

Empowering Interstitial Spaces and Intersectionality in the Writings of Judith Ortiz Cofer

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Abstract

This study contains a critical analysis of Judith Ortiz Cofer's selected works. It offers a portrayal of a voice in the diaspora that successfully transcends the voice of victimization and empowers the uncertain position of minorities within the binaries of place, space and gender while depicting a unique Puerto Rican experience. This thesis examines how Ortiz Cofer's constant circular migration allows her not only to empower a voice in several interstitial spaces, but also, to represent how the individual deals with such spaces.

Resumen

Esta investigación contiene un análisis crítico de una selección de textos de Judith Ortiz Cofer. La misma representa la voz de la diáspora que exitosamente trasciende la voz de victimización y empodera las minorías en los binarismos de espacio, lugar, y género mientras provee una experiencia única de la puertorriqueñidad. Por otra parte, esta tesis examina cómo los patrones migratorios circulatorios de Ortiz Cofer le permiten no solo fortalecer la voz de la diáspora en los espacios intersticiales, también representa cómo los individuos lidian con dichos espacios.

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When I look back at the process of developing this project I see a path filled with people I admire, respect, and whom I have learned from. I appreciate the time and dedication you gave me for it made me grow as student, human being, and professional.

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Dedication

This project is a self-growth process; it is a journey I learned to embrace by looking at my loved ones who were always expressing their pride and unconditional support. At times, I felt tired and overwhelmed and your capacity to believe in me kept me on track. Thus, I dedicate this work to you.

My grandparents taught and encouraged me to be a strong, hard working woman; you pictured others as role models without realizing there are no role models like you. You are the example of “luchar el día a día.”

My parents and sister; you always believed in me. Your sense of humor when I asked for silence and talked non-stop about topics you did not understand are the moments I cherish the most.

Pedro. You always reminded me of my potential. After all, your respect and admiration for my passion kept me going. This is one of many accomplishments I look forwards to share with you.

Dedicatoria

Este proyecto no es más que un proceso de desarrollo y crecimiento. Es una aventura que comenzó como una idea fantástica y se convirtió en un reto agotador que aprendí a valorar a través de mis seres queridos. Fue su apoyo incondicional y muestras de orgullo lo que me mantuvo enfocada en la trayectoria de mi meta.

A mis abuelos. Ustedes me enseñaron y alentaron a ser una mujer luchadora y vencedora. Mientras humildemente buscaban figuras que fuesen modelos a seguir no se dieron cuenta de que eran ustedes a quienes debía emular. Ustedes son el vivo ejemplo de la dedicación al trabajo arduo del día a día.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Resumen.....	iii
Acknowledgment	iv
Dedication	v
Dedicatoria.....	vi
Chapter One: Across the Borderlands, at Home in the Intersection	1
Chapter Two: The Origin of Inquiries, Categorizations, and Context.....	13
History and Multiplicity of Puerto Rican Identity Production	13
The On-Going Process of Construction of the Puerto Rican Identity	17
Migrations and Intersectionality.....	20
Puerto Rican Diaspora.....	26
Puerto Rican Identity and Interstitial Spaces	28
Puerto Ricans on the Mainland	30
The Tradition of Puerto Rican Writers on the Mainland	33
Nuyorican Writers and Judith Ortiz Cofer	34
Great Migration	35
Chapter Three: Double Colonization and the Negotiation of Gender Perspective.....	38
Chapter Four: The “Drifting Boat” and the Negotiation of Space.....	66
Chapter Five: Conclusion, Crossing the Binaries	83
Pedagogical Implications	87
Areas for Further Development and Future Research.....	90
Concluding Remarks and Final Thoughts	92
Epilogue	94
Works Cited	96

Chapter One: Across the Borderlands, at Home in the Intersection

“I am what I am.

A child of the Americas.

A light-skinned mestizo of the Caribbean.

A child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a crossroads” (Morales and Levins 1-4)

In “Ending Poem,” Morales and Levin portray a migratory process that gives birth to a diaspora (a circular migration) and intersections of culture, race, and place in this process. The migratory process that creates crossroads; in other words intersections, defined as the “dimensions of identity and inequality [that] shape [...] social life and structures” (Grzanka XIII). These intersections served as the source for the writings of Judith Ortiz Cofer. Although Ortiz Cofer was born in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico (P.R.) in 1952, she spent her formative years in a circular migration between P.R. and Paterson, New Jersey (N.J.) where her father, a US Navy officer was stationed (Domínguez). Therefore, her identity formation developed in a struggle as defining her Puerto Rican identity. She found herself as an immigrant at disadvantage in the crossroads that Morales and Levin identified.

Judith Ortiz Cofer’s works offer a voice on the diaspora that successfully transcends victimization and empowers the uncertain position of the subject within binaries, a two part system of difference (“Binary”) such as racial and gender binaries. The binaries that Ortiz Cofer’s characters and speakers must transcend are place, space and gender while also depicting her unique experience. Ortiz Cofer’s repeated circular migrations provide an empowered voice in the interstitial spaces of the mentioned transcended binaries. According to Homi Bhabha interstitial spaces are “passage[s] between fixed identifications [which] open up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). The experience Ortiz Cofer acquired in these interstitial spaces, as result of a circular migration

allows a representation of how individuals can deal with the situations that emerge between systems of difference.

The uniqueness of Judith Ortiz Cofer's work depends on recalling memories within a circular migration, consequently telling stories of experiences as a migrant living in both, Puerto Rico (P.R.), which I will be referring to as the island and the United States (U.S.), which I will refer to as the mainland. When reading Ortiz Cofer's work, the audience might feel personal connections with her portrayal of Puerto Rico, her migration and her life experiences on the mainland. This being the case, we need to consider that Puerto Ricans have always been influenced and defined by the indeterminacy of life in migration in some way or another.¹

Therefore, Puerto Rican identity in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is shaped in large part by migration. In some cases, these migrations to and from the mainland are so frequent that the island has been described as a "nation on the move" by Jorge Duany; and as a "commuter nation" by a group of Puerto Rican scholars residing in the U.S. (Duany 262). According to Duany, in the compilation *The Commuter Nation*, Puerto Rican culture has been redefined due to the nature of its back and forth movement to and from the U.S.; hence the island's nationhood refers to a notion of origin and cultural identity²(263). This new delineation of culture refers more to the country of birth rather than to the country of geographical residence (Duany 263). As a consequence, since the 1960's this redefinition has created Neo-Rican territories in both, the island and the mainland, where it is challenging to distinguish between cultural elements of P.R. and U.S. (Duany 264). Nonetheless, it is important to point out that

¹ Ortiz Cofer's family migrated in the 1950's; immediately, she is located in the Massive Migration among many migration periods that P.R. confronted. See chapter two for a further discussion on this topic.

² Cultural identity is defined as "a shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity [...] an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences" (Hall 233).

migration continues to take place, which allows audiences to identify with a similar mobility in Ortiz Cofer's oeuvre.

Ortiz Cofer's mobility and stories are still relevant since currently, there are more Puerto Ricans off the island than on it. Historically speaking, migrating to the U.S. is for Puerto Ricans as Duany conveys it: an option to escape from the economic crisis in the country. Hence, the number of Puerto Ricans living on the mainland today (estimated at 5.1 million in 2014) greatly surpasses the 3.4 million population of the island in 2016. Therefore, 59.2% of Puerto Ricans are living in the states nowadays (Duany). In the same way, Ricardo Cortés, a journalist of *El Nuevo Día*, reports that actual birth rates of Puerto Ricans on the island cannot make up for Puerto Ricans who migrate to the mainland. Evidently, migration in search of well-being and the American Dream has taken place since the early twentieth century. Certainly, as presented in the Puerto Rican literature from the U.S., these migratory patterns have had repercussions for Puerto Ricans' behavior and identity.

Therefore, the Puerto Ricans migration is not only a complex subject but also a significant one since this movement's pattern affects Puerto Ricans who are on and off the island. As Margaret Sands' *Immigration and the American Dream: Battling the Political Hype and Hysteria* indicates, migration is a process that "touches personal experiences and family histories" (5). These personal experiences and family histories are familiar to many Puerto Ricans in general. Therefore, due to the content in her stories, Ortiz Cofer has encountered people who tell her that her stories remind them of their lives, making her believe that her stories must contain universal truths (Ocasio 733). For this reason, we can infer her stories present shared situations, reality and struggles for many individuals in the Puerto Rican Diaspora and on the island.

This study argues that the interstitial spaces and intersectionality within the categories of double colonization³, dislocation⁴, place, and ambivalence⁵ in Ortiz Cofer's work accurately reflect her readers' sense of identity when it comes to the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Thus, she creates a literature in which she incorporates interstitial spaces to empower her characters within the categories of double colonization, dislocation, place, and ambivalence. In fact, her works offer a voice to those in the diaspora taking a stand against the social norm of binaries by locating themselves in the interstitial spaces. Furthermore, Bhabha suggests these spaces are represented in an individual as an intersection of their home and the world (19). The intersection of these spaces becomes important because intersectionality is not considered a neutral term; it suggests multiplicity in regards to categories (McCall 1771). Therefore, categories develop and expand depending on circumstances that arise as a result of an environment of cultural and social multiplicity. In fact, these categories could place persons beyond traditional binary structures such as male/female who as individuals were not aware it existed.

In addition, this thesis will explore how Judith Ortiz Cofer empowers those who cross or exist within borders, transcending binaries of gender, space and identity in order for her narrators to explore and develop the self. Thus, this study examines how Judith Ortiz Cofer's narratives break away from binary logic focusing on defining moments of gender, place/space, and intersectional identity. These defining moments regarding place and space rely on the multiple places where the narrator feels at "home" or "alien." For instance, somebody born in P.R. who decides to leave for the mainland will most likely consider P.R. his/her space since it is his/her homeland, whereas the mainland automatically becomes a foreign place for labor and

³ Double colonization presents women who are submitted in a colonial dominance. See chapter two for further information.

⁴ Dislocation refers to displacement. See chapter two for further information.

⁵ Ambivalence is the struggle to accept or reject ideas. See chapter two for further information.

opportunities. In this sense *place* and *space* are different concepts. A place is a geographic location where the person will share circumstances in common with other residents, in this case working opportunities, whereas space is where the person feels he/she belongs. In light of this binary of place/space, cultural identity is as Hall states “unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory” (233). As a result, identity formation is affected when people in each geographic location, the homeland and the mainland, perceive an individual as a foreigner. Once the individual is targeted as an outsider by society, the person suddenly feels the need to travel within intersections to find a space where he/she belongs.

Given that intersectionality becomes a broad and neutral concept, since it applies to numerous classifications, it is essential to point out that these categories are a convergence of dimensions of difference. Patrick R. Grzanka defined intersectionality as “[a] term used to denote systems of inequality [...] that are organized around and coproduce identity categories” (XVI). Exploring and analyzing Ortiz Cofer’s selected works within intersectionality give us the opportunity to examine the great migration through a literary lens. With this in mind, one can point out the nature of the commuter nation, as García Passalacqua did in his work, “The Puerto Ricans: Migrants or Commuters?”. He states that, “if there is one quality that characterizes [Puerto Ricans] as a people, it is [their] imperative to commute, [their] transient nature” (103). This back and forth movement of Puerto Ricans goes beyond traditional patterns of migration; it becomes an ongoing way of life which defines their nature, since crossing shores is an easy step. Furthermore, the other shore is seen as an extension of the island due to several reasons such as citizenship and political/colonial status of the island (Duany 263). This proximity to the mainland and the back and forth movement in which Puerto Ricans engage, along with the

creation of categories to identify the individuals and their respective representation of a Puerto Rican identity, is exemplified in the writing of Ortiz Cofer.

Ortiz Cofer's migratory lifestyle immersed her in the world of the commuter nation; a world that eventually drives her to re-create historical events interrelated with her life experiences in texts that become a small version of her world and the diaspora. In other words, her texts become a representation of diaspora individuals' struggle when defining their identity due to its constant recreation; as Hall puts it "they undergo constant transformation" (236). Therefore, Puerto Ricans in the diaspora and Puerto Ricans on the island develop a need to search for identity markers. Nevertheless, how we identify individuals depends on the moment, the purpose, and the circumstances.

However, identifying the individual as a member of a category automatically creates new classifications depending on the setting and cultural identity. In an interview with Rafael Ocasio in 1994, Judith Ortiz Cofer noted that, depending on the audience's view and interest, she is introduced as either an American writer or a Puerto Rican woman writer (738). Therefore, this ambiguity makes her difficult to categorize as a writer, making evident the fact that she is an individual who belongs or is assigned by others to interstitial spaces. Upon finding herself as a writer in interstitial spaces as a Puerto Rican woman and a Puerto Rican woman writer in the U.S., similar to a colonial subject, Judith Ortiz Cofer negotiates the interstitial spaces of dislocation and place. These narratives also negotiate the empowerment of the diaspora voices of a Puerto Rican neighborhood outside New York.

Her location as a Puerto Rican writer becomes relevant for two reasons: 1) New York City and the greater metropolitan area became the places of settlement and experience for the majority of Puerto Ricans during the massive migration in the 1950's; and 2) as a consequence,

Puerto Rican literature written in the U.S. is often related to New York City and a Nuyorican stylistics, developed in the streets of “El Barrio⁶”. Nuyorican stylistics is a predominantly masculine, urban and militant literature that reflects traditional political overtones associated with a romanticized pro-independent vision of the island. In contrast to Nuyorican literature, Ortiz Cofer’s texts allow readers to experience a vision of the massive migration and a nomadic lifestyle, along with the confrontation of different cultural borderlands. Also, another feature that distinguishes her work from traditional Nuyorican literature is the fact that her texts depend on the recollection of experiences from the circular migration. As Acosta Cruz states, Ortiz Cofer is an “[author] who embraces a more realistic and paradoxical view of the island seen through bicultural Latina eyes” (156). Thus, her perspective as an individual who was in constant circular migration gives her the ability to move away from the romantic idea of the island to present a representation of an island that has undergone several changes through time.

Meanwhile, readers perceive the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. from the perspective of a writer who experienced life in the periphery of the usual Puerto Rican neighborhoods. Thus, it is evident that with time Puerto Rican migrant writers transferred into other regions and more diverse settings of the U.S. Consequently, as previously stated, categorizing Ortiz Cofer depends on the purpose and the circumstances of the audience. Therefore, finding herself between binaries, she develops a style that negotiates voice and space by taking traits from both worlds to reshape an identity with the aim of blending these traits to belong according to any given situation. Moreover, Ortiz Cofer presents not only her strife in negotiating spaces, but also her ability to cross between these spaces, an ability she acquired from her experience in a constant circular or nomadic migration from P.R. to the U.S. and vice versa, as well as her movements within the U.S.

⁶ Puerto Rican neighborhood located in East Harlem New York City

An in depth analysis of her writing will give a clearer perspective of the variety of interstitial spaces Ortiz Cofer incorporates in her work, and also a wider view of how these spaces are negotiated and traversed. In this study, the analysis will be arranged according to the following categories:

Category	Text
Double Colonization	“Marina”
	“The Witch’s Husband”
Dislocation	“The Habit of Movement”
Place and Space	“Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica”
Cultural Ambivalence	“One More Lesson”

Ortiz Cofer’s works are propitious for studying interstitial spaces and intersections on behalf of her migrant brethren, since she is an individual who moved from P.R. to N.J. in late 1950’s (Acosta-Belén), beginning repetitive patterns of mobility from the island to the mainland during the period of massive migration. We can trace the starting point of Ortiz Cofer’s continual migrations because her father, a navy officer, reported for duty once or twice a year. It was his service in the armed forces that caused a series of displacements of her family to and from Paterson, N.J. until riots began to occur in 1968. The riots in Paterson were behind the family’s move to Georgia, away from traditional Puerto Rican neighborhoods in the U.S. (Faymonville 132). Without a doubt, Ortiz Cofer was immersed into the commuter nation at an early stage in life. Throughout her work, the migration experience becomes a familiar and common event, an easy step because of their U.S. citizenship, and because of her father’s military service. Thus, as previously mentioned, for Ortiz Cofer’s family, the U.S. becomes an extension of the island. In fact, this migratory lifestyle urges her to re-create historical events while recalling memories and

experiences that come to life in her books. Undoubtedly, the re-creation of such moments is the reason readers identify with her texts; it is also why Ortiz Cofer believes her stories hold universal truths.

The second chapter provides a historical context for this geographical intersection, including the transition from Spain's colonial reign to American colonization and its effects on the construction of the Puerto Rican identity. The objective is to trace the historical origin of conflicts within Puerto Rican identity and its repercussions for Puerto Ricans on the island. These contexts also help us to understand the complexity of the interstitial spaces Judith Ortiz Cofer poses through her narrators. Also, chapter two provides a further explanation of the stages of Puerto Rican migrations and how these stages eventually evolved into what is defined as the Puerto Rican Diaspora.

It is important to keep in mind that individuals in the diaspora confront adversities which originate in categories and labels; they are conflicted while trying to classify their identity. They struggle to define their identity and subsequently their attempt evolves into a need to re-shape it. To answer their identity questions and to shape their self-definition, Puerto Ricans in the diaspora cultivate a new literature. In this literature, they portray themes of poverty and discrimination along with conflictive situations and experiences that give rise to a life lived in the interstitial spaces. Also, key concepts such as diaspora, dislocation, cultural and social remittances, double colonization, space and place, and ambivalence are defined to provide a better understanding of the analysis of selected works from Judith Ortiz Cofer.

Chapter three presents the concept of double colonization with its subcategories, gender response and realization to focus on Ortiz Cofer's texts as she positions her narrators and characters in the interstitial spaces shared between traditional binaries of colonized/colonizer and

man/woman. Chapter three also examines how Ortiz Cofer's characters respond to and transgress these binaries with an empowering voice that attempts to break free from the imposition of political ideologies and gender structures. For instance, the reader witnesses how she moves beyond the borders of binaries with her story "Marina" where a male figure forcibly immersed in a female experience has to confront a sense of double colonization and consequently learns to understand both sides of the borders from the empowered space in-between. In addition to "Marina" this study explores double colonization in "The Witch's Husband;" in which the influence of American culture on a woman turns her into an independent female. Moreover, readers perceive in this figure a returning female migrant who upon coming back is confronted with the role of women in Puerto Rican culture.

Chapter four highlights the negotiation of space and place generated by the Puerto Rican Diaspora experience represented in Ortiz Cofer's works: "The Habit of Movement," "Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica", and "One More Lesson." The negotiation of intersectional spaces becomes complex in her writing as these experiences are exhibited through diverse narrators and framed within the categories of dislocation, place, and cultural ambivalence. In the poem "Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica", the speaker portrays the re-creation of the homeland on the mainland inside a "bodega"⁷ where a direct comparison and contrast is made between both nations. The focus of the discussion addresses the ability of the speaker to create a space, and, how individuals travel from space to place, as well as a discussion of the representation of the commuter nation.

A text with relevant representations of circular migration is "The Habit of Movement" in which the speaker portrays the lifestyle of a Puerto Rican in the diaspora and the long and short term implications regarding multiplicity, adaptation, and culture. This, in turn leads Puerto Ricans to debate Puerto Rican identity and to acquire a combination of behaviors and beliefs as

⁷ For Puerto Ricans it is a small grocery store in the U.S.

individuals in the greater metropolitan area of the U.S. The result of this process of acculturation is often a debate on cultural ambivalence, where narrators struggle when confronting binaries of culture. Ortiz Cofer provides an illustration of this conflict through “One More Lesson” where the narrator finds herself influenced by a multiplicity of cultural identities, and, need to decide on one culture or another when in fact she can place herself beyond both.

In other words, it is within the categories of double colonization, dislocation, place and space, and cultural ambivalence that the narrators in Ortiz Cofer’s work negotiate the struggles for acceptance and rejection of the cultures they are exposed to (American and Puerto Rican). Despite this fact, they take the best of each world, and place themselves at the intersection of both, yet, they also remain faithful to their cultural traditions and beliefs while also challenging some of the ideals and beliefs of their homeland. In the negotiation of accepting or rejecting both cultures, the characters engage in acts of mimicry⁸ and assimilation⁹ while seeking acceptance in both realities, a matter disclosed in “One More Lesson.” Therefore, the need to construct a home becomes the reason to debate not only physical dislocation and spaces but also, a reconstructed location of what or where feels like home, debates that are most palpable in “The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica.” Ortiz Cofer reconstructs the idea of home in these narratives.

This analysis is relevant to audiences who directly experience the diaspora by immersion; and, it is also relevant to those who have not left and who, still, are familiar with the implications of the diaspora. In other words, every Puerto Rican knows somebody or has family members who are in the U.S. or living in the diaspora; hence they are influenced by sojourners. On account of this certainty, this research exposes the conflict of coping with dislocation, ambivalence and place; and, it becomes evident for people in the diaspora and people on the

⁸ Ashcroft et al. defines mimicry as the “reproduc[tion] [of] assumptions, habits, and values [...] [of] the colonizer” (10).

⁹ According to Pauls, assimilation consists on taking the traits of a dominant group in society.

island since return migrants bring with them the culture they left behind and the lifestyle learned in the host country along with a hybridity of both (Flores *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning* VII).

Ortiz Cofer's readers, as well as Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, are able to explore hybridity and intersectionality through her work. As a result, the audience obtains the ability to move from one culture to the other, from outside of their territorial and social boundaries and vice versa. Certainly, through these works the audience is immersed in the continual flow to and from "their" territory. Nevertheless, exposing these interstitial spaces along with the negotiation of each is relevant to explore Ortiz Cofer's experiences and memories. These memories might be similar to others in one way or another due to the influence of the diaspora and the production of an identity.

Chapter Two: The Origin of Inquiries, Categorizations, and Context

*“we gave birth to a new generation,
AmeRícan salutes all folklores,
european, indian, black, spanish
and anything else compatible” (Laviera 9-12)*

In “AmeRícan,” Puerto Rican and Nuyoricana poet Tato Laviera envisions and embraces the new conceptualization of his culture. He salutes the cultural mixture and inheritance in Puerto Ricans not only for those residing in the Diaspora¹⁰ but also on the island of Puerto Rico. In his poem “AmeRícan,” Laviera points the intersections of genders, cultures, and races. These intersections Laviera highlights, become a characteristic and defining trait within Puerto Rican literature written in the U.S., since Puerto Ricans abroad share a common history composed of similarities and differences that make each experience unique but also collective; Stuart Hall identified this aspect as cultural identity (233). Therefore, cultural identity is a people’s collective experience. Thus, this cultural identity allows the audience to understand and feel identified with events and situations of the Puerto Rican experience abroad.

History and Multiplicity of Puerto Rican Identity Production

Puerto Ricans went and still go through a hazardous process when trying to define their identity due to political implications and migratory processes that have influenced their idea of Puertorincanness¹¹. When discussing cultural identity Hall suggests that “[i]nstead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (234). With this in mind, it is important to highlight that Puerto Ricans have confronted historical events such as colonization and migration, which as Hall suggests define identity. These are factors that have been part of the

¹⁰ A circular migration between countries (Flores VII).

¹¹ Refers to Puerto Rican identity in Spanish, “puertorriqueñidad.”

dialogue for the production of a Puerto Rican identity. As suggested by Laviera's epigraph, into this conversation we must include the discussion of general social constructions and concepts such as race, gender, and place as they relate to this particular group of people. In fact, these ideas become points of intersection for individuals on the island and in the diaspora since Puerto Ricans in migration find themselves culturally navigating among them.

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the concept of voice as a literary device within the selected texts. According to Porter Abbott, voice is "who it is we "hear" doing the narrating" (70). Thus, it is through voice that readers can explore the complexity of the constant development and shaping of a Puerto Rican identity within the intersections of gender, culture, space and place. Voice allows the audience to experience the Puerto Rican migration from diverse points of view according to the presented intersection in the narratives. These intersections are identified through voice and focalization¹², yet to be able to identify them the audience has to be familiarized with Puerto Rico's colonial processes and its effects on the individuals.

A historical overview of Puerto Rico's history allows for us to understand the complexity of the overlapping of these intersections and the categories that arise from them. The intersections of culture arise with the island's 400 year influence of Spanish colonial regime, from 1493 to 1898 to the clash of the political and at times ambiguous territorial bond with the United States from 1898 until the present. Historically, due to the nature of colonialism, Puerto Ricans have regularly been exposed to various cultures that have shaped the traditional definition of a Puerto Rican identity. Hence, the traditional identity evolved and gave birth to different categories that are significant for this study:

¹² It is the narrative information that is given through characters and/or narrator (Niederhoff). This concept is further explored in chapter 3 within the texts' analysis.

- a) “double colonization,” a term used to carry out observations to women as restrained individuals to colonial and male domination (Ashcroft et al. 66);
- b) “dislocation,” displacement due to imperial occupation and the experiences related to the occupation (Ashcroft et al. 65);
- c) “place,” the geographic location influencing identity formation (Ashcroft et al. 161);
- d) “space,” the sense of possession and belonging that makes dislocation evident through colonization (Ashcroft et al. 65);
- e) “ambivalence” defined as the inconsistency of yearning for one thing while also wanting its opposite (Ashcroft et al. 10).

When discussing these categories, it is imperative to keep in mind that along with colonization, P.R.’s migration is also key to analyze Ortiz Cofer’s selected works in regards to identity. Both colonization and migration play an important and influential role in the construction of the Puerto Rican identity and the Puerto Rican experience on the island and the mainland. Because P.R. was one of the last colonies of Spain in the New World (Duany 424-425) and a current colony of the U.S., identity has been collectively affected and widely influenced by return migrants as portrayed in Ortiz Cofer’s works.

Puerto Ricans have questioned their identity through decades on and off the island. In the 1930’s Antonio Pedreira claimed in “Buscando el Puerto,” that Puerto Ricans’ identity conflict originates in what he denoted as “españolidad puertorriqueña,” because after the colonial transition (Spain-U.S.) various ideas regarding the collective personality and national identity began to take hold. Consequently, Puerto Ricans have had to adapt and reshape their identity in response to the colonial transition period (95-96). Thus, to maintain what were already identity markers for Puerto Ricans such as language and agriculture, some Puerto Ricans began to

construct a picture of the U.S. as a toxic culture that would endanger and corrupt the collective national identity¹³ and culture with the introduction of a new language and industries. People's struggle and resistance to Americanization, acculturation, and adaptation were a great concern that began to manifest in Puerto Rican literature from the island among the authors designated as "Generación del 45."¹⁴

Notably, for this study, it can be argued that from the 1940's through the 1950's Puerto Rican literature from the island depicts Puerto Ricans contending with intersections of cultures and space as they start to categorize what was and what was not part of their culture. This categorization was done with the objective of identifying each cultural marker in a space where Puerto Rico's and the United States' cultural characteristics overlapped. In other words, Puerto Rican intellectuals such as Pedreira were pinpointing national identity markers to resist a new foreign culture to keep alive ideals of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican identity during this new U.S. colonial transition period. Nevertheless, while the island intellectuals remained attached and loyal to the idea of resistance to Americanization, many ordinary Puerto Ricans under the duress of the worsening day-to-day economic situations opted for moving and for life on the mainland. In fact, the choice for a life on the mainland forces Puerto Ricans to reshape and define their identity while surviving the migratory Puerto Rican experience. In "Construction of Cultural Identities in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora," Duany argues that "a key issue is that migrants do not meet most of the traditional criteria of nationalist discourse on who is a Puerto Rican" (28), which provokes the reshaping and defining of identity. Meanwhile, they found themselves in the process of seeking a space to belong to, beyond a colonial transition and the island's

¹³ It is the self-identity and uniqueness in an ethnic group of ancestral relations. Some features are the language and customs (Dahbour 20).

¹⁴ A group of writers who questioned the process of industrialization and acculturation in Puerto Rico after the American colonial regime began (Pagán Vélez).

assimilation. This new Puerto Rican group on the mainland would later begin to develop a Puerto Rican literature in the U.S. Their objective was to define a space where they could point out not only the Puerto Rican experience, but also empower a Puerto Rican identity through the voice and perspective from the mainland's shore.

The On-Going Process of Construction of the Puerto Rican Identity

The history of building a Puerto Rican identity is more complicated than it seems. According to José Mercado and Sophia Reyes in their article “La gestación del sentido de puertorriqueñidad” from 2011, the building of a Puerto Rican identity began in 1776 when historians Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra and Ángel López Cantos identified traits to define the Puerto Ricans of that period. Among these features they identified the following: love for the homeland, hospitality, solidarity, audacity, pride, joy while drinking, and hard-working women. Also, other aspects that were considered Puerto Rican identity markers of the eighteenth century were mulatto and black people's participation in rebellions against Spaniards along with the creole militants who defended the island against the English attack in 1797 (Mercado and Reyes). In light of these rebellious events it is imperative to notice that race also became an identity marker that challenged ideas of color between inhabitants of the island and their construction of a Puerto Rican identity.

Although it was evident that the development of a Puerto Rican identity was taking place in the eighteenth century, there were only attributes to characterize Puerto Rican behavior but no mention of a Puerto Rican identity existence. Hence, there were only allusions to different behaviors among the people residing on the island. It is also notable how people were then engaged in a hybridity process between Spain's colonial practices and the cultural identity processes that began to arise in those inhabitants on the island. In his text “Construction of

Cultural Identities,” Duany explains that although Puerto Ricans have the U.S. citizenship, it does not define their perception as Puerto Ricans first and Americans second (13). Thus, there has always been a certain ambivalence regarding the development and the matrix of the Puerto Rican identity.

Nonetheless, it is the idea of distinguishing characteristic behaviors that create categories and classification of a group. Thus, what does it mean to be a Puerto Rican? It was not until March 2016 when the “Real Academia Española” added the term of Puerto Rican identity, known in Spanish as “puertorriqueñidad,” to its dictionary, years after the original request by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture in 2009 (Fullama). Nevertheless, this inclusion is a broad definition that does not describe the personality of a Puerto Rican (“Puertorriqueñidad”). Naturally, this interpretation leaves open the reality and possibility of the constant change of an identity’s construction in society. Thus, this public reality and ambivalence about a Puerto Rican identity become an evident topic that can be perceived in the narratives of Puerto Ricans on and off the island.

Puerto Rican narratives reflect the historical influences of colonialism and migration in forming a hybrid identity. For this reason, Puerto Rican literature from the island of the early twentieth century focuses on the colonial transition from Spain to the U.S. For instance, Puerto Rican writer, Abelardo Díaz Alfaro presents rejection to an identity’s hybridity processes after U.S. occupation through his text *Terrazo*. In his text he portrays the need to highlight identity markers. Writers from the island as Díaz Alfaro were promoting the idea that being Puerto Rican meant to speak Spanish and to live on the island. Their presented characteristics show the confusion upon accepting or rejecting the American ways. Notwithstanding the above, for René Marqués, as presented in his work *La carreta*, being Puerto Rican meant to experience migration

due to the harsh economic circumstances on the island. By the same token, those Puerto Ricans who were on the mainland and lived the life Díaz Alfaro and Marqués posed in their narratives present a new definition to the construction of the Puerto Rican identity, one that defines the diaspora as a negative state of being. As a result, a different category arises with a new hybridity pictured in the Puerto Rican literature from the mainland. For this reason, along with other writers, Judith Ortiz Cofer displays the construction of the Puerto Rican identity through multiple categories, such as Nuyorican writer, Puerto Rican writer, a Puerto Rican writer from the mainland, Puerto Rican woman writer, among others.

In other words, these categories represent a clash of ideas on identity regarding class, gender, and race as a result of migration. The act of being in the U.S. for writers such as Judith Ortiz Cofer, made “puertorriqueñidad” a volatile, contested topic where Puerto Rican migrants struggle to find out who they are and where they belong. In a 2011 article titled “Ser puertorriqueño,” by *El Nuevo Día* it is indicated that individuals, in general, need to find a solid idea of who they are. Thus, it can be argued that for Puerto Ricans in the diaspora the idea of an identity as a constant change is not an option. Therefore, they formulate definitions and identity markers in addition to their experience on the mainland, yet they still need to define what it means to be Puerto Rican. As stated in “Ser puertorriqueño hoy,” past generations were identified as Puerto Ricans for their “bomba¹⁵” and “plena¹⁶” spectacles while others for the status as “jíbaros”¹⁷. Meanwhile, traditional identity categories have continued changing and reshaping Puerto Rican generations. Under such circumstances, Puerto Rican writers from the mainland rely on narratives to express this clash and to define a space within which they can continue their dialogue in describing their “puertorriqueñidad.” However, these constructions

¹⁵ Traditional music that comes from the Afro-Caribbean heritage.

¹⁶ Traditional music that emerged to inform people about events in the towns of Puerto Rico.

¹⁷ Spanish word for peasant.

become complicated when people pay attention to the intersections of cultural multiplicity and hybridity in Puerto Rican identity.

Migrations and Intersectionality

Puerto Ricans have explored different migrations since the early twenty-first century. Human migration includes both, voluntary or forced change of residence by a group or an individual, and it can be internal within a country or international (“Human Migration”). Puerto Ricans experienced both kinds of migrations; it was a process triggered by U.S. occupation in 1898; overpopulation and poverty; and the post-World War II period (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 42-57). Alejandro Portés also documents in his text, “From South of the Border: Hispanic Minorities in the United States” that a principle source of Puerto Rican migration relied on “Operation Bootstrap” policy in late 1947. This policy’s objective was to industrialize and urbanize the island under the U.S. rule; thus, the industrialization process brought the majority of the island’s population into the cities. Nevertheless, the capital city of San Juan did not produce enough jobs for the rapid growth of population (163). As a result, the population engaged in an international migration to the mainland, creating on the island a disturbing wave of poverty and hazardous employment conditions (Acosta-Belen and Santiago 57). Thus, for Puerto Ricans migration was a forced displacement because they did not have other options.

The ability to migrate offers Puerto Ricans the opportunity to break with the idea of binary logics since the individual moves beyond politically constructed borders. This movement allows people to break with binaries of culture, gender, race, and class. Nevertheless, it is, in fact, an unwilling migratory process that also makes them experience systems of oppression, discrimination, and segregation in both on and off the island. For this reason, writers who have been exposed to these experiences of oppression, discrimination, and segregation use their

narratives to humanize the individuals subjected to multiple intersections such as gender, home, and culture.

The beginning of migration, hybridity, and bond with the U.S. people on the island confronted became significant factors for Puerto Rican writers such as Judith Ortiz Cofer, who explores the effects of migration along with gender, cultural, and economic oppression throughout her texts. For instance, in her novel *The Meaning of Consuelo*, the main character's family moves from a small town in the country side of the island to the capital city of San Juan and eventually to the U.S. due to financial status and gender oppression. The migration processes described in her text were realities for Puerto Ricans since the U.S. granted the citizenship in 1917. Migration to the U.S. was not a limitation and became an easy process for Puerto Ricans. Nevertheless, citizenship and migration implied experiences of cultural clash, identity-shaping on and off the island, and a new adaptation process filled with identity inquiries. These questions generated a desire to identify the self as Puerto Rican regarding culture.

Thus, Puerto Rican migrants were forced to deal with the mentioned situations and the fact they began to be categorized as Nuyoricans instead of Puerto Ricans. In other words, Puerto Rican migrants were subjected to additional systems of oppression and segregation. Grzanka points out, "intersectionality is foremost about studying multiple dimensions of inequality and developing ways to resist and challenge these various forms of oppression" (XV). Therefore, writers who became part of migration waves like Judith Ortiz Cofer used their texts to empower the minority group they feel identified with while challenging the idea of binary logics such as mainland/island, female/male, place/space. Hence, when placing the self between binaries, readers can analyze the systems of oppression of each category and its implication. Once readers identify the binary and its systems of oppression they can take part in the narrative through a

voice that empowers them as individuals inside the systems instead of being victimized. Also, readers are influenced and feel identified with the voice in the texts through the one delivering the message and the experiences of who reads it.

In the case of Puerto Rican writers from the mainland, readers not only perceive how they empower the group within the migration wave but can also see the events that draw them to such circumstances. Consequently, in Ortiz Cofer's narratives, readers can perceive narrators and speakers challenging systems of inequality through the acquisition of the best traits from both worlds. Furthermore, Ortiz Cofer's stories introduce and invite the audience to contemplate the variety of interstitial or overlapping spaces that result from migration. Among the variety of spaces, Ortiz Cofer included: gender, culture, race, and the idea of "home." These spaces are primordial to fulfill the individuals' eagerness of finding and defining who they are due to the ambivalence that migration provokes in identity. Thus, these interstitial spaces serve as a preface to the study of intersectionality. As Grzanka stated in his text, *Intersectionality: A Foundations and Frontiers Reader*, identity's importance relies on the social identity categories that generate systems that produce inequalities (68). Actually, Ortiz Cofer empowers each oppressed individual within the systems of inequality produced by double colonization, dislocation, place, space, and ambivalence. Therefore, narrators and speakers aim to break with these systems of inequality while defining a Puerto Rican identity according to each particular experience.

Regarding intersectionality, the concept of voice provides readers with the opportunity to travel through interstitial spaces and study intersectionality in each overlapping space. When analyzing voice within intersectionality, readers can differentiate points of view that emerge from the experience and exposure to the intersections that arise from the migratory process; for instance, a Puerto Rican on the island, a Puerto Rican from the mainland, or a Puerto Rican on

the mainland. Niederhoff clarifies the audience can focus on who sees the story and what is perceived. This, in turn, leads readers to identify and cope with systems of inequalities that each point of view makes apparent due to the development of multiple categories as result of interstitial spaces. Hence, the reader can travel along with the narrator or speaker, who is the individual dealing with different systems of inequalities at the intersections of spaces.

The idea of “space” and “place” develops from the migratory movement, from where the individual was at home to where the individual feels like an alien. Thus, it also arises as a way to signal differences in a system. Ortiz Cofer outlines both “space” and “place” according to the memories pictured in her works. Thus, it is the awareness of “space” and “place” which makes the individual question the idea of home. Moreover, within the abstract concepts of “space” and “place,” each narrator or speaker appropriates environments of particular points of view according to circumstances. For this reason, “space” and “place” in Ortiz Cofer’s texts present a narrator/speaker dealing with dimensions of inequalities regarding gender, race, and culture. Nevertheless, putting the individual into categories according to the point of view creates systems of discrimination and oppression. Furthermore, the experience of oppression depends on the “space” and “place” where the narrator/speaker finds him/herself. Therefore, Ortiz Cofer’s texts offer a point of view from a person who experiences oppression and is being cast as an outsider, but who also empowers the thought and existence of an intersection rather than a binary. As Anzaldúa articulates, the intersection is a crossroad where the individual needs to decide between becoming a victim or feeling strong and in control (109).

The individual in the intersection has to be in control of multiple situations since finding the self in between intersections of “space” and “place” also overlaps with notions of race and culture. Therefore, the individual might find him/herself attacked within notions of race and

culture while he/she travels from space to place and vice versa. This happens because, through race, culture becomes an identity marker that immediately categorizes the individual as either an outsider or part of the group. Although the norm within culture and race becomes exclusionary, it is still necessary because it offers context to a meaning (Nealon and Giroux 57), in this case to a Puerto Rican identity. Hence, this categorization on culture and race will depend on the subject's circumstance and experience. For this reason, the individual in the intersection is forced to find an identity marker such as language to cope with the circumstance. The individual also had to find the "in-between" allowing him/her to travel from one space to the other to become part of the group instead of an oppressed or segregated individual. In other words, they employ the chameleon effect as a defense mechanism to the systems of oppression. For this reason, Judith Ortiz Cofer empowers not only her Puerto Rican identity culture but also a hybridization of both, Puerto Rican and American. Through literature, she constructs a culture that surpasses the binaries of Puerto Rican/American.

Intersectionality becomes complicated when it develops into several intersections because each overlapping space creates a new one. For example, the intersection between the island and mainland creates a new intersection upon culture which in turn creates a new one within gender. Hence, these intersections create an overlapping chain effect such as race → culture → gender, where race determines culture and culture determines how people perceive gender beliefs. In the case of the Puerto Rican culture a traditional patriarchal structure becomes dominant. As a result, a Puerto Rican woman would find herself in disadvantage coping not only with systems of inequality due to race and culture but also gender.

However, when Puerto Ricans, in general, are exposed to migration their perspective changes due to the contact with other cultures which influence and reshape their behavior. Thus,

upon finding themselves in between binaries Puerto Ricans rely on hybridity and cultural identity that generate from this intersectional angle where they take the best of both worlds. For this reason, the reconstruction of a new world incorporated a perspective that adds a new context to the meaning and definition of a Puerto Rican identity. Nealon and Giroux point out that the world we live in is complex; hence due to a multiplicity of cultures, there cannot exist a cultural context that includes everyone (57). As a result, the existence of an interstitial space is necessary to empower subjects in the diaspora. Nevertheless, they are still categorized into specific groups according to their behaviors.

Nevertheless, the implications of adopting behaviors from both cultures place Puerto Ricans at an intersection where they question, “where do I belong?” since it opens a specter of rejection in the homeland and on the mainland. Meanwhile, in their attempt to cope with interstitial spaces and the struggle for acceptance, authors such as Judith Ortiz Cofer empower the combination of this hybridity. She also enables the ability that gives people in the diaspora the capacity to transcend both cultures. “[They] stand and claim [their] space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with [their] own lumber, [their] own bricks and mortar and [their] own feminist architecture” (Anzaldúa 110).

Intersectionality is an important area of study that widens and broadens as categories that impend upon the circumstances of the subject emerge. The use of intersectionality to identify and study how the individual confronts inequality in each interstitial space is key to recognize and evaluate identity conflicts generated among people. Also, this area of study offers readers a view towards the development of cultural identity, along with diaspora individuals’ anxiety and strife for a space to belong. With this in mind, it can be argued, that Ortiz Cofer created narratives that picture interstitial spaces to show how subjects in the diaspora deal with

circumstances that emerge from the in-between. Also, Ortiz Cofer developed these narratives as a home for the individuals in the diaspora since the text is a space that portrays situations with which they identify. These narratives are in fact a way to deal with systems of inequality within the intersections which develop as a result of becoming a member of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

Puerto Rican Diaspora

Juan Flores defined diaspora as a “circular migration between home country and host country”(VII). Once the post-World War II period ended, Puerto Ricans who migrated still desired to return to their homeland. Nevertheless, many engaged in continual circular migrations. According to Rodriguez-Vecchini, Puerto Rican migration is different since Puerto Ricans perceive this movement as a normal and desirable residential mobility (53). Ortiz Cofer’s narratives serve as a source to examine the Puerto Rican diaspora’s nature and phenomena since she provides a realistic perspective where she humanizes those who have been categorized and forced to live in the intersection, the “circular migration.”

The frequent mobility of the diaspora engaged individuals in the process of searching and settling in a space to be called home. This process emerges since Puerto Ricans have the opportunity to move easily between both nations without the need for travel documents or visas (Duany 359). In contrast, individuals from other countries desire to be legal citizens with the objective of being able to move back and forth to construct their homes in their homelands (Sands 20). Comparatively speaking, for Puerto Ricans acquiring the U.S. citizenship opened the borderland and caused the emergence of the diaspora; yet, it also provoked a desire to define a Puerto Rican identity. Therefore, Puerto Rican migrants have the option and ability to move back and forth and to construct a home wherever they feel they belong to, whether the mainland or the island.

Undoubtedly, their quest to feel at home eventually developed hybridity. This hybridity occurs given that Puerto Ricans had a blurred borderland, yet they were still crossing and confronting a significant geographic frontier with significant borders of language and culture (Duany 426). With this in mind, the image of the U.S. for people who embarked on the diaspora evolved from that of a place with opportunities to that of a foreign nation, despite its cultural influence on the island after the American occupation and the Americanization process. In their search for a better life and engaged in a circular migration, “return migrants to Puerto Rico were part of a large-scale two-way traffic of labor, capital, goods, and information... [they] have traced a compl[icated] circuit, often involving frequent moves in multiple directions, not necessarily beginning or ending at the same point” (Duany 359). The island has received thousands of immigrants since the 1960’s; this number includes return migrants and their descendants (Duany 425). Ortiz Cofer’s literature depicts and delineates this process in her collection of works accompanied and complemented with a new influential life perspective, values and ideas since she was periodically exposed to both cultures, Puerto Rican and American.

Therefore, Judith Ortiz Cofer’s works are rich in cultural remittances. According to Juan Flores, the concept of “cultural remittances” is the connection of ideas, values, and communications that are brought into a society by return migrants and their families once they are back to a space they consider home. This return to their “homeland,” could be temporary or permanent (4), yet, it is always influential. Ortiz Cofer’s work presents the implications of this phenomenon regarding intersectionality. According to Flores, individuals from the diaspora are migrants who bring with them the culture with which they left, the learned lifestyle in the host

country, and a hybridity of both (VII). Thus, Ortiz Cofer's work serves as an example and evidence of the exchange of ideas and behaviors that occur within the circular migration.

Likewise, this hybridity was also labeled by Peggy Levitt as social remittances, a term she defined as the journey of ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital from one country to another (54). In Judith Ortiz Cofer's work, we can point out the hybridity and the attempt to confront the acceptance and rejection of the outsiders and the unknown environment due to their location in the interstitial spaces. This place is what Ortiz Cofer tries to find and negotiate within her narratives. Hence, we can contemplate in her texts how she questions, explores and walks between both worlds due to the hybridity in her identity.

On one hand, the author's hybridity starting point is illustrated in her works with the migrant's aim to preserve the island's culture on the mainland creating a microcosm of P.R. inside the walls of their "home;" while on the other, they assimilate to the continent's culture outside the walls of their "home." Eventually, Puerto Ricans in the mainland pose an anomalous behavior when compared to those on the island (Lorenzo-Hernandez 991) which leads to cultural remittances. Ortiz Cofer tackles this aspect through her works offering a space where each particular speaker deals with identity conflicts while placing themselves and setting bases in no particular nation as a home, but rather in an intersection that offers them a perception of a home.

Puerto Rican Identity and Interstitial Spaces

Even though Ortiz Cofer's geographical location was away from Puerto Rican neighborhoods, her narratives unveil the reality of Puerto Ricans subjected to the diaspora, described by Juan Flores as a cyclical migration experience that consists of a two ways departure and return (33). For this reason, it is perceived in her texts a movement from one place to another which describes a distinctive and particular Puerto Rican migrant experience. As Faymonville

puts it, her written works “deal exclusively with the Puerto Rican migrant experience in the United States [...] thematiz[ing] experiences riddled with the tension of belonging to no place and an existential doubt about belonging” (132-133). Therefore, through her writings Ortiz Cofer seeks to define a Puerto Rican identity found in the intersections where individuals from the diaspora feel they belong while questioning what it means to be a Puerto Rican.

In Ortiz Cofer’s texts can be identified how defining a Puerto Rican identity relies on the experiences and surroundings of the individuals living in the diaspora. Therefore, for the characters and speakers in her work being Puerto Rican does not rely on identity markers. In his article “Nation on the Move: The Construction of Cultural Identities in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora,” Duany states, “being Puerto Rican is no longer a matter of living here or there, in Puerto Rico or the United States” (20). In other words, Puerto Rican identity is defined by the subject and his/her experiences rather than by a nation’s identity markers such as language. Nevertheless, although Spanish is considered an identity marker for Puerto Ricans, the audience perceives in Ortiz Cofer’s work an individual who defines what it means to be Puerto Rican in English and in a combination of English and Spanish. Then again the behavior of language represents an intersection where the individual places itself between both nations re-constructing a home.

The need to re-construct a home becomes the reason to debate not only physical dislocation and spaces but also, mental locations of what or where feels like home. Consequently, the author turns her texts into an interstitial space between nations that reconstructs a “home.” Therefore, the ambivalence of belonging or not to specific places is generated as the result of the people’s back and forth movement, a term defined by Duany as the flow in which people engage in particular communities (431). Thus, we see in Ortiz Cofer’s

work how the Puerto Rican circular migration takes place along with the different situation of being able to engage with the society of such particular communities. This conflict depends on the perspective the Puerto Rican migrant acquires from the new and unknown region of the place they intend to set roots.

It is imperative to keep in mind that Judith Ortiz Cofer and her family embarked in the diaspora when the first massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. in the 1950's was taking place. This migration was the result of historical events among them: World War II, the Post-War, and harsh economic situations in the island (Denis-Rosario 438). Therefore, these historical conditions are connected to her family's particular circular migration around her father's obligations as a Navy officer. Moreover, Ortiz Cofer makes persistent allusions in her narratives to such circumstances and how it affected her growing up process which along with her own family's particular details, general historical events intertwine in her works. This leads readers to a wider and more representative understanding and analysis of interstitial spaces as they relate to the Puerto Rican Diaspora through Ortiz Cofer's memories.

Puerto Ricans on the Mainland

Evidently, people on the island were trying to escape from harsh economic conditions. Nevertheless, when they got to the mainland, they explored a similar experience to the one they had planned to leave behind. They found themselves dealing with poverty, discrimination, and cultural multiplicity; three factors that re-shaped their life perspective and behavior leading non-migrants to categorize migrants into Nuyoricans. In "Los escritores nuyoricans," Duany explains that the term Nuyoricano appeared to categorize the identity of Puerto Rican migrants who moved to New York after World War II, yet Puerto Ricans on the island classify migrants from all locations in the U.S. and their descendants as "Nuyoricans." Thus, categorizing all migrants into

Nuyoricans is also a significant conflict to the identity since the experience of Puerto Rican migrants at New York City (N.Y.C.) are not necessarily the same experiences at other locations in the U.S. This is evident in Ortiz Cofer's work who portrays a different experience to the one presented by Puerto Rican writers from N.Y.C.

Therefore, the appearance of the Nuyorican group automatically creates an intersection where the identity becomes conscious of expected behaviors. Grzanka, in "Identities: The (Intersectional) Self and Society," argues that "social identity" is complex and a system of elements of social life that predicts life chances such as education, income, mental and physical health; but when identity is found in the intersectionality it becomes a questioned construct (67). Thus, categorizing Puerto Ricans from the mainland as Nuyoricans opens a conversation that questions the Puerto Rican identity since Nuyoricans are perceived as outsiders to the people on the island. Meanwhile, categorized "Nuyoricans" also question their identity construct due to the origin of the category by traveling from one cultural behavior to the other. Also, Acosta-Belén and Santiago pointed out, there have been transmissions of wealth and poverty across Puerto Rican communities (107). Notably, Puerto Ricans from the mainland are generalized regarding behavior, appearance, and social class when in fact they confront different levels of poverty and diversity as an ethnic group.

The system of difference that allows diversity within the Puerto Rican ethnic group becomes apparent with salary. For instance, Puerto Rican men earned less than other men in the U.S., yet Puerto Rican men earned more than women (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 111). Furthermore, an important variable regarding Puerto Ricans' poverty in the U.S. was the many female households without a spouse (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 108). Taking these details into further analysis, we can conclude these migrants were confronting ethnic and gender

discrimination, and subsequently poverty on the mainland while they were also categorized as outsiders by people on the island. Thus, to survive in both cultures, they relied on the interstitial space by restructuring their lifestyles according to the culture. Hence they engaged in mimicry¹⁸ of cultures as a camouflage and defense mechanism. Derek Walcott explains that camouflage is natural and it is a way “to adapt and then blend into [the] habitats, whether [individuals] possess these environments by forced migration or by instinct...[thus] [c]ulture must move faster, [and] defensively” (262). Ortiz Cofer presents the metaphor of the chameleon in *The Meaning of Consuelo* and her poem “The Chameleon” where the chameleon serves as a mirror to her regarding identity.

For this reason, Puerto Rican writers on the mainland such as Judith Ortiz Cofer exhibit what Lorenzo-Hernández described as a “distinctive behavioral repertoire” (991). In Ortiz Cofer’s work it is possible to recognize the repertoire of behaviors combined with what are considered Puerto Rican ways. The unique behavior that is portrayed in Ortiz Cofer’s texts arises from identity conflicts since people on the island categorized subjects in the diaspora as Nuyoricans and people on the mainland categorized them as Puerto Ricans. In light of this, it can be said that in both cultures and nations Puerto Rican migrants are considered outsiders. As a consequence of the appearance of categories and their distinctive behaviors, this group of Puerto Ricans positioned themselves in the interstitial spaces of the binaries: island and mainland.

In addition to cultural multiplicity exposure, it is important to take into account that a Puerto Rican experience on the mainland could also vary depending on the family’s economic background. Similar to race and gender, Puerto Ricans’ financial background is an important matter in how they see themselves and are seen among their ethnic group. For instance, Judith

¹⁸ According to Homi Bhabha mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (126). Hence, these are subjects who are engaged on a “reproduc[ion] [of] assumptions, habits, and values [...] [of] the colonizer” (Ashcroft et al. 10).

Ortiz Cofer migrated beyond “El Barrio.” According to her narratives, her father took advantage of his light skin and physical appearance and employment as a Navy officer (which implies a better income) to offer a more affluent life for his children. Thus, it can be assumed her social status was a relatively privileged one in contrast to other Puerto Rican families in the U.S. Her family had access to an established income; hence, economic worries were not a major issue in their family nucleus.

In contrast, other migrants from P.R. were settling in N.Y.C. for the first time to seek a better life and opportunities. By the same token, others within the group were using the home of those from earlier migrations as a bridge (Lorenzo-Hernández 989). Therefore, the Puerto Rican migrant experience depends on the migratory period and the confronted situations by the individual. For this reason, when the audience looks at the Puerto Rican literature from the U.S., readers can identify multiple experiences that pose the adversities of the Puerto Rican community from the mainland. These adversities take place on the mainland and the island; they are the result of identity and cultural clash.

The Tradition of Puerto Rican Writers on the Mainland

Since the early settlements of Puerto Ricans on the mainland, there has been a tradition of Puerto Rican writings in the U.S. beginning with Arturo Schomburg, Bernardo Vega, and Jesús Colón. Nonetheless, when the Great Migration took place with the Puerto Ricans’ crusade to N.Y.C. as the place of common destination, a new Puerto Rican literature emerged. This new generation of writers on the mainland was combining their traditions and customs from the island with the new distinctive Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. Consequently, within this combination of cultural traditions and customs they began to display hybridity and intersectionality in their texts.

In essence, these new writers were presenting their struggles and definition of Puerto Rican identity. Therefore, Puerto Rican literature from the U.S. is regularly related to N.Y.C. and Nuyorican stylistics. However, with the movement of people towards other grounds in the U.S. a “post-Nuyorican” wave became visible since the 1970’s. Some of the writers cataloged in this period are Tato Laviera and Judith Ortiz Cofer (Flores and Santos-Febres XI). Although these writers began to develop their works by the same period, it is possible to note differences among them due to their respective geographic location in the U.S.

Nuyorican Writers and Judith Ortiz Cofer

As the center of Puerto Rican migrations, writers in N.Y.C. have depicted their idea of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican identity with the help and promotion of Nuyorican organizations such as the Nuyorican Poets’ Café while writers from the outside of N.Y.C. do not rely on this organization or their literary style (Ocasio 730). In contrast, Flores and Febres noted that regardless of the settings there is only one Nuyor-Puerto Rican literature from more varied geographical points rather than P.R. or N.Y.C. (XIII). Flores’ and Febres’ argument becomes interesting mainly because people on the island categorize those on the mainland as Nuyoricans regardless of their location. Thereupon, as previously mentioned, this literature was frequently associated with N.Y.C. It is important to keep in mind that Nuyorican writers and writers from the outside of the city have in common the themes of identity, turning all authors into transnational subjects who keep a strong connection with their nation of origin and the one to which they migrate (Kanellos 1164).

Nevertheless, when exploring Nuyorican literature from N.Y.C., the audience receives a romantic and pro-independent perspective of the island and its traditions. In her work *Dream Nation*, Acosta Cruz argues that Nuyorican writers from the 1970’s opt for this approach since it

was a way to channel authentic forms of Puertoricanness (157). In contrast, when exploring writers such as Judith Ortiz Cofer who was also immersed in the diaspora but on the outskirts of Puerto Rican neighborhoods, the audience is capable of moving beyond the romantic view of the island; as Acosta Cruz noted, to a more realistic perspective (156). With this in mind, it is important to notice how Ortiz Cofer's texts present an accurate and more inclusive view of the diaspora. Her narratives provide the audience with the opportunity to navigate with the narrators and speakers through the intersections since her texts offer experiences from Puerto Rico, the mainland, and the spaces in between. Hence, the hybridity in her works allows people from diverse audiences to feel identified with the depicted cultural identity.

In contrast, Nuyorican writers delineate the cultural identity and hybridity of the Puerto Rican diaspora. However, their perspective on this matter is largely based on the Puerto Rican experience in the streets of N.Y.C. while dreaming of a return to the island. Also, in the narratives of Nuyorican writers, hybridity and intersections focus on the romanticized idea of a Puerto Rico from the past rather than the experiences on both, the island and the mainland. In his text "Los escritores nuyoricans," Duany highlights that Nuyorican writers portrayed a mythical idea of Puerto Rico. Under these circumstances, the way they deal with intersectionality is associated with their struggle on defining a Puerto Rican identity. Meanwhile, Ortiz Cofer's texts move beyond defining a Puerto Rican identity. Her texts offer a Puerto Rican in-transit experience because she deals with different geographical locations, P.R. to U.S. and U.S. to P.R. This allows her to negotiate voice and space as a bi-cultural individual.

Great Migration

The post-World War II migration period has been identified as the Great Migration, which is, the one that coincides with Judith Ortiz Cofer's memories and narratives. During

1940's and 1950's the government was stressed by the overpopulation and the growing population. Therefore, migration was considered among the solutions (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 49). As a consequence, many left the island with labor contracts from North American companies where they found less favorable working conditions (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 54), events that Judith Ortiz Cofer also presents in her texts. For instance, in her novel *The Line of the Sun*, an agent sells the American Dream by offering contracts with a raffle ticket at the town square. Among his descriptions to convince people to leave for the mainland, this man portrays the strawberry farms as large places with dormitories like the army but without sergeants giving commands (Ortiz 154). For this reason, migration kept increasing because it was promoted as a favorable and alternate option to escape from Puerto Rico's living conditions. After exposing themselves to the alternate lifestyle condition and a foreign nation and culture, these individuals found themselves changing behaviors and attitudes towards life depending on their experiences. Therefore, their slow movement to the mainland placed them between the spaces of culture, identity, and race.

Even though Puerto Rican migrants began life in the intersectionality and confronted a different reality than the expected one in the U.S., migration continued to be perceived as an option. In his article "Nation, Migration, Identity: The Case of Puerto Ricans," Duany states that in 1950 there were 301,375 Puerto Ricans in the U.S., a total of 12% of the entire Puerto Rican population (426). The net migration from P.R. to the mainland was 446,693 between the 1950-1959 periods (Duany 432). Furthermore, in 1960 the number of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. was 892,513 (Duany 426), but from 1960-1969, only 221,763 Puerto Ricans migrated to the U.S. (432). This data report gives an idea of how extensive migration was during the post-World War II period when compared to the lower numbers in the 1960's. Additionally, it is important to

keep in mind that more than one million Puerto Ricans have migrated to the U.S. since the 1940's (Duany 425) which in turn leads Puerto Rico to become, as Duany puts it, a nation on the move. Subsequently, the island also became a place of cultural and behavioral exchange as illustrated in the narratives of Judith Ortiz Cofer because Puerto Ricans began a circular migration pattern.

At different times, Puerto Ricans have left their homeland seeking a more prosperous life, but Puerto Rico [...] is also a return home for those Puerto Ricans who have lived afar for much of their working lives, and a temporary stay for others who continue to periodically gravitate between the island and colonial metropolis (Acosta-Belen and Carlos Santiago 27-28).

Therefore, within Ortiz Cofer's narratives, it is possible to identify this process of cultural exchange and the emergence of the interstitial spaces in response to her movement between the island and the mainland. As a consequence, there is a need to re-categorize the individuals such as Ortiz Cofer and her narrators who oscillate from one country to the other. Otherwise, such persons would not question their cultural identity while shaping their idea of a Puerto Rican identity when they begin to be part of the diaspora.

Chapter Three: Double Colonization and the Negotiation of Gender Perspective

*I was fifteen
And back on the day I hated you most: when
In a patriarchal fury at my sullen
Keeping of myself to myself,
And convinced I was turning into a Jezebel,
You searched my room for evidence
Of a secret other life. You found my diary
under the mattress and, taking it to the kitchen,
examined it under harsh light (Ortiz Cofer 6-14)*

In her poem “Absolution in the New Year” from *The Latin Deli*, Judith Ortiz Cofer shows a female speaker who is a victim of double colonization. Double colonization, as discussed in Chapter Two, refers to “women [who] are [simultaneously] subjected to both the colonial domination of empire and the male domination of patriarchy [...] [where] both [patriarchy and empire] exert control over female...” (Ashcroft et al. 66). In the poem, a speaker in her late twenties recalls the death of her father along with an old wrong.

As a teenager, the speaker was angry at her father’s Puerto Rican “patriarchal fury,” overprotection, and his searching of her room to make sure she was behaving appropriately as a good girl should. He violated her personal space and privacy when he found her diary under the mattress and took it to examine it under harsh light (Ortiz Cofer 12-14). We can contemplate two different perspectives in the speaker’s voice; voice being whom we hear in the narrative (Abbot 70). The first voice is of a woman who cannot completely overcome a traumatic past life event; she recollects how that incident shaped the rest of her life, because as the poem informs us “to this day/ [she] cannot leave [her] notebooks open anywhere:/and [she] hide[s] [her] secrets in poems” (Ortiz Cofer 32-34). A second perspective emerges when the speaker shows understanding towards her father’s behavior, yet still feels resentment about his action;

I am almost your age. And I can almost understand

your anger then—caught as you were—in a poor man’s trap,
you needed to own, at least our souls.

For this sin of pride, I absolve you, Father (Ortiz Cofer 36-39).

Clearly, the speaker demonstrates a sense of double consciousness¹⁹ by claiming that as an adult she can almost understand her father’s action. This means that culturally as a Puerto Rican woman she knows why the father searched the room, yet she cannot comprehend the cause of his action.

The presence of double colonization as a result of a cultural system of oppression is evident when she indicates her father was “in a poor man’s trap,/[...] to own, at least [his family’s] soul” (Ortiz Cofer 37-38), meaning he oppressed his family because of the social beliefs learned and valued to men in Puerto Rico (P.R.), which apparently he is not aware of and remains trapped. The father’s frustration drives him to physically show his paternal love and care by assuming power and control over his daughter to protect her. According to Ashcroft et al. in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, “women’s struggle against ‘colonial’ domination often continues after national independence” (67); yet for the speaker and Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, cultural independence from their traditional roles learned on the island is only acquired after living in the United States (U.S.). However, being raised in the mainland gives the speaker the ability to sympathize, while at the same time reject her father’s behavior since she was exposed to the U.S. values and attitudes. Living and growing outside of the Puerto Rican culture in the U.S. has allowed this speaker to negotiate her understanding of acceptable cultural behaviors through the exposure and incorporation of living and accepting both, U.S. and Puerto Rican culture. This exposure and re-shaping of culture allows this speaker to identify the state of

¹⁹ The feeling of having the identity divided into parts; it makes it difficult to have a unified identity (“Understanding W.E.B. Du Bois’ Concept of Double Consciousness”).

double colonization she was experiencing due to her father's patriarchal behavior. When the speaker realizes her father was trapped in men pride, we see how she is conscious of the imposed patriarchal behavior her father needed to fulfill. This consciousness allows her later to sympathize with her father instead of seeing herself as a victim of double colonization. Therefore, by abandoning the state of victimization she empowers herself as a Puerto Rican woman moving beyond binaries²⁰ of culture.

The speaker's movement beyond the binaries of culture into the interstitial space²¹ is also identified through the speaker's action of writing. In this poem writing a diary was a way for the speaker to escape gender oppression within double colonization. Therefore, the speaker claims her father read about her "childish fantasies of flight—yes—/from [her father's] tyrannical vigilance" (Ortiz Cofer 16-17). The acts of writing are attempts to escape the reality of her father's dictates in the past when she was 15 through the writing of a diary and in the present through the poem itself. Nevertheless, she writes because she is aware of how she is expected to behave and fantasizes with the idea of challenging the "tyrannical vigilance." However, writing about it demonstrates she did not challenge her father's behavior directly because she is culturally aware of her vulnerable position as a Puerto Rican girl. This vulnerable position demonstrates she is doubly colonized. For example, she claims to be "exposed before [her father's] eyes" (Ortiz Cofer 22). Here we see how the father takes control over her life submitting her into a state of double colonization.

Her double consciousness is once again seen when the speaker empowers herself after confronting the father's "old wrong" of taking her diary. The speaker acknowledges that as a girl

²⁰ According to the Cambridge Dictionary a binary consists of two parts. Thus, binaries are systems of difference such as black/white, men/women, Puerto Rican/American, among others

²¹ Passages between binaries that make possible cultural hybridity without assumed or imposed hierarchies (Bhabha 5).

it is best to remain subject to double colonization. This demonstrates she is culturally aware that continuing to submit to her father is best for her at the moment. Thus, she states “I wondered where/ I would go, if you should cast me out/ of your garden of thorns” (Ortiz Cofer 22-24). Here she knows the father is the one in power and in control of her life. However, since she culturally understands the situation she prefers to behave as if she was double colonized in the eyes of her father. As an adult, she empowers herself when she states “I swore, that day,/ my faith to the inviolable self” (Ortiz Cofer 24-25). The speaker makes clear that although she was double colonized, she would not allow this event to happen again.

Therefore, as the poem progresses, we see her as an adult challenging double colonization and the oppression it implies. She expresses that if she could travel to his grave in present time, she would take her books of poetry for him to read (Ortiz Cofer 41-42). She is no longer intimidated by the paternal male figure. Also, she shows she is empowered through her written works. She challenges double colonization by stating; “Father,/here is more for you to read./ [...] there is more where this came from” (Ortiz Cofer 50-55). For the speaker her writing becomes an interstitial space because it is the medium through which she challenges cultural and gender values.

Many of Judith Ortiz Cofer’s characters and speakers find themselves in an interstitial space. A space that makes them aware of past and new situations that causes a need for them to negotiate their understanding of bi-cultural behaviors. In other words, the speaker stays in the intersection between cultures; an intersection where characters and speakers are allowed to break with Puerto Rican gender binaries and to re-shape their own perspective on life.

As in “Absolution in the New Year,” Ortiz Cofer’s works in general, present female speakers who negotiate their voice within an interstitial space²². These narrators and speakers actively attempt to redefine their Puerto Rican identity. In the works by Judith Ortiz Cofer used in this study, we understand there is a consistent theme of needing to redefine the Puerto Rican identity. Her speakers move from living in one culture to another but attempt to live in both cultures at the same time. This allows them to place themselves in a position of cultural ambivalence²³ regarding gender values in this case. As noted, Puerto Rican migrants were not always accepted as part of the communities where they settled (Whalen 8) and as return migrants, they were not culturally welcomed on the island because of their negotiated definition of the Puerto Rican identity. Hence, they became a people without a country questioning who they are and what they are (qtd in Whalen 12). In light of this ambivalence, Puerto Rican identity becomes a conflicted interstitial space for the negotiation of ideals by Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, on the mainland, and upon their return to the island.

The previous chapter presented an outline of the ideological and physical struggles Puerto Ricans undergo when defining their identity. This conflict collectively originated with the occupation of the U.S. and was first portrayed in the writings of the island’s “Generación del 45²⁴” and again later in the writings by Puerto Ricans on the mainland after the Great Migration of the 1950’s and 1960’s. This study argues that due to the exposure to cultural multiplicity and a need for including the reality of a changing diasporic identity, Puerto Rican identity becomes a troublesome topic for Puerto Ricans on the island, Puerto Ricans on the mainland, and those in

²² Bhabha states it is “[T]he overlap and displacement of domains of difference [...] [where] the collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (qtd. in Perloff)

²³ The fluctuation upon accepting or rejecting something or its opposite (Ashcroft et al. 10)

²⁴ A group of writers who questioned the process of industrialization and acculturation in Puerto Rico after the American colonial regime began (Pagán Vélez). Among the writers in this group we can find Abelardo Díaz Alfaro, Antonio Pedreira, and René Marqués.

transit or living the diaspora; and this is reflected in the works of Judith Ortiz Cofer. Therefore, the literature each of these groups developed exposes the adversities and implications of living in their respective setting along with the influence and new perspective resulting from the migration. Ortiz Cofer's works therefore, portray a diasporic commuter experience with feminine images and the different perspectives as female subjects living in the intersections of a binary of countries and cultures (U.S. and P.R.). In "Absolution in the New Year" the speaker portrays the diasporic experience that allows the negotiation of interstitial spaces letting the female subject break cultural and gender values.

This study argues that Ortiz Cofer's texts incorporate cultural gender binaries through the empowerment of the speaker's female voice or who we hear; and through focalization, the narrative information we receive from the experience and knowledge of the narrator's voice on the experience and knowledge of the narrator (Niederhoff). For this reason, we can also identify the empowering voice that provides speakers and narrators with the opportunity to blur the border of binaries that imply cultural beliefs and behaviors such as gender.

This study focuses on the Puerto Rican experience of double colonization in Judith Ortiz Cofer's narrative. Double colonization is analyzed from two perspectives: the speaker's response to gender roles within two cultural contexts as in "The Witch's Husband," and the speaker's realization and contemplation of gender roles in "Marina." These texts provide the opportunity to understand female voices and images that arise from having negotiated the experience of living on the island and the mainland, and therefore eroding traditional binary standards.

Ortiz Cofer's work represents the evolution of the diasporic Puerto Rican women from a submissive position to an empowered position after being exposed to the U.S. culture and lifestyle. These newly acquired behaviors allow for a comparison of new perspectives with

regards to gender and double colonization. Through these selected texts and their speakers, we receive a fairly accurate portrayal of the experience of those Puerto Rican women whose identities are decentered and delegitimized by the circular migratory process. Judith Ortiz Cofer's speakers lived simultaneously on the mainland and in P.R.; thereby, these texts become spaces that allow for the representation and study of the intersection between the homeland and the mainland transcending binaries of gender, space, and identity. These intersections as discussed in Chapter Two appear due to Ortiz Cofer's own biographical experiences as a Puerto Rican who was raised in the U.S. and P.R. Therefore, she understands the cultural identity²⁵ of both Puerto Ricans on the U.S. and the island.

In her text "Marina," the interstitial space manifests itself with a realization of gender roles as she negotiates the Puerto Rican conservative perspective and the U.S. more liberal experience. In this text, the audience can grasp the narrator's bicultural understanding of gender roles. The character in Marina's story becomes the source for the narrator to begin negotiating traditional to more transcultural beliefs upon gender roles. This is possible because the narrator's migrant background experience help re-shaped her perspective towards binaries of culture and gender. In this story, the narrator is a woman who states to have grown up in New Jersey in the sixties. The narrator claims to have freed herself from her mother's plan for her on becoming a housewife; she went to college and married a man who supports her as an individual, a man who is as good as a parent and a better cook than her (Ortiz Cofer 152-153). Evidently, the narrator presents the difference of a middle-class life on the mainland where diversity allows her to escape the traditional Puerto Rican gender roles. In the story, the narrator finds herself in P.R. negotiating these cultural and gender beliefs with her mother, a native Puerto Rican who is

²⁵ Cultural identity is defined as "a shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity [...] an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences" (Hall 233).

immersed in a patriarchal environment that favors masculinity. The narrator's objective is to negotiate with her mother the intersection of both cultural beliefs to re-shape and expand gender perspective. In this case, the narrator's mother can do it when she realizes the patriarchal beliefs she has been living under.

To analyze the realization of gender roles, it is important to define gender performativity, a "social construction of masculinity and femininity, [and] their ascribed social functions and forms of resistance" (Nealon and Giroux 178). In "Marina," Ortiz Cofer uses both definitions to gender to emphasize the oppressive system of the island. Therefore, the narrator implements her understanding of these definitions to demonstrate to her mother how these are clearly social and cultural constructs that put women in a disadvantaged position. "Marina" is an anecdotal account of a boy who was named Marina and lived immersed in a female world and what living in this world entails. Through this tale, the narrator makes her mother realize the privilege of masculinity and women's social disadvantage due to their gender.

In "Marina" the narrator quickly introduces the culture clash between binaries of gender in the Puerto Rican island's and the U.S.'s mainland culture. As an established Puerto Rican in the U.S., the narrator's more liberal experiences and viewpoints in the U.S. provide an opportunity to understand the nature of social remittances. As stated in Chapter Two, according to Levitt these social remittances are the exchange of ideas, behaviors, and identities migrants bring with them from one country to another (54). This exchange of ideas is the cause of the cultural clash the narrator confronts with her mother when challenging binaries of gender. This is clear when the narrator affirms her mother is concerned about the narrator's familial duties (Ortiz Cofer 153). Undoubtedly, the narrator's mother is not aware of the Puerto Rican patriarchal environment that dictates how women should behave. The mother's behavior is understandable

since living in P.R. “women of all classes were conditioned to be obedient daughters, faithful wives, and devoted mothers” (Acosta Belén 3) for a prolonged time. Therefore, women’s submissive lifestyle becomes a culturally repetitive pattern from generation to generation when they are not exposed to life in the U.S.

The narrator, however, is able to identify the marked gender role system of the island due to her bi-cultural experiences in the U.S. and P.R. In fact, she states; “[her] trouble with Mother comes when [they] try to define and translate key words [...] such as ‘woman’ and ‘mother’” (Ortiz Cofer 152). This creates an interstitial space that eventually in the story allows the narrator to reason and negotiate gender role ideas with her mother. In this story, the narrator realizes that being a Puerto Rican woman for the mother means to be subjected to gender roles, yet the narrator observes how at times her mother negotiates her gender roles perspective. For instance, “[m]y mother rejoices at my success but is often anxious at how much time I have to spend away from home” (Ortiz Cofer 153). In this case, there is a contrast in perspectives based on cultural bias and social construction of gender roles. We see the narrator’s mother understands that for the narrator being a Puerto Rican woman does not mean she has to deprive herself of social habits such as working at the same time as being a mother.

Nevertheless, the narrator is conscious that her mother can change her perspective on gender roles because she also lived in the U.S. and was exposed to the different cultural values. The cultural clash they are confronting has become more conflicted since the mother returned to P.R. Therefore, the narrator describes her mother as an individual who has “gone totally ‘native’” (Ortiz Cofer 151); and someone who is constantly questioning her choices in life as woman since she is living on the island (Ortiz Cofer 151). We can infer the mother has always lived under the rule of the Puerto Rican patriarchal beliefs. Hence, the narrator seeks to negotiate

gender perspective although her double consciousness makes her aware that for her mother this behavior is part of her identity. The narrator's awareness on different gender perspective can be understood as she indicates that her mother spent twenty years in exile alone with two children in a Puerto Rican home in the U.S. where the language spoken was Spanish while the children were pretending to follow traditional Puerto Rican roles (Ortiz Cofer 152). Here the narrator presents herself as an individual who because of her exposure to the U.S. culture has been negotiating bicultural behaviors since her youth. This, in turn, affirms her beliefs that gender roles can be assimilated depending on the setting and circumstance; hence she claims to have lived a dual existence on the mainland (Ortiz Cofer 152). This dual existence is the mechanism of becoming aware of both worlds.

Ortiz Cofer presents a narrator who negotiates the cultural behaviors of both, P.R. and U.S., placing her in an interstitial space that allows the realization and adaptation of gender roles. On the one hand, she plays her Puerto Rican roles at home on the mainland; and on the other, we see her at school "pretending assimilation in the classroom" (Ortiz Cofer 152). Hence, her awareness and double consciousness developed from learning to identify and understand how she was expected to behave respectively in each culture. More importantly is the use of the word "pretending" which means she has been negotiating behaviors rather than preferring one over the other, an aspect that represents her movement towards the interstitial space of cultures. An allusion to her bicultural awareness is also present when she portrays the changing Puerto Rican town where she lives, as follows:

our pueblo is a place of contrasts: the original town remains as a tiny core of ancient houses circling the church, [...] but surrounding this postcard scene there are shopping malls, a Burger King, a cinema. And where the sugar cane fields once extended like a

green sea as far as the eye could see: condominiums, cement blocks in rows, all the same shape and color (Ortiz Cofer 151-152).

In this excerpt the narrator demonstrates to have the ability to accept her town's change; it has become more "Americanized." Particularly, this description not only shows her acceptance to change but also her negotiation within both cultures, P.R. and U.S., since the town reflects how her identity has been re-shaped into a bicultural one.

Meanwhile, the mother presents an inner conflict accepting the new perspective on culture and of course gender. As seen when the narrator points out, "[her mother] tries not to see this part of her world" (Ortiz Cofer 152). Although the mother is aware her town is changing she is not able to accept the new American cultural aspects taking part of her town. The contrast between P.R. and the U.S. offers a nostalgic tone which suggests the narrator's mother yearns for the P.R. of the past. It means the mother refuses to accept the possibility of an interstitial space where the combination of both worlds' view is allowed. This, in turn, creates a clash of culture between the narrator and her mother when it comes to the social construct of gender roles. Undoubtedly, the island is depicted as a reflection of the process the narrator has gone through when re-shaping and negotiating the cultures. At the same time, the island hideaway reflects the process the narrator's mother is beginning to confront. Hence, when looking at the mother ignoring the changes, we see a character that seems to feel culturally threatened. The mother's resistance to these changes of her long held beliefs is portrayed with her questioning of the narrator's life choices. In this case, the narrator's mother has realized what her environment entails but finds it hard to challenge the cultural values which have defined her as Puerto Rican.

The narrator's immersion into the interstitial space between cultures provides her the opportunity to understand the mother's resistance and the conflict of perspective they have. As

result to this awareness the narrator states that visiting her town in P.R. was “symbolic of the clash of cultures and generations that [her mother] and [her] represent” (Ortiz Cofer 151). In effect this also explains why the narrator and the mother disagree. In addition, it also clarifies why the narrator describes her mother as “my loving adversary” (Ortiz Cofer 153). Nonetheless, the narrator’s tone when describing her mother portrays her as an individual who empowers the possibility of fluctuating between cultures because she shows respect to her mother as a Puerto Rican woman. At the same time, she makes readers acknowledge that she has developed a new perspective.

With this in mind, it is important to analyze the effect of the contrast of ideas the narrator and the mother confront since it is where the negotiation of perspectives takes place. Evidently, the narrator presents awareness due to her experience to alternate ways of thinking in the mainland, and although the mother lived on the mainland, she remained firmly attached to Puerto Rican beliefs and social construction of genders. Thus, the narrator’s visit to the island evidences cultural and social remittances. The narrator has the opportunity to expand the mother’s cultural view upon gender roles with the mother’s anecdote about Marina. With the mother’s own story the narrator highlights the fallaciousness of gender binaries in an attempt to help her mother become aware of gender oppression.

The character Marina offers an interesting and unique portrayal of the patriarchal and masculinity oppression. Marina was named by his mother; a woman is while who suffering the trauma of her husband’s death decided she wanted a daughter for company instead of a male son (Ortiz Cofer 158). Gender oppression marks this character because as a male he is forced to live and behave as female, and as a female he needs to fulfill social standards on gender binaries. This character becomes important because it demonstrates to the mother that an interstitial space

where gender binaries are negotiated exists. In fact, at the end of the story the narrator's mother infers Marino has the ability to understand women due to his life experience among them since as she puts it, he would know how to make a woman happy (Ortiz Cofer 160). This, in turn, makes the mother realize there is indeed gender oppression.

Marina is a character who seems to always be in a vulnerable position. According to the mother, Marina was a girl with "café con leche" skin, green eyes and thick Indian hair with a soft voice that was very hard to hear (Ortiz Cofer 156). To emphasize Marina's vulnerability as a girl we are also introduced to someone whose voice is hard to hear. In essence, this aspect allows the thought of Marina as a restrained and silenced individual in a patriarchal social construct. Also, Marina sits isolated, with sad eyes, in a female space where no man was allowed to enter (Ortiz Cofer 154-155). For the narrator, Marina's behavior indicates the existence of oppression.

Nevertheless, being Marina a boy whom circumstances made share a space only designated for females demonstrates how an individual can cross binaries of gender. Therefore, upon moving from one gender binary to the other Marina develops the ability to understand both worlds and acknowledges there is gender oppression towards women. The boy was allowed into the physical place or setting where only as female or Marina would have been able to share. The place is described as follows, "a pastoral setting where no true *macho* would want to be caught swimming or fishing" (Ortiz Cofer 154-155). In this part of the anecdote, the incorporation of the word "macho" by the narrator's mother presents once again the patriarchal structure that favors masculinity on the island. The word "macho" offers a stronger connotation to manhood; it puts men in a more powerful position. Hence, this shows the narrator's mother has not realized the patriarchal system that oppresses her as female although she is the one telling the anecdote about Marina.

As her anecdote progresses, we acknowledge Marina eloped with a girl to the U.S. where she can become Marino. This further strengthens the argument that life on the mainland provides more freedom from the gender constraints in Puerto Rico. Moving to the mainland gave Marino the opportunity to develop his true self. With this in mind Marino certainly empowers the individuals who migrate and become established in the U.S. such as the narrator. This is possible because Marina, the anecdote, is evidence of a cultural and social remittances process that allows those returning migrants to break traditional island culture gender binaries. When analyzing the anecdote itself, Marina seems to have escaped from a conservative and patriarchal social construct.

Without a doubt the narrator quickly noticed Marina's escape from P.R.'s traditional gender roles and uses it as a way for her mother to realize the existence of gender oppression. Despite this opportunity, the narrator asks her mother; "[d]o you think he made a good husband?" (Ortiz Cofer 160). The narrator successfully negotiates her perspective on gender roles with her mother because unconsciously the mother replied, "[h]e would know what it takes to make a woman happy" (Ortiz Cofer 160). The mother knows this is possible because he was able to cross binaries and be with women as a woman. In light of the mother's response to the narrator, it is clear she has become aware of the lifestyle to which women are subjected. As an oppressed individual, the mother believes Marino's experience in the world of women has made him capable of treating women differently.

The mother's realization of the flexibility of gender roles is emphasized through her body language. The narrator explains that when the mother told her how Marino would know how to make a woman happy "she turned to face [her], and winked in camaraderie" (Ortiz Cofer 160). Her gesture implies they have got to reason rather than remain as "loving adversar[ies]" (Ortiz

Cofer 153) as previously noted. Also, this gesture of winking in camaraderie serves as evidence that the mother has negotiated the social construction of gender binary in P.R. Closing the story with this dialogue between the mother and narrator, proves how the narrator's social and cultural remittances lets her mother identify that in P.R. women are subjects at a disadvantage. This dialogue provides a new re-shaped perspective for the concepts of "woman" and "mother." In this case, narrator and mother are aware that these two concepts are defined differently according to life experiences and settings. Thus, through this mutual understanding, they both portray a voice of empowerment where no female is the victim in the story. With this last dialogue from the text, Ortiz Cofer empowers Puerto Ricans who migrate because she presents migration as an introduction to a new life experience. In turn this new life experience gives migrants the ability to have an open mind towards different gender and cultural perspectives; in other words, a change of mind.

The change becomes evident when the narrator contemplates Marino, whom she describes as a "gentle old man" (Ortiz Cofer 160). Marino's image is one of a man who has no means to prove his masculinity in a patriarchal environment. In this case, we not only get a realization of gender roles but also a view of the interstitial space which develops the narrator's double consciousness. For instance, "he would never forget the lessons she learned at the río—or how to handle fragile things" (Ortiz Cofer 160). Here we see the narrator's understanding of P.R.'s cultural and social construction on gender roles since she refers to women as fragile. It means the narrator negotiates her perspective on gender roles according to the circumstances.

Crucial to the understanding of the story's theme is the acceptance that there is always a moment to question and challenge the systems of inequalities oppressing individuals. There are circumstances which help others in an oppressive system, like the narrator's mother, to

comprehend they are at disadvantaged positions. These same circumstances allow the narrator and the mother to move beyond the binaries and into an interstitial space where they can understand the surroundings while generating a new perspective. In this story, the negotiation of ideas upon gender as a product of the migratory experience offers the characters the opportunity to visualize events with a bicultural point of view. In essence, the migratory bicultural experience and cultural remittances²⁶ allow individuals who are at a gender disadvantage to challenge the systems of oppression repressing them by responding to them.

This is the case in “The Witch’s Husband” a story where characters’ actions are a response to gender oppression. In this story, the main character, the narrator, again a Puerto Rican from the island who is a return migrant, applies the more liberal U.S. point of view towards understanding and challenging the island’s gender roles. The narrator’s mother has asked her to cope with the ailing grandmother who insists on taking care of the grandfather who suffers dementia, even though her heart is not healthy. The narrator illustrates how cultural remittances re-shape and put into question the traditional role of Puerto Rican women. The narrator is a college professor at the U.S. As such, her response to traditional gender roles is the representation of reason and bi-cultural beliefs. She also promotes and justifies the acceptance and assimilation of new ideas.

The female narrator, who is influenced by the mainland’s culture due to migration, presents a changed and open-minded perspective which allows her to question the authority of gender binary. In “The Witch’s Husband,” the narrator is able to respond to and disrupt gender binaries since she is a “college teacher in the United States [and] [is] supposed to represent the voice of logic [...] [she] [was] called to convince *la abuela*, the family’s proud matriarch, to step down—to allow her children to take care of her before she kills herself with work” (Ortiz Cofer

²⁶ The connection of ideas, values, and communications return migrants bring to their “homeland” (Flores 4).

42). In this quote, the U.S. cultural influence and her position as college teacher makes her an individual who could successfully persuade a different perspective on traditional Puerto Rican gender roles to the grandmother. The narrator's immersion in the U.S.'s culture as a college teacher makes her aware of patriarchal structures and the privilege of masculinity in P.R. Torres Rivera in "Capítulo 4 Viviendo en sociedad," *Ciencias Sociales: Sociedad y Cultura Contemporáneas*, indicates that masculinity, the behavior of men in a specific culture or society, identifies how men ascend in society by taking control of others (274). Although we do not see an old man representing masculinity due to his mental illness, we can recognize that Puerto Rican traditional gender roles dictate society's masculinity and patriarchy. This would explain the narrator's grandmother's behavior.

The narrator observes and assumes the grandmother is oppressed, and forced by established traditional gender roles to care for her husband. We find the narrator's grandmother oppressed within the male dominant society of P.R.; "[a]nd frankly, I am a bit appalled at what I have begun to think of as 'the martyr complex' in Puerto Rican women, that is the idea that self-sacrifice is a woman's lot and her privilege: a good woman is defined by how much suffering and mothering she can do in one lifetime" (Ortiz Cofer 43). However, we later discover that earlier in her marriage the grandmother decided to seek freedom from gender oppression and left for the mainland. Therefore, the mainland is the place where more liberal ideas of gender freedom are more attainable.

As the story progresses, we see how the grandmother challenges the stereotypical gender roles of the island by returning and becoming the matriarch of the family. The narrator mentions she has learned to respect her grandmother as a strong woman who although a mother of five was also able to find ways to help many others (Ortiz Cofer 42). For the narrator, the

grandmother has demonstrated to be a strong woman who does more than what is expected within the established gender roles. Therefore, she is seen as the matriarch of the family; this, in turn, makes for an intimidating portrayal. This is understood when the narrator says she is at her grandmother's house, whom she respects greatly, waiting for an opportunity to talk to her about putting aside the responsibility of taking care of her husband (Ortiz Cofer 42). The narrator also mentions that her grandmother was a woman "with a big heart and a temper to match" (Ortiz Cofer 44). Clearly, the narrator is concerned with the grandmother's reaction to her advice to stop taking care of her husband, the grandfather, and allow her grown children to take care of the grandfather and her. The narrator highlights, "I have spoken with people my mother's age who told me that they had spent up to a year at Abuela's house during emergencies and hard times. It seems extraordinary that a woman would willingly take on such obligations. [...] Abuela is the all-time champion in my eyes; her life has been entirely devoted to others" (Ortiz Cofer 42-43). Here the narrator's awareness of gender roles in P.R. becomes evident when she implements a tone of respect but without approval to the actions of the grandmother.

The narrator understands that in the traditional island culture, women are expected to take care of others in a maternal way. Nonetheless, she observes the grandmother surpasses the expectations of her culture. Torres Rivera explains, every society constructs what it means or considers as appropriate behavior for females and males according to their cultural context (267). For this reason, we see a grandmother who carries a heavy burden and a narrator who misunderstands the grandmother's behavior. Nonetheless, the narrator considers the burden unacceptable because it is more than the expected in the U.S. and in P.R. This narrator's ability to question and negotiate traditional gender roles becomes possible because of her ability to balance and mesh the cultures in which she has been immersed. Therefore, the narrator

contemplates the grandmother's behavior from an interstitial or third space from where she can attempt to understand the origin of such behavior. Hence, because she is aware of her different perspective and different ways of understanding, she seeks to find what she believes is a good moment to make an attempt to change her grandmother's mind, to relinquish her roles and responsibilities as a traditional Puerto Rican woman.

Surprisingly as the story develops, the narrator discovers the grandmother is also a return migrant. It is not until then when the narrator acknowledges her grandmother's strong character developed as a rebellion against patriarchy. According to the narrator, when her grandmother was younger she spent a year in New York reportedly receiving treatment for her heart at a young age (Ortiz Cofer 43). Nevertheless, the narrative reveals that the treatment off her "heart" was indeed a metaphor for her escape from gender oppression on the island.

The narrator introduces the grandmother as a submissive female at a young age. However, it is quickly revealed by the grandmother that as a young wife, she wanted to abandon her children and husband and never return (Ortiz Cofer 46). The grandmother admits she was "tired, [...] young and pretty, full of energy and dreams [...] Restless, bored. Four children and a husband all demanding more and more from [her]" (Ortiz Cofer 47). Clearly, the grandmother reveals she understands her lifestyle was imposed upon her by society through her husband and children. Undoubtedly, life and future were shaped by patriarchal beliefs. Ashcroft et al. in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, argue that women are doubly submitted and marginalized in a patriarchal society (66). Such was her life destined by her demanding children and her husband in this traditional patriarchal culture.

The grandmother responds to this oppression by leaving for the mainland. As a young woman/wife she escaped to the mainland to have a life freer from traditional Puerto Rican

gender roles. Meanwhile, as an older woman she fulfills gender roles but willingly due to love and sense of gratitude to the old man. However, as an old woman she empowers herself by doing more than what is expected from her in the patriarchal society.

Evidently, the grandmother resists others' imposition with her strong character; she was aware of the system oppressing her. Her resistance was present from early in her married life, and she reacted assertively against gender roles; as an older woman she affirms that as a pretty young woman, she was wasting her life. This reason made her leave for the mainland. As Gloria Anzaldúa in "Borderlands/La Frontera" points out, women have to leave their home in order to find their true selves buried under the imposed personality (107). In this story, the narrator becomes aware that her grandmother did exactly this and as young woman and wife left the island to free herself from the social expectations imposed upon her as a Puerto Rican woman. In fact, this awareness makes the narrator comprehend the manner in which the grandmother behaves as a way to empower the type of woman she became, and that she became much more than the expected.

When the grandmother left to New York City (N.Y.C.), it was her husband's idea; he wanted to set her free. This shows a family nucleus moving beyond the binaries of gender into an interstitial space where they recognize Puerto Rican women struggles in regards to gender roles. The response to gender roles is presented when the grandmother says;

I was sick. Sick at heart. And he knew it [...] The year in New York was his idea. He saw how unhappy I was. He knew I needed to taste freedom. He paid my sister Delia to come take care of the children. He also sublet her apartment for me, though he had to take a second job to do it. He gave me money and told me to go (Ortiz Cofer 48).

The grandmother and her sister Delia traded places for a year. This meant one of them was going to be free, while the other would be returning to a marked gender roles system. However, the experience at the mainland would still give the grandmother the ability to grow as a woman and develop her own perspective on how to empower herself as a Puerto Rican woman.

For this reason, the narrator's point of view on gender roles, one of an established Puerto Rican in the U.S., visiting her family in P.R. is important. The narrator has a privilege people on the island do not have; a position in an interstitial space of cultures and gender. This privilege allows her to develop a double consciousness to negotiate and comprehend the grandmother's behavior. In order to fully understand the origin of the circumstances with her grandmother, the narrator makes clear "[she] need[ed] to know about Abuela's lost year [because] [i]t has to be another good story" (Ortiz Cofer 47). For the narrator, who is a college teacher, the voice of logic and the individual with a U.S. cultural influence, this event becomes the source of the grandmother's strong personality. In the same way, it could explain the grandmother's reaction to her grown children's advice. At the same time, this story could give her the opportunity to connect with the grandmother.

The response towards double colonization, a system oppressing men and system that makes men oppress women, can also be examined through the grandfather's decision on sending his wife to N.Y.C. In this case, the system makes him acquire a second job since he needs to provide for his children while at the same time for his wife at N.Y.C. He takes his role as head of the family to fulfill his masculinity image. Nevertheless, while he was submitted to an oppressive system, he was being generous with his unhappy wife instead of oppressing her. Thus, we perceive a man who instead of trying to have control over his wife, he sends her away and condemns himself to a harder life. In short, he moves beyond binaries of gender and culture

because as a Puerto Rican man, he breaks the dominant male norm since he can treat his wife differently.

Although the grandfather granted the grandmother independence, the figure of the strong independent woman is continuously present in this story. For instance, the grandmother left her husband before he sent her to N.Y.C. and he followed her. The grandmother points out that she returned home on the condition of never being followed anywhere again or she would never return home (Ortiz Cofer 48). This allows readers to realize the grandmother was not prepared or willing to live the life of a traditional Puerto Rican woman as stipulated by the social norms on the island and she recognized it. The grandmother demonstrates that as an individual, she challenged the oppressive system of male domination over women when she threatens her husband. It can be inferred that she decided to leave home, and this is what made the grandfather conscious of the unequal gender system and made him willing to negotiate positions of power with his wife. This story reveals how the grandmother in her home and relationship was subversive to societal impositions and values.

Through the narrator's perspective, we can notice the grandmother became someone who negotiated her gender perspective and found a way to empower herself. The double consciousness of the narrator, when it comes to cultural beliefs and structures such as gender perspectives, allows her to negotiate the interstitial space of culture and gender. Therefore, the narrator's location between the Puerto Rican and the U.S. cultural behavior upon gender makes her question the grandmother's decision to leave her family and never return. This can be identified in the following example: “[s]o you left the children with your sister and went to New York?” I say, trying to keep the mixed emotions I feel out of my voice. I look at the serene old woman in front of me and cannot believe that she once left four children and a loving husband to

go live alone in a faraway country” (Ortiz Cofer 47-48). This part of the narrative shows the narrator is bi-culturally influenced, specifically when she mentions she tries to hide her mixed emotions. This demonstrates the existence of an interstitial space that blends cultural beliefs such as gender role perspective.

The privilege of the narrator to understand both worlds (the Puerto Rican and the U.S.) makes her share similar points of view with her grandmother about strong and independent women. For this reason, the narrator asked her, “You were never really sick, I say though I am afraid that she will not resume her story. But I want to know more about this woman whose life I thought was an open book” (Ortiz Cofer 48). Here the narrator is aware that due to the immersion into the Puerto Rican culture the grandmother might not share her story. In other words, the grandmother could feel judged for her actions in her patriarchal environment. Nevertheless, the grandmother identifies the perspective they have in common and feels comfortable revealing to her, “I worked as a seamstress in a fancy dress shop. And... y pues , Hija’ [...] ‘I lived’” (Ortiz Cofer 48). The identification of the interstitial space is evident with the summary of her life experience through the words “I lived,” meaning she believes the narrator comprehends the implication of this phrase. Anzaldúa points out how fascinating it is to live in both worlds because living in one limits human nature to evolve into something better (108). In “The Witch’s Husband,” the narrator’s and the grandmother’s perspectives on gender roles evolved after experiencing the interstitial space of culture and gender. Evidently, the narrator and the grandmother evolved their gender perspective through their immersion in the U.S. cultural values and their life experience on the island.

The evolution into an enlightened individual due to migration and the existence of the interstitial third space where the grandmother is located is highlighted the anecdote she tells the

narrator. With her anecdote, the grandmother reveals and negotiates her perspective concerning gender roles with the narrator. The negotiation occurs when she uses the anecdote as a lesson to help the narrator understand why she does not want to relinquish her responsibilities as Puerto Rican woman to the grandfather. Telling the anecdote is also a way of responding to gender oppression because she shows her different own subversive perspective and awareness in dealing with gender oppression in P.R. which surprises the narrator. In this anecdote, which is symbolic to the grandmother’s experience, the woman secretly leaves her home at night after carrying out a ritual in front of the window, “she [stays] naked [..], and when the church bells struck twelve, she [begins] to paint her entire body with the paintbrush, dipping it into the jar. As the bells tolled the hour, she [whispers ...]: *I don’t believe in the church, or in God, or in the Virgin Mary*” (Ortiz Cofer 45). This woman, who is later portrayed as a witch, demonstrates an attempt to become free from the religion enforced patriarchy. Her attempt is shown with her standing naked in front the window and painting her body with the liquid inside the jar, an action that alludes to “despojos²⁷”; in this case to get rid of what society imposes upon her. Also, she challenges double colonization with her refusal to believe in; 1) the church, a symbolism for a controlling system, 2) God, the personification of a dominant male and 3) the Virgin Mary, the portrayal of submissive female and an image of a fragile female. The order in which these three aspects are mentioned shows the double colonization of the island;

The church →	God →	Virgin Mary
Oppressive System →	Male →	Submissive Female

²⁷ For Puerto Ricans; it comes from the African heritage and it consists of bathing with herbs, originally at rivers in order to free the person from bad luck or evil.

In this tale, double colonization is faced through the incantation or spell lifting her to fly like a bird after expressing she does not believe in the church, God, and Virgin Mary. It is important to notice the use of the bird's simile symbolizing freedom from the oppressive system (the church), male (God), and female gender roles (Virgin Mary). Undoubtedly, religion has played an important part promoting double colonization. Considering the conservative beliefs in the Puerto Rican traditional gender roles the best way to challenge this oppression is confronting the beliefs that endorse them. Therefore, the spell acts as a response to gender oppression since as witch she is not an appealing image to the church because a witch represents non-Christian powers. When it comes to the representation of the church as the oppressive system, she is not accepted because she behaves differently to the norm.

Similar to the grandmother, the witch flees from oppression to escape from it. This reaffirms her awareness of her disadvantaged position in society. The ability to escape and later return shows that as female they are in control of the situation. Thus, moving from one position to the other creates an interstitial space as a response to double colonization. It is in this space where as females they decide how to behave regardless of the norms stipulated for each binary female/male.

Interestingly, the witch's husband was also able to cast the same spell which shows the struggle to acquire power in double colonization. "[T]he man pretended to sleep and waited until she had again performed her little ceremony [...], then he repeated her actions exactly. He soon found himself flying after her" (Ortiz Cofer 45). Pretending to sleep and secretly following the witch demonstrates his attempt to take control over the witch. Similar to the grandmother's experience, the witch's unusual behavior and action of leaving creates awareness on gender

oppression in the eyes of her husband. Nevertheless, this only occurs after the husband contemplates the group of witches crossing binaries of gender.

The witches present male-like behavior that breaks with the established gender binary. They drink from bottles of wine in a cantina, dance to eerie music, and take cheese and rafters from a bodega (Ortiz Cofer 45). This shows the witches' ability to carry out any behavior regardless of gender roles. Here they demonstrate control as well as the figure in power. Hence, their behavior is shaped according to the moment and the moment's opportunity. For this reason, we see this event happen in the middle of the night. Nonetheless, their secrecy portrays them as rebels of the gender unequal system since this only happens at night among women.

Evidently, this secrecy can be considered a response to gender oppression when we take into account the language used by the witches. In this case, the witch's husband does not understand the language since it sounded like a cat whose tail was stepped on (Ortiz Cofer 45). In fact, they were not talking in another language, but with a defensive tone the man could not reason or understand. Therefore, the witches were not prepared to live by the norm and the husband was not prepared to break the norm. This is observed when the husband expresses "thank God the salt is here" (Ortiz Cofer 45) since God is the representation of the male figure in power in their culture and society, and salt in religious beliefs is considered as a repellent of evil. In reaction to his expression, the witches fly away; "[o]n hearing God's name, all the witches took flight immediately" (Ortiz Cofer 46). Once again, we see an escape from the traditional norm that oppresses women, in this case by a group of witches.

Also, after this event happens, the presence of double colonization takes part in the narrative showing how men are oppressed. After the witches left, the witch's husband was not able to escape and,

[a] man in rich clothes[...] followed by several servants[...] all armed with heavy sticks as if out to kill someone [...] dragged him to the center of the room and beat him with their sticks until the poor man thought that his bones had been pulverized and he would have to be poured into his grave. When the castle's owner said that he thought the wretch had learned his lesson, the servants tossed him naked onto the road (Ortiz Cofer 46).

Double colonization manifests itself when we see the witch's husband powerless and in a vulnerable position in contrast to the rich man. This allows him to understand the witch's circumstance and the nature of her rebellious behavior. In the same way, the grandmother's husband became aware by confronting the system the witch's husband did. This event makes the witch's husband state he would never follow his wife again (Ortiz Cofer 46). His response to double colonization relies on respecting his wife as an individual who is capable of making decisions. This last part of the anecdote illustrates how undergoing an empathetic or similar experience as a disadvantaged individual, a subject becomes aware of oppression, in this case, double colonization.

In essence, it is through this anecdote that the grandmother reaches the narrator's sensibilities and logic. The narrator understands she has failed her mission of talking sense to her grandmother, on convincing her to let others take care of her husband; and argue her grandmother's case without revealing her secret about her life experience in N.Y.C. (Ortiz Cofer 49). The narrator acknowledged her grandmother was already aware of patriarchy but decided to live under such circumstances because she understood the sacrifice the grandfather made for her as victim of the same oppressive system. The narrator is aware that it takes double consciousness and bi-cultural influence to understand her grandmother. The narrator's and grandmother's response to double colonization and its oppression originates by moving into the interstitial third

space where they can negotiate their perspectives and cultural behavior. Taking the witch and the grandmother as mirror, we perceive them as strong characters who dare to respond and confront social injustices with the ability to understand binaries of gender.

In conclusion, the new and more liberal perspective of the Puerto Rican migrant arises from the subject's opportunity to live immersed in both worlds, the Puerto Rican and the U.S. culture. This new perspective that Puerto Rican migrants share as sojourners enrich the traditional cultural values of the island as seen in "The Witch's Husband" and "Marina." In these texts, sojourners give Puerto Ricans on the island the opportunity to re-shape their own perspective towards cultural and of course gender binaries. As noted in the previous analysis of the selected works by Ortiz Cofer, her characters see the mainland as a place where there is more freedom to traditional Puerto Rican binaries of gender. Hence, the mainland is portrayed as the medium to reshape a cultural identity and exchange new lifestyle ideas. This, in turn, empowers the spaces that are created while living in the diaspora, being the diaspora a different Puerto Rican experience. Evidently, Ortiz Cofer's characters find themselves in need to transgress cultural gender binaries while also shifting binaries of place and space which provoke cultural ambivalence and dislocation.

Chapter Four: The “Drifting Boat” and the Negotiation of Space

What does it mean to live in between
What does it take to realize
That being Boricua
Is a state of mind
A state of heart
A state of soul (Mariposa 22-27)

As Mariposa states in her poem “Ode to a Diasporican,” being Puerto Rican does not necessarily mean to be born on the island. For Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, this question arises due to their categorization as Nuyoricans, yet, being Puerto Rican for them is a matter of pride and as Mariposa claims a state of mind, heart, and soul (25-27). As previously stated, Puerto Ricans in the diaspora live in between binaries of place and culture; and as part of the Puerto Rican diaspora, these individuals are directly influenced by the American culture and society. This impact makes them question and challenge the meaning of “home.” For these émigrés “home” becomes a complex of ideas in the diaspora with the intersection of “space” and “place.” Ashcroft et al. state that “in the attempt to convert the uncolonized ‘space’ into colonized ‘place’ [...] dislocation becomes most obvious” (65). Thus, “space” can be seen as the location considered as theirs or their home; and “place” can be seen as the unknown, the location that is no longer theirs or home. “Place” is the location where original customs and behaviors are displaced or denigrated (Ashcroft et al. 159). Therefore, in the intersection of “place” and “space” individuals find themselves confronting dislocation and cultural ambivalence.

This idea of living in between or straddling cultures that Mariposa questions in her poem “Ode To The Diasporican” is better exemplified in the writing of Judith Ortiz Cofer as she portrays the diaspora through life experiences and events of her characters’ lives. In this chapter, we focus on the negotiation of “space” and “place” and how speakers and characters deal with a host and foreign environment. For purposes of our discussion, I framed the experiences of

dislocation and the intersections of “space” and “place” with the following texts by Judith Ortiz Cofer:

- 1) dislocation: “The Habit of Movement”
- 2) the intersection of place and space: “Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica”
- 3) cultural ambivalence: “One More Lesson.”

These texts illustrate the existence of the diaspora as third space through the identification of safe zones between existing locations, homeland and host country. In order to have a clear understanding within the discussion of these texts, I will assume the speakers are female taking into consideration the fact that in the majority of her texts, Ortiz Cofer’s narrators are women.

Ortiz Cofer’s poem “The Habit of Movement,” presents the migratory process and its repercussions in the life of the speaker. Undoubtedly, the speaker confronts a feeling of dislocation as a result of migration. Ashcroft et al. defined dislocation as a “displacement that occurs as a result to imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event [such as] [a] willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location” (65). When reading this poem, we find a speaker who allows us to experience her sense of dislocation and the emergence of an interstitial space because we grasp the speaker’s struggle on identifying a location to belong.

The speaker’s conflict of not belonging to any place is evident from the beginning of the poem where we acknowledge she is engaged in a constant movement, a nomadic life. From the beginning, the speaker states she was “[n]urtured in the lethargy of the tropics/ the nomadic life did not suit us at first” (Ortiz Cofer 1-2). Evidently, the speaker feels comfortable on the island and suddenly finds herself in constant migration. In fact, the phrase “nomadic life” portrays a migration that is a never-ending process to which she gets used to eventually. We see a speaker

who has an uncertain place to live, which in turn implies a feeling of dislocation. In this case, dislocation creates an identity struggle caused by the need to belong in a specific place. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall claims identity as unsteady and difficult to understand since a cultural identity is constructed by a common past with common identifications of who we are (237). Therefore, the speaker’s constant migration patterns make it hard for her to adjust since her identification of the past seems to blur with the constant movement.

The experience of dislocation is immediately intensified as a simile. The speaker claims “[w]e felt like red balloons set adrift/over the wide sky of this new land” (Ortiz Cofer 3-4). In other words, they have no specific place to set roots. These lines point out that becoming part of a “place,” it is in fact not possible because they are immersed in what she described as a “nomadic life.” The image of balloons drifting over a new land shows she is aware that these constant migrations are not allowing her to reconstruct a permanent home; the speaker understands they do not belong to any specific location. In addition, the balloons are described as red, and Fetterman et al. indicated that red is associated with hostility (107). Therefore, we can infer the balloons’ color represents the hostility of their nomadic lifestyle since it is an unwilling process which involves a feeling of alienation.

As the idea of dislocation becomes evident in the poem, the speaker proceeds to show what this state entails for the speaker and her family. For instance, the speaker claims, “[l]ittle by little we lost our will to connect/ [a]nd stopped collecting anything heavier/ [t]o carry than a wish” (Ortiz Cofer 5-7). Here we see how dislocation provokes her to give up any hope of belonging to a particular community or setting. However, the speaker shows mixed emotions since there is still a desire to fulfill the need of belonging to a “place.” To deal with dislocation and the sense of belonging, the speaker becomes familiar with the setting and its community

through libraries in what seems to be a short time. This can be seen when she says, “[w]e took what we could from books borrowed/ in Greek temples, or holes in the city walls,/ returning them hardly handled” (Ortiz Cofer 8-10). Here, the speaker presents the rush and uncertainty of the next unwilling movement. Also, we see the speaker confronting a battle with time where she realizes that to feel part of the setting; her identity has to become familiar with the new place. Hence, the speaker confronts a constant transformation²⁸ in the effort to feel part of the places where she is moving.

In an attempt to deal with the sense of dislocation, the speaker in the poem reconstructs the idea of a home as a nostalgic one. This becomes necessary since they have turned into a family that cannot settle in a home at any specific location. The speaker states,

We bore the idea of home on our backs
from house to house, never staying
long enough to learn the secret ways of wood
and stone, and always the blank stare
of undraped windows behind us
like the eyes of the unmourned dead (Ortiz Cofer 11-16).

The speaker confronts dislocation by accepting the migratory process and a constant movement as a normal aspect of her life. The idea of home becomes a desire that is taken with the speaker and her family from one place to another without becoming palpable. In essence, when she states it is carried on their backs, we see how the home was left behind. The nostalgic tone of this stanza conveys the feeling of dislocation when the speaker portrays the never-ending process of seeking a home and failing to find it. Hence, the wood and stone represent the numerous times they have moved and how the movement did not allow them to feel part of any location because

²⁸ Cultural identities have histories and are subject to a continuous play of history, culture, and power (Hall 236).

they moved “from house to house” (Ortiz Cofer 12) instead of home to home, to later emphasize they would not stay enough time to get to know the residence and make it a home. For this reason, not getting to know “secret ways of wood/ [a]nd stone...” (Ortiz Cofer 13-14) points to the absent process of familiarization or becoming part of a community. Also, the image of undraped windows compared to eyes of the unmourned (Ortiz Cofer 15-16) shows an empty apartment that never became a home.

Due to the struggle of being dislocated continuously, the speaker ends the poem in a tone of resignation. We see this when she says, “in time we grew rich in dispossession and fat with experience” (Ortiz Cofer 17-18). The speaker seems to have realized she has no other option than to deal with dislocation; she now sees the process as a life choice or routine. Nevertheless, her resignation demonstrates they have become empty because there is no location to identify as home.

Thus, when the speaker is not able to define or identify a home, her identity is also impacted. Ahluwalia explains identity is what shapes the character of communities (505). However, the migratory patterns of the speaker’s family are too repetitive not allowing them to become familiar with other communities. This strengthens the feeling of dislocation. Eventually, this dislocation causes them to create an interstitial space which is, in fact, their nomad movement. It is in this space, the habit of movement, where the speaker claims to feel safe; in other words at home, considering a home is a safe place. Therefore, the speaker clarifies;

As we approached but did not touch others,
our habit of movement kept us safe
like a train in motion—
nothing could touch us (Ortiz Cofer 19-22).

These last verses of the poem establish how the habit of movement does not allow the speaker and her family to become emotionally attached to people at different locations. They seem to remain on their own for an undetermined amount of time. However, the habit of movement, as interstitial space also allows them to confront dislocation. In a way the nomadic life although empty and sad, becomes a safety zone for their social and physical unstable setting because it implies they do not risk losing a new space which they feel part of. For this reason, relying on the habit of movement itself as a mobile interstitial space empowers the idea of intersectionalities since it is where the speaker feels emotionally safe. In the end, the habit of movement is where the speaker can create a “space” and the reconstructed idea of “home.”

The idea of home is brought again into question in “The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica,” where the speaker observes the behavior and reaction of individuals inside a “bodega.” The “bodega” is where customers go to feel comfortable and make a connection with their home country and among themselves as Latinos with a shared experience. We see how the customers reconstruct their idea of “home” inside the “bodega.” We also feel intimacy and sympathy towards the situation these individuals confront as migrants as they face dislocation in the U.S. They feel a need to reconstruct a home in this interstitial space. Hill-Collins and Bilge claim in “What is Intersectionality?”; that intersectionality can assume a diversity of forms (4). In this poem, the intersection of “place” and “space” takes life in the “bodega,” a small grocery store, through Latin American products, shared ideologies and experiences.

At the beginning of the poem, we enter the “bodega” and focus on the Patroness of Exiles which is “[p]residing over a formica counter,/ [a] plastic Mother and Child magnetized/ to the top of an ancient register” (Ortiz Cofer 1-3). Evidently, the Catholic image of the Madonna and child become the Patroness of Exiles; and it provides an allusion to a Latino community with

similar experiences. Also, it is important to keep in mind the speaker refers to the customers in the store as “exiles” instead of migrants letting us know their migration was not voluntary. “[S]he is the Patroness of Exiles,/a woman of no-age who was never pretty,/who spends her days selling canned memories” (Ortiz Cofer 7-9). This, in fact, shows how those who visit the “bodega” were all forced to migrate from their homeland, and now find themselves in a foreign host land where all they have left are memories from their home country. Nevertheless, we now see the “bodega” itself as the Patroness of Exiles, a sacred place for migrants. Through the Patroness of Exiles, the speaker humanizes the bodega because it links the exiles to their culture and homeland; it brings memories of what used to be their motherland, their home, their “space.” We see how the speaker sets up an environment inside the “bodega” that allows us to grasp the store as an interstitial space between homeland and U.S.

Also, we see how the “bodega” has served as a reconstruction of their “space,” their home. In other words, it has become a place of safe harbor for these migrants. This is evident when we see the personification of the “bodega” as “a woman of no-age” (Ortiz Cofer 8), making her a witness of several migrant generations. The importance the speaker gives to the Patroness of Exiles, allows us to see how migrants rely on her location for comfort. Her image is also cause of a nostalgic environment since she sells canned memories, meaning she keeps the homeland alive in the memories of migrants.

The “bodega,” as interstitial space becomes a home for migrants to confront hostile situations in the U.S. Clearly, the “bodega” becomes a “space” for a diversity of migrants: Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexicans because they share a cultural identity. Stuart Hall defined cultural identity as a process under which a group of people with a common history as individuals can feel as a collective (233). In this case, the forced migratory process and harsh life experiences as

migrants. This is seen when they feel comfortable to share in the “bodega” their struggles in their current residence place, the U.S.:

[...] Puerto Ricans complain
that it would be cheaper to fly to San Juan
than to buy a pound of Bustelo coffee here,
and to Cubans perfecting their speech
of a “glorious return” to Havana [...]
to Mexicans who pass through, talking lyrically
of dólares to be made in El Norte (Ortiz Cofer 10-17).

First, we need to keep in mind the speaker is incorporating different nationalities, and they all share the migratory experience. This promotes the “bodega” as a place where a Latino community, in general, feels at home. Second, the speaker points out what these migrants have in common. Therefore, we see the economic struggle with the comparison of prices between a flight to Puerto Rico (P.R.) and a pound of Bustelo coffee. This demonstrates they have no escape from the foreign place due to their lack of money. For this reason, all we perceive is a desire to return to the homeland when it comes to Puerto Ricans. The same desire is observed in Cubans who dream to return to Havana. We also see the common objective of migration, specifically with the Mexicans’ description as people in search of the American Dream. Nevertheless, the American Dream seems too distant to reach since they still believe in making money, and there is no evidence they are being successful in the process. When we see this diversity of migrants sharing their conflicts, we perceive the “bodega” as a “space” where they reaffirm their cultural identity as Latinos.

The development of a cultural identity inside the “bodega” makes the store a common ground to reconstruct the idea of home. The “bodega” not only serves to highlight common experiences among Latin American migrants; it also portrays similarities with their home countries. For example, the smell of open bins of codfish and hanging plantains (Ortiz Cofer 4-6) resemble and allude to “plazas del Mercado”²⁹. These products become the remembrance of the homeland, allowing migrants to perceive the “bodega” as an interstitial space where they console their nostalgia and rebuild their home. In other words, the “bodega” is where the culture of these migrants is embraced and reinvented because as Hall puts it, identity is a production that is never complete (234). It means their culture is enriched because the “bodega” allows different Latino groups to reproduce their cultural behaviors. This “bodega” is for Latin American migrants a “space” where regardless of their ethnicity, each migrant can rely on memories while producing a cultural identity as “Latinos.”

The production of their cultural identity as a group enables them to collectively rebuild an interstitial space inside the “bodega,” a space that reminds them of home or their shared history. This is seen in the following lines:

all wanting the comfort
of spoken Spanish, to gaze upon the family portrait
of her plain wide face, her ample bosom
resting on her plump arms, her look of maternal interest (Ortiz Cofer 18-21).

Here, we see the bodega and its talisman as “space” because it makes customers feel free to speak the language of their homeland. Without a doubt, the “bodega” becomes a safe zone or sanctuary where they can escape from the daily dislocation they face outside in the host country.

²⁹ It is the place of encounter between costumers of different products with people who share the same culture and food tradition at a specific region. It also became the setting for cultural exchange practices (Coronado Jimenez).

It is in this zone where migrants become a community. Meanwhile, the image of the Patroness of Exiles appears again; this time, the speaker upholds its important role for migrants. The “bodega” serves as a representation and a poor but much-needed substitute for their homeland. We see how the Patroness of Exiles embodies their respective motherland through Latin American products. Therefore, the image becomes spiritual and symbolic because these Latin American migrants believe in the Madonna as their mother. In this case, she represents their culture and country. The Madonna is the source that creates a feeling of attachment or affective link inside the “bodega” while at a distance from their home country. Therefore, perceiving her figure with “ample bosom” and a “maternal interest” gives them the opportunity to feel proximity to their homeland. This feeling of proximity and the built community inside the “bodega” grant migrants the confidence to expose their struggles. Thus, they speak about their dreams and disillusionments among each other (Ortiz Cofer 22-23). It means they visit the “bodega” due to the bond it creates between homeland and U.S., and as a community.

The “bodega” becomes the interstitial space which allows them to combine their reality in the foreign host land and express their desire to return to their home country. This need is seen in the following:

[the Patroness of Exiles] smiles understanding,
when they walk down the narrow aisles of her store
reading the labels of packages aloud, as if
they were the names of lost lovers: *Suspiros*,

Merengues, the stale candy of everyone’s childhood (Ortiz Cofer 24-28).

The speaker provides a nostalgic tone to show how this group faces their living conditions in the host country by turning the “bodega” into the interstitial space of home while in a foreign

location. In these lines, the Patroness of Exiles listens and understands migrants silently. Clearly, the figure of the Patroness of Exiles is now portrayed as if it was another individual with whom they feel a close connection. This connection permits migrants to enjoy the time they spend inside the “bodega.” For this reason, the speaker compares their reading of labels on packages with lost lovers. The lost lover symbolizes their homeland, while the opportunity to read aloud the labels on the packages becomes the moment when they can get in touch with the lost lover, in this case, the homeland. Similarly, the reference to “suspiros” and “merengue”³⁰; a sweet candy that melts, portrays the “bodega” as a pleasant “space”; yet a “space” migrants enjoy memories of the past for a short time; thus, it is a “stale candy” (Ortiz Cofer 28).

The “bodega” fulfills the needs of each individual for not simply as grocery store, but as a reconstruction of “home.” This is seen when the speaker affirms;

[the products] would cost less at the A&P, but it would not satisfy
the hunger of the fragile old man lost in the folds
of his winter coat, who brings her lists of items
that he reads to her like poetry, or the others,
whose needs she must divine, conjuring up products
from places that now exist only in their hearts—
closed ports she must trade with (Ortiz Cofer 31-37).

There is no doubt these migrants confront economic needs when the speaker describes the old man lost in a winter coat resembling hunger, yet, he still buys at the “bodega” instead of the A&P where it is cheaper. This image empowers the “bodega” as the “Patroness of Exiles” and interstitial space for homeland and the U.S. The empowerment originates when we acknowledge

³⁰ Suspiros and Merengues are synonyms; both words refer to the same candy which is made with eggs and sugar.

the old man needs to fulfill not his hunger for food, but his hunger for a location where he can reconstruct the idea of “home” in a foreign country.

In the same way, the bodega with its Patroness of Exiles, serves as the medium for migrants to find products they could only get in their home countries. Since these products could only be found in the home countries and are now found at the “bodega,” the bodega takes a different role, the role of “home.” Therefore, it is no longer a location simply to search for the products but to spiritually resemble and reconstruct the space/home they left. It becomes a place where products are conjured for costumers (Ortiz Cofer 35). In other words, she has the means to continue providing a spiritual interstitial space for migrants to feel at “home.” Since the variety of products is from Latin America, they can also be seen as the representation of the lands they left. Thus, the “bodega,” is the interstitial space allowing them to cross the binary of homeland and the U.S. The speaker makes clear the Patroness of Exiles is expected to negotiate binaries of place and space; “closed ports she must trade with” (Ortiz Cofer 37). These ports are only available through the “bodega” because it is the interstitial space between homeland and the host country.

The closed ports, in this case, refer to the physical borderlands of homelands and host countries which do not allow migrants to return. Nonetheless, the “bodega” as interstitial space breaks this border allowing migrants to travel from one country to the other, if not physically, through language and memories which reconstruct their “home.” Also, the existence of this interstitial space allows migrants to embrace their differences and express their cultural identities as “Latinos.”

When the interstitial space, the diaspora, appears, individuals engaged in a constant migratory process find themselves in-between race, countries, and cultures. For this reason, it is

inevitable to confront cultural ambivalence. Ashcroft et al. explained that ambivalence is the debate upon wanting something and wanting its opposite and it was applied to colonial theory by Homi Bhabha as a term to describe the attraction and repulsion between colonized and colonizer (10). Therefore, taking into consideration, the contradiction ambivalence represents, it is possible to identify and analyze how Puerto Ricans in the diaspora experience and explore cultural ambivalence when crossing the boundaries of space and place. In fact, cultural ambivalence occurs due to transnationalism. In his text “Rethinking Transnationalism,” Duany claims that transnationalism “undermine[s] the state’s legal definition of boundaries by blurring cultural borders. The identities [...] cannot be contained within a single nation-state, nor can their practices and discourses be completely understood from a well-bounded political, territorial, or linguistic perspective” (17).

Judith Ortiz Cofer’s text “One More Lesson”, illustrates how characters adapt their cultural behavior as a defense mechanism with respect to the subjects’ location. Throughout the story, the narrator realizes she needs to undergo a process of cultural adaptation when she is in P.R. and also in the U.S. This process makes her question her Puerto Rican identity and how others perceive it. Therefore, to discuss her identity struggle, we need to pay attention to the narrator’s mimicry³¹ of culture. Here mimicry is applied in response to the categorization of race in the U.S. which is also associated with class and culture.

In “One More Lesson,” the narrator recollects nostalgic memories about the island while living on the mainland. She recalls, “I remember Christmas on the Island by the way it felt on my skin. The temperature dropped into the ideal seventies and [...] after midnight [...] some of the more devout Catholics—mostly older women—got up to church, *misa del gallo* [...]; mass at the hour when the rooster crowed for Christ” (Ortiz Cofer 61). This remembered Puerto Rican

³¹ a process to imitate the colonizer (Ashcroft et al. 10).

tradition demonstrates a national culture; the idea to seek the culture that existed before after realizing they are in danger of losing it (Fanon 200). In this case, national culture in P.R. is manifested through Catholicism when devoted Catholics, who to the eye of the narrator, were mostly older women, rely on Spanish traditions such as attending “misas de gallo.”

In the story, the narrator also portrays Puerto Rican Christmas as a unique experience. She points out that during Christmas Eve she received dolls with national costumes of Spain, Italy, and Greece but the narrator put them away quickly when she discovered her playmates would not be getting gifts until the Three King’s Day (Ortiz Cofer 62). The narrator shows how she accepts both cultural traditions but living in P.R. she considers when to practice each one. In this case, she decides to keep the dolls away to respect other children’s reality, which is to receive practical gifts like clothes only on the Three King’s Day.

Nevertheless, we also see other children’s curiosity towards the U.S. Christmas traditions. She says, “if you dared to walk up to the hill where the mango tree stood in the dark, you could see a wonderful sight: a Christmas tree, a real pine, decorated with lights of many colors” (Ortiz Cofer 62). Here we see children as people who are beginning to acquire behaviors from both cultures in the same way the narrator and her family did. Nevertheless, the narrator uses the image of both trees to contrast P.R. and U.S. She pictures the pine tree as bright at one side of the hill and the mango tree at the other side in the dark. The mango tree remaining in the dark shows cultural ambivalence since it is still there but it is fading. As one who has experienced life in both P.R. and U.S., for the narrator it is important to keep in mind the mango tree; in other words, P.R.’s culture. Hence, she makes a connection between the pine tree and the place of residence in the U.S. “Only, I was not impressed, since just the previous year we had put up a tree ourselves in our apartment in Paterson” (Ortiz Cofer 62). Here we notice the narrator is

aware of both cultural behaviors. Also, she refers to “our apartment” rather than “our home.” This portrays the mainland as host country and the island as home country.

Afterwards, the narrator demonstrates her ability to shape and mimic cultural behaviors depending on her location. In this story, mimicry on the mainland is encouraged by her father; it is developed as a chameleon effect to strive for a better life condition and social status. The narrator explains her father wanted to convince a Jew, Mr. Schultz, that they were not the usual Puerto Rican family through his fair skin, correct English pronunciation, and military service (Ortiz Cofer 63). Undoubtedly, her father was a victim of stereotypes due to culture, race, and class. We can assume this is the reason he takes advantage of his attributes to be accepted by non-Puerto Ricans regardless of the heritage and distinctive behavior which characterize his culture. Also, the narrator points out her father used her and her brother as display and models to convince Mr. Schultz about their image as not typical Puerto Ricans; but he did not use the mother who was the incarnation of a Latin woman (Ortiz Cofer 63). Later, the narrator claims “a Puerto Rican woman is her husband’s satellite; she reflects both his light and his dark sides” (Ortiz Cofer 64), suggesting he could not use his wife as a display because as his dark side, it would represent every stereotype he was hiding. In other words, she would not be an appealing image to convince Mr. Schultz. The mother then becomes a symbol for Puertoricanness, the father a symbol of mimicry, and the narrator the in-between of both due to her equal and balanced exposure to both cultures.

Furthermore, the narrator proceeds to portray “El Building,” where all Puerto Ricans lived, as a microcosm of the island. This portrayal occurs when she explains their new residence was away from “El Building” in exile; there was no Spanish, no loud music, no yelling, and no “ay bendito” which made her mother feel sadness that is only induced and cured by place (Ortiz

Cofer 64). The idea of the building as a representation of home implies a new migratory process within the U.S. This process is emphasized with the word “exile” when moving from “El Building.” In this case, the movement inside the mainland was forced by the father. On the one hand, acknowledging the mother was induced to sadness by place shows she was forced to put aside her “home” and culture. On the other, the fact she could only be cured by place suggests that by being in contact with her culture at a place where home is resembled would enable her to feel comfortable at a foreign location. Therefore, “place” is what makes them debate who they are and where they come. It is only through the existence of an interstitial space that inequalities of cultures can be resisted and challenged (Grzanka XV). In this case, the interstitial space was “El Building.”

Actually, this forced movement from “El Building” to a different building implies the family was forced to behave differently because “[they] were going to prove how respectable [they] were by being the opposite of what [their] ethnic group was known to be—[they] would be quiet and inconspicuous” (Ortiz Cofer 64). Mimicry of the host country is in this case conducted to maintain an image that could put them in a position of advantage in society. It seems mimicry would allow them to escape from a system of difference that forced them into situations where they were discriminated against due to race, and culture. Their mimicry shows they were seeking to belong to the host country and have a better lifestyle.

Without a doubt, Judith Ortiz Cofer’s works show systems of inequality such as: culture, race, and class merging to give birth to interstitial spaces where the speakers and narrators negotiate a sense of “home.” It is within these spaces where individuals in the diaspora are empowered since she offers a portrayal of intersections where they reshape and reinvent their culture and consequently their identity. Ortiz Cofer gives the audience the opportunity to

empathize with narrators and speakers who belong to the diaspora, allowing readers to understand the origin of identity questions and categorizations that only appear when the individual encounters a transnational movement. It is this movement from one country to the other what makes individuals experience dislocation, cultural ambivalence, and the creation of new spaces that cross binaries and borderlands. As Laviera states: "...across forth and across back/ [...] forth across and back and forth/ our trips are walking bridges!" (21-24).

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Crossing the Binaries

“[W]herever the Puerto Rican goes he tries to organize himself into some sort of a group or a society” (Colón 84).

Ortiz Cofer’s work is proof of Jesús Colón’s³² observation decades earlier in previous Puerto Rican migratory waves to the United States (U.S.). At that time, Colón argued that Puerto Ricans were struggling to be accepted as part of multiple groups in society. We see how Ortiz Cofer later evoked this similar situation through her written work. Evidently, her writings and portrayals of debates about belonging or not to multiple social groups arise due to the appearance of interstitial spaces. These spaces develop in response to feelings of dislocation in the works of Jesús Colón and through Ortiz Cofer’s writing. Her work presents how migration and dislocation makes individuals strive to organize into groups/categories such as: Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans from the diaspora, Puerto Ricans from the mainland, Puerto Ricans from the island, and Puerto Ricans on the mainland, among others. These individual groups each form categories that generate cultural and gender systems of difference, make individuals confront oppression and cultural ambivalence in an attempt to become part of a group.

In Ortiz Cofer’s texts, we see how characters redefine their ideas and beliefs on Puerto Rican identity while trying to be part of a cohesive group, a community. Only by redefining such ideas and beliefs, can characters challenge cultural ambivalence and systems of difference that oppress them. Therefore, it can be concluded that in her texts, these systems of difference are shown challenged with life experiences and new perspectives acquired through migratory

³² He was born in Cayey, P.R. in 1907 and died in N.Y. in 1974. He migrated to N.Y. in 1917 when he was 16 years old. Once in N.Y. he was discriminated against his black skin color and his difficulty to speak English. He wrote about his experiences and the experiences of other immigrants and was the first Puerto Rican to do it in English. He became an activist in favor of the creation of jobs for youth, free day care for children of working mothers, and end of police brutality (Wojcik).

patterns. In this case, she empowers the individual in the interstitial space because she demonstrates they have the opportunity to merge perspectives from both worlds, P.R. and U.S.

It was stated and demonstrated throughout this study that Puerto Rican identity on and off the island has been shaped by migratory patterns leading scholars like Duany to describe the island as a “nation on the move.” After concluding this project, the “nation on the move” is not only a metaphor to describe the back and forth movement, but also to describe the movement of social ideas and behaviors. This phenomenon is also as experienced is documented through Ortiz Cofer’s recollection of memories which allow others to identify with her experience. Thus, through her writing, we explore a Puerto Rican identity that takes its essence from a constant migratory pattern, the merge of two cultures and their respective behaviors.

The combination or merging of two cultures generates the appearance of intersections of space, culture, and gender in her writing. These intersections demonstrate the production and reshaping of cultural beliefs. In Ortiz Cofer’s work, reshaping beliefs lead to the creation of a community which consequently generates questions of identity. In the case of Ortiz Cofer’s selected texts in this study, identity questions produce a new definition for Puertoricanness and what it entails depending on the individual’s experience. Nevertheless, these identity questions give Puerto Ricans the ability to enrich their life’s perspective and culture. It is important to recognize that the perspective on gender, space, and identity Ortiz Cofer displays through her stories is one influenced by the fact that she is a Puerto Rican from the mainland who can understand and negotiate the cultural identity³³ of both, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and on the island.

³³ Cultural identity is defined as “a shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity [...] an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences” (Hall 233).

Nevertheless, in this study, we see Ortiz Cofer reveals the true Puerto Rican culture and identity are questioned with different colonial reigns and later with the migratory waves. Therefore, her work shows many systems of inequalities have risen as a result of the shifts in political powers and constant movement of people to and from the island. Her writings offer a view of negotiation while other mainland literary voices offer only “lucha y resistencia” as a solution. Henceforth, her texts show how the Puerto Rican identity and the idea of being Puerto Rican vary depending on the exposure to cultural remittances and/or the diaspora.

Thus, all Puerto Ricans find themselves engaged in a debate of what it means to be Puerto Rican. This debate develops from the perspectives with which each character confronts double colonization, dislocation, place, and ambivalence. Ortiz Cofer’s work, also allow readers to become part of the debate through the creation of speakers and narrators who take part in each text as observer and voices of logic. This, in turn, gives readers the opportunity to face systems of inequalities created by binaries of space, culture, race, and gender that they similarly face. Undoubtedly, her texts offer a voice to those who cross borders and contest social norms of binaries.

In chapter three, “Double Colonization and the Negotiation of Voice,” we discovered the voice Ortiz Cofer portrayed in “Marina” and “The Witch’s Husband” gives a new and varied perspective that contrasts with the conservative lifestyles on the island. These texts proved the essence of the conservative social structure which developed from the first colonial reign in P.R. and continued to reproduce and entrench itself as a way to reject the U.S. culture and colonialism on the island.

In “Marina” the voice heard has the ability to identify double colonization, and this ability provokes a clash of culture at first and eventually a realization of the existence of gender

binaries. Although we have seen migration as a forced process, a part of the political processes of colonialism, there is no doubt this process allows individuals in the diaspora to negotiate spaces and ideas. For this reason, we see in chapter three how migration gives Puerto Ricans the opportunity to find more freedom upon reflecting on the cultural differences in notions of gender binaries. In the case of “Marina,” we identified challenged ideas such as: men cannot understand women, women have to live by social predetermined roles and women are fragile.

Meanwhile, in “The Witch’s Husband” we see a female who allows us to conclude that being a Puerto Rican woman does not mean she has to submit herself to double colonization. Nevertheless, the ability of this woman to perceive her world in this way originates from her previous experience and exposure to interstitial spaces of: culture, Americans and Puerto Rican; gender, female and male; diaspora, Puerto Rican and the United States. In other words, these interstitial spaces are the source of empowerment to her new perspective and re-definition of a Puerto Rican woman. We can conclude, in Judith Ortiz Cofer’s works that a re-defined meaning to a Puerto Rican woman’s identity impacts how others see a female self-empowerment.

The analysis in chapter four “The “Drifting Boat” and the Negotiation of Space,” proves how constant migrations, which cause dislocation and cultural ambivalence, force characters to create an interstitial space that becomes a safe zone. Ortiz Cofer’s texts: “The Habit of Movement,” “Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica,” and “One More Lesson” are essential to explore the existence of this third space through the lens of a migrant. This also allows the reader to understand the emergence of new combined cultural behaviors. In these texts, different speakers transfer their emotions and experiences; and these can be summarized to self-growth and empowerment of individuals at a disadvantage.

Through “The Habit of Movement,” “Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica” and “One More Lesson,” Ortiz Cofer makes the migrant experience available for any individual who is not from the diaspora. She offers the audience the opportunity to explore the interstitial space where these characters reconstruct the idea of “home.” This way she makes others realize there is a variety of Puerto Rican experiences and identifications. In fact, her work is an example of cultural remittances. This is done through her writing by transferring the migrant understanding of what it means to be Puerto Rican taking into account the romantic idea of the island, the island experience, and of course the migrant experience. We see through these texts how individuals who are categorized due to social systems of difference are able to break binaries of space and culture to reconstruct an enriched cultural community.

Pedagogical Implications

In addition to profoundly analyze literary texts that allow the reader the ability to move across binaries and borderlands without directly experiencing migration, this study through the use of post-colonial theory proves there is a space beyond that can disrupt established systems of inequality in storytelling. Stories identifying and becoming familiar with interstitial spaces creates awareness in the audience. Hence, the analysis of Ortiz Cofer’s selected works serve as source and stepping stone to create critical thinkers who are able to break binaries.

Undoubtedly, this analysis offers a narrowed and clear perspective upon the variety of intersections that could appear. It also makes Ortiz Cofer’s texts relevant for the analysis of real life experiences regarding double colonization, dislocation, and cultural ambivalence. As critical thinkers in the development, students who are exposed and read her works would understand that categorizations and identifications need to be put aside. It would definitely create a more comfortable environment for students. It would also change their perspective on admitted

migrants at school, enable them to treat other individuals equally, and accept a hybridity process which Puerto Rican culture and identity is constantly undergoing.

In light of the advantages this study provides to general audiences and students, it is important to highlight it can also be applied in Puerto Rico's educational system. Puerto Rico's Department of Education 2012-2016 curricular maps, only incorporate one text by Ortiz Cofer; and it is provided as a suggestion in eighth grade's unit 8.4 titled, "Personal Essay and Beliefs." Nevertheless, the integration of this text is focused on the narrative style, through which students observe how an event of the writer's life is significant and a potential source to become a personal essay. However, if we introduce students to Ortiz Cofer's work, intersectionality, and systems of inequality at different grade levels, it would develop selves who understand several life perspectives, binaries, and beyond binaries.

Introducing Ortiz Cofer's texts in the Puerto Rican English classroom at different levels is possible and realistic when looking at the 2012-2016 curricular maps. For instance, seventh grade's unit 7.3, "Poetry: My Identity," suggests the use of Nuyorican and contemporary Puerto Rican poets ("Unit 7.3: Poetry: My Identity" 1). This unit also includes the transversal themes of cultural diversity and environment ("Unit 7.3: Poetry: My Identity" 1). Among the standards and expectations, we can focus on the following:

7.L.1c: Listen and respond during a read aloud from a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts to show comprehension, generalize, relate to character and setting, make connections from personal experience.

7.S.5: Describe, explain, and evaluate texts, self, and world experiences, express thoughts and opinions to discuss current events, concepts, themes, characters, plot, and conflict resolution.

7.R.1: Read a variety of texts and multimedia resources (when accessible) to explain ideas, facts, events, cultural identity (“Unit 7.3: Poetry: My Identity” 2).

Taking into consideration these standards and expectations, the educator is able to include the concepts of: colonization, double colonization, circular migration, diaspora, identity, and cultural identity. Clearly, these concepts are justified with the Essential Question (EQ) 1 which states; “How much influence, if any, does the environment have on my personal identity?” (“Unit 7.3: Poetry: My Identity” 2). Therefore, in terms of the context for this unit, Ortiz Cofer’s poetry would allow students to make connections with the speakers’ recollection of memories and experiences in order to question what it means to be Puerto Rican. Subsequently, this would allow students to challenge determined categorizations that promote systems of inequality.

By the same token, eighth grade’s unit 8.4, “Personal Essay and Beliefs,” where Ortiz Cofer’s work is suggested to be taught, contains the transversal theme of “Culture (Sociology, History, Geography)” (“Unit 8.4: Personal Essay and Beliefs” 1) and the following standards and expectations:

8.S.3: Use a growing set of academic words, content-specific words, synonyms, and antonyms to tell, retell, explain, and analyze stories, personal experiences, and current/world events [...].

8.R.6L: Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a literary text (“Unit 8.4: Personal Essay and Beliefs” 2).

Keeping in mind these standards and expectations along with the unit’s Essential Questions: “EQ1. How does family play a role in shaping my beliefs?; EQ2. To what extent do belief systems shape and/or reflect my culture?; EQ3. How do beliefs shape and influence my behavior?” (“Unit 8.4: Personal Essay and Beliefs” 1), educators have the opportunity to

introduce other concepts integrated in this study. For example: interstitial space, binaries, circular migration, diaspora, identity, cultural identity, and cultural ambivalence. In this unit, Ortiz Cofer's personal narratives would show students that experiencing migration makes possible the encounter with systems of inequality that develop from interstitial spaces. In addition, they would be able to analyze the different perspectives provided by multiple characters in a text like "One More Lesson," which was analyzed in this study; or "The Myth of the Latin Woman," which is the one suggested in the unit. This would also allow students to analyze how experiences shape and reshape an individual.

In the same way, if we pay close attention to units from ninth to twelfth grade, we will notice there is not necessarily a suggestion on the use of Nuyorican or Puerto Rican literature. Nevertheless, transversal themes, essential questions, and standards and expectations allow educators to select works by Judith Ortiz Cofer to teach the required skills. In this case, the educator is still able to incorporate concepts and ideas presented in this study.

Areas for Further Development and Future Research

As previously noted, intersectionality is used as a framework to critically analyze any interstitial space. For this reason, the focus of this study can also be applied to texts written by other Puerto Rican authors in the U.S. such as: Jesús Colón, Tato Laviera, Mariposa, Aurora Levins, Rosario Morales, among others. Within the texts of other Puerto Rican authors from the mainland, besides Judith Ortiz Cofer, readers can contest and analyze the idea of a Puerto Rican identity, "home," and culture. Through these authors' work the audience can identify categorizations, nostalgia for the island, and the notion of combining both worlds P.R. and the U.S.

The audience can identify with the texts of migrants who rely on personal experiences and recollection of memories, as in the case of Judith Ortiz Cofer. This happens because these texts might contain social aspects and systems of inequalities that existed and remain present in society. Therefore, these texts deal with relevant situations that are significant to different generations and settings. For this reason, acquiring the lens of a migrant allow others to experience their life struggles and circumstances. It means this study could also apply to different Latino audiences' perspectives.

Without a doubt, other Latinos can take the scope of this project and transfer it to their respective Latino Literature and experience. For example, Mexicans and Cubans who migrate and confront similar situations to those faced by Puerto Rican migrants. In fact, Ortiz Cofer refers to both Latino groups, Mexicans and Cubans, in her poem "The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica" because they have a shared history with Puerto Ricans. They undertake a forced migratory process, mainly due to economic struggles, and once at the U.S. they find themselves yearning for their homeland; and subsequently categorized as Chicanos, in the case of Mexicans. In the same way, Cubans are categorized as "marielitos" and/or Cuban exiles (Worth 47). This means that Latino groups also find themselves in the interstitial spaces of cultural borders. Evidently, this thesis serves as a preface to study other Latino literatures.

Also, this analysis can be considered for understanding other situations and events apart from literature, such as Monica Puig's representation as a Puerto Rican athlete in the Olympic Games. Undoubtedly, the fact she lives and trains in Florida along with her U.S. citizenship makes the idea of Puertoricanness, and Puerto Rican nationality conflictive for many individuals. For this reason her gold medal in the 2016 Olympic Games brought pride for many Puerto Ricans; yet, others were questioning whether her medal was supposed to count for P.R. or the

U.S. (Cantos). Thus, Puig's representation is also a subject of debate when we look at it through the intersectionality framework. These are daily life circumstances that surround us and could serve as source to analyze what it means to live in-between. This study offers value and a wide possibility when it comes to identify and comprehend the interstitial spaces at a broad spectrum because it is not limited to Judith Ortiz Cofer, Puerto Rican writers from the U.S., or only to literature.

Concluding Remarks and Final Thoughts

What does it mean to be Puerto Rican? It is essential to understand the fact there is not a single Puerto Rican experience. There is a variety of experiences that re-shape what implies to be Puerto Rican. Ortiz Cofer's texts allows us to acknowledge that being Puerto Rican relies on negotiating the individuals' experience as Puerto Rican from the mainland, from the island, or the in-between. Also, this study is significant because Judith Ortiz Cofer's characters, narrators, and speakers are empowered as they traverse the interstitial spaces. We see how the characters in the migratory experience and the conditions and data presented by social scientists and are humanized allowing those readers who have not experienced it feel sympathy towards these individuals who confront oppression due to the systems of difference. After all, we perceive the voice of these individuals at disadvantage whose life experienced in circular migration has led them to develop a new perspective upon binary logics. The texts analyzed in this work present a recollection of memories which allow the exploration of multiple interstitial spaces such as: space, culture, and gender. Nevertheless, this exploration also affects readers as artistic literary cultural remittances. In essence, the texts themselves become a representation and negotiation of an interstitial space which portrays the combination of two worlds and constant migration. In short there is always growth in the works of Judith Ortiz Cofer.

Interstitial spaces originate from the clash of categorizations and systems of inequality. The existence of these interstitial spaces serves as an advantage to those who experience it because they have the opportunity to understand both worlds. Therefore, not only the in-between has importance, but also those who manage to live in-between. Considering this last point, individuals who live in-between are the source, for those who do not, to become aware of systems of difference oppressing them. Ortiz Cofer provides readers in general, the opportunity to become aware of these systems; the ones that place individuals in the diaspora, as well as those that place Puerto Ricans on the island at a disadvantage. The exploration of the in-between shows multiple Puerto Rican experiences according to categorizations. Therefore, learning to understand Puerto Rican identity from different perspectives offers the opportunity to challenge these categorizations. In the end, categorizing individuals into groups is a way to oppress them.

Epilogue

Celebrity and artist Lin Manuel Miranda who advocates for P.R. in the U.S. can also be seen as a victim of binaries. In 2016, he was given a recognition and in an article titled “Lin-Manuel Miranda tendrá su estrella en Puerto Rico,” written by the Agencia EFE for *Primera Hora* it was stated; “the theater producer of Puerto Rican descendant will have the same recognition as other famous Puerto Ricans” “[e]l teatrero de origen Boricua se unirá a la lista de figuras [...] que ya han recibido el reconocimiento” (my trans.). In the statement we can notice he is assigned to a coproduce category; in other words, as an individual he is not identified as a Puerto Rican. We rather see him categorized as a Puerto Rican descendant. Also, after hurricane Maria, Miranda came to Puerto Rico in order to offer his support and help to the University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras Campus, which was damaged by the hurricane. There he was interrupted by protester students who claimed that current Puerto Rican life situation was not his theater, “Lin-Manuel ¡nuestras vidas no son tu teatro!” (“Cinco estudiantes protestan contra Lin-Manuel Miranda en la UPR”). Once again Miranda was targeted during his attempt to help P.R. due to his previous stand in favor of Neo-colonial politics. Nevertheless, Miranda’s stand is based upon the life experiences and perspective of a Puerto Rican from the mainland. In this case, Miranda and protesters were not able to negotiate their cultural and political beliefs upon what they identify best for the island.

As I conclude this study, I also acknowledge a new Puerto Rican reality will make people experience Ortiz Cofer’s portrayal of migration—hurricane Maria. It is four months after the struck of hurricane Maria, and the majority of people on the island lack essential services of electricity, potable water, and communication. Thousands of people have lost their jobs after the

hurricane (“Cerca de 30,000 personas pierden su empleo”). Evidently, Puerto Rico is beginning to face a post-Maria migratory wave; a migration in search for jobs and better life conditions.

Many Puerto Ricans leave temporarily and others permanently, but this post-Maria migration promises to be massive. It has been estimated that “between 114,000 and 213,000 Puerto Rico residents will leave the island annually in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. From 2017 to 2019 [...] Puerto Rico may lose up to 470,335 or 14% of the population” (Meléndez and Hinojosa 1). Nevertheless, Florida’s Emergency Management Office revealed that 204,084 Puerto Ricans have arrived to that state after hurricane Maria (Pérez). We also need to consider that numbers of Puerto Ricans migrating to other states have not being revealed.

It means that these new Puerto Ricans who are migrating to different states will be questioning their Puerto Rican reality and identity once they begin to explore life in-between the island and the U.S. How are these people going to categorize themselves? Will they struggle to belong in their respective communities? Will their experiences in the in-between collapse different realities and worlds that would give life to a new Puerto Rican experience? As we have seen through this study, this process of living in the in-between may lead these individuals to explore what it means to be Puerto Rican from a different perspective. The point of view Ortiz Cofer portrays, and the life experience she writes about.

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