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FRAGMENTATION AND MULTIPLICITY IN CUBAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY: *IN CUBA I
WAS A GERMAN SHEPHERD* BY ANA MENÉNDEZ AND *MEMORY MAMBO* BY ACHY

OBEJAS

by

DAIMYS ESTER GARCIA

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Fragmentation and Multiplicity in Cuban-American Identity: *In Cuba I was a German Shepherd*

by Ana Menéndez and *Memory Mambo* by Achy Obejas

by

Daimys Ester Garcia

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis Requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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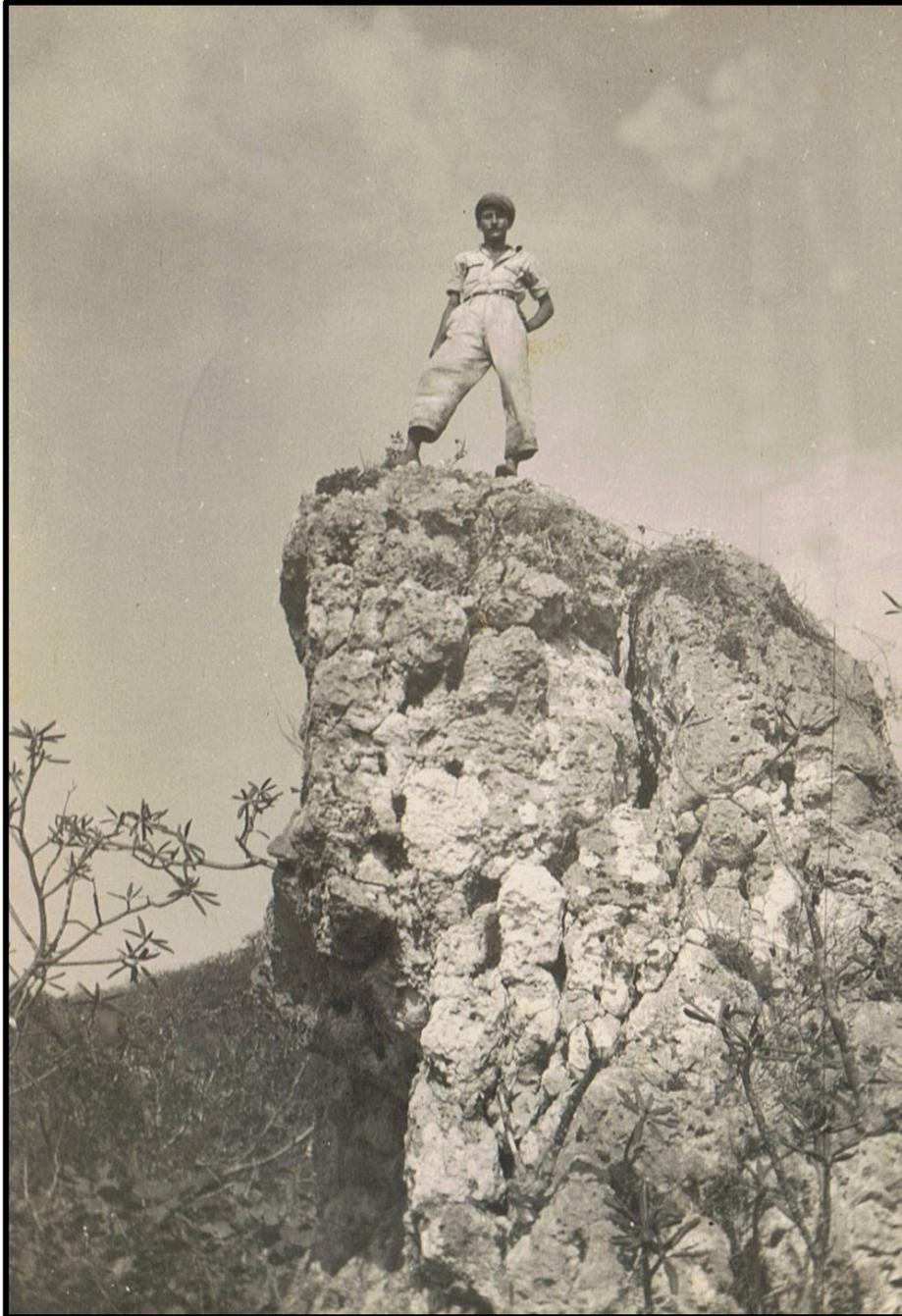


Image 1: Emilio Hernández Juan, Cuba¹

Mas grande que esta pierda se me pone el corazón, y en el no cabe el amor que yo tengo para ti.

-Emilio Hernández Juan, 1952

1: A colleague of mine is asking one of her students why he is not completing the homework assignments. He explains to her that he does not speak English and does not want to get made fun of. She asks him what language he does speak, since he does not speak English, and he says ‘you know, hood’. I sit, frozen; all this student knows is English, yet he has been made to believe he has no language.

2: Growing up, I was asked to walk into stores and ask for information for the grown-ups. “Mija, pregúntale a qué hora cierran, y pregúntale si hay alguien que habla español.” It was my job, as the American, to translate.

3: I am helping lead a workshop on implicit bias and I walk by a group who has been asked to identify the assumptions of the following scenarios: ‘Two students who are usually on task are speaking Spanish. You pass by them and tell them to speak English, that they are here to learn.’ I wait for a response, hoping they do not feel too shy with me around. The lead instructor on our team speaks first: she does not see anything wrong with what the teacher did – it is absolutely unacceptable for students to speak Spanish if they ever want to pass the reading and writing exam. I cringe, holding my tongue. A new instructor to our team starts off quietly: sometimes, the only way to learn is to ask questions in one’s own language, first. And then she clears her throat and speaks up some more – it says in the scenario that these students are usually on task, why does their speaking Spanish mean they are off task – that they are not learning? With every increase in her voice and her passion, I breathe a sigh of relief.

4: I tell Mima that I am Cuban and she replies ‘No, eres Americana.’ I get so angry with her. How could she raise me to have Cuban customs, Cuban beliefs, a love for the island, and then expect me to be ‘American’?¹

¹ Each of these scenarios is written based on excerpts of my journal throughout the past year (2015).

These personal anecdotes have a thin, tight thread that weaves them together: the yearning to belong to a place that will never accept them. Growing up Cuban-American, I have always looked at myself as never fully belonging, as a liminal figure. I had a fractured identity that could never be whole because I straddled two understandings: the Cuban and the American. When I discovered the language of a fragmented identity, it appealed to me because it viscerally described how I felt: broken. At my grandparent's *clínica* I was uncomfortable around those who grew up in Cuba because I was never Cuban enough, but in school – particularly in college – I could never quite fit in with the cool white kids; they could tell there was something *off* about me. I was neither one, nor the other. I grew up in a city where many were part of a marginalized group, but fragmentation happens among our own people, and even in our own homes. My *abuelos* were always quick to remind me that I was American – only American – that I was here to fulfill their American dream. But with that, I had the Cuban traditions and atmosphere that permeated every aspect of our home life – our food, our discipline, our love language; it was my link to the other side of my identity. My grandparents were the only ‘true’ link I had to Cuba; with the passing of my grandfather, then, I felt the terrible realization that without him as a link, I might not be considered Cuban anymore. This sparked a new urgency to explore what makes someone – anyone – Cuban-American.

While writing about Cuban-American identity, I hope to embody Gloria Anzaldúa's call to action in “A Letter to Third World Women Writers” from *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*: “I say *mujer mágica*, empty yourself. Shock yourself into new ways of perceiving the world, shock your readers into the same. Stop the chatter inside their heads” (170). My goal is to make this analysis both personal and political – creative and academic. It is to exemplify Maria Lugones's new way of perceiving the world that Anzaldúa

advocates for. Lugones, in “Purity, Impurity and Separation” makes visible that fragmentation is not a valuable and transgressive understanding of identity, as some might think. What Lugones believes in instead is multiplicity – *mestizaje*. Using this framework, this analysis will look at the different aspects of Cuban-American characters in *In Cuba I was a German Shepherd* by Ana Menéndez and *Memory Mambo* by Achy Obejas. Each novel offers insight into how characters develop and understand themselves (and others) when they use language that shows people they have multiple identities in contact with each other at all times, rather than being one at a time – Cuban, American, woman, communist, lesbian, painter, activist.

Audre Lorde once wrote “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” What I began thinking as self-indulgent, I hope to prove as an act of political warfare. This analysis seeks to make visible the inconsistencies of the logic of fragmentation and make clear that marginalized identities are complex, nuanced, and varied.

The Theoretical Frame

Maria Lugones, in “Purity, Impurity and Separation,” seeks to make visible that the push to define people as fragmented is actually just reifying the control of the dominant over marginalized groups. She explains that the rhetoric of fragmentation is not liberatory, but in fact, relies on the logic of unity and purity that the dominant discourse uses to oppress. To make her meaning clear she uses the metaphor of mayonnaise curdling. When mayonnaise separates, it can never again become egg and oil; instead, “you are left with yolky egg and oily yolk” (459). This metaphor helps us to understand that identity can never be put into concrete, definite categories – there is always a shade of one identity that bleeds into another, like mayonnaise when it curdles. In order to push against the attempt at co-option into the dominant discourse,

Lugones constantly and consistently makes explicit the assertion that identity is curdled, never able to be separated.

For Lugones, fragmentation functions under the logic of purity, where things are “homogeneous, hierarchically ordered” (463). This means there is an assumption that there is no actual difference in the world; underlying everything, there is the possibility to all be united and whole. This, of course, is an impossibility. She deconstructs the fallacy that someone who is considered ‘impure’ can ever become whole; therefore, marginalized groups that function under the guise of unity are constantly striving for something that can never be attained. What is also important to note is that unity and purity, for Lugones, allows for hierarchy. There is always going to be a dominant group when the logic relies on purity. For Lugones, this rhetoric is utilized for control. But what is it that allows for this domination to occur? What does purity rely on to allow it to control others? It relies on reason—rationality. Lugones makes this clear when she explains:

A passionate, needy, sensuous, and rational subject must be conceived as internally separable, as discretely divided into what makes it one – rationality – and into the confused, worthless remainder – passion sensuality. Rationality is understood as this ability of a unified subject to abstract, categorizes, train the multiple to the systematicity of norms, rules that highlight, capture, and train its unity from the privileged vantage point. (465)

Rationality is the most important part of a subject when the subject is constructed under the logic of purity. The rest of the being is worthless. What purity and unity permit is for the self to be separated into categories, but as previously mentioned, these categories are then hierarchized with reason being held as the top measure.

Similarly, Luce Irigaray makes clear in her book, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, that reason is necessarily masculine. It is important to note that Lugones is writing from a point of view where women writers of color are pushing against the oppressive discourses – the white, straight, male bourgeoisie. Irigaray’s view clarifies that women are subjugated to the lesser role because they are not categorized as the rational being, but as the emotional one; men are of the mind – rationality – and women are of the body. It is no coincidence that Lugones uses descriptions associated with the body – passion and sensuality – to make visible that what must be disposed of is anything that does not benefit the mind. So, to become a full, united person, one must compartmentalize the other aspects of the self and rely on reason. Making the connection between rationality as a privileged standpoint and rationality being a necessarily male standpoint is vital to understanding just how deeply rooted the domination of cultural identity that Lugones discusses is similar, if not the same, as the domination of women. This underlying logic of purity and unity infiltrates what can be meant as a transgressive movement – like fragmentation.

bell hooks explains this infiltration of ‘purity’ into the academic writing of the black experience in her essay *Postmodern Blackness*. She advocates for a postmodern view of black identity because it allows for the differences in multiple identities to become visible. She states, “To some extent ruptures, surfaces, contextuality and a host of other happenings create gaps that make space for oppositional practices which no longer require intellectuals to be confined to narrow, separate spheres with no meaningful connection to the world of every day” (para. 15). Finding multiplicity in identity grants the liberation from the standard the dominant narrative has imposed on marginalized groups. bell hooks, like Lugones, Anzaldúa, Irigaray and many other women of color, clarifies that marginalized identities, when understood as fragmented, become

one-dimensional and so do not account for the multiple and multifaceted identities that exist. Each of these women, in different disciplines and different languages, is pushing to make evident the oppression that comes with viewing oneself as split (to use Lugones's understanding of fragmented as split and multiple as curdled).

Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, in *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*, relies on this fragmentary logic to analyze Cuban-American identity. He explains that the hyphen is a space that “signifies connection, continuity” (x). But for Pérez-Firmat, there is a strictly clear category of people – the one-and-a-half generation – that are the only ones who can be considered Cuban-American. For him, there may be Cubans living in America, and the kids of Cuban-Americans, who will never really know the island, but it is the generation of people who were “born in Cuba but made in the USA” that have ‘achieved’ the ‘Cuban-American’ culture (3). Already, there is the language of fragmentation—a clear demarcation of one side and the other. There is also a clear exclusion of people that share experiences of Cuba but are not allowed in the category of Cuban-American because they are not ‘pure’ enough—another sign that Pérez-Firmat is functioning under the logic of purity.

As with any text, one can find moments of multiplicity that speak throughout it, but Pérez-Firmat's analysis falls into the same traps of domination that Lugones points out as fragmentation. A perfect example where this struggle is visible is in his chapter on the mambo. He explains that the mambo is “a forum for foreignness and a haven for the heterogeneous” (72). This is a similar description to what Lugones offers as a curdled society: “According to the logic of curdling, the social world is complex and heterogeneous” (463). But the deeper one gets into Pérez-Firmat's chapter, the more compartmentalized it becomes. He explains that “the mambo's impurities did not make it any less Cuban”—meaning Pérez-Firmat associates impurity as less

authentic (72). If we take Lugones's understanding of impurity as the logic of *this* analysis, then impurity is only a negative thing when function under the logic of the pure. That is why Pérez-Firmat, functioning under the logic that only makes a small group of people Cuban-American, must make excuses for why the mambo is still Cuban—even with its impurities.

Later in the chapter, he claims that “the hyphen is not a minus sign but a plus, a Cuban-American is not less Cuban but more American” (73). While the sentiments behind this may be to make clear that he does not see Cuban-Americans as any less Cuban (even if they are fragmentary), to have an additive system means there has to be concrete categories. Addition always implies subtraction. Also, with concrete categories comes the hierarchy of those categories. This exemplifies just what Lugones means when she says:

a need for purity that requires that we become ‘parts,’ ‘addenda’ of bodies of modern subjects – Christian white bourgeois men – and make their purity possible. We become sides of fictitious dichotomies. To the extent that we are ambiguous – nondichotomous – we threaten the fiction and can be rendered unfit only by decrying ambiguity as nonexistent – that is, by halving us, splitting us. That we exist only as incomplete, unfit beings and they exist as complete only to the extent that what we are, and what is absolutely necessary for them, is declared worthless.

(467)

We must be fragmented in order for others to be whole. The Cuban-American needs to be more American because they must fit into the fiction of purity. In the language of fragmentation, Cuban-Americans are not ambiguous but complete parts that cannot ever make a whole. The problem with this is that we are using American as the standard to which we want to become a part of. This idea of being more American and not less Cuban feeds into the need to be pure—to

be a part of the dominant culture. Pérez-Firmat does not want to give up his Cubanness, but he understands that it makes him ‘unfit’ as a citizen and so the solution is to become more American. And it presumes an essential category of ‘American’ that erases the fact that anyone at some point or another can identify as a hyphenated being: British-American, Irish-American, Italian-American etc. The American, historically, has always been a hyphenated existence—but as Lugones explains, in the search for power and domination having others strive for unity allows for manipulation and control.

The mambo transforms into a fragmentary object under Pérez-Firmat’s analysis. Something that was earlier described as ‘heterogeneous’ is later described as becoming a ‘free-standing fragment, a part that escaped the whole’ (78). Instead of being a powerful style of music *because* it is many things at once and incorporates many different styles, the mambo is described as something that is no longer a part of anything else—that ‘whole’ existed where the mambo escaped from. The mambo stands on its own – and because of its fragmentary nature, has a difficult time picking up in any one place. Pérez-Firmat explains that not many people were a fan of it, at first. The mambo eventually becomes popular *despite* its impurity, according to Pérez-Firmat

It is also significant to mention that Pérez-Firmat’s analysis overwhelmingly relies on men to make his point: Desi Arnaz, Pérez-Prado, Carlos Hijuelos, and José Kozer. There is a clear connection that can be made between the fragmentary language and the almost complete exclusion of women in his analysis. María de Carmen Martínez, in her article “‘Her body was my country’: Gender and Cuban-American exile-community nationalist identity in the work of Gustavo Perez Firmat” explains that “Cuban exile politics has typically rendered women absent, invisible, silent” (296). She is critical of Pérez-Firmat’s work in that he does not contend with

the fact that he is writing from a privileged, white, male standpoint. Throughout Martínez's analysis, she makes the claim that Pérez-Firmat's narrative of the Cuban-American is a one-dimensional and exclusionary rendering.

One final point that is important to discuss is Lugones's explanation of the Mexican/American. For her, the term Chicano signifies a person who is functioning under multiplicity and *mestizaje* because there is no splitting between the Mexican and the American; Chicano demonstrates that an identity is in constant motion, never separable—always multiple. She makes clear that the Mexican/American is someone who functions under the logic of purity and is made fragmented in order to keep her/him believing they are incomplete. Lugones makes it a point to say that there should be no hyphen when describing the people under this logic because Sonia Salívar-Hull uses the hyphen as a place of resistance.

Saldívar-Hull equates the hyphen to *mestizaje*. She illustrates, in her book *Feminism on the Border*, that Chicanas “stride across multiple worlds as U.S. Mexicanas” and that

Chicana remains a useful self-referent for those of us who refuse to ride the hyphen between Mexican and American for the sake of expediency. When we do ride the hyphen, it serves as the new space, the bridge... [where people] can negotiate an empowering racial, gendered, working-class, political terrain we also call *mestizaje* (44).

The hyphen, for Saldívar-Hull is a space where the many facets of identity can intersect and become connected and understood as multiple. She sees the hyphen as a connection; this connection is not solid ground, but a bridge. And this bridge is ridden—this term implies the bump and bustle that goes with any ride; it is clear that the hyphen comes with movement and unstable ground – there is nothing fixed about it.

So, what does the hyphen mean for the Cuban-American? Pérez-Firmat uses it as an additive, fragmentary tool of the logic of purity to create a fictional understanding of identity that reinforces the dominant narrative. But how does the hyphen change when it functions under multiplicity – in making space for the races, genders and sexual orientations that have been silenced – as Saldívar-Hull and Lugones intended it?

Defining Cuban-American

The two writers whose work I have chosen to analyze are both Cuban-American women. Achy Obejas was born in Cuba and came to the United States as a young girl. She would be considered part of the ‘1.5 generation’ that Pérez-Firmat discusses in *Life on the Hyphen*. Ana Menéndez, on the other hand, was born in Los Angeles and later moved to Tampa, and then Miami. Under Pérez-Firmat’s definition, she is not a Cuban-American but an American with Cuban parents. Both these women must contend with their multiple identities to find a voice for what they have experienced. Pérez-Firmat’s definition of what makes a ‘real’ Cuban-American is not sufficient in understanding these writers. Obejas, although technically fits under his definition, is a woman and a lesbian – both silenced individuals in Pérez-Firmat’s analysis. Menéndez does not fit into any part of his Cuban-American. This analysis, then, abandons Pérez-Firmat’s definition and looks to uncover the nuanced identities that each of these writers brings to the Cuban-American identity from the varying perspectives they have created through their characters.

I chose these two women precisely because of their differing positionalities on the Cuban-American spectrum. These women differ on where they were born, how much they have interacted with the island, and where they grew up in the United States. Their characters offer insights into various sexual identities, class identities, and racial identities. They offer varying

degrees and ‘types’ of Cuban-American women that may exist. To say that what a Cuban-American ‘is’ by providing arbitrary guidelines is exactly what Lugones is pushing against. It was of utmost importance, then, that the novels I chose contend with Cuban-American women of varying spaces, because so much of what is written about Cuban-American identity, as previously stated, is male-centered and based on uninformed definitions of what makes someone Cuban-American in the first place.

Obejas’s novel is told from Juani’s – the protagonist – point of view. But with her, we get a glimpse into her mother and aunts, her cousins and cousin’s husband, and her Puerto Rican girlfriend. These different perspectives show the complexity of what it means to identify as Cuban-American and offer varying levels of explanation for what Lugones calls curdling versus splitting—multiplicity versus fragmentation. We also get to see the story of women who came to the United States at different points in their lives and how they all identify as Cuban-American, even with their drastically different experiences. Some came as older women, but with no children, some came before the revolution in Cuba and had kids in the States – who grew up wanting socialism and communism to revolutionize the United States and Cuba. Some came older, after the revolution, and with their young children, and some were born in the United States but grew up within a Cuban household, learning Cuban culture and customs. Despite these vastly different situations, all of these women identified as Cuban, American, and Cuban-American throughout the novel. Exploring just how this is possible, and how identities fold over, is one of the goals of this analysis.

Menéndez’s novel is told as a series of short stories that each gives a snapshot of a Cuban-American’s daily existence. While never explicitly stated, the reader realizes that these characters know each other and live in each other’s stories, but are never told as one cohesive

narrative. This style offers interesting insight into how fragmentation and multiplicity can be studied in a structural way. The characters function under the fallacy of purity with their desire to be pure. In each story there is a realization that being Cuban-American is not pure and a longing for the power that being part of the dominant, pure group brings. But there is also the awareness that they will always be impure. This text also offers many levels of Cuban-American identity, in terms of just when they came into contact with the American aspect of their identity – or for some, the Cuban side. This novel makes clear the various levels of social class within the Cuban-American identity—many characters arrived to the United States having given up their professional careers in Cuba, to become lower-working class in the United States. Many stories also center on the Cuban-American who was born in the States but feels the connection to Cuba and copes with that struggle.

This analysis is divided into three sections, to better explore the different aspects of each novel. The first will be the linguistic analysis—how the novels utilize language to deal with the multiplicity of identity. The second section is the character analysis—how the characters interact and are depicted for the reader that offer insight into what occurs to fragmented identities and what follows when they are viewed as multiple and layered. The last section analyzes the structural aspect of each novel and how the form helps to push the reader to feel and find ambiguity and nuance in the text.

Linguistic Analysis

Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still

have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speaker rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate (81).

This quotation, written by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, exemplifies the potential that language has to further ideals of fragmentation. In the first sentence of the quotation, the reader sees that language is directly connected to the understanding of self. Anzaldúa points out that she can never be legitimate if her language is not legitimate. This returns to the logic of purity and fragmentation. Language systems, when viewed as whole, concrete, separate systems, have the same hierarchical underpinnings that the logic of purity and unity have. What Anzaldúa makes visible is that Spanish and English is not enough to encapsulate how her language works. To speak Spanish is to assume that Spanish exists as a separable entity. The world Anzaldúa lives within is one of multiplicity, to use Lugones's term. She speaks Chicano Texas Spanish, and Tex-Mex, and Spanglish. She understands that language exists on a spectrum—in similar ways to Lugones's understanding of *mestizaje*. Lugones extends Anzaldúa's understanding of ambiguity and transformation what happens in identity to make clear the reifying potential that fragmentary logic has. Continuing Anzaldúa's move to make visible the liberating possibilities of *mestizaje*, Lugones reveals the dangers of fragmentation and supports why multiplicity is vital to feminist, marginalized movement.

Ofelia García and Li Wei, in their book *Translanguaging*, provide a new way of looking at language that showcases the fluidity that is inherent in it. Language is traditionally thought of in additive terms—you speak English, plus you speak Spanish. As you learn a new language, that becomes a new system you have acquired. García and Wei, though, view language radically

different. What they call translanguaging is an attitude that “considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems...but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages” (2). What this means is that language cannot be separated into sets like English and Spanish. It is more accurate to describe language as one system that can be loosely separated into *english* and *spanish* features, let’s say. When people communicate, they use these different features based on the situation at hand. For example, when they communicate with people that have similar repertoires to their own, they do not stick to one ‘system’ but move between features without any order. This is showcased by Anzaldúa’s thoughts on language. Anzaldúa makes the poignant connection between language and identity; what translanguaging offers is a way of providing a framework that pushes against the notion that language must be divided into set systems, and results in a parallel framework that makes clear, as with language, identity does not function under these rigid structures. In the same way that Anzaldúa makes clear that her language is multiple, García and Wei offer terms that help with understanding how language and language-learning works.

But how can multiplicity of language be made visible in writing? Is it something that one can analyze and make fragmentation or multiplicity apparent? Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, for example, italicizes words in Spanish and keeps words that are in English in roman font. She also, for the most part, makes sure to write in English whatever it is she wrote in Spanish. Is this a sign of fragmentation? Does this separation demarcate language systems in a way that makes them seem like whole, concrete systems, able to be separated? Or is the fact that Anzaldúa is using Spanish in an English-only academic setting itself a transgression against language systems and their power to splinter identities? Those who do not understand

Anzaldúa's strategy and background may advocate for the prior, but *Borderlands/La Frontera* is itself a hybrid work. Anzaldúa makes clear that her writing in Spanish at all makes others in the academic world uncomfortable. The book is both an academic text and a memoir; it includes prose, poetry, research, analysis; it develops ideas of intersection, multiplicity, transgression and political action. The entire book revolves around being multiple in a world that is constantly, violently, ripping her apart. The switch between Spanish and English in a setting where standardized English is forced on the marginalized speaks to her commitment to making her work *mestiza*.

In Obejas's novel, Juani is aware that there is something more to language than just the traditionally understood systems. She goes as far as to posit that there is something nonverbal that is a part of the communication of her Cuban-American family. Juani thinks:

We have an affinity, a way of speaking that's neither Cuban nor American, neither genetic or processed. There's a look, a wink, the way we touch each other. We communicate, I suspect, like dead people—not so much compensation for the lost sense, but creating a new syntax from the pieces of our displaced life. (13)

It may be that Juani's understanding of language is separate, Cuban and American referring to Spanish and English. But it also seems like she cannot quite place what is happening when she communicates within Spanish or English—there is an ambiguity to language that includes nonverbal attributes of communication. She is working with the dichotomy of Cuban and American, but she is also making clear that there is a space, a gap, involved in her communication—it is not just language, but gestures and experiences that tie people together and pushes past the simple understanding of communication. This scene straddles between the multiple and the fragmentary.

Lugones accounts for the language of fragmentation even though she works to make the multiple visible. She states “sometimes the logic of purity dominates the text, sometimes the logic of curdling does...the reader needs to see ambiguity, see that the split-separated are also and simultaneously curdled-separated. Otherwise one is only seeing the success of oppression, seeing with the lover of purity’s eyes” (436). There needs to be an explicit attempt made by the reader at finding the multiplicity so that new language can begin to circulate when we discuss identity. If we as readers do not make an effort to see the multiple in every interaction, then we will just fall back on the language of the oppressor. What Juani offers us is an ambiguous space between her two traditionally understood as dichotomous identities.

Obejas’s novel also uses italics to signify to the reader that it is not just Spanish that is viewed as a concrete category, but other identity markers that are traditionally marginalized. There are Spanish words like *gracias* and *gusana* that are italicized, but there is also a sprinkling of English words that have been italicized as well. In a scene that revolves around Juani and Gina, Gina tells Juani:

‘Look, I’m not interested in being a *lesbian*, in separating politically from my people’ she’d say to me, her face hard and dark. ‘What are we talking about? Issues of *sexual identity*? While Puerto Rico is a colony? While Puerto Rican apologists are trying to ram statehood down our throats with legislative tricks and sleights of hand? You think I’m going to sit around and discuss *sexual identity*? Nah, Juani, you can do that—you can have that navel-gazing discussion. (77)

Italics can be used in a way that shows separation as splitting—Spanish in italics signifies a concrete language system that must be separated from English. It serves to make explicit that Spanish is not the norm. There is an emphasis that is put on Spanish that undermines its place in

the text, keeping it clear that English is what belongs – because it is in roman font – and Spanish is what is extra. In the quotation, Gina’s explanation of sexual orientation as insignificant is clear when she relegates it to italics. When Juani describes herself as a lesbian, it is not italicized—it is just part of her many identity markers in her story; we see this, for example, when she tells the reader “my lesbianism is not the cause of my alienation, but it’s part of it” (79). But when her girlfriend Gina uses the term, it is italicized. Gina sees these terms as separate from her. She finds the discussion of sexual identity beneath her; the italics give the reader the impression that she is disgusted with the idea that anyone would waste their time with that discussion when there are other, more pertinent, issues at hand.

How is this feeling of disgust portrayed to the reader? Through italics. Italics serve to show a sense of hierarchy. When English is in roman font and Spanish is italicized it is understood that Spanish is below English in the hierarchy because the ‘normal’ font is English. The same strategy that is used to separate Spanish from English is used to separate sexual identity from other political discussions. This leads the reader to form a common denominator when using italics: disgust, uselessness, less than. When Obejas chooses to italicize lesbian and sexual identity when Gina uses the terms, it shows the reader that Gina sees these topics as below her own identity as a Puerto Rican activist.

It is important to note that Gina refuses to identify with these terms because she thinks that to be a successful activist for her Puerto Rican people, she must *just* be Puerto Rican. Gina, here, is functioning under the logic of fragmentation because she cannot see herself as both multiple and productive. She feels that in order to be productive she must choose one category to function under. Juani confirms this categorization when she tells the reader “But for Gina, being a public lesbian somehow distracted from her *puertorriqueñismo*” (78). Italicizing

puertorriqueñismo makes it clear that Juani believes Gina is putting herself into a concrete category. And if it follows the aforementioned correlation between uselessness and italics, Juani does not have a high opinion of being *just* a Puerto Rican activist.

The irony in this is that Gina is fighting against Puerto Rico becoming part of the United States *because* she does not want Puerto Rico to become a part of the dominant system. Yet, she becomes trapped in the dominant narrative by creating a concrete category for her to function under. Gina understands that full assimilation into the dominant system can never happen—she understands that Puerto Rico will always be a colony, even with ‘statehood.’ Nevertheless, she reinforces the logic of purity she is fighting against when she commits herself to categorization of identity instead of multiplicity.

Menéndez, in her novel, does not use italics in any language interactions. Conversations that flow between English and Spanish are never italicized; there is no separation between English and Spanish as language systems. This proposes one large language system – like García and Wei’s translanguaging – because there is no distinction in languages. The only use of italics in the novel is for song lyrics. All the song lyrics are in Spanish though, so this raises questions of language and italics. But, in addition to being italicized, song lyrics are always separated from the rest of the text, into block quotes. The italics are part of a larger attempt to separate lyrics from the rest of the text. This gives the impression that the separation is not about the language but because of their status as lyrics.

García and Wei also use italics in ways that are not exclusively about demarcating a shift in language. While they do italicize other languages the few times it appears in their text, the italics are reserved mostly for any word that may be discipline-specific vocabulary. Any word that has to do with the study of language itself is italicized so the reader is clued into the fact that

the word is being used as a term, not just as any word. What this does is change italics' place in the hierarchy. Instead of being used to showcase different, lesser languages than the norm, the italics serve to emphasize importance. The italics help the reader to identify what terms are vital to the academic understanding of García and Wei's argument, and gives the reader access to the language that is needed in order to participate in the larger academic discussion of just language learning—García and Wei's main goal.

Character Analysis

The characters from each novel shift from fragmentary to multiple and back throughout the text. Obejas's novel shows the reader both what fragmentary language does to influence the reader's thoughts on a character and how multiplicity is actually a more just way of describing them.

Juani – the protagonist in Obejas's novel – describes her cousin Patricia as fragmentary and multiple, respectively. Patricia is titled the 'American' by the other cousins; because she was born in the United States, she can never escape this ubiquitous label. Whenever Patricia does something, anything, Juani chalks it up to an 'americanada.' For example, when Juani wants to go to Cuba, she asks for Patricia's help. Patricia is willing, on the condition that Juani speak to a career counselor when she returns. Juani thinks "It was another *americanada*, that was clear—but what could I do?" (155). Patricia's concern for her cousin was because of her Americanization. She is held to this (imaginary) standard of Americanness that is a fragment of her identity. But to complicate this thought, Juani, right after, thinks "And there was no questions she was coming from a big warm Cuban heart that loved me tons" (155). Here, it is apparent that although Patricia is labeled American, her heart is Cuban. This takes the category that Patricia is placed in, and blurs the lines of what, exactly, she is—Cuban or American.

It is important to note that Juani's description of her cousin Patricia is not American, but an American action. When it comes to *who* Patricia is, or what she is made of, she is Cuban. She has Cuban parts—a Cuban heart. Patricia is hard to pin because she does 'act' American but is viewed as Cuban, according to Juani. It is difficult to place Patricia – to identify what category she falls under, if any, when Juani shifts between claiming Patricia is American or Cuban.

Juani goes on to say "I'd always thought it was unfair to kid about her being Americanized when she is in fact, American-born. Besides, Patricia's always known more about Cuba than all of us put together—our parents included" (155). Here, Juani makes an explicit distinction between being American and being Americanized. For Juani, Patricia's actions should not be made fun of as American because she is American-born. She is *supposed* to act in these ways. But what are those ways? Her family obviously views her as Cuban if her 'American' actions are thought of as odd enough to point out. Juani also makes an interesting point about Patricia knowing more than anyone in the family about Cuba. This raises the question...do you have to *know* about a place to be a part of it? Does knowing more about Cuba mean more than being born in Cuba, in terms of identity? Is Patricia more Cuban than the parents, aunts, and uncles who lived there, because she knows more about the history and politics of the country? These questions make it unclear what it means to be Cuban, and in turn, what it means to be Cuban-American.

This distinction between American and Americanized parallels Lugones's notion of purity and impurity. To be American is to be pure and to be Americanized is to be impure. Patricia should be considered pure because she was born in America—making her, at least in Juani's mind, American. But what she is viewed as throughout the novel is Americanized. She

must contend with her multiple identities because she understands that her heritage as Cuban, her connection to Cuba, makes her impure. It makes clear that even being American-born does not make you American. Lugones discusses this when she uses the term *mexican/american*. This term is to showcase individuals forced to function under the logic of purity and are seeking to assimilate into pure culture – they are trying to be pure. She uses the slash instead of the hyphen because, for Lugones (as for Saldívar-Hull) the hyphen is a place of resistance. Therefore, people that must deal with multiple identities but create concrete categories instead of pushing for multiplicity live within a binary—made clear with the slash. But Patricia illustrates that pureness is an impossibility because she cannot be pure even when she is American-born. Patricia ‘rides’ the hyphen in Cuban-American.

I just want to make clear that being considered ‘impure’ by the dominant society is not always as evident as Patricia’s case. This happens with language in the United States on a daily basis. Geneva Smitherman and H. Samy Alim, in *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.*, make the case that we need to ‘language race’. What they mean is that language is used to oppress and discriminate against African-Americans in the United States. They focus on the nuances of discrimination against the black community based on their use of standardized English. There are two views on English: Standard English versus Standardized English. These two distinct views lead to different power structures and the understanding of language as power. On one hand, to assume there is a Standard English assumes a pure English that exists outside of societal influences. It erases the histories and experiences of millions of people who do not have access to this English. On the other hand, to speak of *standardized* English is to acknowledge that English is not itself a separate, unaffected, phenomenon. It acknowledges that a dominant group’s English is the powerful English and that

others need access to it in order to participate (although never fully) in this power structure. Smitherman and Alim give an example of this power structure in a black woman's reaction to hearing the word articulate: "I see articulate as some sort of negative euphemism about black people in general. I see it as saying this is a way to actually negate the black person's intelligence" (39). Even when people of color have access to standardized English, it is always made to seem as if it was by accident; they are always made to feel like outsiders because it is always a surprise when they are 'articulate.' This connects to Lugones point of the dominant group needing others to be fragmented in order for them to be whole. Even when marginalized people get access to power, they are always undermined by the master narrative in some way. This point makes clear that becoming 'pure' is always an impossibility.

While Patricia is loved by our protagonist, Jimmy, her cousin Caridad's husband, is not. His portrayal as fragmented serves to further the dislike the reader has for him. The clear and unambiguous description of Jimmy makes clear that discussing someone using the logic of purity makes them hated. We first see Jimmy described by Caridad at the moment she begins to fall in love with him. She describes him in a similar way to Pérez-Firmat's description of Cuban-American existence. She says to Juani "He got so Americanized without even realizing' ... 'See, he doesn't belong in either world, Cuban or American,' Caridad said, shaking her head in pity, patting her heart with an open palm" (44). Jimmy came to the United States young enough to be Americanized, but as we have said, he can never be American under the logic of purity. He has also been in the United States long enough to be a foreigner in Cuba. The lack of purity is on both sides – neither purely American nor purely Cuban. While this lack of purity could be empowering, because Jimmy is being understood in the terms the logic of purity provides, Jimmy is viewed as fragmented and the lack of value in impurity makes it the worst offense for

Jimmy. The reader understands this lack of value in impurity by Caridad's reaction to it—she feels pity for him.

When Juani and her cousins are in the car discussing Jimmy, they agree that ““There's something disgustingly Cuban about him, and I think, in a way, that appeals to her, like a primordial memory”” (60). It is surprising to hear Cuban being equated with disgusting because there is a consistent fight throughout the novel to be Cuban. But when it concerns Jimmy, using Cuban as a label makes it a category—something concrete. It shows the reader that concrete labels can only be negative; when Cuban stops being multiple and fluid, it stops being the powerful identity people crave – instead it is what makes Jimmy disgusting. And what attracts Caridad to him is this exact fragmentation, this categorization as pure is what Caridad craves. Her cousins make clear that she craves this because she remembers a time when she felt ‘pure’ and wants to return to that powerful identity.

Patricia, although she had to fight with others who were labeling her, was thought to be an intelligent, thoughtful woman. Pauli, on the other hand, was the cousin who was always multiple, and with that, was always the problem. She was always thought to be the rebel, the lost one. It was not until her father died – the enforcer of purity – that others, mostly her mother, started to value her ability to break norms and move between her multiple identities.

In the beginning of the novel, Juani tells us about Pauli's discovery that her father was cheating on her mother with another woman. Pauli takes matters into her own hands and ends the affair. When Juani is describing the scene to the reader, she makes visible the falseness of the logic of purity by describing the different ways the reader could view the situation:

“In American terms, Pauli refused to enable her father. In Cuban terms, she was an ingrate” (63). This quotation demonstrates that, sometimes, contradictory things can exist simultaneously.

With the logic of purity, rationality is the only valid indicator—and reason dictates that two opposite things cannot happen at once. Pauli cannot choose how her actions will be interpreted, she suffers through both at the same time. But the logic of purity must split these two reactions up in order for them to be rational. The reader can see that Pauli, even in the midst of fragmentation, attempts to be multiple.

It is Pauli's push to be multiple that allows her to live a life that seems less pressured and more fulfilling than any of the other characters: she moves to Mexico, she becomes a dancer, she is intimate with whoever she wants – which is men who are seemingly unavailable and who she will probably never see again (priests, cab drivers, rabbis, foreigners) – she has an unplanned and unmarried pregnancy. All of these things are viewed as a 'disgrace' because everyone else is functioning under the logic that she *must* follow the norms of what it means to be Cuban. But she never listens, and does what she wants. Once her father dies, Pauli is seen in an entirely new light. Her mother, Celia, is freed from the rigid lifestyle that was imposed on her by her late husband. For example, Celia can now eat as many citrus fruits as she pleases, and does so with gusto, because her allergic husband is not around anymore. She can enjoy what was forbidden to her because her husband – who served as the enforcer of rules and categories of right and wrong – was no longer around.

When it came to the new light Pauli was seen under, Juani commented “What no one expected was that Tía Celia would become Pauli's champion...Tía Celia shone with pride about her daughter, the previously problematic child...her crazy independence, her sexuality and vigor, all these became medals of honor” (94). This is a complete shift from how Pauli had been viewed throughout the beginning of the novel. Now, her mother could appreciate the freedom that came with being multiple. What was seen as a problem when Celia lived with the logic of

fragmentation became an advantage when she was liberated and allowed to see multiplicity for its potential.

Gina, Juani's ex-girlfriend, depicts the largest level of pain and shame that the logic of purity can inflict. As seen in a previously discussed quotation (in the linguistic analysis section), Gina refuses to engage in any conversations regarding sexual identity because she feels it will 'split' her from her people. She feels that being multiple – namely, lesbian – will not allow her to be productive as a Puerto Rican activist. It is in this scene where the reader can see just how debilitating the language of fragmentation can be. For Gina, identifying as lesbian gets in the way of identifying as a Puerto Rican. She does not see any space for them to coexist. If Gina is going to create change in her government, for her people, then she must be only Puerto Rican—she cannot be anything else. But that means that Gina cannot connect with Juani on an intimate level. She is unwilling to participate in the part of her identity that directly ties her to Juani.

What adds another level of strangeness and ambiguity to Gina's fixation on being only Puerto Rican is that the reader later finds out that the 'independista' movement that Gina holds so dear, does not approve of gay rights. What she holds so dear will not accept her as a multiple identity. This is *why* Gina refuses to engage in her other identities—because if she publically identifies as lesbian, it will erase her from the conversation if Puerto Rican rights. Lugones discusses this idea when she describes the difference between what she calls transparent and thick member of a groups. Lugones explains that a transparent member of a group is one whose "perceptions become dominant or hegemonical in the group" (474). Thick members are erased because they have many intersecting identities and are "relegated to the margins in the politics of intragroup contestation" (474). Even in marginalized groups, people who do not represent the one identity marker in the group, but are a part of several oppressed groups, are silenced.

Lugones gives the example of black women to make her point clear: “white women are transparent as women; black men are transparent as black. Black women are erased and fighting against erasure” (474). Being multiple, even within a marginalized group, means being erased.

This is exactly why bell hooks advocates for a postmodern understanding of the black voice—because in her historical situation, the black voice only represents black men of a certain class. Black scholars push against postmodernism because they feel that they just got a ‘black voice’, so to say now that it does not exist, or that it is oppressive, goes against everything people of color have been fighting for. But, bell hooks makes clear that postmodernism allows for different experiences of class, gender, and sexuality to come into contact with race and allow for multiple identities to emerge and exist.

Gina can either be interpreted as a transparent member of a group or a thick member trying to become visible. Gina may choose to identify as Puerto Rican and leave the rest of her identity behind because she understands being transparent gives her a level of power that she otherwise would not have. This feeds into why Gina does not want to be explicit about her sexual orientation; it shows the shame that underlies being pure. It reveals the violence that is enacted against oneself in order to be pure. This will only lead to the stronger domination of the dominant, oppressive system. But Lugones understands what Gina is experiencing and declares, “Our style cannot be outside the meaning of Latina and cannot be outside of the meaning of Lesbian. So, our struggle, the struggle of lesbians, goes beyond lesbians as a group” (476).

Juani exemplifies the muddiness of identity throughout the novel by her description of others as fragmented and as multiple. She is also constantly and consistently attempting multiplicity. There is one point in the novel where she is contemplating the trauma that comes with being queer but is sure to let the reader know “how dangerous all this is to say—how

suggesting a correlation between being queer and being nuts throws out more than thirty years of civil rights” (75). Juani understands that the dominant logic can take anything and change it to fit its own agenda. She understands that trauma is a very real effect of being queer in a society that enacts continuous violence against those who do not fit within the norms of the dominant logic. She also understands that the dominant narrative can co-opt this and manipulate the narrative to say that people who identify as queer are crazy or dangerous or are mentally unstable and need to be separated from other ‘normal’ people. Using Lugones’s framework, this is an instance where Juani showcases the multiplicity within identity and the dangers of fragmentation.

Also, she is committed to understanding herself as multiple, even when it leads to difficult confrontations. Specifically, this can be seen when Gina’s friends are judging her for being a Cuban-American. One of Gina’s friends in particular, Hilda, finds Juani’s lack of a label offensive:

‘No,’ I finally said, ‘I just don't like that word.’

‘What word?’

‘*Gusana*.’

...’Do you like *Cuban-American*?’ Hilda asked

‘Sometimes.’

Her eyebrow went up. ‘Really?’

‘Sometimes, yes.’

‘And other times?’

I felt as if I was under a hot light, my face red. My palms itched. I felt my intestines knotting and twisting. ‘Cuban, *cubana*, whatever.’ (128)

The only word Juani refuses to identify with is *gusana*—a slur meant to discredit any Cuban that left the island. Not just a slur, it is an exacting label created by others and imposed by others to enact power dynamics of the logic of fragmentation. It creates an us-versus-them mentality. Juani makes it clear that she is okay with any of the other labels – Cuban-American, Cuban, Cubana – depending on the circumstance. This points to Juani’s understanding that identity is fluid and depends on any given moment. Hilda becomes more and more aggressive with Juani because she is unwilling to concede to a concrete label. Juani is unwilling to give up her multiplicity. It is not until another of Gina’s friends intervenes with ““Hey, she’s a woman with flexibility”” that the argument ends (128). This other friend points out that all Juani was guilty of was being flexible, and while Hilda did not like that the conversation ended, the abrupt end based on this statement conveys to the reader that multiplicity can offer power of its own.

Menéndez’s novel approaches identity a little differently. In her short stories, there are instances where fragmentation and multiplicity come into contact and create friction for the characters. These characters must deal with their shattered reality. They each long for purity because they understand that being pure means being a part of the dominant group; it means an easier existence without suffering, without fighting for visibility. But they are also aware that they will never make it to this pure group because full assimilation into the dominant group is an impossibility. Accessibility to purity is a tool used by the dominant group to continually bury marginalized groups.

In the title story, Máximo – the protagonist – spends the story telling jokes. These jokes highlight the pain of feeling fragmented while showing the hopelessness of pureness. The last joke in particular struggles with how the pure imposes a negative value on the impure and create a yearning for purity. Máximo tells the other men he plays dominos with “the story of Juanito

the little dog” (27). Juanito, just arriving in the United States, is walking through the city when he sees a beautiful poodle he just has to meet. The poodle – meant to be the American – sees Juanito the Cuban dog and defines him as a mutt: “Do you have any idea who you’re talking to? I am a refined breed of considerable class and you are nothing but a short, insignificant mutt” (28). Juanito, hurt but trying desperately to be valued continues to woo the poodle and is continuously shut down. Finally, after Juanito has received all the rejection he can take, he reveals to the poodle – and the reader – that in Cuba, he was a German Shepherd.

This American poodle has taken away the power of Juanito to identify himself, and has labeled him a mutt. The poodle is the exemplary, ‘pure’ subject and has the power to erase any power in multiplicity that Juanito had by fragmenting him. Because Juanito is now in the United States, he is no longer valuable—he is viewed as impure. But this impurity is not interpreted as a powerful position because it is under the influence of the pure. Like Juanito, Máximo imagines himself as pure when he was in Cuba and what he has become in the United States—“a generation of former professors served black beans and rice to the nostalgic” (7). But what Máximo realizes is that he can never be pure—he will always be a mutt in the United States.

Ernesto, in his story “the Party,” exposes the comfort that the dominant group gets to enjoy. Yes, being multiple allows for some freedom, as Pauli showed in Obejas’s novel, but being multiple also brings pain. We experienced the suffering Juani had to endure in order to stand her multiple grounds against Gina’s friends, and now we will see the exhaustion being varied and multiple can cause.

This story centers on the arrival of another Cuban exile to the United States. As everyone is waiting for the anticipated arrival, they all begin to talk of Cuba—the dissidents, the young men who were heroes, the “tough times, idealism, the struggle, the disappointment” and Ernesto

could not stand it any longer (201). The Cuba, the resistance, the heroes that were being discussed did not exist, and maybe never existed. In the story it states, “Suddenly, Ernesto is weary of language, weary of words and the memories they try to trap and kill for viewing. He is tired of all the layers in a sentence, the phrases that live only to conceal” (201). Ernesto has a realization that words are not just how we communicate, but how we create histories. He could no longer bear the layers of meaning, the different truths that all existed at once. He was exhausted by the multiplicity that exists in language, and in identity. While it can be liberating not fitting into a box, it is also a constant struggle to push against a dominant ideology—and pushing so hard gets exhausting, quickly. Ernesto, at this moment, reached his breaking point. He does not want words to make multiple meanings, to be nuanced, because when words are nuanced they hide and shift meaning. What Ernesto wants is transparency, and that can only come when there is a lack of movement. Lugones defines transparency as “unaware of one’s own difference from other members of the group” (474). And even if that may cause erasure to other voices, what Ernesto wants is to be unaware, because that will eliminate his suffering. He just wants what *is*—the supposed essence that comes with being a whole subject. There is a recognition of the power of language and Ernesto is tired of it. He yearns to be an empty referent; he wants to have peace and be outside of himself.

Ernesto goes on to think “now, old as he’s become, that he would like to welcome blankness, to live in a white house with white walls and white floors. He would banish films and photographs, everything that dulls the moment with yesterday’s thin light” (201). White is what he longs for, even though white is the dominant discourse that does not accept him. He understands that he can never be pure—but he longs for simplicity. The white is both literally and metaphorically the dominant groups of people. Ernesto makes clear that only the dominant

discourse offers this comfort – the white is a space where there is never suffering because there is a lack of oppression—they are the oppressors. He wants nothing to remind him of the space that he inhabits. Ernesto would get rid of movies, pictures, anything that can point to the core of what the stories and the words do to the history of Cubans. He wants to get rid of all that can speak multiplicity.

He ends his draining though process with wishing “he could pin a single truth to the wall and force himself to memorize it” (201). What Ernesto wants most is the comfort of absolutes. If absolutes exist, then he can have an answer to why he suffers, why Cubans must leave their country, and why the Cuban people are subjected to pain; better yet, if absolutes exist, he would not have to worry about any of those questions in the first place. It is in Ernesto’s desire that the reader realizes that absolutes are impossible. There is no truth that Ernesto can pin to the wall because truth is circumstantial—truth will not relieve Ernesto of any pain. This truth is what he wants to get away from while already knowing that it is impossible.

Finally, the logic of purity falters in “Her Mother’s House.” Lissette, our main character, goes back to Cuba to find her identity. This story is one where the child is born in the United States but is raised by Cuban parents and grows a sense of identity and connection to an island she has never been to. There is already potential for multiplicity because Lissette understands that she has nuanced identity features, even if she has never been to the island. In fact, she is born into multiple roots: she is born in Miami to two Cuban parents, but each of her parents fled Cuba for different reasons—one fleeing Batista’s regime and one fleeing Castro’s. She is brought up in this fictional, uncertain state of not know which Cuba is real—both of her parents have differing reasons they left Cuba, but Lissette’s entire life is predicated on one main fact: she grew up in the United States because her family believed they could not go back to Cuba.

Lisette describes her reason for going back to Cuba as something “she could barely explain to herself. How every story needed a beginning. How her past had come to seem like a blank page, waiting for truth to darken it” (210). She is longing for a beginning that is not her own—that starts before she was born. She is looking for a Cuban identity in the hopes that that will help her feel complete, whole. What is interesting is the color binary presented. Menéndez could have used many other words at the end of that quotation: a blank page can be ‘filled’ with words, or ‘enlightened’ with truth. But Menéndez chose the word darken. This is one of many allusions to color as a symbol of good and bad. The story ends with the revelation that the truth she believed all her life is, in fact, a fiction. So, maybe the darkening is a foreshadowing of what is to come; or to look at it through Lugones’s lens, maybe it is a symbol of fragmentation—the darkness of fragmentation.

But because impurity takes what is considered negative and reveals its liberatory potential, darkened can also be taken to mean the opposite. Equating darkness with undesirable has been something the dominant structure has been purporting for a long time. But Menéndez flips this understanding. What Lisette’s darkening will give her is the freedom of another layer to her identity. Since all she knows is the American side, and wants more of her Cuban identity mixed in, the darkening signifies the making of her identity more complex than just finite categories—like a palimpsest.

When Lisette arrives in Cuba, what she finds is that she “had been vaguely hurt that no one recognized her as Cuban” (213). Although she identifies with being Cuban, the reality that Cubans from the island do not see her as Cuban reminds her that there is something different about her—she cannot pass as pure. It exposes that her identity can never be absolute. Being Cuban makes her fragmented in the United States, but it does not make her Cuban in Cuba.

She is surprised when she gets to her mother's house in Cuba and the people living in it are people who used to work for her mother—Matún and Alicia. She is disappointed with the house itself—run down, small, simple. Lissette realizes that her mother had lied to her about the house all these years; the house was not this beautiful, ornate, palace that her mother had described all her life (although it may be how her mother remembered it). This realization is the beginning of her fiction-believed-as-reality being shattered. What she thought was real – pure – has turned out to be a false.

But this house reveals something else to Lissette, and the reader:

‘You know. The government has been very helpful to us. Yes, very generous with us. They gave us this land when your grandparents left. Every Sunday, me and the wife drive the scooter to Havana and sell guavas and mangoes. We are not poor; we are doing very well,’ he said. ‘Thanks to our government and the grace of God.’ (224)

Lissette copes with this information by pressing money into Matún's hands and “His eyes never changed expressions until he closed them and bowed them ever so slightly. Gratitude and reproach, the small space between knowing and forgetting” (224). This is a difficult scene to interpret and is written in a way that makes it ambiguous on purpose. The first interpretation is the one that fits in with the narrative of the Cuban exile: Matún says all these great things about the government in Cuba because he has to. Lissette sees through this veil, though, and gifts him money because he is in desperate need of it. Matún is embarrassed that he needs money, but is thankful that Lissette is helping him. This is the interpretation that utilizes the logic of purity. Her truth – that her family *had* to leave Cuba, that it was worth leaving – is confirmed. Even

though Matún told Lissette that he was doing fine, Lissette can see through the lie. Why? Because it *has* to be a lie, if we follow the logic of fragmentation.

Of course, there is also the other interpretation—that Matún is telling the truth and Lissette, to make her life bearable (since her entire identity is predicated on the fact that it was necessary for her parents to flee from Cuba for a better life) hears something that is not there – a lie – and gives Matún the money. Menéndez creates this ambiguity in the text to mirror Lissette’s uncertainty to what is true and what is not. Lissette cannot *grasp* her identity as Cuban because what defined it before was based on what her parents told her about Cuba. But if it is true that Matún is doing well, she could no longer hold onto that myth. In this interpretation, Matún pretends to be grateful but is actually reprovving of this woman who feels she is better than him and does not see him as an equal because she is offering him money. Lissette cannot let go of her fiction even when it is in front of her; being Cuban-American, for Lissette, must include growing up in Cuba was an impossible option.

She is already fragmented and liminal because she was born in a country – the United States – that was not her own and did not feel like her own. She went to Cuba – hoping to find herself in the homeland of her parents, hoping to find relief and purpose as to why she must endure this liminal identity. What she finds is that Cuba does not clear any of her doubts, but makes things muddier. What this story shows is that absolutes are a myth, and believing in them does not make identities any less painful. Identities, Cuban-American and all others, are ever-changing stories that make up people’s histories.

Analysis of Structure

Each of these novels uses different structures to tell its story. In turn, each of the structures offers new ways of viewing texts as layered and multiple, questioning the logic of fragmentation.

Menéndez uses short stories to tell the narrative of different characters. The stories are not organized in chronological order, and while many characters that have their own stories appear on the sidelines of others, it is never explained that the characters are in any way connected. The protagonist of each story offers a snapshot of identity and if they appear in another story as a supporting character, it is not important to explain who they are. These attributes serve to fragment the story, if fragmentation is the logic one is working under. The lack of making clear that there are recurring characters enables the reader to view them as unimportant in another story. But looking at the structure through the lens Lugones offers, the short stories show that there are spaces between identities and experiences—that nothing is able to be fully known. The lack of continuity offers the reader a sense of rupture between the snapshots of the story. By rupture, I mean a sense of ambiguity between what Menéndez tells the reader in each story and the unspoken times between these stories. Not making the connection that the Máximo in the title story is the same Máximo who organizes the party in “The Party” explicit allows the reader to discover and make their own connections between characters and stories. The structure allows the reader to participate in building the world of these Cuban-Americans in the story as much as each of the characters.

Obejas’s novel is told through Juani. But she does not make it easy for the reader to understand the characters because she builds the story by interlocking the present with the past. The story is not chronological; it is set up so that the reader starts in the present, with Juani, but

travels back in time, through her memory, to make sense of something that has happened. For example, Juani shows us relatively early on, that when she raises her hand, she cups her breast because she feels pain. The reader is unaware of what has happened, but knows they will find out what it is eventually because Juani admits that it sparked the memory of what happened (whatever that may be). Obejas (through Juani) keeps the reader engaged in the back and forth of the story by leaving ambiguity for the reader to come up with their own conclusions. It is not until the middle-end of the novel that the reader finds out that Juani is in pain because she was in a fight with her ex-girlfriend Gina. Gina is another excellent example of how Obejas writes the story in a way that has the reader develop multiple feelings and presumptions about characters before the entire story is revealed. The reader starts with the information that Gina is the ex-girlfriend, but spends the entire novel watching their romance unfold and becomes emotionally involved in the transformation of their identities.

Both novels utilize transformation and ambiguity to force the reader to participate in the creation of the story, instead of following along. The reader becomes another layer of identity in the text that reinforces Lugones's declaration that there should always be a push toward multiplicity.

Conclusion

Eric Gardner, in his book *Unexpected Places*, makes the poignant observation that of all the academic writing published on Frederick Douglass, more than half were about his first – of three – autobiographies, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (7). This means that the scholarship produced on Douglass, what we know and understand about him, is based on a fraction of his writing. And with the almost forty-year gap between his first and third autobiography, the scholarship produced about Douglass is missing important analysis in his

changes and shifts within his own writing. So, what does this all say about what academia knows? And what does this mean for how the academy has extended the conversations that Douglass's writings are a part of?

The example of Douglass offers a more tangible understanding of the dangers of fragmentation than the abstract ideations of identity. With most of the scholarship on Douglass focusing on one of his three biggest literary works, the development of this conversation is narrow and missing vital information. It is undeniable that marginalized groups need to make themselves visible—but using fragmentation leaves these groups at risk of becoming one-dimensional and concrete. While fragmentation seems to offer an understanding of self, this understanding is superficial and erases many voices in its creation.

The logic of purity can only lead to a reification of the dominant—the dominant group, perceived as whole, has the power to fragment others. It is only through viewing identity as multifaceted and in constant motion that people who interact in several intersections of marginalization can be seen and heard. Looking at Obejas and Menéndez's novels through Lugones's lens, these writers permit their characters to take on many identities in the novels—women, Cubans who came to the United States, single mothers, widows, American-born Cubans, cubanas, lesbians, activists, women in abusive relationships. The master narrative co-opts even marginalized groups looking for liberation, as Lugones makes clear with her explanation of 'transparent' members in any minority group, when fragmentation is the prevailing logic. What mestizaje and multiplicity offer to these groups, then, is a way of creating a critical identity that allows for many self-identified labels to interact and enmesh.

Linguistic differences play a large role in identity formation and each of the authors in this analysis use italics to demonstrate the play and nuance of language. Obejas, for example,

uses italics as a tool to show the reader when identity is taken as a concrete category or when it is fluid. When Gina is talking about sexual identity and identifying as lesbian her use of those terms are italicized to signify to the reader that these categories, for Gina, are finite. And as Gina's character develops, the reader sees the oppression that comes from having these categories concretized. Even Lugones, the frame of this snapshot into Cuban-American identity, uses italics, not just to demarcate language, but also to show the reader moments of internal processing and thought. The italics tell the reader that what she is telling us is not just about making an academic claim, but a personal one. She begins her essay informing the reader that she is writing in the tradition of transgressive women of color and does so in italics. She also offers personal stories, interruptions, and calls of action in italics. Lugones creates a direct connection – a personal connection – with her reader through the use of italics, while building the credibility she needs in the academic realm by producing research and scholarship, shown to us in roman font. Language offers insight into identities and the way language is traditionally separated in writing is through the use of italics. Each of the authors – and theorists – explicitly plays with and changes the rules of italics to create multiple viewings and understandings of identity.

Also, Obejas and Menéndez use Cuban, American, and Cuban-American both as specific signifiers and interchangeably. This blurs the lines to when someone is one or the other on the spectrum. Menéndez, for example, creates Lissette as an American-born Cuban who does not feel American but does not know her Cuban roots. Lissette shifts and changes as her story progresses because she realizes that in Cuba, she is not recognized as Cuban, but that her life in America might not have been necessary. She discovers that the people who stayed behind in Cuba are not doing as badly as she grew up believing and that her parents were not as realistic

and truthful and she once imagined. These constant changes within Lissette make visible to the reader that identity is a moment-by-moment occurrence, constantly transforming as situations change.

Finally, even the structure of the novels pulls the reader into a world that twists and turns constantly. There is always some sense of space for multiple interpretations and interactions between characters. Obejas does not tell Juani's story chronologically, so the reader is constantly interpreting and reinterpreting scenes once new information is given. Menéndez leaves certain ambiguities in each of her stories so the readers can make multiple interpretations of each situation, sometimes realizing that the not knowing what is true is part and parcel to her stories.

Lugones offers a way of looking at marginalized identity – and in this analysis Cuban-American identity – that makes what is usually understood as weakness a strength. It is multiplicity that offers Obejas and Menéndez's characters permission to second-guess and transform themselves. The language of fragmentation reinforces the dominant ideal – the white, straight, male, bourgeoisie – something the characters in each of the novels can never be a part of. The language of curdling and multiplicity, then, offers those of us who are attempting at every turn to defy and transgress, that opportunity.

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Image 2: Leonor Hernández Cabrera, Cubaⁱⁱ

To Daimys: En memoria de los tiempos ido.

-Leonor Hernández Cabrera, 2014

Para Mima: En memoria de nuestro mundo ilusorio, nuestro refugio seguro, y nuestro enlace eterno—el amor y la memoria.

-Daimys Ester García, 2016

End Notes

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- ⁱ This is a family photograph of my grandfather in Cuba.
- ⁱⁱ This is a family photograph of my grandmother in Cuba.