Linking Myth with Transnational Feminism: Developing Female Identity in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

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Abstract In her debut novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, Cuban American author Cristina García investigates the complex social, cultural, political and psychological impact of postcolonialism on identity formation through the journey of three generation of Cuban women which reflects developing consciousness during Cuba's transition from colonisation to revolution. The paper aims to show the way through the remembrance and reimagination of three generations of women of del Pino family, which is made possible by the help of myth, magical occurrences and traditional healing practices, García attempts to recover, to reconceive and to create and develop awareness of Cuban women and cultural heritage that might have been erased. By highlighting the heritage of Cuban women who strongly survived the volatile time during the Revolution, García admits a history of trauma and female resistance to the nationalist male politics. The paper also aims to emphasise how the recurring experiences of these women from three consecutive generations expose García's employment of a major metaphor based on 'phoenix' myth. The female characters go through cycles of cultural and sexual changes where García reworks the myth with the cycles of death and rebirth. Last but not least, the paper attempts to demonstrate that by using myth and magical events, García attempts to remove physical distance among women who are torn between cultural differences between Cuba and America and provides them with the sense of togetherness and empowerment, and by combining multiple voices and alternative viewpoints on past and present, she attempts to render marginal voices and realities and to subvert and deconstruct Eurocentric notions of identity, reality and truth.

Key Words Feminism, female identity, myth, magic, the marginalised

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Introduction

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the relationships among del Pino women reflect the broader political rivalry between Cuba and the USA in the aftermath of the Socialist Revolution that occurred between 1953 and 1959. The fragmented multi-vocal narrative tells the story of a modern Cuban family without providing any unified and verifiable truth where Celia, the matriarch, was attempting to preserve her family story. Since immigrants normally lose touch with their homeland, often family histories are lost. Celia wants to make it sure that there is something that can connect her granddaughter Pilar with her motherland Cuba and Cuban identity. Celia finds the intergenerational transformation of family histories crucial as transformation of information makes it possible for the tie between homelands and adopted lands to be created where the immigrants find them in a hyphenated space. Chapter arrangements of the novel also disrupt the traditional notion of the logical course where one event leads to another. Whereas some chapters expose past events through flashback, others narrate the same event but from another narrative point of view. The labelling of chapters with the name of focalisers, significant years or titles of prose or poem makes it utterly difficult for the reader to form a consistent narrative. It thus criticises the Eurocentric conception of reality as something linear, progressing from a beginning to an ending, and advocates the existence of multiple versions of reality. A fragmented narrative emphasises the fact that time and space are relative constructs and encourages us to have subjective versions of history or reality. The narrative structures of the novel and the magical realist narrative used there create a space where conventional ideas of time, space and identity are taken apart. By using multiple focalisers and narrators, different time and space dimensions and a narrative that moves back and forth, García questions the notion

of a unified and consistent narrative and individual identity, paving the way for a flexible and hybrid culture.

In her debut novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, Cuban American author Cristina García investigates the complex social, cultural, political and psychological impact of postcolonialism on identity formation through the journey of Cuban women. The paper aims to show the way through the remembrance and reimagination of three generations of del Pino women, which is made possible by the help of myth, magical occurrences and traditional healing practices, García attempts to recover, to reconceive and to create and develop awareness of Cuban women and cultural heritage that might have been erased. By highlighting the heritage of Cuban women who strongly survived the volatile time during the Revolution, García admits a history of trauma and female opposition to central male politics. In the novel, the del Pino female characters—Celia, Felicia, Lourdes and Pilar—are shown as strong and empowered through their mystic and spiritual experiences, and their alternative narrative(s) of the Revolution. By allowing these women to have a voice, García provides them with some sort of agency and authority over men who basically manipulated Cuban history after Fidel Castro assuming the power. The paper also aims to emphasise how the recurring experiences of these women from three consecutive generations expose García's employment of a major metaphor based on 'phoenix' myth. The female characters go through cycles of cultural and sexual changes where García rewrites the myth with the cycles of death and resurrection. Finally, the paper attempts to demonstrate how magical realism in the novel combines multiple voices and alternative viewpoints on past and present and makes it an apposite vehicle for examining global spaces and issues and attempts to render marginal voices and realities and to subvert and deconstruct Eurocentric notions of identity, reality and truth. By employing myth and magical events such as post-mortem visits of family members and telepathic communication between female family members, García attempts to remove physical distance among women who are torn between cultural differences between Cuba and America and provides them with the sense of togetherness and empowerment.

Cuban Revolution and a Counter-Narrative

The masculinisation of Cuban consciousness, and the militarisation of Cuban life showed the ideological shift which hastened the fundamental changes on the life on the island, and thus created an environment which is hostile and oppressive towards the conformist. Under the circumstances, the oppressive regime aims to "attack the sense of history of those they wish to dominate by attempting to take over and

control their relationships to their own past" (Morales 23). Oppressive regimes such as Castro's one marginalised people through destroying "records, oral traditions and cultural forms and through interfering with the education of the young" (23). The process marginalised many Cubans who were against the Revolution's restriction on personal and social ways of life, and religious and/or political ideology, systematically oppressed them, and ultimately forced them to leave the country. The Revolution tore down the fabric of many families, created an atmosphere of fear, and weaved a master narrative excluding the suffering of the oppressed and displaced. It is imperative to mention that Castro's obsession with the modernisation of Cuba resulted in him to "sanction discrimination against religious observers" and to destroy folk culture (Otero and O'Bryan 43).

In order to provide a counter-narrative on the Revolution, Cuban writers, particularly the female ones take the help of magical realist narrative which includes the appearance of ghosts of dead relatives in reality, female magical healing power, the (re)writing of myth and the strong belief on the supernatural power of natural objects. The use of magical realism in a Cuban female context enables women to challenge their social and political exclusion, and functions as some sort of defense mechanism for them. Cuban female magical realist authors highlight the folk medicinal practices of Cuban women, show its superiority over modern medical system introduced by Fidel Castro who dreamt to see Cuba as a medical superpower, and thus come up with an alternative version of the Revolution. In the entire process, memory and (oral) narratives function together to retain traditional Cuban way of life. By sharing their folk knowledge with the community members in difficult times, these female healers basically upgrade the entire community. Again, authors like Cristina García also investigates spiritual practices and knowledge spaces of Cuban women through examining 'santería', an ancient Afro-Cuban religion where Yoruba goddesses are worshipped. García emphasises the significance of women in preserving conventional spiritual practices and at the same time sheds light on the way spirituality can be subversive. The relationship between women and santería ritual is significant as it helps to reestablish the Afro-Cuban oral tradition in modern histories of Cuba where Afro-Cuban are oppressed and excluded. Again, the spiritual connection between women and Yemayá—the goddess of water—destabilses the controlling Christian religious practices. The relation also emphasises the way female agency and empowerment comes from goddess(es) and are transferred through the voice of women showing solidarity with other women.

Subverting and Deconstructing Eurocentric Notions of Identity, Reality and Truth

Nira Yuval-Davis states, "Identities are narrative stories people tell themselves and others about who they are" and thus comprise the "constructions of belonging" (202). García's writing investigates cultural hybridity and the way maintaining a hyphenated existence confuses one's identity. As in her essay "Displacements and Autobiography in Cuban-American Fiction", Alvarez-Borland opines, "Cuban-American writers face two challenges: how to reconcile their past experiences in their country of birth with present experiences in their adopted country [and] how to navigate between bicultural and monocultural readers" (43). The novel explains the construction of identity through three different levels of relocation of Cuban people—the story of those who remained in Cuba (Grandmother Celia), the first generation of immigrants to America (Celia's eldest daughter Lourdes), and those who came to the US as children (Lourdes's daughter Pilar). In the whole story, each woman's account is a crucial variable in the creation of a communal culture and hybrid identity. Born in Cuba but brought up in America, Pilar is conflicted between the opposing perceptions of her identity and heritage where her displaced mother and physically distant grandmother form two crucial aspects of her identity. Pilar is the only protagonist in the novel who provides a first-person account of her story, and performs as some sort of agent or subject in forming her account whereas both Celia and Lourdes's narratives are told by a third person omniscient narrator which places them in the position of victim or object of their own prejudiced ideas.

The narrative of Pilar symbolises an intersecting point between Cuban and American cultures. Although she reached America at the age of some two years without having any ideas about Cuban culture, in the beginning, she finds more proximity to her Cuban identity. She says, "Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out" (García 46). In spite of defining herself a Cuban, she has never experienced Cuban life. Therefore, Pilar is unable to fully understand the political discourses between her mother and grandmother. She thus adds some sort of fresh perspective or an outsider perspective on the issues of dislocation and identity. Although Pilar attempts to build a connection with Cuba, it becomes difficult for her due to Lourdes's silence on, and denunciation of, the topic. Interestingly, both issues intensify her isolation from Cuban culture or tradition, and her desire to (re)connect with it. It ultimately creates distance with Lourdes and Pilar finds consolation in communicating with Celia through magical process of mind reading, making communication possible regardless of geographical distance: "[…] I hear her

speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She seems to know everything that's happened to me" (García 22). Therefore, the magical realist means of communication between women enables them to get in touch with each other in spite of their physical distance, to share their stories and to be empowered. Oscillating between her known surroundings of New York and her imagined, and probably fantasised, Cuba, Pilar seeks belongingness which brings her closer to her grandmother and pushes her visit Cuba. As Elena Sáez says, "Pilar's negotiation of her identity is nevertheless overshadowed and overdetermined by this nostalgia and its own confused origins" (131). Pilar admits, "I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom, even though I haven't seen my grandmother in seventeen years" (García 139). Both Celia and Lourdes had the option to embrace either Cuba or America where they went for opposite paths. However, as Pilar personifies the meeting between two cultures, languages and heritages, she chooses both and is therefore able to create a new identity for her.

However, Pilar, who entertains various facets of her identity, is demotivated by Lourdes, who advocates a linear and closed version of history: "This is a constant struggle around my mother, who systematically rewrites history to suit her views of the world. … It makes her see only what she wants to see instead of what's really there" (García 139). Whereas Pilar represents a more flexible approach to the construction and negotiation of one's identity, both Lourdes and Celia uphold rigid construction of identity based on dominant political ideologies. Anja Mrak rightly says that both Celia and Lourdes's "slavish adherence to hegemonic ideologies and their identity politics in fact originate in traumatic experience, which forecloses simplistic judgment of their actions and interactions with others" (185). Lourdes's violent rape and later leaving Cuba for the USA make her see migration as an opportunity to reinvent herself and to restart her life. However, she is haunted by her brutal past memories in Cuba. She finds it essential to regain control over her body which bears the mark of sexual violence and rape. She tries to do so first by an irresistible appetite and sexuality and then by obsessive dieting. Here, the reader can see the way magical realism disrupts traditional temporality, giving the opportunity to the past to invade the present as the manifestation of her memory of the rape, and memory in general: Lourdes "smells the brilliantined hair, feels the scraping blade, the web of scars it left on her stomach" (García 154). Lourdes's trauma is emphasised by a magical realist metaphor, enabling a "movement from the abstract to the concrete, from the figurative to the literal, from the word to the thing" in order for nonrepresentational words or voices to "acquire a distinctly material presence"

(Hegerfeldt 68-69). Hegerfeldt says again that by "rendering the metaphor 'real' the text emphasises the power such constructions have over human thought and human action, and the very real suffering they can inflict" (69).

If Lourdes considers migration a fresh start for her, she should definitely reexamine her past and memories and employ them as a tool for her new identity. Although Lourdes wishes to erase Cuba and everything Cuban from her mind, including her mother, she was quite attached to her father before his death. However, they keep interacting with each other even after his death, a phenomenon which is clearly magical realist. Through supernatural events like telepathic communication and post-death appearance, the ontological and spatial boundaries between reality and fantasy is resolved. Lourdes is afraid of crossing the geographical boundary between Cuba and America, fearing that old trauma might return. The initiation of Lourdes's conversations with her dead father and borderless communication between female characters provides the characters the strength to come to terms with their traumatic past, and to (re)build relationships. When Lourdes receives the death news of her father, she asks Sister Federica at Charity Hospital: "Did he say where he was going? (García 15), a question which highlights Lourdes's dismissal of borders between the living and the dead, and introduces the possibility of her future meetings with her dead father. She will be involved in conversations with her father partly due the fact that there is no one else to talk to; however, going deep into the issue the, the reader can understand that her communication with her dead father is a way of coming in terms with her trauma of being raped as trauma victims need a listener to share their traumatic stories and to turn them into narratives. In other words, Lourdes's communication with her dead father offers her a safe resort.

Although Lourdes and Pilar's trip to Cuba is a significant one, Pilar immediately realises that the passing of geographic border does not have to involve the passing of ideological border: "Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all" (García 170). Pilar's statement refers to both physical accessibility and cultural inaccessibility between Cuba and America. Pilar's trip to Cuba provides her the chance to reconnect with her grandmother where the reestablishment of the bond between them is presented with a touch of magic or supernaturalism: "As I listen, I feel my grandmother's life passing to me through her hands. It's a steady electricity, humming and true" (172). This statement highlights the magical realist way of passing information, (hi)stories and culture from one generation to another. Through Celia's confession of the atrocities of the Revolution—"I know what my grandmother dreams. Of massacres in distant countries, pregnant women

dismembered in the squares" (169)—Pilar's fantasised version of Cuba is replaced by a more impartial interpretation, containing both positive and negative aspects. Ultimately, she becomes able to establish a connection with her lost tradition and culture and to reconcile between two cultures. In order to comprehend her mother and grandmother without being judgmental, Pilar is the embodiment of transnational feminism and a model of identity politics that "deconstruct prevalent concepts of selfhood and thus open up new channels of cross-cultural conversations" (Schultermandl and Toplu 23).

Lourdes's father Jorges visits her for the first time forty days after his burial in the US, thanking her for the royal burial he was given. On their first meeting on the street, Lourdes fails to see him but can only smell his cigar, and she reaches home after a very short conversation accompanied by a feeling of disaster:

> "Where are you, Papi?"
> …
> "Nearby," her father says, serious now.
> "Can you return?"
> "From time to time."
> "How will I know?"
> "Listen for me at twilight." (García 51)

She shares this story with her husband and surmises that things are "very wrong" and later considers the entire events as her mere imagination (52). The reader can easily understand that Lourdes is a bit sceptical about the idea of talking with her dead father unlike Celia who accepts Jorge's words as if it was normal and expected. Lourdes's scepticism is quite explicit during Jorge's second visit after seven days:

> "You didn't expect to hear from me again?"
> "I wasn't even sure I heard you the first time," Lourdes says tentatively.
> "You thought you'd imagined it?"
> "I thought I heard your voice because I wanted to, because I missed you. When I was little I used to think I heard you opening the front door late at night. I'd run out but you were never there."
> "I'm here now, Lourdes." (García 58)

Since Lourdes sincerely loves her father and is reluctant to let him go, her conversation with her dead father is her only possible way of working through her

trauma. By forcing her repressed memories from the past to the present through the interactions with her dead father, Lourdes initiates the process of reconnecting to herself and the world around her and breaks the isolation resulting from traumatic experiences. As Pettersson says, "Despite the pain that re-emerges with her dead father's appearance in her life, it becomes clear that Jorge has returned to help his daughter remember and to give her hope" (52). This clearly shows the flimsy border between those who are dead and those alive, and the way dead relatives can be our guides and healers. Lourdes's being in constant communication with her dead father for long seven years is the time for her being under healing treatment. When their communication starts declining after that, it seems to Lourdes that her father is "dying all over again, and her grief is worse than the first time" (García 151)—a clear indication of her reaching the final period of grief and getting ready to accept his death. Realising that she does not have much time before her father leaves her eternally, Lourdes asks the most difficult of all questions:

> "Did you love Mama?" Lourdes asks tentatively.
> "Yes, *mi hija*, I loved her."
> "And did she love you?"
> "I believe she did, in her way." (García 152)

Being convinced at his father's assurance, Lourdes decides to go to Cuba and be (re) united with Celia. The fact that it is his father's spirit that convinces Lourdes to be reconnected with her family and past shows the significance of spectral guidance on the characters.

In Cuba, Pilar also mentions her possessing clairvoyance, a magical realist phenomenon which seems to have been initiated when she was molested by some young men in America: "Since that day in Morningside Park, I can hear fragments of people's thoughts, glimpse scraps of the future. It's nothing I can control. The perceptions come without warnings or explanations, erratic as lightning" (García 167). Pilar's magical power of sensing people's thoughts and of smelling the future can clearly be linked to the responsibilities her grandmother has given her—to record both family and collective history and to cover the void of the official history. In other words, Pilar's magical ability enables her to rewrite the official history from a marginalised perspective and to provide a voice to the oppressed. Her story will thus be all encompassing as her grandmother comments, "She will remember everything" (191). Again, Pilar's magical connection with her grandmother, regardless of her physical distance, provides her guidance and helps her reconcile

her hyphenated identity. It also shows the way magical realism keeps all the three del Pino women closer, regardless of their different political ideologies, and functions as a valuable device behind their empowerment.

Overcoming Physical Boundaries and Achieving a Sense of Empowerment

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, magical realism enables all three del Pino women, who are not staying in the same location, to cross geographical boundaries, to communicate with each other, and thus to draw them closer to each other and to get a sense of unity and empowerment. Again, Cristina García works within the phoenix myth and associates it with the figurative sequence of death and rebirth. She also uses metaphors connected with different 'orishas' or Santeria goddesses from classical mythology to feature her women characters. Although Celia and Pilar have no meeting between them since the latter's family settled in America, they keep in touch and stay closer to each other through magical means of telepathy as Pilar testifies she "hear[s] her speaking to [her] at night just before [she] fall[s] asleep" (García 22). Their telepathic connection draws the women so close that Celia wants to see Pilar: "[…] Celia says she wants to see me again. She tells me she loves me (22).

Apart from having meaningful verbal conversations, there are instances in the novel where characters are able to see dead family members as in the case of Celia who sees her dead husband Jorge "emerges from the light and comes toward her, taller than the palms, walking on water in his white summer suit and Panama hat" (4) but fails to communicate with him as she can only see the movements of his face but "cannot read his immense lips" (4). Here, Jorge's presence as a gigantic person, his ability to walk on water and, most importantly, his reappearance from a post-death world which is taken quite normally by Celia who is even expecting gifts from him just like their early days of marriage—all these phenomena disrupt the logical aspect(s) of reality and advocate the employment of magical realism in the novel. Again, the broken communication between Celia and Jorge might symbolise their opposing political views. In other word, due to their having differences in political ideologies, their communication hampers even during Jorge's post-death visit. Nevertheless, Maria Rice Bellamy identifies, as "García uses alternative forms of connection, specifically total recall and dreams, to create relational bridges between characters even when they do not consciously seek them" (80), they are unconsciously interacting with each other although they think they cannot understand each other. Pilar also describes a similar scene where she has an image of Celia calling her but she cannot hear: "I have this image of Abuela Celia underwater, standing on a reef […]. She calls to me but I can't hear her. Is

she talking to me from her dreams?" (García 170). Pilar's vision can be connected to Celia's movement on the ocean: a vision which enables Celia and Pilar to communicate although the pronounced words are not understood.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, García creates characters who are embodiments of 'orishas' or Santeria goddess, having the ability to recreate themselves just like phoenixes. Carine Mardorossian draws an association between Santeria and the notion of 'postcolonial third phase'. Like the "relation identity [that] challenges the separatism of identity politics, cultural purism, and ethnic absolutism in favor of mappings of identity that emphasize the deep interconnectedness of our lives across the globe," Santeria merges various cultures—mainly Yoruba of Africa and Catholicism of Europe—in order to create some sort of pluralistic identities for its gods, goddesses, and followers (Mardorossian 3). *Dreaming in Cuban* has phoenix pattern, appearance of ghosts, Santeria rituals and goddess figure—all of these characteristics help the novel to be categorised as a magical realist one. Celia's extreme suffering after her lover Gustavo has left her is lifted to a supernatural level: "Celia took to her bed by early summer and stayed there for the next eight months. … Celia had been a tall woman, a head taller than most men, with a full bosom and slender, muscled legs. Soon she was a fragile pile of opaque bones, with yellowed nails and no monthly blood" (29). Celia's transformation reflects that of an ageing phoenix and her upcoming infertility symbolises death. When in order to tempt her to take food a well-wisher of Celia attempts to make a baked Alaska and sets the entire kitchen on fire, a neighbor takes the fire as the sign of her "determin[ation] to die" just like the way the phoenix decides when to die (García 29). In the process of Celia's recovery, a *santera*'s prophecy—'"Miss Celia, I see a wet landscape in your palm. [You] will survive the hard flames'" (37)—summarises two parts of quintessential argument: García's employment of a phoenix design and Celia's rebirth as an embodiment of Santeria sea goddess—Yemayá.

Gradually, Celia transforms into an avatar of Yemayá— "the model of the universal mother and queen of the sea and of salt water" (Barnet 92). However, she does not either realise or acknowledge her association with goddess until Jorge dies. Although Jorge's ghost utters unintelligible words in its first appearance, Celia's attempt to establish a meaningful communication with her husband goes in vain. Although Celia "tempted to relax and drop," thereby having a permanent association with Yemayá, she rather remembers her dedication for the Cuban Revolution (García 7). Celia's act of drowning herself in the ocean after Lourdes and Pilar have left Cuba for America can be the symbol of another rebirth: "The water rises quickly around her. It submerges her throat and her nose, her open eyes that do not perceive

salt. Her hair floats loosely from her skull and waves above her in the tide. She breathes through her skin, she breathes through her wounds" (189-190). Celia's ability to breathe via her skin—a magical realist phenomenon, defying the law of nature—symbolises her development of grills and coming back to her nature as the sea goddess. Celia releases her pearl earrings, which she has used for more than forty years, one by one to the sea as pearls are product of the sea, thus the proper possession of Yemayá: "Celia closes her eyes and imagines [the pearl] drifting as a firefly through the darkened seas, imagines its slow extinguishing" (190). Celia is reborn, achieving immortality.

Celia's second daughter Felicia's cyclicality is exposed to the reader after her father's demise. She asks the assistance of a *santera* in order to remove the distance between herself and her father which suggests the way magical realism possesses healing or soothing abilities. It seems that her phoenix cycles are based mainly on her association with men, particularly in relation with her marriage. Her first husband Hugo regularly beats her and transmits syphilis to her. In order to protest her husband's brutality and to gain agency or, to some extent, emancipation, Felicia reincarnates herself like phoenix with fire:

> Felicia carefully brought the blue flame to the tip of the rag. She smelled the quick sulfur and the plantains frying in the kitchen. She watched until the delicate flames consumed the rag, watched until the blaze was hot and floating in the air. Hugo awoke and saw his wife standing over him like a goddess with a fiery ball in her hand.
> "You will never return here," Felicia said and released the flames into his face. (García 66)

The extraordinary description of fire, an ordinary thing, gives the entire scene a magical aura; again, comparing Celia with a goddess, holding a burning ball in her hands also provides the scene a mystic touch, suggesting the significance of myth and magic in empowering women.

Before marrying for the second time, Felicia seeks the advice of a *santera* who informs her of her two more short-lasting and unsuccessful cases of marriage: "Four days later, […] Ernesto dies tragically in a grease fire at a seaside hotel" (García 118). Smelling a conspiracy behind her husband's death, Felicia suspects Garciela, a troublemaking client at the saloon where she works, and decides to avenge her husband's death: "She mixes lye with her own menstrual blood into a caustic brown paste, then thickly coats Graciela's head. Over it, she fastens a clear

plastic bag with six evenly spaced hairpins, and waits. … That is the last thing Felicia remembers for many months" (119-120). Once again, Felicia burns a person but this time with a paste of caustic soda and menstrual blood, a phenomenon that defies the law of nature but provides her the required strength to take revenge of any wrong committed against her, thus empowering her. The fire imagery is used again when she attempts to get away from her manifestation as the wife of Otto, her third husband; fire thus provides agency to Felicia and assists her in accomplishing her tasks. When she invites her husband for a roller coaster ride, he gets ready to perform oral sex by unzipping his pant, an essentially dangerous task which proves to be his last. Although Felicia testifies it as a mere accident, later, the reader gets a crueler version of the accident from Herminia who holds Felicia responsible for her husband's murder: "I don't know if this part is true, but Felicia said that she'd pushed this man, her third husband, from the top of a roller coaster and watched him die on a bed of high-voltage wires. Felicia said his body turned to gray ash, and then the wind blew him north, just as he'd wished" (146). Associating the event of Otto's ashes to be blown by the wind to the north with his choice of leaving Cuba for Minnesota, USA (America is situated to the north of Cuba) can be considered a fantastic idea. Otto fails to physically migrate to the USA in his life time but is able to do so after his death in the form of ashes. Felicia again takes the responsibility of her own metamorphosis and achieves agency through fire. She initiates the ultimate manifestation as a *santera* and the votary of Obatalá where after losing consciousness for the last time, she is "possessed by Obatalá" (147). Her deteriorating health can easily be compared with the demise of an ancient phoenix: "[H]er fingers curled like claws […]. Even her hair, which had been as black as a crow's, grew colorless in scruffy patches on her skull. Whenever she spoke, her lips blurred to a dull line in her face" as if she has the beak of a bird instead of mouth (149). She ultimately finds peace in her death.

Celia and Jorge's eldest Child Lourdes's cycles, which include uncontrolled consumption, extreme dieting and obsessive sexual urge, are related to posttraumatic stress, and express themselves through both fast weight gain and loss. Due to her monstrous appetite, Lourdes turns into a lump of flash, which ultimately provides a sense of grotesque, and her hyper-appetite is paralleled with hyper-sexuality:

> Lourdes's agility astounded Rufino. The heavier she got, the more supple her body became. Her legs looped and rotated like an acrobat's […]. And her mouth. Lourdes's mouth and tongue were like the mouths and tongues of a dozen experienced women. … Lourdes was reaching through Rufino for

something he could not give her, she wasn't sure what. (16)

Lourdes actually goes through a long period of powerlessness due to the impending death of her father which also invokes her powerlessness she experiences during and after her rape. As Rufino is unable to give her the feeling of control, she would like to regain the control over her own sexualised body by herself. In the same manner, Lourdes takes control over her body through excessive dieting after her father's death and the post-death return. She considers both weight loss and weight gain as the representation of her control over her body. Her loss of food appetite is also followed by her loss of sexual appetite: "It's as if another woman has possessed her in those days, a whore, a life-craving whore who fed on her husband's nauseating clots of Yellowish milk" (García 133). Her another phoenix-like cycle of monstrous weight gain and seeming hyper sexuality begins when she again decides to eat everything within her reach. Jorge's return as a ghost explicitly helps Lourdes to come out of her powerlessness and the trauma of being raped, and thus functions as a source of empowerment. It also offers the cultural picture of a Latin world where the boundary between the dead and the living is fragile and where the dead appears as a normal and integral part of reality.

The reader witnesses a magical realist scene where Lourdes's dead father meets her forty days after his death. Although initially she is horrified by her experience, the meeting with her father later proves beneficial for her. The interactions with her deceased father reveal hidden truths to Lourdes which are imperative to her identity (re)construction and her empowerment. It is her father's ghost that convinces Lourdes to visit Celia in Cuba, thus attempting to reduce the distance between mother and daughter who express opposing political ideologies. In other words, the magical realist communication between Jorge and Lourdes helps the latter to reunite with her physically separated family in Cuba, and to meet her ideologically estranged mother. As Bellamy opines that magical realism "facilitate[s] the interaction of people distanced by ideology, geography and even death" (79). Celia, who is an ardent supporter of the Revolution, terms Lourdes as "a traitor to the revolution" (García 20) when she shows her disgust for Cuba and everything Cuban and decides to settle in the USA, an event that marks their ideological estrangement. Lourdes seems to have been haunted by Jorge's ghost so that she learns the secret of her family, gets reunited with her family and her past memories and comes in terms with her traumatic past. Here, haunting serves a positive purpose as Justine Edwards mentions Toni Morrison who "asserts that the literary use of haunting offers the possibility of representing 'unspeakable things unspoken'" (119). In García's novel,

Jorge explains Lourdes all crucial events between Celia and him—Jorge's act of resurrecting Celia by loving and marrying her after her lover Gustavo leaves her; his leaving Celia with his mother and sister while taking extended business trips, knowing that they will abuse her; and his role behind Celia's subsequent mental instability when Celia, after the birth of Lourdes, announces, "I will not remember her name" (García 34)—a feat which points out a haunting scene of Jorge's ghost bringing to light what remained unspoken in his life as a human being. By allowing a ghost to reveal his story, García is able to unearth the buried stories of Lourdes's childhood, to alleviate the gap between mother and daughter and to help Lourdes assert her identity.

Among all the female protagonists in the novel, Pilar showcases the most magical ability. She can remember, or at least believes to remember, everything which has taken place around her since her birth, and even goes on narrating a repetitive childhood event: "[B]ack in Cuba the nannies used to think I was possessed. … They called me *brujita*, little witch. I stared at them, tried to make them go away. I remember thinking, Okay, I'll start with their hair, make it fall out strand by strand. They always left wearing kerchiefs to cover their bald patches" (García 22). In the novel, Pilar's cyclicality is the most difficult to perceive probably because García uses the first person narrative in writing Pilar's section. Her cycles include her engagement with diverse cultures and actions like dancing, painting, enjoying protest music and playing the bass guitar. The turmoil in her sexual and emotional life caused by her college boyfriend Rubén with whom she seems to have an assured sexual relationship but whom she later catches cheating on her launches a ruthlessly depicted phoenix cycle which she realises when she "feels [her] life begin[s]" (143).

Picking up the worship of the 'orisha' Changó, the god of fire and lightning, in order to visit Cuba to meet her grandmother Celia, Pilar enters a 'botanica', a market for Santeria suppliers where she is recognised by the shopkeeper as "a daughter of Changó", telling her to "finish what [she] began" and providing her herbal medicine to use in bath "for nine consecutive nights" (157). In order to regain her power lost in her near-rape incident in the park, she initiates the bathing ceremonies to invite Changó who has the power to throw flames from his mouth in a phoenix relation. Here, García uses the phoenix cycles to give Pilar some sort of proximity not only to Celia but also to cultural memories of Cuba and to enable her to (re)assert her control over her body and mind after the incident of sexual harassment in the park; myth is thus shown to possess an empowering aspect. As Sáez says, "In the absence of this authentic connection to Cuba, Pilar finds herself attempting to recapture an

alternate history via imagination" (132). The use of myth and magic also helps Pilar to come up with a different or subjective version of Cuban history from her own imagination, a history which starkly contrasts the male-oriented official history. She laments, "Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there's only my imagination where our history should be" (García 109). After bathing for nine consecutive nights, Pilar realises that she along with Lourdes should go back to Cuba to complete the cycle of imagination and to regain the fading memory of Cuba. The connection between Pilar and Celia epitomises the phoenix myth—Celia has the rebirth in the memory of Pilar as she writes in the final unsent letter to her Spanish lover, Gustavo, "My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. … She will remember everything" (191).

Conclusion

In many cases in the novel, different magical events help the female characters to network with each other and to give them a sense of togetherness and belongingness by allowing them to overcome geographical and ideological borders, providing them with some sort of agency and empowerment. Although *Dreaming in Cuban*, may not be considered a quintessential magical realist novel, García has employed magical realist ties to remind us about her characters and, probably, her Latin origin. Again, by using multiple languages and therefore multiple expressions, various stylistic devices, different viewpoints and thus multiple versions of reality or history, García attempts to create a cross culture. The female characters' association with ghostly figures helps Pilar to (re)connect with her ancestry and initiates Lourdes's healing stages, relinking her with her family and culture. By allowing her female characters to tell their stories, García attempts to liberate the conventional narrative and/or history from the grasp of dominant discourse, and thus opens up an alternative (read female) space, standpoint and history.

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