her fear in this context is a counterpoint to Yunior's memory of her security in the tiny house in Santo Domingo. He has no memory of her being afraid in that house, in that impoverished neighborhood. She had fears and worries there too, but she did not feel threatened by what or who was outside the house. Therefore, this one emotionally inscribed recollection of a New Jersey apartment is not enough to change the residence into a house of memories, but rather it serves as referent back to the house on the island, another place on a different map.

None of the apartments where Yunior lives in New York or New Jersey function as memory palaces the way the small three-room house in Santo Domingo did. They are monuments to periods of time in his life, but only as a generic space; the details are missing. The cracked plaster walls have no particular meanings attached to them. Those memories are only images that lead nowhere; they do not serve as referents to any specific events or habits on the current map.

Like the other dwellings, the apartment that Yunior later shares with his drug-dealing business partner and friend, Cut, has few memorable interior details. What little is revealed is a repulsive comment on the smell of his

mattress. There is no bedframe and hardly any other type of furniture in the apartment. When his downstairs neighbor comments on the abundant light in his place, he knows she is just being nice because “[a]bout all [he] had in the apartment was light.” (115) This apartment, this fuzzy dot on Yuniór’s map, holds three notable memories: 1) smoking and dealing weed, 2) Aurora, his on-again, off-again drug-addicted girlfriend, and 3) Cut, who has enough sense to tell Yuniór to quit letting Aurora back in.

While the memory map of the Dominican Republic was of places with few connections in between, the one he builds of New York and New Jersey are of routes and connections between locations that barely exist. They are gaps in the map of Yuniór’s memory. This is the beginning of the narrator’s attempt to control and manipulate the narrative through an increasing amount of detail about routes and locations outside of his own personal domain, places that are void of personal meaning. The location of the apartment shared with Cut is never even revealed, but the regularly traveled route to their drug clients is somewhat detailed, and although there is some geographical context, it is fragmented, like scraps of a map. “We hit the crowd at the bus stop, pass by the trailer park across Route 9, near the Audio Shack,” and later “we take the Pathfinder out to South Amboy and Freehold” (179). They are distractions, a way of distancing himself from the possibility of choosing a different path or having any real connection – not based on superficial actions and traits – with another person. His girlfriend Aurora is the perfect example of the shallow

connections he maintains. He chooses a relationship with someone whose whole being revolves around the next hit; she cannot possibly establish any sort of deep connection with him, so it's easy to keep letting her into his space. He has no real connection to either the girl or the space. Whatever emotions and connections he had to this time and these places and people have been deleted from the narrative. He has sucked out any meaning, leaving a map full of filth and degradation, but sanitized of feeling. He is simply fulfilling his place in the world as he believes his geography dictates.

There is one notable exception to the sparse descriptions of U.S. living spaces and that is in the chapter titled "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, Halfie." It is structured as a dating guide based on Yuniors personal experiences in the world of multiracial dating. Using the second-person narrator allows the reader further into Yuniors thoughts and how they coincide with or contradict his actions and speech in these dating situations. At the same time, the use of second-person narration provides some distance between narrator and the subject, allowing a small bit of control that the previously mentioned first-person narrator achieves through a deficiency of information. The vulnerability of first-person narration would allow the reader to be uncomfortably close, while second-person narration allows Yuniors to promote the illusion that the actions and thoughts revealed might exist only in the realm of possibility, not necessarily part of the real and remembered past. Anyone could follow the instructions: "Shower, comb, dress. Sit on the couch and watch

TV. If she's an outsider her father will bring her, maybe her mother" (143). It implies that perhaps this is someone else's route on the map.

Though all of *Drown* openly deals with racial conflict, both internal and external, "How to Date..." most clearly showcases the performativity of race in personal and social interactions that James Scott details in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1-5). Because the issue of race is so obvious in the title and the thoughts, it is easy to miss the fact that geographical performativity is just as important. The first part of the performance for a date takes place in the apartment – only on nights when his mother and brother are gone – and is an exercise in denial of race and class. Each place and object in the apartment that he attends to is a marker of class and/or race, and he makes adjustments to make himself seem more white and less islander: "Take down any embarrassing photos of your family in the campo, especially the one with the half-naked kids dragging a goat on a rope leash" (143). The "problem areas" are the refrigerator, the bathroom, and the photos. These things all correspond obviously to memories of dating, but more importantly to evidence of his insecurities, and memories of not feeling good enough as is. Some of the temporary modifications in the apartment are always the same, regardless of race or geography: "Hide the pictures of yourself with an afro." (143). However, others depend on where the girl is from. When hiding the government cheese in the refrigerator you have to take geography into consideration: "If the girl's from the Terrace stack the boxes behind the milk. If

she's from the Park or Society Hill hide the cheese in the cabinet above the oven, way up where she'll never see" (143).

The attempt at being more white and less poor continues throughout the date as do the negotiation of race, class and geography. When a mother wants to meet you, for example: "Don't panic. Say, Hey, no problem. Run a hand through your hair like the whiteboys do even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa" (144).

The choice of a dinner destination is also governed by where the girl lives; girls from different places require different actions: "If the girl's from around the way, take her to El Cibao for dinner," but "[i]f she's not from around the way, Wendy's will do." (145).

The same geographical principle holds true for expectations of sexual activity, but race also plays the most important role in the prospects for physical interaction. Evidently, white girls are easy: "If she's a whitegirl you know you'll at least get a hand job." (143) Local girls are harder to persuade because they will have to see you in the neighborhood and at school (147). "Halfie" girls are just as conflicted about racially associated physical characteristics as you are, and end up talking more, dumping their own insecurities on top of the ones you already have: "Stroke her hair but she will pull away. I don't like anybody touching my hair, she will say" (148). When the date is over, there is almost a sense of relief – no more pressure to act a certain way or be a different person, no family.

I believe this chapter is not as personally revealing as it first seems. Even though Yunior's thoughts and actions are presented in plain sight, the focus is always on the different girls, or rather types of girls. The girls are an intentional misdirection, just as the detailed routing is in the other chapters. Ironically, the evasion is revealed in the date preparations; all of his actions are about hiding who he is, because he buys into the cultural script that says that his physical characteristics, economic status, and geographical origin determine his identity and his value as a human being. That means that hiding is the only path to control that he knows, and he is skilled at hiding inside his own map and at his own monuments.

During the time Yunior is still living with his mother, there is a very limited description of the neighborhood, and a few specific places in the general area named and given some geographical context as well as personal context. The two most important sites are the mall and the pool, and they are connected to two important people in his life, his mother, and his former friend Beto. The only general physical description comes from Yunior's memory of what Beto hated about the neighborhood – "the break-apart buildings, the little strips of grass, the piles of garbage around the cans, and the dump, especially the dump." (91) It is ugly, but not specific. This depiction could apply to dozens of neighborhoods in the New York/New Jersey area. The other micro-photos of the area are of fencing, dandelions, the pool rules sign, and pear trees – "four to a court, probably to save us all from asphyxiation." (91) Does Yunior

remember anything larger than these close-up pictures? It is difficult to speculate, because he is carefully controlling the type and amount of information being shared. The map, with its atypical monuments, is the narrative. Control the map to control the story in the telling. Yuniór's map is a fractured mirror of his past and the reflected picture reveals some empty spaces in the memory and in the history. Focusing on the details without the context of the neighborhood is an obviously deliberate gap designed to put space between Yuniór and his own story. Memory does not exist without context, but here it is stripped away to dampen any emotional connection between the narrator and his narrative.

The two locations in this unnamed area that receives more attention than any other are, as mentioned above, the mall and the pool. The brief description of the route to the mall illuminates a little bit of Yuniór's relationship with his mother, and his actions inside the mall, both present and past, depict the history of his friendship with Beto.

Taking his mother to the mall demonstrates the obligation that Yuniór feels to his mother as her navigator. This sense of obligation is geographically illustrated in two different ways. The first is that he notes that he could be in another part of town where he could "make a fortune on Saturdays selling to those kids going down to Belmar or out to Spruce Run" (96). The second is the route to the mall, which is a hassle, given that it involves a lot of walking through an area that could be hostile territory, and then taking a bus. "[W]e

have to walk two miles through redneck territory to catch the M15" (95).

Naming the "redneck" neighborhood as a territory indicates the social and racial division between this area and his own.

The bus part of the route to the mall reveals another aspect of the mother-and-son relationship. He is hiding a significant aspect of his life from her, which is how he makes his money – dealing drugs. He keeps his head bowed and his cap pulled down over his face, "praying that nobody tries to score," (96) because he recognizes a lot of people on the bus from his dealing. Yuniór remembers her denial of this obvious reality through the picture of her physical demeanor during the trip: "She watches the traffic, her hands somewhere inside her purse, doesn't say a word." (96) Like a statue, she is a monument to two aspects of their relationship: obligation and denial. She asks and he fulfills his duty; in return, he hides and she lets him. Interestingly, the things he hides from his mother are not the things he hides from the reader, who can read the map and see the drug-dealing and skanky girlfriends and dirty apartments in all the barely-there places along the way.

There is something else he hides from his mother: the reason behind the disintegration of his friendship with Beto. She knows they were close friends, although she is also unaware of the activities they shared that help form their bond. He and Beto had also spent time at the mall, and they did a lot of shopping, or rather shoplifting. They even had a regular route for the shoplifting that Yuniór calls "looting." First was the bookstore, then the record

store, followed by the comic-book shop and Macy's (97). Even later, after he has ended his friendship with Beto, he still follows the same route, but without the stealing. The description of the track through the mall is perhaps the first place in the book where the repetition and circularity of Yuniór's roads and paths becomes obvious. In "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" Freud posits that "the patient repeats instead of remembering" (Marxist.org). Yuniór's map is full of circles and backtracking, but his patterns reveal as much or more about who he is than does the map, the narrative, itself. They escape his control, because although he can hide inside the memories of his route-making, he cannot erase the imprint his repetition leaves behind. Trying to forget through repetition only reveals to the reader the patterns, which are a text of their own that we can interpret as Yuniór's failure to go beyond what he believes to be his familial, racial, socio-economic and geographical destiny. He wants to forget this, but it still shows up on his map.

Yuniór's maps include places both on and off the grid. Those on-the-grid places include the library, bars, a diner, and particular neighborhoods – some of them are included because they are areas where he sells drugs. The off-the-grid places are generally buildings and apartments that have no official designation; they are simply interstitial places where people gather to drink, do drugs, and have sex. An illegal dump site also makes it onto the map, a place to sit in the car and look at trash. Beyond description, Yuniór offers very little commentary on the everyday sights/sites of his life. They are just places he

enters or sees on a regular basis. These places are on his memory map, but they are devoid of any meaning, mile markers on a path that always comes back to the same place, nothing gained, nothing lost. The effect of these empty places and routes is to connote to the alert reader that Yunior's life, paths, and spaces are nothing in the middle of nowhere.

Yunior and his friends have a regular route between these places. Drinking at the Malibou and eating at the Franklin diner are regular activities on the route. There is also a gay bar that is on their routine cruising loop. They never go in; instead they shout insulting names as they go by. There is not a destination, only stops on the way to where they started. Yunior is making all the moves that are acceptable to his peers and playing the part of a red-blooded Dominican male on the streets of the U.S.; he is fulfilling what he and others believe to be his geographical destiny. Where he was born and where he lives now are supposed to mean something about who he is. He is not willing to color outside of the geography/identity lines.

Yunior's map is full of circles and dead ends. "I deal close to home, trooping up and down the same dead-end street" (106). He may not have realized it at the time, but the Yunior that remembers and narrates knows that the expression "dead-end" applies to more than just a street. The map reveals so much without him having to discuss his feelings or ideas about the future. He can hide under the routine, but the maze of a map reveals that he is trapped by his own actions, by his own choices. He lives in a way that makes

him feel like he controls this place, with the young men who are his friends, men like his father and brother who embraced unquestionably the Dominican machismo that marked them as “real men.” Yunior is terrified of being revealed as different, because different means less than masculine. Being accepted means respecting the cultural boundaries that define who is included and who is excluded (Stein xi-xii). Staying inside the boundaries is safe, and those boundaries define his own personal map that keeps him trapped in a landscape of drugs, trash heaps, run-down bars and a mall.

Stealing at the mall was daytime, all-weather entertainment, but the hot summer nights were spent at the community center pool with kids and teenagers from all over the neighborhood. When night fell, Yunior and Beto would join the crowd. The remembered image of the crowded pool allows Yunior to recall not only the sight of the kids and the splashing water, but it also opens up other sense memories – the noise that made the abuelas shout at them, the smell of the chlorine, the feel of gliding through the water and touching the tiled bottom. His private places are hidden in shadow, but this very public place is a site rich in multi-sense memories. Its image enables him to re-imagine the physical experience but recreates the mental and emotional experiences connected to it. When Yunior looks at all the people in the pool, he feels the passage of time; that experience remains the same for succeeding generations of kids, but he is getting older. “Fuck me, I say. I’m not the oldest motherfucker in the place, but it’s close” (*Drown* 92). The place, and its

memory, remain the same, but he does not. The pool is another monument, where site and meaning are solidified in his memories.

One of the things that changes is his friendship with Beto, and the events that change and kill it are also connected to the pool. After swimming, Beto and he would usually go to the former's house and watch porn. Two nights – "Twice, that's it." – turn out differently than the others. The first time Beto reaches into Yuniór's shorts in the middle of a film, and although Yuniór's verbal reaction is "What the fuck are you doing?" (103), and he is scared, he does not stop Beto from bringing him to orgasm. Yuniór practically runs from the house afterward; he is upset and confused. Metaphorically speaking, he has travelled this route before, and it appears on his map of the Dominican countryside. This incident with his friend is reminiscent of his childhood experience of being touched by a strange man on the bus. Both times someone just reaches over to touch his genitals, and although the childhood molestation is by a stranger, and the incident initiated and completed by Beto is with a friend, they are both unexpected, uninvited, confusing and upsetting for Yuniór. Both incidents are also mentally and emotionally pushed away, because neither the child nor the young adult is able to deal with what happened. Any frightening incident initiates fight, freeze, or flight response, and in both cases Yuniór freezes and then flees. The freeze, the space of the trauma, is recorded on his map just as much as the flight. Afterwards, in the Dominican and New

Jersey instances, he retreats into denial and never directly says anything about either incident again.

THE BOY WITH NO FACE

As mentioned above, Yuniór's first journey's recorded on his Dominican map is the bus trip with his brother, Rafa, to find a boy whose face was destroyed as a baby when he was mauled by a pig. They had heard about him from other people and wanted to see him for themselves. When they find him, he and his brother pretend to befriend him until the opportune moment when they are able to rip off the bag the boy, Ysrael, wears as a mask. Their response to his appearance is horror, quickly followed by cruelty.

The section of the book that belongs to Ysrael – told in two parts, at the beginning and at the end of *Drown* -- is narrated in a decidedly different tone and with a different level of detail. It describes the life of Ysrael from an omniscient and sympathetic third-person perspective.

Cruelty has followed Ysrael for his entire life, and he responds by creating a brave and daring persona for himself. Ysrael is a superhero, empowered by his mask, but also limited by it, because it does not hide his identity. Everyone knows who the masked boy is, and even if that haven't seen it personally they know the damage it hides. Unfortunately, it is the only physical protection he has, and therefore Ysrael must protect himself with his mind and imagination as well. It doesn't matter that no one else believes, only that he does.

Ysrael's superpowers are speed and invisibility, but they are not unlimited, so he must spend much of his day lurking through his territory. Having a territory is all about control. He patrols that territory every day, taking the same route and seeing the same people. He also tries to prepare himself for a foreign land, Canada, where he hopes, and believes, that he will go one day to have the surgeries that will fix his damaged face, mangled horribly by a pig when he was just a baby.

Every part of Ysrael's daily route has a purpose or a particular delight. He begins at the guanábana tree, where he does pull-ups on its branches, and then he continues his strengthening exercises by picking up the coffee dehusker. Even a superhero has to practice. After a brief rest the route he patrols begins in earnest, running past his uncle's coffee bushes and the pasture. "[A]nd then he says FLIGHT and jumps up and his shadow knives over the tops of the trees and he can see his family's fence and his mother scrubbing his little brother..." (153). Ysrael continues on to the disgusting areas outside the bars to collect coins, and then to the church where Father Lou teaches reading and writing and English phrases he will need outside his own territory, up north. Once a week his route includes the bookstore, accompanied by the Padre, where he buys a comic book. After his lessons he crosses the street to talk, with his hands, to the little girl who lives in the house. He never goes inside; she never comes outside, but she is closest thing he has to a friend, even though the glass of the window always separates them. It is an apt metaphor for how he

participates in the life of the village: hiding, avoiding, and ignoring those who call him names – No Face – and malign his good deeds. When he carries a cat across the street, a man accuses him of eating cats, another adding on “He’ll be eating kids next...” (155). He uses his cloak of invisibility to protect himself from all of it.

Upon first meeting with Ysrael, the boys talk to him, and Yunior is especially open to the boy, but the end of Yunior and Rafa’s encounter with Ysrael is no different than the boy’s experiences with other children, and many adults. He is the object of their scorn and violence. They hold him down, remove his mask, and uncover his mutilated face. The journey to see Ysrael, and the encounter with him, are covered, along with other memories, in the first chapter, but Ysrael gets a chapter of his own further into *Drown*. This is only true for him and Yunior’s father, and they both are significant, in different ways, to the narrator’s own story. Ysrael is his metaphysical parallel, and his father’s story is integral to Yunior’s own. They are both mirrors that help remind him of his own journey.

Ysrael is a lot like Yunior, running routes and hiding for protection. They need to stay in constant motion in order to exert some sort of control in an environment where they have very little. The threats to each are different but very real. Ysrael faces the threat of humiliation, scorn and physical violence. Yunior wears his own sort of mask and fears being revealed, being seen as anything less than a tough macho male. They both need their masks to feel

strong. Perhaps that's why Ysrael gets his own chapter, told from his perspective. As a narrator, Yunior can reveal his own fears and vulnerabilities, while keeping himself safe, mapping endless routes that only reveal what he is willing to. Telling Ysrael's story is safer, removed from him by a great distance. Ysrael is not painted as an object of pity. He has strength, speed and invisibility: "He says STRENGTH and the fat boy flies off him and he's running down the street...." (156) The masked boy's powers of invisibility are imagined, but Yunior also uses the invention and imagination of recall to hide inside his own narrative. While his maps tell us about his life, they reveal very little of his true self. Ysrael's imagined super strength is a reflection of Yunior's desire, but like Ysrael, he is really only playing at being strong, performing the expected role of Dominican masculinity.

They both need to extend their maps to new places because neither is going anywhere. Ysrael continues to hope, while Yunior pretends not to care, and they both are stuck in routes that, regardless of the complexity, always come back to the same place. They are constantly running, but only going in circles. Only one of them has the power to change their route and access a wider, and perhaps more revealing, map.

PAPI

Yunior tells the story of his father's absence from two perspectives: one is his own and the other is apparently that of his father, but filtered through Yunior. The first is that of a child whose father leaves and does not return for

five years, a child who does not know his father, does not even recognize him when he returns. The second perspective draws a map of the father's journey from the family home in Santo Domingo to New York and finally New Jersey, and recounts Ramón's experiences through dialogue and thoughts, but told as though they are Yuniór's memories, even though they are obviously borrowed memories from his father, his mother, and Nilda, the second wife (concurrent with Virta, Yuniór's mother). Virta's relationship to Yuniór had chilled before they left the Dominican Republic, and it never warmed back up; she may have shared some facts, but she and her son did not discuss her relationship with her husband, Ramón; she, in fact, hid her correspondence with him after he left. Yuniór's relationship with his father was never good, and Ramón probably shared parts of his story that made him look good, but he would never have mentioned any personal failings or weaknesses. Given Yuniór's low level of access to his father's history, the level of detail in the account indicates that a significant portion is composed of Yuniór's own imagining. From the very beginning, Yuniór takes control of his father's story, making it his own with one sentence: "My father, Ramón de las Casas, left Santo Domingo just before my fourth birthday" (163). In the sense that everyone's story is rooted in the stories of other people, usually parents, it is indeed Yuniór's story to tell. He continues to insert reminders that this is his story, and that he controls the narrative, by inserting sentences and words that refer back to him, especially pronouns: *my, me, our*. There are also sentences that clearly communicate the

impacts of Ramón's actions on the family back on the island: "These harangues [about ignoring his family] must not have bothered his conscience much because that year he sent no money" (187). In truth, the father's perspective is really that of Yuniór, the adult, remembering, combining, composing and inventing the story of Ramón's five years away from his family.

Making his father the main character gives Yuniór the advantage of relating his thoughts about Ramón, as a father, a husband, and a man in an indirect manner. He can reveal as little as he wants about himself, and practically nothing about his feelings. Except for the last few pages, the chapter's tone is one of a report. No matter how much his father caused pain for him and the rest of the family, there is no discernable emotional catharsis over the telling of his father's abandonment and neglect. None of the people in the chapter show very much emotion, and if there is any, it is told with blunted affect. The sharpest sentiment expressed is Virta's remark to her son before he goes to see Nilda (the other wife): "Give my regards to the puta" (206). Nilda eventually reveals the deep sadness she felt after Ramón left her to go back to his first family, but for her it is long past and no longer troubles her. Her revelation is one brief sentence and delivered in a matter-of-fact manner. Yuniór's only mention of personal emotion is even flatter than Nilda's, as if he is stating a statistic: "Anger has a way of returning" (206). The sentence lacks a personal pronoun, which lengthens the distance between him and the feeling. His map has taught him that people leave him – physically and emotionally –

because that is how his world is; he will play his part, but he will waste no sentiment over such abandonments.

The dearth of emotion is only one way for Yuniór to accomplish his goal of controlling his narrative. He uses the words and memories of himself and others, along with imagination, to compile the history of his father's first five years in the U.S. There are different perspectives and versions, but Yuniór is the one to decide what is included in the final version. The statement that his father's story is his story is doubly true. Not only does it explain a period of time in Yuniór's life and show the origins of his own story, but it also establishes Yuniór's claim of ownership. It belongs to him, and he can shape it as he will. He effectively annexes his father's map to his own. Ramón is gone, and his dubious legacy is this map, with its small collection of monuments to the damage he leaves in his wake. While not expressing an explicit opinion of his father, Yuniór says all that is needed to communicate his sentiments on the man and reveals it to anyone who cares to know. Yuniór, of course, makes sure this new section of map reveals no more than necessary about him, personally, while also exiling his father.

THIS IS HOW YOU LOSE HER

This Is How You Lose Her was published sixteen years after *Drown*. The time periods that are covered overlap somewhat, but *This Is How...* moves beyond youth into Yuniór's adult professional life as a university professor.

Although there is a chronological overlap in the subject matter, the memories of these two versions of Yuniór are very different, not in conflict with each other, but rather that the later novel fills in some of the large gaps left by *Drown*. In both books Yuniór searches for meaning, and that quest to make sense of his life leads him back to the maps of his memory. The maps are something he can visualize, and each place on them, each route, links him to the remembered past, and allows him to recreate and relive those memories in writing. The recreation of the geography of his life is what he requires to make his story meaningful, and to understand how he arrived at his present self. *Drown* offered only a partial geography, yet even there we are able understand his story and what lies beneath the words and the maps because he shows us large pieces of his maps and some of the people and places on them. As geographers Denis Cosgrove and Mona Domosh note in "Author and Authority: Writing the New Cultural Geography," "[W]hen we write our geographies we are not just representing some reality; we are creating meaning" (35). *This Is How...* creates a more complete, more meaningful geography, one that reflects the kind of openness of thought and emotion that the more mature narrator is now willing to share. The first lines of the novel are already defensive, but in contrast to *Drown*, they do admit some small spark of vulnerability: "I am like everybody else: weak, full of mistakes, but basically good" (*This is How...* 2). The primarily site-based versus the route-based mapping not only represents some of the changes in the mature Yuniór's life – some chapters represent an

older, somewhat more stable Yunior – but also the beginning of a decision to stop hiding who he is from himself and from others. This type of mapping is a way to let the reader further in than in *Drown* did, but still exercise control over the shape and amount of information offered. Just as Yunior lets us know through his stories that he is deceptive in his dealings with other people, especially women, we should expect no less deception in his narration. Díaz says of his character that he is “a top-notch prevaricator” (Barrios 5). Yunior still hides things as a way to protect himself, consciously and unconsciously. As mentioned in the above discussion of Yunior’s sexual assault as a child, the mind will distort and even bury memories that are too difficult to deal with (Caruth 153 – 154). Therefore, when Yunior takes us inside his family’s apartment, we are not viewing a photograph or a documentary, but rather the way he remembers the site.⁷

Somewhere along the way Yunior has lost himself, and by navigating the maps of his past he revisits the person he was and the process of becoming the man he is now. What was lost along the way to his father’s and his culture’s ideal of masculinity? That ideal, tied up with his family’s poverty and the Dominican and U.S. versions of racial prejudice and gender roles, weighed him down and turned him about in *Drown*, so that he became someone that other

⁷ Frederick Bartlett affirms this idea in his monograph *Remembering*, when he says that “memory is an imaginative reconstruction of past experiences, rather than an exact replica” (93, 205 – 209).

people told him he should be, instead of the smart, bookish, imaginative boy that he was, because it was too dangerous to be that vulnerable and to allow any pain to show. In the last part of this novel, as he writes this book, he is moving down the path to find who he can be in the future.

In philosopher and historian Howard Stein's discussion of psychogeography, he points out that "...who one is, comes to be experienced as indistinguishable from where one is, and in turn where and who others are perceived to be in relation to one's own" (15). The mental and physical boundaries people put between one another become defining lines between who is one of us and who is one of them (xiii-xiv, 3). As we have seen throughout this dissertation, location is a powerful influence on what we experience, how we perceive and, in turn, remember, that experience. This fact decodes Yunior's memories of the people, places, spaces, and sites of his life, and what happens when he crosses the boundaries between his "us" and "them".

Living inside the borders of a community, can give one a feeling of belonging to its members, but belonging implies certain commonalities among the people of the community – culture, language, rituals, etc. *Drown* shows Yunior doing all he can to maintain his sense of belonging to the Dominican community of the London Terrace neighborhood, through these superficial signs. While he ventures outside, he always returns, and he maintains the behaviors and attitudes of a young Dominican male living in the U.S. His

lifestyle of meaningless sex, drugs, sometimes going to school, and sometimes working helps him fit in with his specific community – young Dominicans of his generation and socio-economic class. Crossing the established physical borders of his community does not mean that he ever crosses the cultural ones. If he were to reveal any differences, then he might no longer belong.

This Is How You Lose Her begins in New York with an adult Yunion; but our discussion begins with the community of his youth, where Yunion learns to work very hard not to stand out as different, but rather to fit in, because he wants only to belong. Changing locations later in life does not automatically undo the ingrained attitudes and actions of a lifetime; therefore, it is important understand where those attitudes and actions originated and set the pattern for years to come. The geography changes later, but his patterns do not. The same person is simply making new maps and filling in gaps in the old ones, but at some point, the *This is How...* version of Yunion realizes that if his life and relationships are going to improve, then he has to look back and figure out how he got to where he is, personally, physically, relationally, and geographically. An insightful comparison can be found in the film *Memento*, where the main character Leonard says, "We all need mirrors to remind ourselves who we are" (*Memento* 2000). The character's own ability to remember has failed, so he uses the mirror (and the tattoos he adds to his body) to guide his actions for the following day. Yunion's version of these mirrors are his maps and his

writing, allowing him to see himself and his mistakes in order to, hopefully, stop repeating them and find a better way forward.

While *Drown* skips from childhood to early adulthood, *This Is How You Lose Her* covers the late childhood, adolescent/teen, college, and professional years that are spent in the London Terrace neighborhood of New Jersey. Yunior reveals new parts of his Jersey maps that he had hidden in *Drown*, often more personal pieces than previously shown. The apartment home he shares with his mother and brother is depicted more fully – though not all at once – and other characters from the neighborhood, and their dwellings, are introduced. School, as a social rather than academic construction, is barely more than a dot on the map, but it still receives more attention than it does in *Drown*.

Yunior's first experience of the United States and New Jersey is the London Terrace Apartments, a space that is rapidly transformed by forces of prejudice – racism and classism – creating the phenomenon known as white flight. As Dominicans move into the area, the previous tenants, mostly white, move out. Yunior only has a few opportunities to play with the white kids before they are gone. Even though both groups must be roughly equal in terms of income, the factor of race means that they are not equal in social class. The people who populate this new development will be either white or of color, but not both, and the outcome is that the white people stage a tactical retreat.

I use *tactical* here in the sense that Certeau defines *tactic* versus *strategy*. As he explains, a strategy assumes a "proper" (own) space from

which a subject exercises power, and that space also separates the subject from the other, while “[t]he place of a tactic belongs to the other” (xix). The siteless subject – now the whites in this limited space - employs tactics instead of strategies because it has no space/place of its own and uses movement from place to place to find one into which it can insinuate itself, but only with limited success, and rarely permanently (Certeau xix). Yunior’s father, Ramón, has moved his family in and will not be leaving, and other Dominicans are coming in as well, so the white people move out to find a space where white is the dominant color; but if people of color start to settle in the new area, they will move again. The Dominican’s have now gained a site of their own, and the white people have become the other in the London Terrace neighborhood.

Yunior’s father, Ramón, is invested in this space for two reasons: The first reason is that for most of the time since coming to the United States, he had lived in tiny, shared apartments.⁸ London Terrace is new, clean, comparatively spacious, and a good place to locate his family after bringing them from the Dominican Republic, because the apartment showcases his success and respectability. The implicit message is that other residents have reason to respect him, and the time that he had spent away from his family is now not important because he spent that period achieving this success. The second reason he establishes a base in this neighborhood is to reestablish control over his wife, Virta, and the sons he left behind five years earlier. His

⁸ The exception is his most recent residence, which belonged to Nilda.

approach to this goal is to put them in a barely populated building and isolate them from other people, even to the extent of forbidding them to go outside without permission. He makes clear to them that he is in control of this space, the apartment. In a U.S. culture and socioeconomic class where he receives no respect and is given no authority, the only people and the only place he has power over are his family inside this apartment. Yuniór's memories reveal the plan in action.

The narrator's recall of this place and time reveals little of the surrounding landscape or even the size of the apartment complex. The first impressions are of snow and cold, marking the difference between Yuniór's island home and this new place; and young Yuniór's desire to explore is thwarted by his father's directive to take off their boots and coats and listen to how everything works, inside and outside. The map is limited because Yuniór's life is suddenly limited by a man he does not know, but who claims authority by dint of biology and power. Yuniór narrates the surprise and wonder he felt upon seeing the large size of the space, comparing it to the tiny house in Santo Domingo, but his emotions change rapidly. When Yuniór decides to go outside, without permission from his father, he quickly learns that doing anything without permission is a punishable offense: "Had I known my father even a little I might not have turned my back on him.... He grabbed my ear and wrenched me back onto the couch" (*This is How...*122). Confusion takes the place of wonder, as he looks up at his father's face. Later he feels resentment

at not being allowed out of the house, because he knows the reason is not the cold, as father says, but rather his father's desire for control: "[I]t's too cold, Papi said once, but really there was no reason other than that's what he wanted..." (123). Even as a nine-year-old, Yuniór understands that the new family dynamics are a struggle for control of the space, one which begins inside the apartment, but rapidly extends to the outside. Virta, Yuniór's mother, is depressed but resigned to her new life in her assigned space, and she has no sympathy for her son or his rebellion. Who will control how the map is made and what it will show? Yuniór's map reflects that power struggle between his father and him. He expands the map by rebelliously going outside and interacting with the other children, adding sites and territory, whenever his father is not home. His crime is double, crossing the group boundaries of race (us and them) and also crossing his father's machista boundaries of a man controlling his space and the family within it. Although in the future Yuniór will extend his London Terrace map to the neighborhood, the city and other parts of the New Jersey, this apartment will remain the cartographic center of the geography of his youth, even after his father leaves for the final time. More than anywhere else, the narrator allows the emotions retained in the visual memory of this place to illuminate the map of his remembered life.

The London Terrace apartment is a pivot point in Yuniór's life, turning him from his carefree but impoverished childhood to an urban working-class youth, with a strict and controlling father. His life is changed completely in

terms of family, friends, language, culture, school, and climate. Not least of all the changes is the presence of a father in addition to his brother reinforcing – and physically enforcing – what it means to be a real man, a Dominican man. He has to start drawing a different map, adding new sites with new meanings. The apartment is site number one on his new map, because it is not just a new place to live, but also a space where Yunior must hide himself and pretend that he is everything his father and brother expect of him. This space marks the beginning of a new direction in his life, one that takes him from pretending to becoming a Dominican stereotype. Readers can only understand this because Yunior, the narrator, shows us more than the image; he also lets us follow the deeper memories that are attached to it: the abusive words and actions, the evolution from innocence to sexual promiscuity, and the smoking and selling of marijuana.

In spite of Ramón's investment in his space and his control, he is not invested in his wife, Virta, or his sons, Yunior and Rafa. He leaves them permanently, sometime between Yunior's tenth and fourteenth birthday, but his shadow remains through Virta's phone calls to him, Rafa's hatred, and Yunior's confusion about the reason for his abandonment. Yunior's later sexual behavior and understanding about what it means to be a man is also twisted by the enduring presence of his father's legacy which continues throughout his life.

ANYWHERE BUT HERE

In the penultimate chapter of the book Yunior acknowledges that influence in a back-handed sort of way by recounting a piece of his father's life when he had been in the U.S. earlier, away from his wife, Virta. The first major difference between this section and the rest of *This Is How...* – and the whole of *Drown* – is that the first-person narration is not from Yunior's point of view or even that of his father, but rather his father's mistress, Yasmín; and the chapter is more about her than it is about Ramón, his father. This is Yasmín's first and only appearance in Yunior's story, but Yunior gives her control over the narrative and lets her do her own mapping. He does not appear in this chapter, nor is he mentioned; in fact, he seems to not even exist. The plot and the timeline do not fit with any other part of his story. Virta is mentioned as living in the Dominican Republic but has no living sons. A new character appears: Enriquecillo, never mentioned anywhere else, was Ramón and Virta's son who died before the time in this chapter. Another difference is that Ramón buys a house in the U.S., a fact new mentioned elsewhere in the narrative histories. He also works at a commercial bakery instead of an aluminum processing plant. By including this chapter Yunior effectually moves his father even further away, so far that their existences never cross paths.

Yunior and Rafa's absence – nonexistence – from this chapter mirrors their own father's absence from their lives. Unfortunately, although he does eventually leave them again, his shadow stays. He has been, and remains, Yunior's own personal phantasm, following him around, while Yunior makes

mistake after mistake. Placing Ramón in this chapter is like placing him in an alternate reality where he cannot touch Yuniór or his life. His father still exists, is still the same kind of person, but in this single chapter, Yuniór the narrator is officially excommunicating him from his own existence. He is the unfortunate recipient of a postmemory;⁹ whatever made his father into what he is was inescapably passed on to his unknowing and unwilling son. In order to potentially break the patterns of self-destructive behavior, as Yuniór aspires to do at the end of the book, his father and all the baggage that came with him have to be pushed out of Yuniór's life. His father had built his own world once, without his original family, and now it's time for Yuniór to build one out from under his father's heavy shadow. The chapter effectively boxes up his father and puts him away in another life and another time. This section of the book is one that the reader will probably read twice because it does not seem to fit, and that is the whole point, because Ramón has no place on Yuniór's narrative map.

The things that do not change between the DR and the US are the prejudices toward dark skin, weak men, poverty, and women, all tied in with dwelling place. The new socioeconomic environment may change and how and

⁹ Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as follows: "Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before — to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." (An Interview with Marianne Hirsch)

why these factors mix and stick together, the exact nature of the intersectionality that lives in this new country, but it always comes back to people forming alliances and aggressions based on their race, class, gender, and space. The tendency for everyone to impose an identity on someone else based on these factors, and the fact that that imposition from without becomes an enormous influence on the formation of identity, is at the core of Yuniór's need to retrace and decipher his maps.

When Yuniór is around fourteen or fifteen, his brother Rafa is diagnosed with cancer, and within the space of one to two years, he dies. The sections that the narrator devotes to the last part of his brother's life illustrate clearly the intersectionality that existed in the U.S.-Dominican community of his youth, especially the descriptions of the Rafa's girlfriends and his relationships with them. There are three who are mentioned by name: Nilda, Tammy Franco and Pura Adames, whom he eventually marries not long before his death.

Nilda is Rafa's girlfriend when he first becomes ill, and it is immediately obvious that their relationship is completely based on physical attraction. Everyone in the neighborhood knows that she has been sexually involved with numerous men, who have all used her and discarded her, as does Rafa: "She was what we called in those days brown trash" (32). Almost all of the women and girls, especially those in the girlfriend/sexual partner set, are categorized by their skin color, their social station and their sexual tendencies. Yuniór usually mentions skin color first in his descriptions, which is not surprising,

considering how ingrained and internalized Yuniór's awareness of and adherence to the racial codes of U.S. and Dominican culture is. The "trash" part of the expression is an intertwining of class and gender prejudice. Good families keep their girls from running around and hanging out with boys, but boys who run around and have sex with every girl they can are strong and manly, and this behavior has no implications for the family's place in the social hierarchy of their community. Girls should have very different social maps than boys. Yuniór understands this and sometimes feels guilty for playing his stereotypical macho role and watching Rafa do the same without interfering. The memories that make up his own maps implicate not only Rafa, but also himself in the perpetuation of the unequal roles of males and females, glorifying one for the same behavior that penalizes the other.

Although at first, Nilda makes a flimsy effort at resistance, Rafa controls her, and she accepts it. He, however, feels free to have sex with other girls while he is still with Nilda: "He might have seemed enamorado [sic] with Nilda but he also had mad girls in orbit" (36). Yuniór had wanted to warn her about getting involved with his brother, but he knows that she never listens to warnings about the men to whom she attaches herself; he writes: "I wanted to warn her, to tell her he was a monster, but she was already headed for him at the speed of light" (33). Rafa's misogynistic nature is a theme of all his relationships; when he first decides Nilda is going to be his, he pulls her to the back of the bus where she sits on his lap, and he puts "his hand so far up her

skirt it looked like he was performing a surgical procedure" (34). When he gets off the bus, he puts his hand to Yuniór's nose and says, "This is what's wrong with women." (34), demonstrating his complete hypocrisy and lack of respect for any aspect of women. The response he provokes from Nilda he then treats with contempt once he is finished, because he believes that women are objects to be used and then thrown away. Rafa decides he is finished with her when she tells him her dreams of a future together with him. He has no interest in a future with her, or with the other girls he is sleeping with throughout his relationship with Nilda. When she finally leaves him, Rafa explains to Yuniór that "she just had to go" (38). Yuniór does not understand, but he knows that a week later his brother is seeing another girl. Yuniór's memories of watching Rafa's behavior with women are clearly expressed on his memory map, and we can see the influence those memories had on the direction of Yuniór's life as he later begins to mimic his brother's behaviors.

The next girlfriend is only mentioned in one paragraph, but her description provokes the most powerful confession of internalized racism in the whole novel. Yuniór describes the girl as a "cocoa pañyol" (39) from Trinidad, with an affected English accent. It is the contrast between her dark skin color and her sophisticated-sounding accent that leads to his conclusion: "It was the way we were back then. None of us wanted to be n-word¹⁰. Not for nothing"

¹⁰ While Díaz uses the offensive term throughout his writing, I have chosen to redact the term in this chapter, not to sanitize his text, but due to the injurious impact of the word and in solidarity with other critical race scholars who have chosen to do so.

(39). Yuniór resigns himself to the fact that the prejudice of racism, which exists as part of the social fabric of the time, cannot be overcome. He and his counterparts have accepted that hateful name as part of who they are. They do not own it and re-brand it, but rather believe that it defines their life and their identity. Yuniór's acceptance of the status quo extends beyond race; he has been trained by his father and his brother to believe that women exist only for men; he accepts this and acts accordingly.

Rafa has become, and, at this point, Yuniór is becoming more like their father, although they both hate him for cheating on their mother and then abandoning them to live with a younger woman. In the same way, Yuniór knows how his brother relates to women, and thinks about warning Nilda, but he does not even try in spite of the fact that he has been friends with her for several years. The obstacle for Yuniór, the thing that prevents him from speaking up, is once again the need, motivated by fear, to identify with the cultural attitudes of his geography, the attitudes that he will carry with him into adulthood. This is the beginning: the place where the large, all-encompassing map begins: "That was the summer when everything we would become was hovering just over our heads" (37). The narrator is looking back at the place – the apartment and the neighborhood – where his own inability to maintain, or sometimes even initiate, a healthy relationship with a woman began. The phrase "I am where I am" (Stein 22), should perhaps be amended to I am where I am and everywhere I have been: because Yuniór, the narrator, still has

all those places and their rules inside of him. By writing his history of place, Yunior can take what was internalized as a part of his identity, take it out and examine it, and also let his readers do the same. His need to understand the rules of his map is summed up perfectly by Adrienne Rich's parallel statement about herself in *Blood, Bread and Poetry*: "I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist, I am created and trying to create" (212). The particulars are obviously different, but the need and the effort are the same. Yunior remembers the maps and the sites where the person he is, was created, and he uses his ability to recreate through memory, imagination, and composition, to construct something new, the book, and perhaps the possibility of a different way of living away from that place.

The next named girlfriend, Tammy, is already an ex-girlfriend by the time she appears in the narrative, and only reappears because she learns that Rafa has been diagnosed with cancer. Yunior remembers Rafa and Tammy's past relationship as "A two-year-long public-service announcement" (*This Is How...*94), because Rafa had been physically abusive to her. Although she is married now, she still comes to see Rafa, but she will not enter the apartment. Rafa has to go outside to sit in the passenger side of her car, which Yunior refers to as "the bitch seat" (95). He may feel sorry for her, but the language he uses to describe her, and the situation, imply complete disrespect for her and women in general. Even the car seat is not safe from gender prejudice; the

term “bitch seat” assumes that the man drives – is in control – and the woman sits on the passive side. He accepts the way women are treated in that place – just as he accepts racial prejudice – and also perpetuates it himself. Poet Noël Araud, as quoted by Gaston Bachelard, states: “I am the space where I am” (155), and Yunior certainly is this space in New Jersey, infused with misogyny, racism, and classism, just as his father, his brother, his friends, and even his mother are.

The issues of classism, and gender bias, are important features in the story of the third named girlfriend, Pura Adames, and her relationship with Rafa. Much of the prejudice against her comes from Yunior and Rafa’s mother, as well as her prayer group, the “Hallelujah Crew” (100). During Rafa’s cancer treatment, he decides he needs a real job, and he finds one at the Yarn Barn. Pura meets him there during his short-lived stint at the business, and Yunior first sees her crying over his brother after he had collapsed at work, and not long after that she begins showing up at the apartment. She had never met Rafa before his collapse, but she begins a persistent campaign to insinuate herself into his life, his family and their house. He first describes her as “[n]ot Dominican like my brother or me but *Dominican* Dominican. As in fresh-off-the-boat-didn’t-have-no-papers Dominican” (100). There is obviously a divide between those who have grown up in the U.S. and are legal, and those who have not, and are not. In the same vein, Yunior characterizes her as dense, because she starts coming around before Rafa feels better. He also describes

her as a "total campesina" (101) because of the way she carries herself and the way she speaks. Contrary to his mother, he thinks she is not so bad, and gives her some compliments, most of which are backhanded. He says she is pretty, and "...a hell of a lot better than most of the ho's" (101) Rafa brought around. A statement that compares her favorably to Rafa's other "ho's" is not very flattering. She is honest about her past, but Yuniór's exact words are "...way too honest: within a week she'd told us her whole life story" (101). It is a sad story, although Pura's reliability is questionable, because the purpose is to manipulate the family, especially Rafa. She does not want just a relationship; she wants to get married in order to legalize her immigration status. She is constantly dropping obvious hints about marriage and papers. When he is feeling better, Rafa takes her downstairs to the brothers' bedroom to have sex, although, unsurprisingly, he is not interested in marriage at this point, even though he unexpectedly treats her better than the other women in his past. With his tacit approval, she settles into the household and begins to act as though she is in charge. Virta is livid, and treats Pura rudely, trying to let her know that she is not wanted; Pura seems to be oblivious. Meanwhile, Rafa directs his cruel tendencies toward Yuniór – even more than usual – and his mother, because he seems to enjoy the tension that Pura's presence creates in the household. When he shows up with Pura after a two-week disappearance and announces they are married, Virta kicks them both out: "Please, I would like you and your puta to leave my house" (106). Yuniór remembers and

composes this part of his story as an invasion and subsequent expulsion of an enemy, and he maps it as such. The center of his map, the apartment, now gains battleground status.

Virta has dealt with all kinds of girlfriends that Rafa has brought home, some of them paper-seekers like Pura, but this latest girl brings out an intense animosity that Yuniór has not witnessed before now. Virta's fears are for her older son, but those fears are translated into anger and hatred, which are easier than fear, because fear supposes a lack of control, while anger feels like taking control. She expresses her feelings in the ways that are acceptable, and even expected, in the space where she resides. Instead of reacting directly to Pura's manipulative and controlling behavior, she – and the prayer group – insult her dark skin, her low-class/campesina ways, and her inappropriate-for-a-female sexual morals. Her younger son has dark skin, and has been shamed for it, but that does not stop her from mistreating Pura. Like Pura, Virta came from poverty, and even now would not be considered a part of an upper class, but now there is a divide: Pura is new and other, not a part of the greater "we" that defines this place. Her tactics are an attempt to become legal, to be included in the community. The strategy of Virta and her friends intends to keep her out. This is their space now and they want to exert some control over it (see Stein xiii – 3). They also perpetuate the tenet of male dominated culture that real men can and should have sex with multiple women to prove their masculinity, but women should remain pure until marriage and then faithful to their

husbands. Accepting the status quo only perpetuates it, but there is a certain amount of comfort in knowing the rules and playing by them, and women gain a certain amount of power, or at least the illusion of it, by using the rules against other women who have broken them. In spite of the fact that Virta and other women of the prayer group have been victims of the rules of male dominance, they do not blame any of the current problems on Rafa. The irony of Pura's name is not lost on them, and they consider her fair game because she is trying to achieve a higher status by ignoring the rules with which they pretend to comply.

The ideas about race, class and gender that are so openly expressed and widely accepted in the community permeate this part of Yuniór's map and memories. They are a part of the place and the people. In Yuniór's memories some of those people are nearly always pictured in the same place, the apartment – his mother, his brother, etc. – and they serve as memory markers for Yuniór, and they wear the prejudices of this place like vine-covered monuments, just as Yuniór does. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, speaking of the mentality and physicality of memory, has expressed the idea that when a person settles into a space, the space also settles into the person (362 – 365). Yuniór's actions and his speech are an embodiment of this type of habitation, of community attitudes and values. Yuniór does not worry about the fact that his mother comes home from her factory job and then does all the work around the house; he simply appreciates the beauty of male privilege while he sits on

the couch and watches television. He plays down his intelligence and skips school because his friends and family place little value on education or being smart. He admits that he would trade his high IQ for "a halfway decent face in a second" (31). Getting high and hanging out is acceptable. He does hide his marijuana, the smoking and later the drug-selling, from his mother, but not from anyone else. Any others who disapproved have been removed from his map.

It is easy to think of Yunior's memory map as something that he observes, separate from himself, but it is in fact a part of him. The recalled geography of his life comes from within; he recreates the map, and it recreates him, past, present and future. Recall is not static, but rather a process, an interaction between person, past, place, and other people. It is physical as well as psychic, and we live it in the present. As Pallasmaa notes: "Remembering is not only a mental event; it is also an act of embodiment and projection" (365). Yunior's memory propels his present attitudes and his actions, and it is the repeated results of those repeated actions that finally shove him in front of the mirror for a more conscious examination of where he was, where he is, and where the road goes next.

When Yunior eventually leaves the London Terrace neighborhood, he goes to Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. In spite of his poor high school attendance, we learn that Yunior is extremely intelligent and has been reading college level books for several years. At one point he comments:

"I had an IQ that would have broken you in two..." (31). His relationships with women during his university days follow the pattern he has learned from his father and brother. He recounts his memories of two relationships he engaged in during his time in New Brunswick: Alma and Veronica, whom he called "Flaca." As his memories show, he has clearly carried the Dominican "real man" values with him; London Terrace still resides within him.

Alma is an art student trying to recover her Dominican heritage, even going so far as to learn Spanish to communicate better with Yuniór's mom. For him it is an ideal relationship – great sex, no deep commitment – but he ruins it anyway by cheating on her with another student, Laxmi. Alma learns about the other woman by reading his journal, and Yuniór realizes he has been caught when he comes home to her sitting on the stoop with the journal in her hand. He is not sorry for the cheating, but he is "overwhelmed by a pelagic sadness. Sadness at being caught" (47). He appears to be only sorry that he will never be able to have sex with her again. The terse closing line of the chapter is the title of the novel: "This is how you lose her" (50). His own memories show him what not to do, but he cannot break away from the well-worn paths of his map.

When Yuniór tells the story of his relationship with Veronica Hadrada, la Flaca, he takes a more reflective stance, and recalls that he was alternately honest and dishonest with Veronica about his expectations, which, aside from sex, are pretty much nothing. After what seems to be a few weeks into the relationship he tells her "It wasn't supposed to get serious between us. I can't

see us getting married or nothing..." (80). She makes it clear that she is more invested in him when she tells him that he can call her whenever he wants, because if it is up to her, she will want to see him every day. He recalls that his level of commitment was low: "Weekdays I never called you, didn't even miss you.... But Friday and Saturday nights, when I didn't meet anybody at the clubs, I called" (81). In spite of that fact that he has sex with other women, and that Yunion and Veronica have widely divergent levels of commitment, the relationship goes on for two years. He does feel some affection for her and enjoys having someone he can call on for a sexual encounter. Yunion reveals that his feelings for her do grow over time, but his revelation is done indirectly, saying that "his boys" are worried about his long relationship, concerned that he might want to settle down with her, because in their world of his youth, in which he and his friends are still stuck, that would be a bad thing. It is on this same page that he feels the need to say to himself, about himself, "You were whitetrash from outside of Paterson and it showed in your no-fashion-sense, and you dated [n-word] a lot" (82). He has left the London Terrace neighborhood, but it has not left him. He maintains the same stratified prejudices about women – the class they come from, the color of their skin, their usefulness to him sexually – and has gathered a group of friends who holds the same views. They also measure others by their own status, in terms of the color and class of the women they date.

New Brunswick and Rutgers may be a new section of Yunior's map, but because of the choices he has made, the map is colored the same as the older New Jersey sections. The interactions with women are the same, the friends as well, and in both places, he maps sites, but not connections. He also maps the people as landmarks attached to particular places. He recalls, for example, Alma doing other things in unnamed places, but his memories of their interactions are connected only to the apartment. Veronica is a little different, perhaps because he considers the possibility of her being a more permanent fixture in his life – thought not because he is deeply in love, but rather it just seems practical. The likely possibility is that the long-term nature of their association provides the opportunity for Yunior to form more than one place-to-person connection. His strongest recollections of her are linked to four sites – a classroom where they both took a Joyce class, his apartment, a bookstore in Montclair (interestingly, across from the map dealer), and Spruce Run – a New Jersey State Park. The other people who constitute a landmark associated with his apartment are a faceless, nameless group, identified collectively as 'the boys.' They are Yunior's shadowy Greek chorus, repeating to him the lessons he has learned from the past about gender roles, hierarchies of race, and stereotypes of class. They discourage him from committing to one woman: "I remember: The boys keeping an eye on me. They figured two years ain't no small thing, even though the entire time I never claimed you" (*This Is How...* 82). He cannot leave them off of the map, because they perform an important

role, but as a memory monument the boys have become a monolithic being and voice; their individuality is faded and worn as though by time and erosion. This is not the profound forgetting that Paul Ricoeur refers to, but it is what he calls *psychical trace*, less than a full, vivid memory more of an impression (415). The impression the boys left with him is the attitude of disrespect toward women. They are gone, but their influence did not fade away with them.

Yunior's relationship with Veronica is what the image of the apartment evokes most strongly: the relationship is fully remembered, except for why it fell apart. There is no memory of a big fight or revelation of Yunior's cheating, only a slow disintegration. One night after having sex, he wakes up and finds her gone. In Yunior's words, "That's the most we can hope for. Nothing thrown, nothing said that we might remember for years" (*This Is How...*83). The only trace of their break-up is her absence which remains present in his memories. Ricoeur describes this type of trace as an impression in wax left by a signet ring. The ring is gone, but the evidence of it remains (415). Yunior and Veronica's relationship was too one-sided and too weak to flourish, but strong enough and long enough for Yunior to remember well, even though it is long gone.

All of Yunior's relationships with women have a single pattern in common: cheating, lying, and getting caught. His mistakes come from his view of women as being useful only for cooking, cleaning, and sex, a view that was born in Santo Domingo and continued to develop and mature in the London

Terrace apartment and neighborhood. He does go beyond the map of his past by engaging with women who have interests similar to his, with whom he can converse, sometimes, but those intellectual connections are secondary to sexual pursuits. He remembers the mistakes he has made but cannot seem to stop himself from repeating them compulsively. His behaviors surely meet the definition, often attributed to Einstein, of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

There is one relationship from London Terrace that does not fit the aforementioned pattern, because it is not so much a relationship as it is a pattern of abuse by a single female teacher, Miss Lora, who lives in his building. Here the narrative takes a step back in time to discuss Yuniór's college years, and then even further back to his years in high school, but this is a memory, a part of the map that he has been hiding from himself and from the reader. After recounting the destructive patterns of his relationships in New Brunswick, he goes back to deal with where, and with whom, the foundations his brother and father laid began to build into something more than ideas; this is where they were first put into action.

Lora is added to his London Terrace map through his own recalled thoughts, and also the remarks he remembers his friends making about her. She is skinny, "como un palito" (*This Is How...* 149), and all his friends agree that she is not a pretty woman, but Yuniór finds himself fascinated with her, because she is so different from the other women he knows. From his point of

view as a sixteen-year-old he thinks that the relationship with his teacher is one of equals; he even feels that he is the one to initiate it, but she encourages him, knowing he is interested, with touches and looks; she talks to him about the things he is interested in – mostly the coming destruction of the world – and she invites him to her apartment to watch a movie about the coming apocalypse. He is vulnerable, still missing his dead brother, smoking weed until he cannot see straight, and “messed up and alone like a motherfucker” (150). When Yuniór goes to her apartment, they immediately have sex, and he immediately feels like he might be in love. He notices in her apartment a series of pictures of the other young men he recognized from his younger days. He knows enough not to ask, but addresses it again later, when he notes that there are more photographs than he saw the first time. He never consciously makes the accusation that she is a serial abuser, but it is glaringly obvious to the reader. In direct contradiction to his earlier feelings of supposed love, he resists when she begins to reinitiate sexual contact about an hour about after their initial encounter: “This time your wits are back so you try to find the strength to fight her off. I can’t, you say. And just before she pops your rabo in her mouth she says: Really?” (159). Even before meeting Miss Lora, Yuniór had been having nightmares because of his obsession with books and movies about the end of the world. The longer he continues seeing her, the worse his apocalyptic dreams become, to the point that every morning he finds himself spitting out blood from biting his tongue. He feels guilty for cheating on his

girlfriend, Paloma, and feels like he is a *sucio*, like his father and brother – whom he never wanted to be like – but he keeps going back in spite of his best intentions. When he contemplates his behavior and compares it to that of his father and Rafa, he comes to the conclusion that infidelity must be an inherited trait, something he has no control over. He resigns himself to the apparent fact that he is like Ramón and Rafa, who certainly set the stage by displaying their faithless ways. Yuniór's so-called role models were simply showing him part of what it means to be a real Dominican man; this is how he can belong to the territories where he was born and raised. He is caught between wanting to belong, to stay safe inside cultural territory, and hating the behavior that he has learned as necessary. He hates it because he remembers how his father's and brother's sexist attitudes and behaviors had hurt his mother and made Yuniór afraid to show any disapproval.

His sexual encounters with Miss Lora trigger a pattern of behavior that will continue throughout his adult life. He believes that he has cheating genes, so why should he fight the inevitable? It is only later, as a university student, that a girlfriend tries to make him understand that his relationship with Miss Lora was abusive. He obviously did not believe that at the time it was going on, and later he is skeptical about his girlfriend's claims that the woman should be in prison. Accepting those claims would mean that he accepts that he was victimized by a woman; being a victim, especially of a woman, is completely antithetical to what he believes is the ideal of the real Dominican man. All that

he has learned about gender roles while growing up in London Terrace makes this a terrifying prospect, because it would separate him further from the social and cultural territory of his home. He is alone. The guilt and intensifying end-of-the-world dreams indicate that some part of him knows that having sex with Miss Lora is not a right or good thing. Even if Yunion denies that he was sexually abused by the teacher (and by others in the past), the drastic change that she causes in how he sees himself and the self-contempt he feels is traumatic, and his denial cannot protect him from the effects of this twisted relationship.

When he leaves London Terrace and Lora behind, arriving at Rutgers, he implicitly acknowledges that the situation was abusive: "Even after it's behind you and you've blocked her completely, you're still afraid you'll slip back to it" (169). He dates "like crazy" (169), but he's convinced he will never be able to have a relationship with someone his own age because of her. Yunion never tells the secret until his senior year at Rutgers; he tells his girlfriend – "the one you finally trust" (170) – and he feels relieved at letting the secret go and the fact that she doesn't hate him in response.

Telling the secret and opening up to the idea that the connection between Lora and him was abusive does not cure him of the effects it had on him. If the family's apartment is the place where learned his prejudices about gender, then Lora, is the woman who sets in motion all that harmful potential that Yunion never wanted to be unleashed in him. Yunion has been a victim of

sexual abuse before, and he also had unwanted sexual contact with one of his male friends (both mentioned in *Drown*), two situations that left him angry and confused, and then Miss Lora came along and lit the match. Marked in red on Yuniór's map are those two apartments from which he physically escaped, but both still follow him around. Even if the places inside are harmful, Yuniór, like many victims of abuse, revisits them because at least there he knows what to expect. In psychology and related fields this phenomenon is known as repetition compulsion, and it causes "a person to repeat a traumatic event or its circumstances over and over again" (Esposito 1). One of the ways this compulsion may be played out is through sexual promiscuity; it is a way (an unhealthy way) to deal with anxiety or guilt, and to seek mastery over the original abuse and abuser (Timms 22). Yuniór's sexual behavior is a response, not a conscious plan to re-enact or overcome his abuse/abuser, but the memories – recalled, suppressed, and distorted – influence and disrupt his relationships with other people. The abuse and his reactions to it become part of his inner geography, affecting how he will traverse the paths that still lie before him.

MAGDA

The malignant presence of the London Terrace neighborhood carries not only into Yuniór's first adult relationships but also into those that he tries to make and maintain after university and well into his academic career. The very first chapter of this book tells the story of his relationship with Magda. Part of

the chapter is devoted to her wonderful qualities and why she and Yuni6r are so compatible, but more space is devoted to why and how it all falls apart. He is living in Brooklyn and has already begun his career as a university professor, and she lives in New Jersey with her family. Yuni6r's map of Brooklyn is almost blank, with only a few context-free sites – the movies, *The Crossroads*, and he adds some sites from New Jersey. All of those places are ones they visited together. This portion of his map is entirely devoted to her, but she becomes nothing more than a monument to his failure and the loss of someone he loves. The relative blankness of the Brooklyn map signals an inability or lack of desire to remember anything but her. His failure to stay faithful and the revelation of his infidelity lead to the destruction of another possibility for real love. Months before their relationship ends, Yuni6r has an affair that lasts all winter. When Magda finds out, Yuni6r begs her to forgive him and convinces her to come on the trip they had been planning to the Dominican Republic, but it is too late to repair their relationship, even before the trip begins. He tells the story of their break-up as though he had only cheated with one woman, which is enough for a break-up; but given Yuni6r's history, that woman is probably the only one he was caught with. Even though he is more open in this book than in *Drown*, Yuni6r has made an art of only admitting the bare essentials, while including irrelevant nonessential details that make it seem as though he is telling everything, and he skims quickly over important information. One incredibly duplicitous statement he makes leaves a lot of room for other episodes of

cheating: "The thing is, that particular bit of stupidity had been over for months" (*This Is How...3*). The phrase "that particular bit" leaves open the question: "What about the other bits of stupidity, and what about those months between ending the affair and its discovery?". In that same paragraph he says: "We weren't as distant as we'd been the winter I was cheating" (3). He treats the cheating as a minor detail, while hammering home the point that they were closer now. He cannot lay out a map, because it would show much more than he is ready to reveal, to the reader or himself, and that leaves a lot of blank space. The memory is distorted, whether intentionally or subconsciously. His focus on making his version of history reasonable, while making Magda seem like the one who was being unreasonable, shifts his recall of the past. There are only scant and isolated locational details until he and Magda go to the Dominican Republic. She is a monument with no clear placement. Yuni6r tells nothing of where she lives; the only thing spoken about his own apartment is that it is in Brooklyn. The extreme focus on one object or person is termed as a sharpening strategy by cognitive scientists; it is "a means by which our brains and mind select and enhance specific things to hold them in our memory" (Schwartzberg L 674). Yuni6r holds fast to Magda in his memory, making an almost bare map with large lieu de memoire in the middle.

Yuni6r hopes the trip to the Dominican Republic will help them repair the relationship. Truthfully, only Yuni6r has any hope; Magda is done, but says that she does not want to waste a vacation that was already planned. The

difference in attitudes toward the island, and the kind of space it is, reveals the irreconcilable differences between the two people. For Yunior, the island is home, family, his childhood, and history. According to Howard Stein's theories on territory and belonging, Yunior is inviting Magda into what he considers his territory; he is among his people (3-15) and wants to share it all with Magdalena. For her, in contrast, the island is a vacation destination; she is not interested in getting acquainted with his grandfather, seeing his childhood stomping grounds, the beauty of the interior, or the history of the island. She wants to go to the beach, and not just any beach, but Casa del Campo, which Yunior calls "The Resort That Shame Forgot" (*This Is How...* 13). The resort is completely separate from the rest of the island and advertises itself as being its own country, not really part of the Dominican Republic, but rather its own little colony of rich white people, a space where privilege and pale skin are celebrated. The only Dominicans there work as maids, servers and groundskeepers. As a guest, Yunior feels distinctly out of place and resents the racist and classist elements that dominate the landscape. The Dominican Republic that Yunior wanted to show Magda was part of his own map, the DR of his memories; he wanted to show her part of himself. Casa del Campo is not a map that he made, and he resents the fact that it ends up attached to his own.

The situation is ironic given that he knows racism and classism are a part of life in the Dominican Republic; he experienced them both as a child living on

the island among Dominican residents, but this place is an affront to his territory; the Europeans and Americans are obviously not his people. They are invading a Dominican space without the permission of those who inhabit this place. In spite of his own experiences, he neatly avoids the fact that as a child on the island he actually had been made to feel that he did not belong, was not even Dominican, but Haitian, because of the same racist ideas. As an adult, however, he seems to love Santo Domingo and embraces the island where he spent the first nine years of his life, but while he loves to visit, he admits that he does not want to live there. The capital city is now an even greater and more important site on his life map than it was when he was a young man in the U.S. As an adult he visits at least once a year, but typically more often. If he traveled to the island as a teenager, he never mentions it, making it seem that the site disappeared from his map for a while. As an adult he portrays a happy childhood on the island, although the earlier narrative *Drown* had bared evidence of pain and difficulty. The memories as an adult are thus colored by both nostalgia and avoidance. This sort of recollective evolution is described by Susan Schwartzberg in her study of an Italian artist, Franco Magnani, living in California, who only painted scenes of his childhood village in Italy before the war. In many ways the paintings were quite accurate, but the views portrayed by some paintings were impossible. For example, things that could only truly be seen from multiple points of view were painted together in one frame, as though one could see them all from one perspective. Like Yunior, Franco

Magnani left his childhood home at an early age, so some of the views could be explained based on age and height, but others were the product of distorted memories that enabled him to capture the idyllic (in his memory) experience of living there (Schwartzberg L 679-696). Yuniór seems to experience a similar distortion of memory in his adult perspective of the island. The passage of time may not have been enough of a protective mechanism for some trauma, and thus those memories have become inaccessible, forgotten for now. In his discussion of blocked memory Ricoeur states that "trauma remains even though it is inaccessible, unavailable. In its place arise phenomena of substitution..." (445). Finally, Yuniór's experiences of the island when he visits now are those of an adult, not a powerless child, so he is able to assess the prejudices he encounters with less sensitivity and, apparently, no traumatic after-effects. The map may not be accurate, but it is easier to look at.

LAND OF THE LOST

The last chapter of *This Is How You Lose Her* begins with a well-worn theme: "Your girl catches you cheating" (175). This is how a six-year relationship, that turned into an engagement along the way, ends. He never names the woman, but he says that he believes that she was 'the one.' She told him from the beginning that the one thing she would not tolerate was cheating, and from the beginning he cheated, throughout all six years, with some fifty women. "You swore you wouldn't. You swore you wouldn't. And you did" (175). Even though she stays for a few months after discovering

his affairs, she cannot forgive his past infidelities or deal with his sexual addiction. If he has been cheating on her this long, in spite of repeated promises, there is no reason to believe he will change. In a last-ditch effort to keep her from leaving he tries to walk a different path. He writes poetry to her, blocks e-mail messages from the women he cheated with, stops drinking and smoking, goes to sexual addiction meetings, and blames everyone from his father to Santo Domingo for his behavior; these are a few of the resolutions and accusations from a very long list. Her eventual departure from his life is a complete break from him: no contact, no communication. He moves out of her Harlem apartment and begins to obsessively make contact with her. He stops when her sister calls and threatens him with a restraining order. Then he moves back to Boston.

There is no map of Harlem. It was obliterated with the relationship, or simply tossed aside as having no merit since she removed herself from his personal geography. Only three destinations in this final chapter, merit mention, and they are all outside the U.S.: the Dominican Republic, Boston, and New Zealand, and there is one lone mental photo of a beach in New Zealand. She had wanted to go to the beach where some scenes from *The Piano* (1993) were filmed. Seeing the beach, or even imagining it, brings back the memory of the movie, and the beauty and deep sadness that the image of the beach evokes, making it an appropriate place for Yuniors and his fiancée

to finally realize that what they had together is irrevocably broken.

BOSTON

When Yunior moves back to Boston, he pretends to be okay, but in reality, this moment initiates five years of bad decisions, poor judgement, obsessive behaviors, denial, depression and injuries. He reverts to all the behaviors he had resolved to change and begins to behave even more erratically. Hearing her favorite musical group makes him cry; he loses his temper with students and friends and has to remind himself not to drive to Harlem to see her. On top of old bad habits and unpredictable moods is the fact that he hates Boston. He has felt the effects of racism his whole life, but in Boston, it is more evident and openly practiced than he remembers dealing with before. He is called *n-word* and *towelhead*; white people scream at him and throw things, and he is stopped by security every time he steps onto the Harvard campus, where he teaches. His change in geography is also a change in the level of racial prejudice; the map of Boston is bleak. In spite of his ascent on the social and economic scale – as a Harvard professor with the corresponding salary – his skin color marks him as suspicious, possibly criminal, and worthy of scorn and hate by the white population. The white people who treat him this way make assumptions about his socio-economic status as well as his morals and loyalties based on his dark skin. His map of Boston is truly ugly.

During the first year after his fiancée leaves, Yuniór falls into a deep depression; he simply comes to a halt. He stops going to the gym, bathing, shaving, washing clothes, sleeping, and some days he barely leaves the bed. His map has collapsed in on itself and seeing no path forward he looks at the window one day, and he considers just jumping. One of the reasons he does not jump is the thought she might still forgive him. He references 9/11 indirectly, but obviously, when he tries to explain his feelings over the loss of his relationship by saying: "Like someone flew a plane into your soul. Like someone flew two planes into your soul" (*This is...* 179).

Another set of spaces that hold negative and unflattering memories are the clubs that he continues to frequent. These are the places where he meets the women that he has sex with, whether or not he is in a relationship. He knows the cheating leads to the break-ups, but he keeps going back; he continues treading the routes of old maps that lead nowhere. The clubs are also where he later fails to find anyone willing to go home with him. Some of the women are simply not interested, but others reject him because he is Dominican. They link him to the same stereotypes he has been narrating about other Dominican men, and in Yuniór's case the stereotype again seems accurate.

The Boston map also includes Yuniór's running routes that are associated with both racism and physical pain, when he decides to start running and working out again to lose the pounds he gained during his depression. The

streets he runs are where he hears many racial epithets being shouted at him, and this only confirms Yuniór's opinion of Boston as a racist city. In spite of hateful comments from bystanders and motorists, he begins to run obsessively – morning and late night. He calls it his new addiction and running helps him not to think about the ex-fiancée. "[E]very time the loneliness rears up in you... you tie on your shoes and hit the paths and that helps; it really does" (187). He has to abandon the routes he has mapped when the excessive running leads to plantar fasciitis. He tries to ignore the condition, since denial is how he has dealt with most of the negative issues in his life, but this is one limit he cannot ignore; the pain is too great to continue. When it becomes clear that he can no longer run, he decides to practice yoga, which also becomes an obsession. Central Square becomes part of his personal map, because that is where his group practices. It helps him let go – three years later – of the fantasies that his former fiancée will come back to him. Central Square becomes another place associated with pain when Yuniór ruptures a disc in the middle of a sun salutation. Yuniór's map of Boston is filled with sequential sites of pain, both emotional and physical.

Another place on Yuniór's personal map of Boston is the Harvard campus. For him, it reinforces the racist character of the whole city, compounded with the prejudice that he has experienced throughout his life, beginning on the Island and never relenting, not even within his own family. Campus security officers regularly stop him to check his identification, because

he is a person of color and surely must not belong. He is also frustrated that most of his black and Latinx students transfer away from Harvard after a semester experiencing the racist atmosphere of the city and the university, supposedly a place of enlightenment.

Even now as a professionally successful adult, Yunior is still haunted by the phantasms that were created before his birth. He does not mention Trujillo in either *Drown* or *This Is How You Lose Her*, but Junot Díaz himself calls Yunior “one of Trujillo’s children” (Barrios Interview 7), in imitation and in suffering. Like Trujillo, he carefully curates and controls the information: “[T]he present dictator of the novel is Yunior” (7). The haunting is not only personal, but cultural, and no one talks about it, but all Dominicans still feel it. The extreme machismo, misogyny (Derby 1113-1116), and racism (Bishop, all) are traits that Trujillo did not invent, but certainly cultivated, inflated, and exacerbated in a society that he ruled over absolutely. All those characteristics are behind Yunior’s suffering, not just culturally, but also personally, because his father and brother imitated the dictator, consciously – in the case of Yunior’s father – and unconsciously. Trujillo is the phantasm in the national crypt. What psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok describe on a personal basis – internalizing the trauma, keeping it a secret, and never speaking about it out of fear, - the steps that create the crypt - happened on a national and individual basis. The paths Yunior takes and the maps he makes reflect this personal and cultural haunting.

The last chapter not only shows Yunior taking the same kind of routes, and thus building the same kind of maps that has done previously, but it also repeats the narrative practice, seen in some of the previous chapters (“Alma”, “Miss Lora”) and in *Drown*, of using second-person singular address. As much as Yunior is writing a book about himself, he is speaking to himself, speaking into the mirror of maps that he has created and traveled. He has reached a point of crisis in his life: the break-up of a six-year relationship and engagement, physical struggles, and depression. Self-reflection and searching for insight offer the only way out. At this low point he is ready to examine his maps to see how he came to the place where he is now. He reaches for the past, conducting an inventory of the maps and the sites and people contained within them; their images alongside his memory and imagination, allow him to recreate the spaces of his journey to this time and place. He can then either move forward or turn away in denial, treading the same paths and making the same mistakes. Writing *This Is How...* is both the exercise, and an attempted exorcism, of his memory and his way of beginning to move forward. At the end there is a tiny spark of hope; perhaps it will be enough: “In the months that follow you bend to the work, because it feels like hope, like grace – and because you know in your lying cheater’s heart that sometimes a start is all we ever get” (*This Is How...* 213).

Díaz claims that he purposely created the Yunior character in response to a challenge by women activists at Douglass College. They posed the

question: "What can male artists do that would align them with a feminist struggle?" (Díaz, Interview with Filgate 3). His response was to create a character that in his words, "... can map masculine subjectivities, can map masculine privileges, can map the masculine.... [The narrator] can create maps that implicate himself, and by extension, perhaps some of the gender formations that make a person like him possible" (3). *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her* are those maps tracing the why, the how, and the where of Yunior's life – his lack of control, his mistakes, his lack of hope, and his loneliness and longing for a home where he fits. The narratives also illustrate his formation, evolution, desperation, and confession, along with the barest of hopes that a man like him can free himself from the maps he has been born into and has made, and sketch himself into a new one, a better one.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PLACES INSIDE: SANDRA CISNEROS' *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET* AND *CARAMELO*

For a study of locational memory in first-person novels by American Latino authors, the work of Sandra Cisneros is an obvious choice because the events in *The House on Mango Street* take place almost exclusively in one neighborhood, and the narrator maps it well enough that the reader always understands where they are in relation to the neighborhood as a whole. Each space is imbued with the actions, people, and emotions of a short period of Esperanza's life. On the other hand, her longer novel *Caramelo* explores smaller places – houses, schools, a piece of beach – and the routes between them across a much larger map, but the reader always knows the remembered location of the narrator. In both works, the protagonists come to understand how their lives and identities have been shaped by the places and spaces they have inhabited.

Sandra Cisneros is the author of one novel (*Caramelo*), three short narrative collections (*The House on Mango Street*, *Woman Hollering Creek*, *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*), two collections of poetry (*My Wicked Wicked Ways* and *Loose Woman*), and several children's books. She is the recipient of several literary awards: The National Medal of the Arts, The Texas Medal of the Arts, the PEN Center USA Literary Award, the Fairfax Prize, a MacArthur Fellowship, and the Ford Foundation's Art of Change Fellowship. She is also the founder of the Macondo Foundation and the Alfredo Cisneros del

Moral Foundation, dedicated to encouraging and advancing the careers of aspiring and emerging writers. In addition to a successful writing career, she has worked at every level of the education system and continues as a community activist. (sandracisneros.com) Like Cofer and Díaz, Cisneros uses memory maps to emplot her own intersectionality, in terms of race, gender, and border crossings, particularly in the interconnected and loosely autobiographical stories of *The House on Mango Street* and *Caramelo*.

THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET

The House on Mango Street is Cisneros' most acclaimed and well-known work, receiving both accolades and criticism. It is made up of forty-four vignettes that tell the story of her community and her neighbors intermingled with her own thoughts about her struggle to find a place where she fits. There is no linear connection between the vignettes; what ties them together is Esperanza's narrative voice and the geography of the Mango Street neighborhood. All the actions and reflections take within the space of about a year.

The House on Mango Street was originally published as a children's book, but it soon found a broader readership, because the simple, and sometimes childlike, narrative is only the surface of a deeper story, of a sometimes light-hearted and other times painful childhood of a girl who is marginalized by poverty, gender, and race.

Esperanza defines who she is and who she wants to be – as a woman of color, a writer, and architect of her own life – by rejecting the place where she is and reaching for the place she wants to live and be. As the narrator looks back at the memory map, she has created of Mango Street, she sees that it shaped her, but did not and does not define her. As an adult narrator she has grown strong in her own sense of identity in opposition to the prevailing values of the neighborhood where she grew up. The intersection of poverty and race are determining factors in the geography of her childhood. Mango Street is affordable for the family budget, and it is not a place where they will stand out or be ostracized because of their skin color or origin, but based on Esperanza's remembered observations, the prospects for women in that milieu are few. The limiting role wife and mother confined to the house seems to be the fate of many women who live there, as a result of the male-dominated culture. The image the narrator remembers most vividly of the women on Mango Street is of them leaning out the window to watch the world in which they cannot fully participate. Windows are made for viewing, not for living. Esperanza remembers that such was the fate of her grandmother, for whom she was named, and she is determined not to repeat her life. "I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (Cisneros 11).

Esperanza is determined to break out of predetermined borders and defy those who would define her only as a poor Chicana girl from a lower-class Hispanic neighborhood. But to do that she must fight to understand and

express herself and then eventually to effect a geographical change that will take her away from this trap of place. She must leave Mango Street behind, but before that, she shows us the path of how she got to Mango Street in the first place and what it was like, by evoking a vivid and impactful map of the places and people of her neighborhood. As much as she wants to leave Mango Street, she also recognizes that it is an essential part of who she is. Her childhood friend Alicia, who already understands the power of place, tells her "Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you'll come back too" (107). Like Díaz's Yunió, her story is her map and her mirror, and it has the power to set her free. She will always have her map; she will always remember, and it will guide her forward, away, and back again, but it is not as imprisoning as Díaz's childhood map was. She is determined that the confines of this place will not control her.

Esperanza, the protagonist and narrator, is a girl living in a red brick house in Latino neighborhood of Chicago. In the narrative present, she is twelve to thirteen years old, but she speaks sometimes with the voice of a younger child and other times as a young teenager who is transitioning to womanhood. She has two brothers, Carlos and Kiki, and a younger sister, Nene. In the book's vignettes, Esperanza explores her neighborhood, describing the people and places that comprise the nucleus of her world. As we saw in Cofer's and Díaz's neighborhood depictions, this is a community in the stages of racial

transition; the white people are moving out as the Chicanos, Puertorriqueños, and Dominicanos move in.

As much as the people of Mango Street define the places where they live, the place itself also defines them in multiple ways. For Esperanza's family, the house is a step up from the sub-standard apartments in which they had been living. Having their own house now means no more dealing with landlords who will not maintain the apartments, and the house is something they own, instead of renting. The house thus, in some ways, symbolizes the possibility of moving up, being able to grasp at something better. In her study "The House (of Memory) on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Counter-Poetics of Space", Karen W. Martin describes the house as "a space of disappointment and dislocation" (54). She feels that she does not belong, a sentiment that applies not only to the house, but to the neighborhood as well.

From the very beginning the narrative creates a sense of movement: from apartment to apartment and finally to a house, and then the neighborhood explorations. Those places where Esperanza remembers living are the steppingstones that begin the narrator's journey to, through, and away from Mango Street: "We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot" (3). Even though the house is an improvement over what came before, it is also a disappointment. Esperanza's parents had described to

their children the house they aspired to have one day, but this Mango Street house was nothing like the one they had imagined or seen on TV. They all still have to share one bathroom, and the staircase is a hallway type, and the kids still have to share rooms. Having their own house is better than the apartments, her description focuses on her disillusionment with its size: "It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath" (4). In her article "Shortcomings and Limitations of Identity Politics and Intersectionality in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," Lilijana Burcar remarks that "the image of the house comes to serve primarily as a recurring symbol of women's domestication and estrangement" (34). While Esperanza's early disappointments in her family's house center on the confines, her later description of the house she desires is focused instead on the matter of controlling her own space and on the peace she may in a future place. In opposition to what she sees on Mango Street, Esperanza dreams of a future space where she can be the person she wants to be, with no limitations because of her gender, race, or economic status. She will not be like her grandmother who, as Esperanza recalls "...looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (11).

The symbol of the desired house is a point of criticism for some critics. For Burcar this aspiration is a sign that the narrator has bought into the "American dream" of mainstream U.S. society: "The novel presents patriarchal constraints as synonymous with and exclusive to the Mexican-American

community, and by extension to the rest of ethnicized communities" (34). It is true that the images of female subjugation here occur within the context of a Hispanic neighborhood, but saying Esperanza believes that patriarchal structure only exists in communities like hers is a stretch. Esperanza clearly equates these gendered limitations more with socio-economic class than with ethnicity, as she believes that, even as a Mexican American, she will be able to transcend the confines of Mango Street once she has success. Her father takes the family on rides to see the houses of the wealthy (where he works as a gardener), and these drives do fuel her desire for a house on a hill and with a garden, but mostly the comparison reinforces the financial resources that her own family lacks. At some point she stops going with the family to see the houses: "I am tired of looking at what we can't have" (86). To Esperanza, being poor is about not having choices, being powerless, something she desperately wants to avoid. She fights against the triple threat of being poor, female, and Hispanic. And for her, this struggle is inherently geographical.

Esperanza's own description of her imagined house includes none of the features that her parents had put into her imagination, such as staircases (not hallway stairs) and individual bedrooms, and, other than being on a hill, it is without geographical context, because at this point in her life the idea of racialized neighborhoods does not figure into her mapmaking. It is worth noting that Esperanza does not describe the rich peoples' houses themselves, only their placement (on a hill), but she does invent and critique the reason the

wealthy choose to live on hills – to not be bothered with the concerns of those below. She vows that someday, when she has a house on a hill, she will not forget where she came from. The physical aspects of her imagined future house are poorly defined – she only mentions a porch with flowers, and an attic populated by “bums,” who presumably have also escaped from their Mango Streets. (87). Burcar’s criticism about the equation between patriarchy and ethnicity also misses another important feature of the storytelling: The adult narrator relies on memories attached to specific places, with specific people, and tells the story from the point of view of a twelve-year-old girl who is concerned with her immediate circumstances, alongside the hope of escaping them in the future. Interestingly, the adult Esperanza, who did escape Mango Street, never mentions her current living circumstances in any way. We know she is in a different place, but we know nothing of the house or neighborhood where she ends up, as a writer. The most important thing about her current house is not its status or location, but just that it is her own.

Some of the places Esperanza has lived have been a source of shame for her, but except for the Mango Street house, that shame has been created by adults in authority. A nun from her school openly shows her horror when she sees Esperanza playing outside the apartment building on Loomis. “You live there?” (5). Esperanza had not thought about her own poverty until the nun spoke to her with such disdain: “The way she said it made me feel like nothing” (5) Only once does Esperanza take her lunch and eat it at school, whose

lunchroom is typically reserved for those who lived too far away to go home for lunch. Esperanza, feeling that eating at school would make her a part of a special group, begs her mother to pack a lunch and to send a note to the school. The nun at the canteen sends her to the Sister Superior who scolds her because she knows that Esperanza does not live very far away. The nun takes her to the window to point out where she lives, and the Sister Superior points to an ugly row of houses that is even worse than Esperanza's Loomis neighborhood. The nun's assumption that Esperanza is even more destitute than she truly is makes Esperanza feel so ashamed that she nods to Sister Superior's question "That one?" (45) and begins to cry.

The most apparent source of geographic shame, though, is the Mango Street house, and the reasons for that feeling are multiple. One, already mentioned, is the contrasting vision of the "real" house the parents had built up in their children's minds. Another is that Esperanza has already learned that people often look down on others whose living circumstances show their poverty, and as she matures she is increasingly aware of this shame. Finally, Esperanza does not want to belong to this house or its neighborhood. She wants a different place to map, but she feels that she is stuck with Mango Street.

Esperanza does not hate everything about Mango Street; she and her sister Nenny make friends and together they explore the houses, shops, and derelict places of the neighborhood. Her map-building begins immediately after

her family moves to their new house. Esperanza's first orientation to Mango Street comes from Cathy, who lives "upstairs, over there, next door to Joe the baby-grabber" (12), thus marking this place as one where danger lurks. Cathy's house is easily identified by the many cats outside and inside of it. Edna owns the building next door, and Benny and Blanca own the corner store. After Esperanza meets her neighbor, Cathy, the other girl informs her that they can only be friends for a few days because her family is moving away, saying "the neighborhood is getting bad" (13). Thus, the very first place on the new neighborhood map, outside of her own house, is one marked by racism, classism, and a sense of decline. Cathy makes clear that she is white when she tells Esperanza that she has a distant cousin in France and will one day inherit the family house and go to live in that country. Although her claims are likely untrue, her statement emphasizes not only her European ancestry but also a strong level of financial aspiration and potential. In the meantime, the influx of brown people makes the neighborhood now unsuitable for her white family. In her childish innocence, repeating what she has heard from adults, she does not seem to realize, or perhaps care, that she is talking to one of the people who is supposedly making Mango Street an undesirable place to live.

After Esperanza meets Cathy, she meets Rachel and her older sister, Lucy, who live across the street. Cathy does not like them because "they are raggedy as rats" (12), and "smell like a broom" (14). They are, from Cathy's point of view, another example of how the neighborhood is going down. Her

dislike is not based on personality or conflict, but rather their perceived lower standard of living. Esperanza, however, decides she likes them, and after she buys a share of a bike from the sisters, they all hop on. This gives Esperanza her first tour of Mango Street and also gives the reader a quick layout of the neighborhood.

Yomna Saber frames Esperanza's subsequent wanderings as an updated version of *flânerie*, a practice traditionally associated with a man of leisure strolling through a European city, dispassionately observing the people and things he sees. Saber argues that shifting "perspective to a modern city in America, a Mexican-American barrio, and a female gaze" opens up the possibility of "com[ing] across additional social, cultural, and economic afflictions particular to the inner city" (69). This proves to be true in the case of Esperanza, who is neither white, nor male, nor European, so Saber designates her a "brown flâneuse," thus flipping the traditional gender, race, and class of the role. Unlike the traditional lone male flâneur, she is often accompanied on her strolls by friends or her little sister, Nene. Another important difference between Esperanza's 'flânerie' and the conventional version is that the traditional flâneur is disinterested and observing but does not involve himself in what he sees. While Esperanza sometime displays detachment, she is usually more than an observer; she often interacts with the people and spaces of Mango Street, but even when not directly interacting, she narrates with personalized subjectivity. While she does not often offer direct commentary, the

reader sees through her eyes, hears with her ears, and is able to draw the obvious conclusions, even when young Esperanza may not consciously do so. In one humorous instance, for example, Esperanza recounts her neighbors' speculation about what "The Earl of Tennessee's" wife looks like. He is only mentioned once, but women of varying descriptions visit him. The young Esperanza never comes to the obvious conclusion that they are all different women, and none of them are his wife. Nonetheless, she offers the reader enough clues to see past the naive young narrator.

Many of the incidents she observes are not so comical. She is witness to, and sometimes a victim of, the injustices, the oppression, and the violence that are often a part of life on Mango Street. She sees women who cannot leave their house, a mother and her out-of-control children abandoned by the father, a woman threatened and abused by her husband, and others who will never be able to fulfill their potential because they are stuck in or simply resigned to their current situation. Seeing these women only reinforces Esperanza's desire to leave Mango Street behind, to be the woman that this place will clearly not allow her to be.

Esperanza's wanderings and observations are how she creates her map of the Mango Street neighborhood, never imagining this map that will anchor her memories and someday pull her back to this place. Her family's house is the fixed point around which the greater part of her map is oriented: the crooked house where Cathy, and later Meme Ortiz, lived was just a few houses down;

the house across the street is where Rachel and Lucy live, the store with a candy counter is visible from her house, just on the corner.... thus her own house serves as a reference.

In spite of this structure being central to her map, very few of her recollections are from inside her house. The red brick house is not her house of memory; the whole of Mango Street is. Each memory is attached to a store, house, apartment, abandoned lot, or certain trees, and recalling those sites sparks the memories of the things that happened there. Once the process of recall begins, it opens up the whole neighborhood and its people. Memories of one place lead to another place, and more people associated with places of their own.

The few places mentioned that are outside of the Mango Street community, have no geographical context on her map; they are surrounded by and attached to nothing; there is no reference to distance from the neighborhood or proximity to any other structure. It is not coincidental that these places are the sites of marked physical and sexual violence. Esperanza learns through experience and verbally related incidents that being young, Hispanic, and/or female makes someone a target for abuse at all levels.

Around the house, the map spreads as Esperanza journeys through one year on Mango Street. Sometimes mapping is a group effort. She is often accompanied by Nenny, her little sister, and/or her friends; her first adventure with Lucy and Rachel, on the borrowed bicycle, moves the map outward all the

way down Mango and the Avenue (no name given). In one short ride she adds the grocery store, the “[l]aundromat, junk store, drugstore, windows and cars and more cars, and around the block back to Mango” (16). From the beginning, there are no hidden, clandestine, or even private places on her map. The neighborhood is a reflection of the house, with no single place to call her own. Conversely, she enjoys the company of her friends and getting to know the people around her. Given the situation, she travels openly, staying on the public grid that exists in the Mango neighborhood: no back alleys, no hiding places, or none that she reveals. The tour seems fun on the surface, but it is just the beginning of learning the neighborhood – the places, the people, and their voices – that eventually teaches her that she does not want to belong here.

As an adolescent, twelve or thirteen years old, Esperanza balances on the line between childhood and the first stages of adulthood, and although she moves easily between those two worlds, there is often tension between the landscape of care-free fun and games and that of responsibility, violence, and sexuality. The child side of her shows up most often in outdoor settings. The first example of this is the previously mentioned three-person bike ride. Down the street from Esperanza’s house is the big tree in the Ortiz family’s back yard, and the recalled image of that tree sparks two clear memories for her. The more exciting of the two was the “First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest” (Cisneros 22), obviously a child’s event. Meme Ortiz broke both arms but won the contest. The second is not so dramatic, but it is more significant because it

supports Esperanza's growing feeling that that this place is not for her, and the house she lives in is not the home that she desires. When she is up in the tree, she can look across the roofs around her, and she sees her family's house "looking smaller still, our house with its feet tucked under like a cat" (22). The memory of that moment high in the tree is split between the vision of a child and that of a developing and restless adult. The image of the resting cat may seem charming, but it also reflects a contentedness with its place that Esperanza does not feel. She has known since their move that Mango Street is not where she wants to end up; for her, it is only a transitional space. She wants to create maps that go beyond Mango Street.

There are multiple examples of outdoor spaces that recall not only the transition, but also the tension between childhood and adulthood, as Esperanza seems to want to fall back into the former but is inexorably pushed forward into the later. All of the places seem safe, and some are, such as the area around Esperanza's house and the one where Lucy and Rachel live. This is where the girls, including little sister Nenny, jump rope and sing the accompanying rhymes, but on one particular occasion, in the chapter entitled "Hips," they are playing double-dutch and making up their own rhymes: "Skip, skip, /snake in your hips. /Wiggle around/and break your lip" (51). All the improvised rhymes are about hips, a physical symbol for the change from girlhood to womanhood. Only the much younger Nenny sticks to the traditional rhymes, because she does not yet understand why the other girls are inventing their own sly jokes

about hips. Esperanza realizes that Nenny “is in a world we don’t belong to anymore” (52). The contrast between a child’s game and the rhymes about the upcoming changes in their bodies illustrates the balancing point where Esperanza stands, between childhood and womanhood, just as the vaguely defined space between one house and another demonstrates her physical and emotional experience of being caught between a place she does not want to define her and the house of her own in her imagined future. She finds herself at a juncture where time and place are the same. As a minor in her household she has no control over where she lives, neither in terms of geography nor structure, and the house that will be all her own still lies far off in the future.

Esperanza’s balancing act – innocence versus understanding, childhood versus adulthood, Mango Street versus the imagined and desired place of her own – becomes more difficult to maintain as Mango Street experiences increasingly open her eyes to a world of violence, oppression, fear, and grief. Her mapping marks out areas of childhood innocence and adult experience, but she often finds herself in the between spaces where the two overlap, or where the former transitions into the latter. She is an observer of these spaces and the interactions within them, including her own, sometimes displaying a flaneuse’s detachment. (Saber 77).

The vignette entitled “The Family of Little Feet” begins as an innocent experiment with high heels. A neighbor gives some of her old shoes to the girls, and and they decide to walk down the street in their new heels. At first it is a

fun game as they figure out how best to walk in their new shoes, but soon their antics draw the kind of attention they did not expect. When they reach the corner grocery, Mr. Benny berates them: "Them are dangerous, he says. You girls too young to be wearing shoes like that" (41). This is the first indication that a simple change from children's shoes to women's shoes changes the men's perception of the girls and the type of interaction that is acceptable. For the girls, this warning initially carries no weight; they are innocent of any problems that their footwear may cause. Their next encounter is with a boy on a bicycle who calls out "Ladies, lead me to heaven" (41), and as Esperanza remembers their high-heeled trek she recalls a feeling of confusion about his remark: "But there is nobody around but us" (41). They continue on with the determination that they will never wear any other kind of shoe again in spite of the reactions they have garnered so far, but the innocent game grows darker when they encounter a "bum man" (41). Rachel, the youngest of the three, asks the man if he likes her shoes; he says that he does and proceeds to tell her how pretty she is, and he offers her a dollar in exchange for a kiss. Esperanza and Lucy know this is a bad idea, but Rachel "looks like she's thinking about that dollar" (42), so Lucy grabs her hand and pulls her away, down the street. They take the back way home (the less public way) "just in case" (42), and then they hide the shoes under a bushel basket, never to be worn again. Taking the back way adds a new route to Esperanza's map, one that avoids the eyes and remarks of boys and men who see the girls as sexual

objects. The Mango Street route is now colored with fear and confusion, but the alternate route seems safer, an area where they are hidden and temporarily safe from this experience of adulthood for women. The memories of Mango as an unsafe place for girls or women begin with this foray on heels; the map takes on its first hues of sexual menace for all females in this territory. Mango is the only place Esperanza knows, so she does not realize yet that the threat of exploitation and violence extends beyond the confines of her neighborhood.

Esperanza has a friend, Sally, who seems like two different people depending on where she is. At school, Sally is confident, aloof, and attractive to all the boys. Based on rumors that Esperanza does not want to believe, Sally is, to some extent, sexually active, going into closets and hidden spaces with boys. The Sally that goes home, and must stay there because of her very strict, and abusive, father alters her appearance to look more like a girl than a woman, lowering the hemline of her skirt and removing some of the make-up. She becomes timid and obedient and does not laugh. Esperanza understands enough to know that Sally does not want to go home, and she soon understands why. Sally tells her "He never hits me hard" (92). She explains that her father thinks she will shame the family by running away, like his sisters did. "Just because I'm a daughter, and then she doesn't say" (92). Her house is a prison where she is not safe. Her father believes she is too pretty to be allowed out of the house on her own. She does eventually repeat the pattern of her father's sisters when she runs away to get married; but then she finds herself

imprisoned in her husband's house (still on Mango Street) for the same reason her father confined her. She is not allowed to talk on the phone or even to lean out the window. Her friends can only visit when he is away. Sally thus falls victim to the same trap that so many women on Mango Street do. She has no voice, no presence, no agency at all, simply because of her gender. Both of Sally's Mango Street houses are sites of abuse and oppression on Esperanza's map of memory.

"The Monkey Garden" is another sexualized site that features Esperanza with her friend Sally (pre-marriage). It is a walled lot that once contained a caged monkey, but it is now a place where junk and old cars are dumped. In spite of its contents, the flowers and trees still thrive there, and the children of the neighborhood have taken it over as a playground. It is a space of innocence and fun, until the day that Esperanza and Sally encounter some boys there. Sally tells Esperanza to go play with the other kids; she chooses to stay back, alone, with the boys. The boys steal Sally's keys, and when Esperanza sees Sally kissing them to get her keys back, she runs back into the garden with three big sticks and a brick to save her friend. Sally and the boys both tell her to go home, and the narrator recalls: "They all looked at me like *I* was the one that was crazy and made me feel ashamed" (97). Esperanza never returns to the garden, and this place that had been a colorful spot on the map becomes another dangerous site of shame, fear, and confusion. In their article "Adult Promiscuity Following Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Introduction," psychologist

Robert Timms and neuromuscular therapist Patrick Connors observe that abuse perpetuates itself through repetition (22). With this cycle of abuse, Sally is exercising what seems like the only kind of power she has, not realizing that it is simply allowing another male to take power from her.

The most traumatic site on Esperanza's map is a carnival, in a location that is unknown to the reader. From a space hidden behind the tilt-a-whirl she addresses her absent friend Sally, who had promised to meet her by the red clowns but never returned. While Esperanza waits alone, she is accosted and sexually assaulted in the shadows of the carnival ride. She tells the invisible Sally: "I couldn't make them go away. I couldn't do anything but cry. I don't remember. It was dark. I don't remember. I don't remember. Please don't make me tell it all" (100). This is another example of an outdoor space which should signify innocent fun but becomes a site of sexual violence for a powerless girl. Even though Esperanza desperately wants to wipe this horrible experience and its place from her mind and ultimately from her map, she cannot completely erase it. The best she can do is isolate the place on her map by depriving the clowns and the tilt-a-whirl of any larger geographical context and any connection to home, the anchor point of her memory map. By denying the connection through the ellipses and spare narration, she removes the experience from the everyday places of her life; nonetheless it remains an ugly site on the map that she will eventually call up again as she recalls and maps her earlier life, to recall the danger of being a girl all alone.

Esperanza is determined to define herself by navigating out of and around those spaces where men victimize women. Fortunately, there are safe spaces where she can go without fear. For all that her house is structurally a disappointment, her home is nevertheless represented as a place of safety and love. In "A Smart Cookie", her mother encourages Esperanza not to be like her or her comadres who never got a chance to "be somebody": "Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard.... Got to take care all your own." (91). Her home is also a place where her friends, like Sally and Minerva, are welcome. The family once tried to offer Sally a place of refuge, away from her father, but her father came for her the very first night, and Sally had been forced to go back with him. The example of Minerva offers another sad case: "Minerva is only a little bit older than me but already she has two kids and a husband who left" (84). She sustains her sense of self by writing poems on little pieces of paper "that she folds over and over and holds in her hands a long time, little pieces of paper that smell like a dime" (84). She and Esperanza share their poems with one another in this home; it is the only thing they have in common, but it is enough to form a friendship. Both Minerva and Esperanza live in houses that do not express anything about who they are, but they rise above their physical circumstances through their poetry and the aspirations they express. The physical house and the home occupy the same spot on the memory map, but they are clearly different from one another. Home is people, the monuments of

her young life, and it represents safety and security in contrast with the mixed symbols of Mango Street.

Aunt Lupe and her house, more specifically her room, are introduced in "Born Bad." Esperanza's aunt is bedfast and has spent decades in her bedroom, yet she is one of Esperanza's greatest supporters. Critic Karen Martin correctly identifies the significance of Lupe's house to Esperanza's development as a self-actualized person and writes: "Aunt Lupe's home is one of the few domestic spaces that offers Esperanza the tantalizing possibilities of a creative, nurturing space conducive to the development of autonomy" (61). When Esperanza visits her aunt, she reads books and poems to her; she writes her own poetry and whispers it to her Aunt Lupe who is, as Martin notes, "an admiring, attentive audience (of one) who encourages her to write as a means of earning her passage out of Mango Street" (62). The significance of Aunt Lupe's house is represented in the level of detail with which the narrator recalls it. During the time spent with her aunt, young Esperanza observes and remembers the pictures on the wall, medicine bottles and sticky spoons on the nightstand, the smell of medication and illness, and the position of her aunt in the bed. The photographs are Lupe's memories of her own youth and a different life. The story represents a long, drawn-out illness, but the good memories of Aunt Lupe seem to carry more weight than her suffering.

The narrative tells Esperanza's memories, but Aunt Lupe's memories (and thus Esperanza's borrowed memories) are in the photographs around the

room – her in short dress showing pretty legs, another holding her children. For Esperanza, there are two different Aunt Lupes: the vibrant pretty woman in the photographs, a woman she never knew, but whose early life she imagines, incorporating those memories into her own. They are borrowed memories acquired not from stories, but from images and imagination. The other Aunt Lupe is the one whom Esperanza knows, the one who is immobile and stuck in a room, but who listens to and inspires her young relative. Esperanza's Mango Street map of memories is filled with women enclosed in houses, inscribed in spaces from which they cannot escape.

For some reason, which Esperanza does not understand herself, she and her friends had referenced Aunt Lupe in their game in which they imitate people. They laughed like the children they still were in many ways, but after that day she died, they felt guilt over the cruelty of having mocked someone so helpless. The last line indicates their dreams were troubled by their game and Aunt Lupe: "And then we began to dream the dreams" (61). Esperanza's guilt is the greatest of the group, because her aunt's room was a refuge for her. When Aunt Lupe dies, Esperanza loses her strongest advocate, and she also loses that space of creativity and possibilities, free from judgements about her gender or social class. On the map of memory, Aunt Lupe's house is a site of hope, happiness, guilt, and loss.

Karen Martin points out that "As Cisneros nears the end of her narrative, her vignettes highlight female immobility, isolation, and victimization as a result

of cloistered domestic life by presenting a series of women who are displaced or out-of-place, within their own homes" (62). Their isolation and immobility make them marginal members of the community; they are seen but have no meaningful participation in community life. Some walk into their prison willingly, because they have been taught that this is just how things work. Esperanza calls them those "who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (Cisneros 88). Sally is one of these and Esperanza's neighbor Rafaela is another: "On Tuesdays Rafaela's husband comes home late.... And then Rafaela, who is still young but getting old from leaning out the window so much, gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (79). On those nights she throws a dollar down to the kids and asks them to bring her coconut or papaya juice, which she pulls up to the window on a clothesline. She has been displaced from her island only to be taken to an urban island, where the window is her only – and limited – access to the community outside. No mention is made of which island she is from; it is another piece of her identity which has been subsumed by this new place. The little houses of Mango Street isolate the women, not just from men, but also from other women, denying them the chance to form friendships or find any kind of shared support.

Mamacita is another woman who has been uprooted from her presumably tropical country where she had lived in a pink house, and transplanted into another that is defined by social and linguistic isolation. Her

man worked two jobs and saved his money to bring her to Mango Street
“...because she was alone with the baby boy in that country” (76), but she is more alone now than before the move. Mamacita had her own map back home, populated with community members, but the new one on Mango Street consists only of a confining third-floor apartment in a new and strange place. Esperanza does not interact with her or the man, but she does observe – with both sight and sound – and tells Mamacita’s story. What she does not observe she imagines, and gives the “[h]uge, enormous, beautiful...” woman a voice (77) thus allowing her to be more than just an object to shipped across borders. Mamacita’s man may have had good intentions, but she is miserable in this place, and when he tells her that this place is home, and they are not going back, she is desolate. She does not leave the apartment, and Esperanza relates the speculations of the neighbors; she is too fat to go up and down the three flights of stairs, or she is afraid because she does not speak English. She only knows a few phrases: “*He not here* for when the Landlord comes, *No speak English* if anybody else comes, and *Holy Smokes*” (77). She is separated from her neighbors by language and social norms, and the ultimate injury is that the linguistic divide begins to separate her even from her son as he begins to learn English from the TV. In her adult recreation of her memories, Esperanza remembers Mamacita and Rafaela just as well as the people with whom she interacts directly. She weaves their stories, which come as much from imagination as memory, into her map so that they stand as monuments for

those who cannot leave Mango Street and as warnings about the urgency of her own departure. Her Mango Street location is intertwined with the limitations experienced by the women there. They and their confined spaces figure prominently on her map of memories, like snapshots pinned to their location.

Even though Esperanza is surrounded by examples of lives she does not want to emulate, she also finds some like-minded women whom she admires and from whom she receives encouragement to reach for her dreams. Chief among these is Alicia, an older friend who is enrolled in university, and who knows that her own opportunities for financial independence and personal freedom and happiness are limited unless she can transcend Mango Street through education. She goes to the university every day, despite the obstacles her life and location present: "Two trains and a bus, because she doesn't want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin" (32). She has experienced her own displacement; home is Guadalajara, and she plans to return there one day. Multiple locations in the story are connected to Alicia— the apartment with mice, the buses, and trains – but the site that most vividly shows the impact of Alicia on Esperanza's outlook and her future, is the steps of Edna's house, where the two meet and talk to one another. As mentioned earlier, in contesting Esperanza's position that Mango Street is not who she is, Alicia foretells: "Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you'll come back too" (106). And, indeed, eventually Esperanza will use her remembered

map to tell the story of life on Mango, a particular place in time, and the people who both defined it and were defined by it.

Alicia is not the only one to tell Esperanza that she will leave, but that she will also return one day. In the house of her friends, Lucy and Rachel, where the family is mourning the death of their baby, she meets the three sisters, who are her friends' aunts. Her description of the three women, evocative of mystical female triads throughout literary history, lends them a numinous quality: "Three who did not seem to be related to anything but the moon. One with laughter like tin and one with eyes of a cat and one with hands of porcelain" (103). Esperanza also credits them with powers of knowing because of the in-depth and intuitive conversation they have with her. At one point they tell her to make a wish, and she silently does so, and they tell her it will come true. The sisters' response to her reveals that they know what her wish is – to leave Mango Street and find a space of her own: "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street.... You can't forget who you are" (105). When they want to make sure she understands and will do as they advise, they only ask her to remember, and she affirms that she will. She will use her map to remember and will return to Mango through her writing, becoming the voice for those whose voices might otherwise be unheard. The sisters are foretelling that her writing will give her the power to set herself free and to speak for those who cannot. She will break the constraints of patriarchal

expectation, in literary critic Ruben Sanchez's words, "by becoming a writer and writing about her past" (234). She will ultimately chart for herself the course of her life and the kind of space in which she will dwell.

Mango Street, as a narrative, is the product of personal and collective memory, as well as the imagination that pulls all the pieces together. Esperanza listens to her friends and neighbors and interweaves their memories with her own, and she imagines the parts that fill in the gaps. She creates more than just a map; each vignette offers verbal photographs that allow the narrator to recall Mango Street, retrace its paths, and recreate it in her writing. "I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong" (109). The story that started out being about a girl becomes more; it is also the story about a neighborhood and the people who populate it.

The title of the last vignette is "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes," which is notable for two reasons. First, it makes Mango Street an active subject, which indicates a level of power over the narrator. It will always be with her, and even though she has defined herself in opposition to everything that Mango Street represents to her, it is an important part of who she is, because where she was matters. Place exerts power. Second, this title suggests she does not actively choose to remember Mango Street, but rather cannot forget it. Writing and fulfilling her responsibility to go back is a way of exorcising it, making it let go: "I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold

me with both arms. She sets me free" (110). The narrator does not always want to be staring at maps of her past. Despite the evident circularity of the ending – repeating the words of the beginning, as if starting the book again – it also sends the mind forward, wondering how Esperanza got away and what territory she will map now.

CARAMELO

Caramelo, published nineteen years after *Mango Street*, begins with a disclaimer; the reader is advised that the story that follows is just a mixture of memory and invention. This narrative premise was implied in the writings of Cofer and Díaz, and in *The House on Mango Street*, but here is made explicit by the narrator herself. The writer says she is simply following the "family tradition of telling healthy lies" and asks forgiveness if she may have "inadvertently stumbled on the truth". All families have secrets and lies. Some are healthy, motivated by a need for privacy or the protection of someone for whom the information may not appropriate. Others may be emotionally, mentally, and even physically damaging. A family's lies often become its most sacred truths and therefore must be protected. Secrets, repressed memories, and denial are passed on to subsequent generations and have unpredictable results. The secrets and lies in *Caramelo* mask and recreate an entire geography and family history, giving the family members a false view of themselves and their origins. Some of the maps that have been passed onto them are false, altering behavior and condemning family members to live the lie. In *Family Secrets and the*

Psychoanalysis of Narrative, Esther Rashkin asserts that these secrets generate ghosts that can haunt family members for generations to come (5). In the case of *Caramelo*, the ghosts are generated by lies about family purity and a hidden map with a shameful black spot.

Celaya, the novel's protagonist and narrator, exorcises the family ghosts by owning and telling the family history as her own story. Through memory, artifacts, imagination, and the spectral aid or counterpoint of her grandmother, she makes new maps, reconstructs the past, identifies the ghosts, and diminishes their power by exposing the secrets that created them. For Celaya, telling the story uncovers a whole new landscape that, eventually, explains so much about her family and herself.

Unlike Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*, the far-ranging Celaya makes and keeps multiple memory-maps of Chicago, Mexico City, Texas, and the roads in between. The places include streets, houses, beaches, hotel rooms, and schools. Throughout the novel she employs the memories and histories of parents and grandparents, making them her own, good and bad, until by the end of this 460 page novel she has created one huge map of family and personal memory – although, by the narrator's own admission, its accuracy is dubious. She explains in the epigraph to part two of the novel, "Here is how I heard or didn't hear them. Here is how I imagine the stories happened." The novel's subtitle also hints about the creative license taken with memories; the

book's full (and code-switching) title, when originally published, was *Caramelo, or Puro Cuento*.

Celaya Reyes, also known as Lala, is the only girl in a family of seven children, and she is the narrator and protagonist of *Caramelo*. As a character, she appears at different ages during the novel – as a five-year-old, a teenager, and an adult. Her parents are Zoila and Inocencio, and the novel revolves around the family of Inocencio. He has two brothers, Federico (known as Uncle Fat-Face) and Armando (known as Uncle Baby), and having immigrated from Mexico, they are all upholsterers in Chicago. Every summer the three brothers pack up their families and head to Mexico, their timing generally staggered – early, mid, and late summer. However, one year their mother, Soledad, suggests they all come together, and that summer comprises the first section of the novel. The novel is organized into three parts; 1) the narrator's early childhood memories of that pivotal summer in Mexico, 2) a dual and dueling narrative of the Awful Grandmother's childhood and young adulthood, told and fought over by both Celaya and a spectral Soledad (the Awful Grandmother), and 3) the narrator's memories of her teenage years and the appearance of Soledad's ghost, who reveals herself exclusively and repeatedly to Celaya.

Clearly, the parts are not sequential, and even within each section the narrative slips back and forth through time. The *when* is often confusing, but the *where* is not. In her article "Narrative Coyotes: Migration and Narrative Voice in Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*", literary scholar Heather Alumbaugh notes

that “Lala’s [story] documents and negotiates the gains and losses caused by spatial movements. As a result, we always know where Lala is as both narrator and a character” (56). Celaya’s story is not a chronology; it is a map, made of multiple fragmented maps from different times and places, and the gains and losses that Alumbaugh references are each marked on her map. The spaces she documents on her map are imprinted with emotion, thoughts, and reactions. As she follows the map, she always precisely documents the markers of place – street names, landmarks, buildings, beach names – to invite the reader into her map.

Celaya begins her story by describing a photograph of her family on the beach in Acapulco; everyone is there – from grandparents to small children – except for her, making it appear as though she does not exist, or that she is the photographer. The latter seems fitting, although she was too young for that role, because using that photograph and all the memories that it sparks, she begins to describe the map from Chicago to Mexico, showing us photographs of the landmarks along the way and the paths and places of one summer and the landmarks along the way. Alumbaugh observes that “When Lala aligns herself with the photographer, she explicitly defines herself as one who documents and preserves ‘recuerdos’ (64). She exerts narrative control both through her presence and her invisibility; and even though others contribute heavily, she will be the one who decides how to uncover the family maps and untangle, expose, and redraw the family story.

Although most of the experiences recounted along the family's paths, in the novel's first section, are from this one particular summer, Celaya also folds in memories from past trips and those that will come later. The memories of the past are sometimes borrowed from her parents or older siblings. Even though they are borrowed, the memories are so vivid in her mind that she wonders if they are hers, gained from firsthand experience. "Did I dream it or did someone tell me the story? I can't remember where the truth ends, and the talk begins" (20). Figuring out where the truth ends, and the talk begins is the perfect summary of *Caramelo*, but to accomplish that, or even come close, Celaya will have to discover the maps and roads that the family has hidden from itself for so long.

Unlike *Mango Street's* Esperanza, whose paths are mostly confined to a neighborhood, Celaya's travels are transnational; but she still traversed familiar routes, because the family's migration is circular and regular. It recalls the repeated migrations of Judith Cofer's childhood, but Cofer's trips are primarily by air, and she does not describe any of the land travel involved. Celaya, in contrast, traces the route carefully on her map, starting with the giant Turtle Wax turtle on Ogden Avenue, which carries Route 66 in and out of Chicago. After that the marks on the map are more like post cards, as they simply refer to the cities which they pass through – Saint Louis, Tulsa, Dallas, San Antonio, Laredo, Monterrey, Saltillo, Matehuala, San Luis Potosí, Querétaro, and finally Mexico City.

CHICAGO

Recalling the trip, leads Celaya to thinking about the preparations for the trip, which in turn leads to mapping the origin of the trip: the apartments where the three brothers and their families currently live. The apartments are not houses of memory, because each description focuses on a single image of the space, with some minor details added. They appear on her map as static photographs, rather than layered memories. Uncle Fat-Face and Aunty Licha's apartment, just off Taylor Street, is the first in this mapping sequence because their home is where they set aside goods to pay for the trip. To pay for the trip and multi-week stay, all year long they buy items at the Maxwell Street flea market that they will later sell in Toluca, Aunty Licha's hometown. Their apartment-turned-warehouse is piled high with everything from toasters to press-on nails. In Celaya's memory: "All year their apartment looks like a store" (7). The Awful Grandmother's commentary on this activity is that they should only take cheap and gaudy things to the Toluca market, because there is "[n]o use taking anything of value to that town of Indians" (7). Her opinions on other people often express her racial prejudice, which will turn out to be a hatred of her own geographical/racial origins. She bases a person's worth on the color of their skin, and this behavior is designed to support the biggest of the family lies: the illusion that the Reyes family is of pure Spanish origin. Her concept of territories and boundaries is based on place of origin and where people are, in an imagined hierarchy, in relation to her family. Toluca is an example of the

lowest rung of the hierarchy. Celaya's mother is another example of the lower end of the racial hierarchy. The Awful Grandmother, Soledad, dislikes Zoraida for tainting the supposedly pure blood line of the family; Celaya's mother is a dark-skinned Mexican American and never pretends to be anything else, disdaining the foolishness of the Reyes for clinging to this invented notion of racial purity. The most ironic example of Soledad's disdain for people of dark skin and her adamant fight against allowing them in the family is Candelaria; the girl, the family's maid, turns out to be the illegitimate daughter of Inocencio, Soledad's favorite son. Thus the scorned dark-skinned girl is Soledad's granddaughter, although neither of them acknowledges the relationship. Candelaria's deep brown skin means she will never be acknowledged as daughter, granddaughter, or sister in the Reyes family. The Awful Grandmother preaches her prejudice and racial purity as the gospel by which they should all live. It becomes obvious that Inocencio has learned those lessons well, but that Celaya strains against these invented boundaries.

Celaya's memories of Uncle Baby and Aunty Ninfa's apartment are images of a small apartment crammed with big, heavy, ostentatious furniture. Their apartment is the opposite of Uncle Fat-Face's crowded space since Uncle Baby and his wife seem to live like wealthy people. As a young child, the narrator thinks they live like movie stars, and for a long time she thinks of "air-conditioning and cigarettes as the smell of elegance" (12).

A comparison between one of the pieces, a lamp with strings that look like water, in Uncle Baby and Aunt Ninfa's apartment with one from her own family's flat, a Carmen Miranda lamp, transitions us to the description of the place her own nuclear family lives: "In our own flat, things of beauty are not forever" (12). The narrator proceeds to name all the decorative items that have disappeared – a candy dish, little geisha parasols, porcelain boxer puppies. She also includes a marble coffee table that now lives at Uncle Baby's place, because she and her siblings cracked their head on it too many times. Her description of her own home is centered on things her family has lost, and the implied comparison leads back into more description of Aunt Ninfa's contrasting house – with its furniture and lamp shades wrapped in plastic. The description of Ninfa's carpet makes Celaya remember wearing her good socks, because everyone who entered the neat apartment had to take their shoes off at the front door.

The memories continue bouncing off one another; the comparison swings back to Celaya's own apartment where she remembers all the things piling up, items bought in Chicago to take to the other side and items brought from Mexico, all mixed together. Her flat is a mix of the two uncles' homes: one stacked like a store and one crowded with ostentatious furniture. Celaya does not attach memories to each item, but to all of them as a collective – the rotating furniture from the upholstery shop, her father and mother shopping at the flea market and second-hand stores, and most of all, symbols of a life split

between this side and that side of the border. It all keeps her conscious of the two territories that she too is split between, because of her father's and uncles' recurring need to go home. Her maps are those of a nomad, because Mexico is not home to her, and even in Chicago possessions do not denote permanence. She needs to make maps in order to make sense of her life; and as a teenager and adult she will need them to understand the family and their secrets, and the lies which protect them.

All three brothers have the same job – upholsterers – and they always work as a threesome for the same company (although they have been at several companies); yet her father's two brothers make a point to appear to have a higher standard of living than they actually have. As seen above, Uncle Baby and his wife buy furniture and fixtures they see as "high class," and every year Uncle Fat-Face buys a new used Cadillac in order to appear wealthy. Celaya's father, Inocencio, has seven children and, reasonably, buys a station wagon, but he too is captive to the family's illusions about race, ethnicity, pride, and social hierarchies. He and his two brothers change upholstery jobs on a regular basis because they refuse to lower themselves to doing their work in the way their bosses demand – faster, using staples instead of hand-stitching. They also have their pay docked for coming in late, but they believe they are always on time, depending on what time-standard one uses. They eventually, again and again, become dissatisfied and take their tools and walk out. Celaya has heard this multiple times, but she has also heard the version of that story

where they are fired, rather than leaving of their own accord. Before they leave for Mexico, her father tells his family that L.L. Fish Furniture Company has given the brothers the whole summer off because they are such good workers. Celaya knows better: "But that's nothing but story" (8). She proceeds to tell what really happened; they were fired, again. The three brothers have clearly bought into their mother's propaganda that the Reyes have a lineage that puts them above having to follow others' rules – and that they can weave lies in order to obscure inadmissible truths.

THE TRIP TO MEXICO CITY

Returning home, for Inocencio, and visiting Mexico, for Zoila and the children, also means a miles-long line of cars waiting to cross the border. Remembering the bridge and the waiting recalls many details of the experience for Celaya. She remembers the heat and the image of her mother fanning herself with the Texaco map. She remembers the smell of gasoline, sleeping, waking, and the interminable waiting: "Are we in Mexico yet?" (16). She realizes that she forgot at some point about the stinging, white light of the crossing point. "That I don't remember forgetting until I remember it" (16). There is no singing at the bridge, because after four states of endless songs, her mother tells them to shut their *hocicos*. The detailed memories of this borderland point to the fact that this bridge between two countries is a very important place on her map. As soon as the family crosses, everything changes: the language, the food, the drinks, the radio programming, "Sweets

sweeter, colors brighter, the bitter more bitter” (17). Celaya encodes her map of Mexico with sight, sound, and taste because at that point in her life Chicago is home and Mexico is the place that is different.

Mexico and Chicago are two different cultural spaces, but much of what happens in Chicago is still dominated by the years Celaya’s father spent growing up in Mexico City, with a mother determined to advance a false and poisonous story about family origins, and a father who had long ago distanced himself from the day-to-day life of the household and family. The opinions of the matriarch of the Reyes family (the Awful Grandmother) are still taken as truth and command by her sons; as Celaya recalls: “Father always does whatever the Grandmother orders –” (22). In the same way, much of what will happen during this particular summer in Mexico will continue to have repercussions back in the U.S. The effect is mostly one way, given that The Awful Grandmother is dissatisfied that her sons – especially Inocencio, her favorite – live in that other country, but how they live has little effect on her. In contrast, Celaya’s maps are connected by the family and its myths and lies, in spite of the distance between the two map centers – Chicago and Mexico City.

On the way to the grandparents’ house, Celaya tracks the landscape and the sameness of the plazas in the towns they pass through. Unlike Díaz’s Yuniór, whose New York and New Jersey trail markers were trash piles and bars, Celaya’s road is marked by cacti and bandshells. Narrating the in-between spaces is more than just pictures and time passing; it connects the maps of the

two sides of the border, and it is a way for Celaya to make sense of that connection. As Denis Cosgrove and Mona Domosh observe in their study: *Writing The New Cultural Geography*: "We write to create to create sense from the world" (37). Drawing her map with words, and then using it to tell her story, is how Celaya makes sense of her world, just as Esperanza had done in *Mango Street*.

While Celaya moves through space, she also moves through time but not always in the same direction. After her account of traveling through small towns, she recalls stopping in Querétaro, the last stop before moving on to Mexico City. It seems like a natural progression of the journey, but it is not, because the Awful Grandmother is there. Yet, she did not make the trip with them, and she did not meet them there during this trip. The reader eventually realizes that this encounter occurs in the same place (Querétaro) but at a different time. Looking at that site on her map allows Celaya to recall a previous time when the Awful Grandmother had indeed been there, because that day had involved what was, for a small child, a traumatic experience. After looking around and having lunch, Soledad had decided that Celaya needed a haircut, and Inocencio, as always, had followed his mother's decrees. They took her to the barber shop and had her braids cut off, and Lala was inconsolable. Her brothers added to her misery by asking her if she was a boy now. That experience, from a prior trip, is what Querétaro represented to her from that

point on – lack of control, her father always bending to his mother’s wishes, and how awful the Grandmother really is.

Finally, the family caravan arrives at the grandparents’ home. Despite previous experience, going through the metal gates to the house on Destiny Street is always a little frightening because, in Celaya’s memories, “the Awful Grandmother is like the witch in that story of Hansel and Gretel. She likes to eat boys and girls. She’ll swallow us whole, if you let her” (*Caramelo* 23).

THE HOUSE ON DESTINY STREET

Celaya narrates the basic layout of the grandparents’ house: it is two stories, with two apartments in the back and two in the front, built around a large central courtyard. The grandparents and Aunty Light-Skin, whose given name is Norma, have the two back apartments, along with Antonieta Araceli, Aunty Light-Skin’s daughter. The two front apartments are normally rented out for extra income, but during this summer that all three families are visiting at the same time, the renters are asked to move out to make space for all the extra people. There is little description of the rooms, except for the those belonging to the grandparents. The mysterious contents of the locked wardrobe in the grandparents’ room are what earn that room a special place in Celaya’s memory of the house. Only Celaya ever sees the contents of the wardrobe, because one evening when she has been banished from the cake-and-punch portion of her father’s birthday party, her grandfather invites her into that to watch TV with him. When they reach the grandparents’ room, she simply asks

what is in the locked wardrobe, and he opens it and shows her the two special objects inside. Wrapped in a piece of cloth are some rib bones which he had had to have removed after being injured during the war. He is truthful with her, except for one detail – he opts to confirm the grandmother’s lie that he had been heroically injured in battle, rather than upset the well-constructed story after all these years, by admitting that he was actually injured while going home after completing his mundane and ignominious military detail of burning the dead. The other special item in the wardrobe, the real reason the grandmother locks the wardrobe, is a silk rebozo (shawl) that was left unfinished after Soledad’s mother had suddenly died. Had it been finished, it would have been costly and coveted because of its main color, caramelo, a difficult dye to make; it also would have been highly valued for the hand-knotted fringe, because Soledad’s mother, Guillermina, had been one of the most skilled *empuntadoras* of her day. Such a seemingly benign object is the key to the grandmother’s history and deeply held secrets; it is only after Soledad’s own death that she is able to talk about it, as a ghost, and even then, she is unable to completely reveal all of the painful memories that it holds. The term *caramelo* turns out to be laden with meaning, as it relates not only to the shawl but to the skin-color prejudices that weave the novel together. Celaya will tell the whole story, but in doing so she will make it part of her own and exert a level of control that only the living can exert over the tales of the dead. She is still, however, dependent on her grandmother’s recounting her version of

history, and the two often struggle openly with each other to control the narrative. It is a narrative which will reveal new maps of the past, in terms of the family truths, myths, and their origins, as well as making explicit the irresolvable tensions between memory and invention.

While the rebozo holds more memories than most items, Celaya also explores a hidden piece of more recent family history in her interactions with the maid, Candelaria, and many of those interactions happen on the house's flat roof, where Candelaria helps her mother with the laundry. The rebozo and Candelaria have something in common: their color. Celaya describes Candelaria's skin as *caramelo*, like the candy, and in her eyes, the black hair and almost burnt sugar skin make the older girl the most beautiful person she has ever seen. The Awful Grandmother and Aunty Light-Skin are not pleased that Celaya plays so familiarly with Candelaria. They claim that the maid is beneath them because of her indigenous origins, and they fully suppress the fact that she is genetically a member of the family, Celaya's own half-sister. After Celaya catches lice from the older girl, the adult women feel that their beliefs about social and racial hierarchy have been validated. They treat Celaya's hair and tell her to stay away from Candelaria; no one even considers treating both girls for lice and/or letting them continue to associate with each other. Keeping a distance from the servants, especially those who are Indians, is the grandmother's way to deny her own ancestry and to keep the family away from the secrets of her own past.

ACAPULCO

Although Candelaria is sent back to her village, she is recalled when Oralia, the housekeeper, needs help. This is how, later that summer, she ends up going with the family to Acapulco as a caregiver for the little ones. For Celaya most of Acapulco is a reminder that although they are still in Mexico, they are tourists. The house where they stay, shaped as a boat, fits well with their souvenir sun hats, and the family beach photograph that comprises the novel's opening scene.

At the Acapulco house, Candelaria fades into the woodwork, but she is very much present and noticed at the beach, standing in the waves in her dress. Celaya is there to witness her being pummeled by a wave and almost drowning. The result of that incident is the grandmother deciding that the girl is useless if she cannot even take care of herself, much less the children. The whole family takes her to the bus station to send her back to Mexico City with the Destiny Street address pinned to her slip. Celaya wants to wait until Candelaria's bus leaves, but the grandmother only broadcasts her prejudice by saying "Get me out of this inferno of Indians, it smells worse than a pigsty" (79). While the beach's spot on the map is marked by Candelaria's beauty and near disaster, the bus station, in contrast, is stamped with the grandmother's bigotry.

A third site on the Acapulco map is the boat that takes them on an excursion. The space appears to be about recreation and making themselves

sick on free sodas, for Lala and her brothers. However, for the mother and grandmother, the boat represents a "between space" where her the two women have an important conversation: Celaya sees her grandmother talking to her mother while her "[m]other is sitting looking straight ahead and saying nothing" (81). After they disembark and load back into the station wagon, the grandmother is in good mood and tells everyone stories while Zoila remains silent. As they drive down the street on the way out of town, Zoila begins to laugh hysterically, and then she explodes at her husband. The ensuing conversation makes it clear that The Awful Grandmother has told her daughter-in-law about Candelaria being Inocencio's daughter, born before he and Zoila were married. Because this family's shame and lies are always suppressed, Celaya experiences the trauma without understanding why her mother and father are fighting. Zoila makes her husband stop the car, saying she is leaving him, but he follows her and tries to convince her to come back while she hurls insults at him, and most of the family simply wonders what is happening. Eventually the whole family, and most of the other people on the street, gathers around them, and then Soledad gets involved, encouraging her son to leave his wife there. The grandmother accuses Zoila (born in the U.S.), of being a social climber, saying that Inocencio should have a wife of higher social standing. She proceeds to insult Zoila's improper Spanish, her place of birth, and finally her skin color, "dark as a slave" (85). This makes Celaya wonder if this is why her grandmother loves her father more than her Uncle Fat-Face,

whose skin is also dark. Zoila fights back, and both women tell Inocencio that if the other is in the car, they will not be, both saying he must choose between his mother and his wife. The chapter ends with a surprise: "Then Father does something he's never done in his life. Not before, nor since" (86). The one thing Inocencio has never done is stand up to his mother, but the chapter and section ends without telling us how the situation was resolved. Whatever he did, both women and the rest of the family all end up back to the house on Destiny Street in Mexico City. For Celaya, memories of Acapulco will always mean confusion, distress, and questions about her grandmother's view of racial and ethnic differences.

DENIAL, OBFUSCATION, AND EVASION

In his book, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur reminds us that forgetting is a normal and healthy part of memory, because having all our possible memories ever-present in our mind would be horrifying. "Could a memory lacking forgetting be the ultimate phantasm..." (413) On the other hand, some forgetting involves traumatic memory loss, and there also exists forced forgetting –imposed by outside influences or forces. The Reyes family suffers from both types of forgetting. They create the latter type in multiple ways; some favorites are the use of counter-narratives (false trails), muteness (never speaking of people/places/events), and plain lies (to hide uncomfortable truths). They all overlap a bit, and for Celaya, they all have the same effect: blocking her knowledge and understanding of her family and

their history. She cannot make proper maps with so many gaps and uncertainties. The Reyes' propensity for telling stories/lies leaves even the reader in doubt of the narrator's version of her family history.

One way that the family evades the truth is through repeating and reliving two sayings that have been passed down from the great-great-grandfather in Spain, and perhaps even further than that. Both of the sayings are about men and, are often directed to the next male generation. The first of the two family mottos is "We are not dogs." This admonishment was always given after one of the Reyes men had committing the social sin of getting a woman pregnant, and in every case except one it was a command to marry the girl. In all of the cases, the men's first instinct is to flee or send away the women, with either option resulting in abandonment of the unlucky girl. The action and the scornful rebuke provoke further movement for the man and/or the woman into spaces they might not have chosen for themselves. Celaya's great-grandfather Eleuterio ran all the way back to Spain when Regina, his future wife, became pregnant. His father shamed him into returning to Mexico by telling him that the Reyes are not dogs. He returned and convinced Regina that a single woman with a baby would have a hard life, so she married him, which meant being uprooted from her home and finding herself among a society that was harshly judgmental about the dark color of her skin and her Indian heritage. Several chapters later we learn that Eleuterio actually had a wife in Seville who had constantly reminded him that socially and economically

he had married up, and he had left her to find his own opportunities in Mexico. He ends up giving the “We are not dogs speech” to his own son, Narciso, after Narciso has repeated the social crime by impregnating their young housekeeper, Soledad (later known as the Awful Grandmother. Narciso (later known as the Little Grandfather) understands and marries Soledad. Narciso had already acquired a job with the National Roads Commission, so Soledad goes with him to the city of Oaxaca, where her new husband lodges her in a boarding house, because of the travel his job requires. Before even giving birth, then, Soledad has been moved and left alone to wait on her traveling husband; she feels abandoned, again. The only move that she has chosen is the one from her Aunt Fina’s squalid building, with sixteen children and a lecherous uncle with pedophilic tendencies, to the Reyes’ spacious apartment to work as a maid, and that move had been out of desperation. As a wife she is now expected to follow her husband’s path, thus still having few choices of her own.

The second motto that the Reyes family reiterates through the generations has a message much like the first: a man of quality should be “feo, fuerte y formal” (ugly, strong, and proper). Like the earlier saying, this phrase is repeated through the generations to reassure everyone that the Reyes men are respectable and responsible, which is contrary to fact for many of them. The family uses this concocted self-image to cover up any mistake or shame. But as Celaya learns, saying something over and over will never make it true. No reliable family maps can be drawn, and no family ghosts can be exorcised,

as long as these maxims and surface truths hide the realities within the family. This sort of repetition reveals as much as it conceals; if the mottos reflected reality, they would not have to be repeated so many times.

SOLEDAD/THE AWFUL GRANDMOTHER

Throughout the narrative, Lala's grandmother represents the biggest obstacle to recreating an accurate map of the family's past. Soledad's racial prejudice is real, but it began as, and continues to be, an intentional misdirection, pointing away from her own past and origins. Those she now despises are the kind of people she came from: Indians, laborers, brown-skinned, poor. Like her mother-in-law, Regina, she had been the child of a poor family with Indian ancestry. Regina too was a dark-skinned woman who decided that she was not going to let her former poverty, her skin color, gender, or her ethnicity make her a victim. When she married Eleuterio, she made sure she acquired control of the family's affairs, and she dealt harshly with those who did not want to do things her way. As Soledad recalls, the site of that house is dominated by Regina. She thus became a model for Soledad, along with the erasure of her past, and that is the first step in the process of Soledad evolving into an Awful Grandmother. Like Regina, she deals harshly with her servants; she distances herself in every way possible from anyone with ethnic or class origins similar to her own; and just as her mother-in-law had doted on her pretty, light-skinned son, Soledad shows clear preference for her light-skinned children over the one with dark skin. Once Soledad opts to follow

Regina's path and mask her origins, her future personality and psychical mapping became predictable. However, this severing of oneself from one's origins inevitably results in gaps in the family map and, thus, generational trauma.

There are clues about Soledad's past, especially the caramel-colored rebozo, that no one can interpret until Soledad's ghost passes her own life-maps to her granddaughter by telling her story. Soledad does this for two reasons: the first is that she sees Celaya making the same mistakes, following the same paths that she had taken, and the second is that she herself is unable to move on after her death; she is stuck in the "between" space; she is both present and gone. Celaya does not know how to avoid the path of past Reyes women because she has never heard any true stories about them. There is no memory to guide her. No one has worked through their own problems and issues or been able pass on those lessons. Perhaps the knowledge of those family memories would have kept the fifteen-year-old Celaya from running away with her own boyfriend, Ernesto, to Mexico City to get married. After one night together, Ernesto is overcome with Catholic guilt and tells her he cannot marry her. He leaves her in the hotel room with some money and a bus ticket. She has unwittingly followed the maps of past Reyes women without even knowing it. This kind of behavior frustrates her ghostly grandmother because she did not want her granddaughter to experience that kind of abandonment,

but she also does not want Celaya to tie herself to a man at such a young age; she is only fifteen and still naive.

Freud points out in "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through" that someone who does not remember will repeat, but that repeating is forgetting; repetition, in fact, takes the place of memory, and is a resistance against remembering. (par 11). I believe this phenomenon applies to the Reyes family; shared memories from the women of her family might have helped Celaya see that she was going down the same wrong paths as they had.

SPECTRAL NARRATION (TEXAS)

The stories that the spectral grandmother tells, which include her own memories, along with those passed to her by Regina and Narciso, convey little joy, but plenty of pain. Now that she is dead, she finally has nothing to lose by letting go of her secrets. She reveals them all now – or Celaya recreates them – because Celaya had made a bargain for her ailing father's life with Soledad, who is lonely in the liminal space between life and death. The bargain is that Celaya will tell her grandmother's story, which will allow her to move on to the afterlife, and in exchange, Soledad will not try to take Inocencio, Celaya's father, with her. It is the secrets and lies that she has perpetuated in her family that are holding her back from that afterlife. Critic Heather Alumbaugh observes that this pact marks the point where Lala becomes a kind of narrative coyote¹¹, who will bring her grandmother's story across the border from secrecy into

¹¹ Coyote is the term applied to people who smuggle illegal migrants across the U.S/Mexico border.

knowledge and understanding. Likewise, her storytelling will help Soledad leave the borderlands between life and death and will allow her to cross over completely. In Alumbaugh's words: "like a coyote, Lala smuggles her grandmother's story and her own family history from the past to the present, from Mexico to the U.S., from the dead to the living, and from one person to another" (54). As a child of migration, Lala is well qualified to perform this task, because she has already learned the shame about gender, race and class from her and her mother's experiences on both sides of the border. Alumbaugh further comments on the spatial and geographical nature of the novel: "In a novel obsessed with spatial crossings, it is no accident that Cisneros uses multiple spaces – ranging from liminal spaces such as geographical borders, buildings, and houses to Lala's lack of private space – to produce Lala's migratory narrative ability" (55-56). Those spaces, and the ones that her grandmother adds, are also places of memory to help guide the map-making and border-crossing narrative. Mary Carruthers affirms that imagined sites (and real ones) can serve not only as storage but as places of invention and composition. (11-39) The mental photographs of those places – some real to Soledad, but only imagined by Celaya – provide the two storytellers the raw material needed for the recall, imagination, and composition that will form the story.

The secrets that Soledad has held closest are her suppressed truths about her childhood and early life, and her childhood is where the two

storytellers begin to recreate the story, bickering back and forth about how to tell it. Soledad had mentioned her birthplace and early childhood home in Santa María del Río in San Luis Potosí when Inocencio had once mentioned wanted to buy a rebozo for Celaya. She says the art of weaving and knotting them has died out and all of them are factory-made now, but the finest ones used to come from San Luis Potosí. It does not even sound like a memory, as she tells it, just information about a particular bygone craft. Soledad never mentions that she was born there, or that her father dyed cloth for rebozos, and her mother wove some of the finest fringes to be found. The only clue to any personal and/or emotional connection is that she becomes irritable when the subject of rebozos comes up, but her grouchiness is not uncommon, so no one suspects any personal reason for it.

She has buried the secrets of her childhood so deeply that she seems to have scraped away any affect or impression. As Ricouer notes, one can change a traumatic memory to suit one's needs: "One can always recount differently, by eliminating, by shifting the emphasis, by recasting the protagonists of the action in a different light along with the outlines of the action" (448). These are strategies that are recognizable in Soledad's actions and words, but her need to obscure and repress those childhood memories has long ago become pathological. She can give nothing away that would allow someone to raise those memories or retrace her steps. She has formed a kind of crypt for those secrets, as theorized by Abraham and Torok in *The Shell and the Kernel*, where

they describe a psychological crypt for memories of an action or event so intolerable that it cannot be kept in the conscious mind (130-131). For Soledad, the deepest contents of that crypt are the death of her mother and her subsequent abandonment by her father. Even worse, I believe the text leaves enough clues to conclude that Soledad's father killed her mother. I base this conclusion on several clues. The first is Abraham and Torok's theory on the formation of the crypt. The child, Soledad, hides the murder from herself not to protect her father, but to protect herself. The second clue is the psychic trace in Soledad's physical description of her father, before Guillermina's death and after the death and remarriage. The father was a hard-working man who stunk of black dye and whose hands were permanently stained. The narrator, writing the story based on information from Soledad, supposes that "– it must have been the years of black dye that seeped into Ambrosio Reyes' heart. How else to explain his dark ways?" (*Caramelo* 94). In this brief account there is no mention of Guillermina's cause of death. But later, in a brief and hurried explanation of being orphaned, Soledad, with careful wording, attributes her mother's death to typhoid fever (118). Soledad cannot speak the words that describe her mother's death: it happened and that's it. She only mentions her father one more time, saying that she will never forgive him for his abandonment.

The problem with crypts is that they generate phantoms (Abraham and Torok 132), and the crypts are passed as a nameless emptiness in the place of

memory or family history. The nature of the phantom is to return and repeat, yet given that it is only present in absence, in the gaps of memory and narrative, it must return and repeat itself in the world of the living. The Reyes family is a prime example of a haunted family, even without Soledad's own ghostly reappearance. They repeat the same types of mistakes again and again, but repetition cannot replace memory; they are not the same. The family members tread already worn paths without realizing it, because the lessons of repressed, avoided, and inaccessible memories are absent. Memory shows us who we are, maps where we have been and, perhaps, charts where we want to go, but if the supposed past is false, if the maps are inaccurate, do we lose our way?

In the course of the narration of Soledad's story, it becomes clear that she and Celaya have a lot in common. We have already discussed Celaya making many of the same mistakes that her grandmother did, but they are alike in more ways than that. Both have always felt out of place wherever they are – in the U.S. or in Mexico, at various apartments and houses. Soledad's feeling of being out of place originates with her father's abandonment; she no longer belonged at her home. After that she lived at Aunty Fina's where she was related to the family, but not part of it. She was simply used as cheap labor, taking care of the house and the children. The father of that family always saw her as a sexual object, even though she was still a child, and she could not relax enough to sleep well because he would come in and lift her

dress up. It is unclear how far his malevolent intentions went, except that he probably did not rape her, because she was not knowledgeable about sex when Narciso seduced her. Even so, she felt exhausted, used, and unsafe, and therefore she could not feel "at home." At Regina's house, she was once again a servant, mostly ignored as long as she did her work correctly. Again, she did not really belong. As discussed earlier, she lived in a rooming house in a town where she knew no one, so she was very much "out of place". Even when she had her own house and family, and she had servants instead of being one, she continued to feel alone and out of place. The irony of her name, Soledad, is not lost – solitude, loneliness – because her worst fear in life and in death is being alone. Throughout her life, she feels abandoned by her father, then by her husband, and finally by her sons who went to the U.S. to marry and have families. This is why she demands that they visit every summer and does everything she can to keep them in her sphere of influence, even across the border. After the Little Grandfather dies, she moves to Chicago to live with Celaya's father Inocencio, who already had less than enough room, because he is her favorite, and she knows he cannot say no to her. Her fear of being alone is why, in the final section of the novel, she tries to take Inocencio with her after she dies.

FINDING HER OWN SPACE

Celaya feels displaced as well, but for different reasons. She has never had her own space in any of their apartments or houses. When she was small,

she slept on the recliner and later the couch. Her father promises she will have her own room when they move to Texas, but her grandmother (while still alive) takes it, and she is back on the couch. She tries to carve out some personal space by pushing two chairs together and sticking her head in a book. Virginia Woolf identified the need for a woman to have a room of her own for thinking and writing, but Celaya does not have this space, physically or metaphorically. She is the only girl in her family, with a mother who complains that she is always whining, causing her to feel even more alone.

Celaya is also out of place with the girls at school, because she identifies as Mexican, not Chicana, and makes the mistake of talking about her great-grandfather from Spain in history class. Some of that Reyes pride, inherited from a lie, gets her in trouble, because the girls see that Celaya believes she is better than them because of her Spanish blood. The Reyes had taught her to believe that, and she believes it enough to talk about it in class. She has been told too many times about those old family maps and has not seen the lacunae.

Excavating and telling her family story is an identity-building activity and therapeutic activity, aiding her in reconciling who she is, where she comes from, and who she wants to be. She has family maps that stretch over three countries, and from the past to the present, but the storytelling can bring it all together in her mind. She has a bit of an epiphany at her parents' anniversary party; before that moment all the facets of the Reyes family have seemed disparate and confusing – geography, nationality, ethnicity, class, half-truths,

whole lies, responsible, and irresponsible; the list could go on. Telling her grandmother's story allows her to see Soledad in herself and telling the family story allows her to acknowledge them as part of her too, all their faces, races, classes, and genders: "Everyone, big and little, old and young, dead and living, imagined and real high-stepping past in the big cumbia circle of life" (425). Telling everyone's story, including her own, has led her to this moment in this place. Having filled in the maps, aired some of the history, and let the rest go, she can finally understand or define her place within the family. "Maybe it's my job to separate the strands and knot the words together for everyone who can't say them, and make it all right in the end. This is what I'm thinking" (428). Like her great-grandmother weaving the fringe of a rebozo, Celaya is weaving the different family strands together into one story, a more authentic one, where every person is important and deserves a voice, and where inherited prejudices and inherited traumas can be set aside.

In her article "Weaving Transnational Identity: Travel and Diaspora in Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*," Tereza Szeghi states that "Cisneros voices an Anzaldúan mestiza consciousness that claims a multiplicity of influences, the between spaces, and the negotiation of these influences and spaces, as a distinct form of identity" (164). Celaya no longer feels out of place, because she pulls the family onto one big map and into one big story. Without moving an inch, but across 400 nomadic pages, she successfully and triumphantly turns

herself into a site where geographies, ethnicities, colors, nationalities, classes, eras, and languages converge.

CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation thinking of the landscapes that were revealed to me through stories and finally through the clouded minds of my grandmothers. My paternal grandmother, Tennie, was a clear-thinking, straight-talking woman until she had a stroke shortly after her one hundredth birthday. When I was able to sit with her, she told me about the people walking down the road; I only saw a paved road with cars going by, but she saw a rural Alabama landscape and the people who inhabited it. Likewise, my maternal grandmother, Lecil, retreated to the territory of her youth and young adulthood during the last years of her life. Her nursing home room was her home on the mountain, and outside the windows were the homes of her neighbors. I tried to see them in my mind, but my inner vision was not as clear as hers. Thus, I became interested in the nature of memory, and its connection to place, in the stories people tell.

Thinking of my grandmothers led me to thinking of my family as a whole and how we fit – or do not fit – with each other. Denial is my family's superpower, and it worked for many years, but the guilt, resentment and hurt feelings it tries to cover gradually became ineffective. Silence was the favored form of denial. Consequently, I grew up with no understanding of why my relatives related to each other as they did. One thing I did come to understand as I got older was that both of my grandfathers were alcoholics. I barely knew my mother's father, and my paternal grandfather died when my father was a

boy. Despite not knowing them, I saw and felt the effects of their addiction and behavior. After my work on this dissertation, I now recognize this as post-memory, a phenomenon that affects all the narrators discussed in this dissertation, with the possible exception of Esperanza (*Mango Street*).

All six of Cofer's, Díaz's, and Cisneros's narrators tell their stories from a first-person point of view using memory (including post-memory) and imagination, reconstructing the geography of their own lives. The power of place to initiate recall and subsequent invention and composition not only is documented not only by literary scholars and philosophers but is also given credence by many scientists. Science journalist Robinson Meyer explains in his article "In the Brain, Memories Are Inextricably Tied to Place" that recent neurological studies have brought psychologists closer to answering the question of how "episodic memories are formed, "locking [in the] ideas and objects to a single place in time" (*The Atlantic* par 2). We remember in memory palaces. I remember every inch of my maternal grandmother's home, which leads me to memories of the activities we did there; I have a vivid memory of laying in her bed and being scared she would die during the night because her breathing was so labored. Cofer (*Silent Dancing*) recalls vividly the parlor where her grandmother spun stories. Yuniors (*Drown*) seems to remember every piece of his family's tiny house in Santo Domingo and the activities and events connected to each one, and Celaya's (*Caramelo*) memories are tied to travels, houses, and cities.

Although geography enables us to connect to our past, it does not make our memory immutable. Each time we remember, our minds must reinvent the episode, and not every time will be the same, and other people will remember the place and episode differently. Writing down the memory, as does Cofer in *Silent Dancing*, stabilizes recall, perhaps truthfully but maybe falsely – or somewhere in between. The narrator shares many past events with her mother, but the two women often differ greatly in their memories of those episodes. These kinds of differences lie behind Maurice Halbwachs' assertions that group memory is much more reliable than individual memory, but when the parties involved differ completely, one has to choose which one to believe. This is the issue Celaya confronts so explicitly, in pondering the invented thread that runs through all her supposed memories. Health journalist Rachel Barclay, explains this by assessing how the brain works: "Human memory is notoriously unreliable." She further adds that, instead of leaving blank spaces, "the brain fills in the details as best it can, borrowing from other memories and the imagination in order to build what feels like a complete picture" ("Your Memory"... pars 3-4). Sometimes we feel like we remember because someone has told us about their memory. I can mentally recreate the time my father became so angry he punched a hole in the kitchen wall, but what feels like a memory is, in fact, only the story my sister told me. In *Caramelo*, Celaya feels like she remembers certain occurrences that happened during previous trips to Mexico, but those trips happened before she was born. In the first chapter to

Memory, History and Forgetting, Paul Ricoeur wrestles with the idea of memory versus imagination and whether it is possible to separate the two (5-7). The last decade of memory studies has answered the question definitively: no, it is not possible to separate these cognitive abilities. A research team headed by psychologist Craig McFarland recently published an article about the links between memory, imagination and problem solving. They affirm the link between memory and imagination on a neurological level: “[E]pisodic memory and imagination both involve the retrieval of specific, detailed information about past experiences and thus rely on similar cognitive processes.” Not only are the processes similar, but they also “have been shown to recruit the same neural structures” (932).

In my family, Christmas Day meant going to see my father’s family in Alabama. When we left home in Wildwood, Georgia, I could always gauge how far or close we were to our destination in Anniston by the landmarks along the way – the welcome center, leaving the interstate, crossing the river, Rainbow City, the house with the bizarre fence. All the aunts, uncles, and cousins gathered in one house, except for one aunt. She and her family never attended the gatherings, so we had to visit them separately. There was long-standing animus between her and some other family members over something that happened before I was born. When I finally heard the explanation, it did not seem adequate to the years-old grudge. Routes and spaces hold meanings that

we assign to them – going home, going to visit, dread, happiness, sadness, fear – and they also hold our memory of circumstance and emotion.

Memory itself is spectral, recalling visions of people, places, times, and circumstances that no longer exist, at least not in that former combination, the mental presence of what once was. Many family members have passed during my lifetime, but I still see them in their houses and at reunions. Seeing them helps me remember their faces and the sound of their laughter. I remember being a tiny child, climbing into a chair and sitting with my great-great grandmother Nettie. I have no memory of us speaking to one another, but we giggled together about nothing that I can recall. She is with me still, sitting in an old recliner in an old house. It is not just people who stay with us, or happy circumstances. When Esperanza got older, moved away, and became a writer, Mango Street was still a part of her. Yuniór's father left his family twice, but he continued to haunt his sons after the second and final time he left; both his presence and his absences were traumatic to the whole family. He did his damage and then walked away physically but left behind a ghost that persisted in Yuniór's life. Yuniór was also haunted by places of poverty, racism, sexism. The post-memory created by the Trujillo dictatorship is a cultural crypt created by the effort to forget, and Yuniór is part of that legacy. The Awful Grandmother's (Caramelo) crypt is family-oriented and therefore closer to the one theorized by Abraham and Torok, created by the internalization of witnessing or experiencing an unthinkable act. The only difference between the

two trans-generational crypts is the setting, the place where they were created. Celaya and her family, and Yuniors and his family, are haunted by the phantoms that have arisen from their families' crypts.

Directly and indirectly the violence and malice created by the prejudice against difference – the human inclination to believe that difference connotes inferiority – negatively affects all the narrators studied in this dissertation. Erika Lee, in her book, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*, offers some insight into the reasons for mistreatment against these five narrators: "Xenophobia identifies and dehumanizes 'bad immigrants' as those who come without authorization, take away jobs from Americans, do not assimilate..." (324). In spite of the fact that the narrators of these six books are citizens of the United States, by birth or naturalization, they have all been treated as a homogenized group – brown and foreign – by the dominant culture. They are also united by their migration experiences, poverty (or the threat of it), and gender bias (as victims or as perpetrators). As theories of intersectionality have made clear, it is impossible to disentangle all the different factors – poverty, racism, sexism, family lies, and phantoms – created by the afore-mentioned isms. The effects come in different forms and various degrees. The dual and inseparable power of memory and imagination allows some storytellers to triumph over those effects and leaves others to struggle with only a little hope, but they all do their working through by writing their own stories, remembering, and retracing the maps of their lives. The stories/maps

as mirrors allow them to see how they fit, where they are, how they got here, and where their next destination might be.

They are all narrative travelers, and their memory maps tie all the pieces together. Although all of them seem to write for their own benefit, to understand the heritages that they carry with them, their working-through involves sharing their maps and memories with us. Marlene Kardar, in the introductory essay to *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, calls life writing (fictional or non-fictional) "the original genre" and sees in it the potential to "(a) [encourage] the reader to develop his/her own self-consciousness in order to (b) humanize and make less abstract... the self-in-the-writing" (12). Reading the six works discussed in this dissertation offers the reader not only an opportunity to understand the narrators but also the possibility to foster the desire to explore our own maps. I am not only the product of my family, but also of Alabama-Georgia-Tennessee-Kentucky, and most of all, of my memories and imagination of both.

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