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FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
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Master Thesis

**MALE - FEMALE POLARITY AND LATINO FAMILY DYNAMICS IN  
AWARDED BOOKS BY AUTHORS OF LATINO ORIGIN FROM  
UNITED STATES AFTER 2000**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this diploma thesis, titled "Male - Female Polarity and Latino Family Dynamics in Awarded Books by Authors of Latino Origin from United States after 2000", is the result of my own work and that I used only the cited sources.

Prague, June 16th 2011

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## **Abstract**

This Master thesis focuses on the dynamic of the development and rethinking of the concept of the traditional Latino patriarchal family built up around male dominance. This work explores the changes of the traditional concept under the pressure of society of the United States in novels written in English by authors of Latino origin awarded for their novels after 2000. The most significant of them being Junot Díaz and his *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; the other two are Mexican Female authors Stella Pope Duarte with *If I Die in Juárez* and Reyna Grande with *Across a Hundred Mountains*. The first part is purely theoretical, stemming from the concepts of traditional Latino masculinity, the role of the female and children in the patriarchal family in order to explain the clash of values and family crises which Latinos undergo once they are confronted with the different system of values of the United States and the consequences for all family members. In the second part, all three books are analyzed on the basis of the male – female polarity. Consequences for families are explored as seen by Latino/a authors. Finally, solutions and possible ways of escaping the vicious spiral of violence and tensions created by the changed paradigm penetrating the Latino family life as suggested in the novels are discussed and assessed.

## **Key words**

Latino male, Latina female, Latino family, patriarchal society, feminism, machismo, mujeriego, familialismo, marianismo, Latino immigrant.

## **Abstrakt**

Tato diplomová práce se soustředí na dynamiku vývoje a proměny konceptu tradiční hispánské patriarchální rodiny, jež je založena na mužské dominanci. Cílem této studie je zmapování změn v tradičním konceptu pod tlakem společnosti Spojených států amerických v románech napsaných v angličtině autory hispánského původu, kteří byli za svá díla oceněni po roce 2000. Nejdůležitějším z nich je Junot Díaz a jeho „Krátký, leč divuplný život Oskara Wajda“. Další dvě díla jsou napsána autorkami mexického původu – Stellou Pope Duarte a jejím „If I Die in Juárez“ a Reynou Grande s „Across a Hundred Mountains“. První část se věnuje čistě teorii. V první řadě je popsán koncept tradiční

hispánské maskulinity, role ženy a dětí v patriarchální rodině, aby následně byl vysvětlen střet hodnot a rodinné krize, kterými hispánci procházejí, když jsou konfrontováni s odlišným systémem hodnot Spojených států amerických a jejich důsledky pro všechny členy rodiny. Ve druhé části jsou analyzovány všechny tři knihy, a to na základě polarity vztahu muž – žena. Jsou prozkoumány důsledky pro hispánské rodiny z pohledu autorů knih. Závěrem jsou zrekapitulovány a vyhodnoceny možnosti úniku ze začarovaného kruhu násilí a napětí vytvářeného pronikáním odlišného paradigmatu do hispánské rodiny tak, jak to naznačují tři zmíněná literární díla.

### **Klíčová slova**

Hispanický muž, hispánská žena, hispánská rodina, patriarchální společnost, feminismus, machismus, familialismus, marianismus, hispánský přistěhovalec.

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## Introduction

The Latino element has always been present in both American culture and literature; according to some studies, origins of Hispanic literature date back as far as 1513 with the diaries of Juan Ponce de León describing his travels around Florida (Kanellos 2), yet the Latino voice has never been as influential and widely heard as it has been in the recent years. There are many strong indications of the increasing impact of the Latino element on American society. According to the last census carried out in the US in 2010, the Hispanic population increased by 43% between 2000 and 2010 reaching 16.3 % of the entire population of the US (2010 Census Data - 2010 Census) During the George W. Bush era, the website of the White House was first translated into Spanish, giving again a crystal clear indication of the influence and political power of the Hispanic minority (Peterson). Yet where the recent development has been most significant even for people living far away from the US is the film industry where the “Latino culture boom” in the United States gave rise to some now worldwide famous directors of Latino origin such as Robert Rodriguez or Kenny Ortega.

Nevertheless, this thesis will focus on the recent development in the field of literature where writers of Latino/Hispanic<sup>1</sup> origin have recently been achieving great success. For the purposes of this thesis, the following definition of Latino will be used as a parting point.

Hispanics or Latinos are those people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire -"Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban"- as well as those who indicate that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino." Persons who indicated that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" include those whose origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central

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<sup>1</sup> The terms seem to be interchangeable as they both appear in academic papers. For the purpose of this thesis, the term Latino will be employed as it seems to be generally preferred by the writers themselves despite the negative connotations it sometimes implies.

or South America, the Dominican Republic or people identifying themselves generally as Spanish, Spanish-American, Hispanic, Hispano, Latino, and so on. Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States.

People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race. Thus, the percentage of Hispanics should not be added to the percentages for racial categories. Non-Hispanic White persons are those who responded "No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" and who reported "White" as their only entry in the race question. (U.S. Census Definition of "Hispanic")

To further specify the scope of this thesis, it will concentrate on the research of the development of Latino literature after 2000, with a special focus on the Latino family and the reflexion of family dynamics throughout the last decade. It is impossible to keep the necessary distance in order to select the best pieces according to their literary qualities that could have been validated by time. Instead, it is vital to find other means of evaluation which would be credible for the purpose of this thesis. Too many books by Latino authors have been published in the last decade and it is virtually impossible to read them all in order to select the best pieces according to the literary taste of the author of this thesis and widely established criteria. In fact, the only reliable criteria that can be chosen as an objective means of assessing the works of Latino-American authors are the prizes their books were awarded. Unfortunately, the number of prizes for literature featured annually in the USA is not small and some of the awards should not be even taken into consideration as their reputation, as of now, is not fully established or compromised by the interest groups in the wings. The selection was finally reduced to the two most important and widely acknowledged awards – the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Moreover, these two awards can be singled out as a representative reflection of the critical consensus among the US literary community and the logic has it that the awarded books therefore in a certain way way embody what both general reading public and experts appreciate in books written by Latino authors in general.

The three books chosen for the thesis is the Pulitzer Prize winning book *“The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao”* by Junot Díaz – an American writer of Dominican origin, who immigrated into the U.S. as a 7 year old (Céspedes) and currently teaches creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Díaz); *“Across a Hundred Mountains”* by Reyna Grande – an immigrant of Mexican origin who arrived in the United States at the age of four, and a novel *“If I Die in Juárez”* by Stella Pope Duarte – an American writer born to Mexican parents in the United States (Spotlight on Stella Pope Duarte).

Taking into account the narrow selection mentioned in previous paragraphs, some further measures to balance the sample of awarded books have been taken – there are two different countries the writers come from; Junot Díaz being Dominican, Reyna Grande and Stella Pope Duarte of Mexican origin. This fact well reflects the major importance of the Mexican community in the US and also the relatively marginal roles of other minorities of Latino origin in the United States. Consequently, it might sometimes be misleading to imagine the U.S. Latino community as a mixture of immigrants from all South American countries. It is therefore not surprising that some researchers and writers throughout all fields often consider the words Latino and Mexican as synonyms. However, this should by no means make the reader follow this wrong approach, as especially central American and Caribbean Latinos differ a lot. It is also worth mentioning that all award winning authors have not fully experienced their original culture due to the early age of their immigration, only to return back to their roots later on in their lives.

All the above mentioned books share one major feature that is typical of the Latino community in general – the central role of the family in their lives and its almost magical significance which can become very painful once they lose their familiars or become separated from them. For these reasons, the main objective of this thesis shall be the observation of the dynamics of the Latino family and its situation in the works of the award winning writers after the year 2000. The obvious advantage of the American writers of Latino origin is that their experience of life in a Latino family is first hand and they are therefore able to interpret it for the wide reading public in a very credible way. As it will be developed further, the concept of a Latino family is strongly related to the concept of Latino masculinity which is the paramount constituent of this social unit. Both

concepts have been changing in the last decades as the modern lifestyle is penetrating more and more Latin American countries and also due to the “feedback” that comes from the Latinos living in the United States who come back changed, acquiring the values of the new culture they live in. The current books of Latino literature in a way foreshadow the possible development and set an example for Latino men, women, teenagers and families they might follow in order to transform the deeply *machista*<sup>2</sup> and violent Latino societies, so that a new and more suitable model can be adopted. It is not without interest that in the books awarded major American prizes for literature, either the American society as a whole or at least an American as an individual are often depicted as a possible role model to be followed by Latinos.

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<sup>2</sup> masculine (working translation)

## **Part One – Theory**

### **Chapter One - Latino Male and Female**

#### ***Traditional Roles of Latino Male in Opposition to Latino Female***

Despite the fact that the traditional roles of an adult male and female in societies and tribal communities all over the world are more or less similar, there are some specifics when it comes to Latinos which should be listed and discussed for further analysis. Abalos, professor of sociology and religious studies at Seton Hall University, in his book, focused on the rejuvenation, redefinition and healing of the Latino male, provides an extensive definition of its role in the traditional Latino patriarchal society, summarizing the rules of such organization structure in several brief points. It is more than characteristic that the man's role is defined in juxtaposition to the opposite sex, ergo Latina women. The approach is convenient due to its contrasting nature:

Women are seen primarily as producers of children.

Women carry the honor of the family in their sexuality.

Women's main task in life is to be housewives.

Women are expected to be sensitive, emotional, soft, and gentle.

Women are never allowed to be economically autonomous.

Women are subjected to a double moral standard.

Women are forced to become manipulative in order to survive.

For the lifelong repression women have endured they gain their part of the bargain by driving their men to provide for them.(53)

In other words, in traditional Latin American societies, in particular in the rural ones, the social role and importance of women are diminished by the significance of men. It is vital to take a quick look on some mechanisms through which the male dominance is put into practice, which should help us understand the frustrating experience of a Latino male who is forced by the U.S. society to accommodate to its rules and the tensions that

are therefore created within the Latino family living in the United States and its consequences for its vitality. There are also some concepts concerning women, despite the passive role they play in the patriarchal society, which are worth mentioning as means of their oppression.

### ***Machismo***

According to a psychological study by Brandes, professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, machismo, defined by Mexican men themselves is

well, you hear much said about Mexican machismo, the macho. The macho is a person with no interest in feelings; he's the kind of person who is interested in nothing but what he does and he says. And, really, that can't be. . . . He likes to give orders rather than to do something himself, far from providing an example by putting his own words into practice. . . .(122)

Professor Abalos provides a more scholarly definition when concluding that "This kind of machismo is an inherited understanding of what it means to be a man, un hombre muy macho<sup>3</sup>, who commands a mixture of respect, obedience, loyalty, and fear from other men, women, and children. He is the central figure, the source of protection and of mystery; he is the only one who can be trusted to provide security" (84). The Latino man in its natural environment therefore necessarily becomes the cornerstone, the law, the only breadwinner and the dreadful ruler of the family. This concept is obviously very closely related to violence and systematic abuse. In the preface of the manual by anti-violence activist Zambrano called *Mejor sola que mal acompañada*<sup>4</sup> written for abused spouses of immigrants in the US, Zambrano provides her own definition of the concept of machismo in the form of a proverb frequent in Mexico "En América Latina hay un dicho que el hombre que es hombre y macho que le pega a su mujer, deja de ser hombre y

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<sup>3</sup> a very masculine man (working translation)

<sup>4</sup> Better Alone than in Bad Company (working translation)

macho si no le pega otra vez.”<sup>5</sup>(11). An important point is made by a Mexican male treated for violence who affirms that

the machista man is closed-minded, violent to his wife and frequently his children, has to be in charge, has extramarital relationships, gives orders, does not care for the children..., wants to have many children, sees women as property, treats his wife like a child. (Welland, Ribner 116)

It is worth noting that the women in the eyes of this person and assumingly of many more of same cultural backgrounds is seen only as a child, the first and most important child at best. In other words, in family life, the woman is reduced to an object, not a subject of its own free will who is able to act independently.

The lack of authority of women in the patriarchal Latino culture is so strong that even governmental authorities are implicated in the “complot” against the rights of women, as again one of the interviewed abusers affirm that “many men didn’t beat their wives, but if they did, no one did anything to protect her. But you know that in Mexico, women are very quiet, they don’t tell the police about things.” (Welland, Ribner 121)

### ***Mujeriego***<sup>6</sup>

This concept is again strongly related to the previously discussed machismo. The logic behind the social importance of being a womanizer is very simple, as professor Abalos explains, it adds to one’s prestige to be “considered by other patriarchal males to be *muy macho*, very masculine, because they can please more than one woman.” (95). In patriarchal societies such as the Latino ones, public life is executed by men, while women are limited to the area of their houses, therefore *mujeriegos* are considered as fortunate and heroes by other men that share the public space with them (Abalos 95).

Given the above mentioned mindset of Latino men, it is not without coincidence that when professor Brandes carried out his study among Anonymous Alcoholics in

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<sup>5</sup> In Latin America, there is a saying that a man who is a man and *macho* and beats his wife stops being a man and a *macho* if he does not beat her up again. (working translation)

<sup>6</sup> womanizer (working translation)

Mexico City, he considered worth mentioning the characteristic behaviour of Mexican men who constantly boasted about their sexual life in front of the others, half dissimulating penitence.

Emilio is to all appearances happily married. And yet his personal stories reveal long-term relationships with other women. As he puts it, this is the one problem that he has never been able to conquer. He has always been “*mujeriego*”—a womanizer—he confesses, with an air of combined pride and regret. (Brandes 125)

To reader’s surprise, the story does not end here but goes even further, including public admittance of uncontrollable masturbations (Brandes 126). The study is definitely right when concluding that “The confession inevitably reinforces their gender identity, despite their abstinence from drink.” (Brandes 126)

Yet only little has been said about the implications of the reckless sexual life for the spouses of *mujeriegos*. Assuming the fact that it is mostly an impossible task for a Latina woman to deny his husband a sexual intercourse, generally risking being raped, the man not only pleases himself with her, but also can transmit venereal diseases for which the woman bears no responsibility. However, she is condemned to suffer the consequences of such conditions and indeed has no means of avoiding them. Apparently, in the traditional Latino patriarchy, it is solely the male’s decision whether he will or will not use condom in order to protect his spouse (Abalos 118).

### ***Mariquitas***<sup>7</sup>

The rejection of homosexuality and other sexual deviations from the mainstream is widespread in the Latino community. The intolerance towards a sexual behaviour that is different is obviously not limited only to Latino communities, but occurs in the patriarchal societies all over the world. Latin American men, nevertheless, are allegedly allowed to play active role in a homosexual encounter (penetrating the other participant)

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<sup>7</sup> Homosexuals (working translation)

without any damage to their masculine identity. In other words, only the males participating passively in a homosexual “act” are stigmatised (Brandes 128).

Another institution (in both societal and literal meaning of the word) playing a crucial role in the rejection of non-conformist sexual behaviour is the Roman Catholic Church. It consistently condemns homosexuality and other “illnesses” of the kind, trying to eradicate them. Needless to say the numbers of Latino people active within the realm of the Roman Catholic Church have always been high and the trend persists even after their immigration to the United States. As professors Welland and Ribner affirm “seventy percent of Latinos are Catholic, 23% are Protestant or “other Christian,” and 85% of all U.S. Latino Protestants identify themselves as Pentecostals or Evangelicals” (56). While official Christian denomination does not necessarily overlap with religious observance, the above statistics do indicate that religious matters are of crucial importance here.

According to professor Abalos, the life of Latino homosexuals is often a tragic story:

Latino men [...] continue to experience great suffering in the Latino community because of their sexual preference. They are frequently rejected by their fathers, if not the whole family, and by the men in the community. And they are condemned by the Catholic Church and other churches as well.  
(32)

Latino women have had a little to say on this issue, but given the society they live in, it is out of their reach to exert any influence in this matter.

### ***Familialismo***<sup>8</sup>

As defined by professors Welland and Ribner, *familialismo* is “the strong identification with and attachment to nuclear and extended family, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among family members” (142). In practice, wives care about their family and, more importantly, are also willing to suffer maltreatment from their spouse rather than bearing the responsibility for the breakup of the family. For the Latino male, on the other hand, the concept of *familiarismo* is perceived as being the

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<sup>8</sup> Familism (working translation)

breadwinner and also protector, unfortunately only from the possible outside harm, of the family. (Welland and Ribner 145)

### ***Marianismo***<sup>9</sup>

This concept closely relates to the role of the female at home as a carer who serves her children, husband and keeps the house. The religious connotations implied are obvious:

The word marianismo derives from the name of Mary, who is venerated by Catholics as both virgin and mother of Jesus, and as a model for all women. Marianismo also implies that women are spiritually superior to men, but that they endure much suffering at the hands of men. (Welland and Ribner 62)

By this means, women are put on a pedestal, yet only symbolically, which confirms their special role but at the same time limits their possibilities in real life, only to be protected in their sanctuary as holy relics by men.

### ***Alcohol***

Alcohol is a perfect example of how the traditional Latino patriarchal society works when distributing the privileges. Not only are Latino men allowed to drink in public with friends (Brandes 103), but even *está bien visto*<sup>10</sup>. Latino women, on the other hand, restrict their drinking habits to *fiestas*<sup>11</sup> they run in their houses for their family, relatives etc. (Brandes 103). To take this matter even further, it is not socially unacceptable for a man to become an alcoholic and yet retaining his position within the community. On the contrary, female alcoholism is highly stigmatized and numbers from Mexico City prove that 65% of male alcoholics are married, but only 25% of females suffering from the same conditions are able to retain their marital status, facing the traditional prejudices of

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<sup>9</sup> An allusion to Virgin Mary

<sup>10</sup> Well regarded (working translation)

<sup>11</sup> Parties (working translation)

patriarchal society (Brandes 103). Alcohol consumption is also narrowly related to the social life and “rites of passage, particularly baptism and weddings” (Brandes 109). On the majority of occasions, it is mostly men who participate in drinking, exchanging bottles of alcohol as presents. Latino women, on the other hand, are not recipients of gifts in the form of alcohol. It is a widely acknowledged fact among Anonymous Alcoholics in Mexico City that “If it’s hard for a man to stop drinking, it’s even harder for a woman.”(Brandes 108)

After surveying the issues related to alcoholism, it is inevitable to touch again on the very hot and paramount topic – domestic violence. There is no need for thorough explanations of how the excessive consumption of alcohol facilitates violent behaviour of males in general, even those who might otherwise be quite restrained in their behaviour while sober. Professors Welland and Ribner, both with rich experience in counselling and their main area of focus being dealing with domestic violence of Latino male, provide some interesting facts and statistics about the relation of violence and alcoholism. The following answers were obtained from Latino males abusing their spouses and ordered by court to undergo a treatment in order to prevent their violent behaviour in the future.

Twenty-five percent of the respondents stated that they drank heavily. Forty-two percent of the survey participants reported that they were drunk at the time of the IPV<sup>12</sup> incident. Ten of the 12 men interviewed reported problems with alcohol, which in some cases clearly amounted to alcoholism. Nine had abused only alcohol, and 1 had abused both alcohol and several drugs. Four of the 12 men interviewed reported being under the influence or drunk during the IPV incident. (94)

To sum up, the relation of alcohol and violence is undeniable and it becomes even more prominent in environments where a Latino male becomes frustrated, ergo, for example, when he becomes an immigrant in a foreign country where different policies and social paradigms apply. We will analyse the consequences of this condition in the following chapters.

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<sup>12</sup> Intentional Program Violation

It would be entirely misleading not to take into account the fact that all the above mentioned concepts are interdependent, creating a web of interpersonal, mostly familiar, relations called Latino patriarchal society. It would be similarly naive to assume that the above mentioned issues take place in all Latino families. There are some factors that need to be considered – education and origins of Latino family play vital role in determining how patriarchal the family would be shaped. Generally speaking, the more educated the people the more likely the shift from the traditional Latino society. Analogically, the larger the place where the family lives (referring to a city), the more likely it is for the woman to enjoy some rights and freedoms.

Logic has it that most Latino immigrant families come to the United States from rural areas where the patriarchal system is strongest and people poorest. It is crystal clear that the transition Latino families have to face is huge and it is a highly successful enterprise if the family does not fall apart.

## ***Chapter Two - Males and Females in United States and Western Cultures in General***

This brief chapter, despite it might seem a little bit off topic, needs to be inserted as its importance for the following literary analyses and understanding of what a Latino male and female experience after crossing the border and becoming *un inmigrante*<sup>13</sup> is paramount.

Leaving aside the politically incorrect and pre-suppositional questions of whether the Western civilization in general and the United States in particular are more developed cultures and societies than the ones in Latin America, they are simply substantially different. Since the end of the Second World War, the Western male has been losing ground to its female counterpart. First women started working in overwhelming numbers, sometimes inevitably taking jobs from men. Consequently, they became to a large degree economically independent entities and, above all, politically conscious economically independent entities. The second wave feminist movement in the United States has been gaining influence ever since it started in 1960's ("Second wave Feminism"). Gradually, the academic performance of women was improving throughout the last century (in the US) to finally create a decent achievement gap between both genders, overtaking the boys sometime around 1990 with the achievement steadily growing ever since ("Achievement Gap in the United States"). The consequences and impact on the labour market are only starting to take effect, yet from the above mentioned information, it is evident where the issue is heading. The US men seem to be losing their jobs to the more hard-working and reliable women.

"As we have seen, men in this new environment have lost jobs and virtually any publicly acceptable sense of entitlement." (Tiger 248)

Besides, currently, the woman in Western cultures enjoys all the same rights and opportunities as the man (at least in theory and in some places also in practice).

Yet more pressure comes from the private area to finish the United States male. With the introduction of the contraception pill, more power and control was given to

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<sup>13</sup> An immigrant

females and “perhaps for the first time in the mammalian life, certainly for the first time in human history, one sex can control reproduction. This has given enormous general power to women and has been translated beyond the family sphere.” (Tiger 258) This fact obviously caused even more distress to the already emotionally and legally defeated male. In the words of Tiger, Charles Darwin Professor of Anthropology at Rutgers University “Finally, no one attached to the traditional image of authoritarian patriarchy could imagine the consternation men endure. They have suffered an unexpected blow to the emotional quality of their lives.”(249)

Nowadays, there are even voices declaring the end of patriarchal societies in Western cultures and the rise of the Woman as the dominant figure. As professor Tiger puts it, foreshadowing the dim future of the male in his fascinating book:

Females as a group will expect decreasing cooperation in raising children from men as a group. The male sex partner, even the progenitor, may be a rental, not a genuine partner. The industrial world may be in the first stages of a movement toward an economic system dominated by women. (143)

All in all, the West is currently experiencing the decline of the male role in society. The male (with the exception of males of colour) is not protected by the law. In fact, it is discriminated against in all possible ways. There is an immense and very urgent need of the Western male to reinvent itself and adjust to the new environment where he does not play the key role anymore, losing almost all of his traditional roles – the breadwinner, the protector, sometimes even the father, to name only a few. Women do not seem to have problems, coping with their new liberties and rights, yet there is one issue that has often been overlooked, but crucially influences the lives of women living in the time of peaking feminist activity, there is a choice they need to make which often brings unforeseen consequences to them:

“Those without children may have to accept a sense of loss of one of life’s fundamental experiences. Those without work may endure the same loss. A rapidly increasing proportion of women must face a newly emphasized and widespread dilemma

– the apparent choice between love and work, and all the compromises that choice involves, which are at the core of modern social life.” (Tiger 244)

It is exactly this highly stressful environment where the Latino male and female, used to the traditional patriarchal society, are replanted and required to enroot. Needless to say, it is a tough task, especially for the man.

### ***Chapter Three - Latino Male and Female in United States***

A male or a female immigrant from a Latin American country arrives in the United States and is immediately confronted with the new reality and role he has to accommodate himself to. Immigration to the United States is often economically motivated and therefore the immigrants often come from rural backgrounds the fact of which makes the sudden shift even more striking.

Concerning the male, in a certain way, by entering the United States, the immigrant aspires on living his own American Dream, therefore he accepts the story of capitalism. This story obviously enforces individualism and severe competition which is, somehow, not inherent to the Latino culture, especially the focus on the family makes the individualistic approach little viable (Abalos 83). Moreover, this capitalist paradigm of the dominance of the successful and hard working, no matter how one tries, is very soon confronted with the reality of racial prejudices in the United States. The white male is deemed superior to them and they soon discover the impossibility of reversing this order, even in the next generations of Latinos already raised in the United States. This division is so deeply enrooted that

Latino men can't beat up Anglos, can't compete with them, can't resist their power. Even those who have a college degree and a good job, who are considered middle-class, feel vulnerable. This situation leads to anger against one's self and others: "I have to be in charge; I have to take control again; I have to maintain my manhood, my honor, my machismo. (Abalos 84)

Once the capitalist aspirations of the male immigrant are frustrated, obviously, it is not always the case, the Latino male starts seeking alternatives to vent his aspirations for dominance that were denied him by the powerful white male. The measures he can resort to are obvious: violence, alcohol, promiscuity, all of them being the traditional ways of affirming and ensuring his own masculinity and executing dominance back home within his own cultural realm. Professor Abalos calls this outcome "the disappointed

male" (84). Now that he does not have the comfort of his own masculine identity within his own masculine culture, the process of re-identification begins and the consequences are severe. They are even more disastrous and destructive if the Latino male brings along to the United States his spouse and children which is rather unlikely as

a common pattern of immigration among Central Americans is that the mother, father, or both will come to the U.S., leaving the children in the care of grandparents, aunts, older siblings, and as a last resort, paid childcare. Once the mother or the parents get settled (which may take as long as 10 or 12 years), they will send for the children left behind. (Artico 3)

Therefore, in most cases, it is the man alone, or only the male and his wife who try to establish a new life in the United States. The male who starts drinking heavily is of no use to his spouse, who does not tolerate the at home perfectly possible *mujeriego*<sup>14</sup> type of behaviour. The reason is simple:

Latina women know that they have rights in the United States. They are able to find work and get an education that for many means a degree of freedom from men that was impossible for their mothers and certainly for their grandmothers. Since many Latina women feel their lover will ultimately disappoint them, they prepare to protect themselves from the fate they inherited from their mothers. (Abalos 90)

The fact that Latina women, once they are in the United States, usually work and therefore obtain economic independence of their spouse only facilitates the possible separation or efforts to achieve it as the situation within the family often deteriorates due to the irresponsible behaviour of the frustrated male.

The mother finds it necessary, and possible, to work outside the home to keep the family financially solvent. Working gives her previously unknown

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<sup>14</sup> Womanizer (working translation)

economic possibilities, new skills, and interactions with others that may subtly influence her traditional female gender schemas. His wife's development and the children's role as brokers of the new culture, because they learn the language and culture more rapidly, are threatening to the man's prestige and control. The woman may be earning more than her husband and have work benefits he does not enjoy. His previously unchallenged role as head of the household is severely compromised, but machismo dictates that he not share his anxiety or confusion with anyone. The man may respond by exaggerating the male characteristics of authoritarianism and control" (Welland, Ribner 63)

Gradually, the situation degenerates into a vicious spiral with the outcome of either the family falling apart or culminating violence, sometimes even leading to murders. No matter what the outcomes are, the most affected are the members of the nuclear family themselves.

Naturally, there are many people in the United States, working in counselling, social services, psychology and other fields, who are currently trying to find solutions for the Latino male, so he can adapt to the changed environment he arrives in without severely damaging the life of his spouse. This effort is probably by no means facilitated by the fact that many immigrants are in the United States illegally and therefore not inclined to cooperate with the authorities.

Based either on counselling practice or on the personal experience, some writers suggest solutions to the painful issue of Latino male accommodation to the new environment. From the therapeutic point of view, professor Brandes mentions a unique approach in his study of an Anonymous Alcoholics group of Mexico City:

The term *compañera*<sup>15</sup> also equates the female partner with the male *compañero* in A.A. Symbolically, this usage elevates a man's significant other to a status beyond that of sexual partner, wife, and mother. It transforms her symbolically into a kind of friend, placing her on an equal footing with the

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<sup>15</sup> Partner in all senses of the word (working translation)

men in the group. Likewise, to equate one's compañeros in Moral Support with the compañera at home is to convert the men into quasi kin. (120)

From the point of view of a university professor of Latino origin influenced by the catholic paradigm, professor Abalos suggests that

We need to create alternative stories to replace those from which we have emptied ourselves: patriarchy, romantic love, the disappointed male, capitalism, tribalism, the wounded self, and uncritical loyalty. But I am concerned that we not just say no to the inherited stories of the past with nothing to put in their place. I want to begin with the Latino male who makes a decision to free himself from the despairing story of the mujeriego, the womanizer, and creates an alternative, the story of the faithful lover. (122)

Last but not least, there is a testimony of one of the participants in court ordered counselling concerning abuse:

Now the way that I think is not that I have a child in my house, but that I have a partner. It was very hard to make the change, but it happened simply when I realized that most of the things I was doing were wrong, in the sense that it is impossible and negative to try and control the woman who's your partner. . . . You don't want to be very machista or very passive. It's a divided thing, something you do together. (Welland, Ribner 207)

To sum up, there is hope for the Latino male to be able to adjust to the new environment which is increasingly penetrating the Latino countries anyway. The solution is in reinventing itself as a loving and understanding and, above all, equal partner to his spouse, loving and tolerant father of his children and a good communicator. The very sense of the change is very well defined by the saying "*Soy manso, pero no soy menso*"<sup>16</sup> (Brandes 121). The issue of the reinvention of the Latino male, as we will explore later, is

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<sup>16</sup> I am tolerant and understanding, but not cowardly (working translation)

one of the main concerns of the contemporary writers of Latin American origin. Especially the polarity between the old and the new male model is often analysed in their works.

As it is evident from this chapter, the story of the Latina woman coming to the United States is the story of liberation. She is able to find a job, learns the language and, above all, learns to use her rights. In many cases, she gets rid of the Latino male as soon as she can, assuming she can no longer stand up to the constant abuse, alcoholism or infidelity. Once she is finished with her male counterpart, she often embarks on the life of the single mother with all implications included. Professor Abalos provides yet again a comprehensive list of the consequences of matriarchy lived within the patriarchal mindset:

- Matriarchy parallels patriarchy in that its domination still relies on gender.
- A matriarch remains caught by the tradition and practices the story of patriarchy and raises her sons and daughters as if she were the father.
- The story has been reformed, but no new and better story has been created.
- The matriarch becomes a master at using guilt as a form of manipulation.
- The matriarch takes on the mantle of silent martyrdom or of a complaining victim.
- To her children the matriarch is either a negative devouring mother or a saint who deserves the best. (119)

In fact, through this gender inversion, nothing changes within the concept of the old patriarchal family and there is more to the issue. Mothers not only exert patriarchal power within their family, but also pass on the pattern of male dominance by giving too much power to their sons and, on the other hand, forcing female offspring to serve the sons (Abalos 121), there is therefore no progress towards a more equal and less prejudiced society, letting boys grow up the same way their fathers were raised. Sadly, mother does not seem to be a sufficient substitute for the missing father, as 70 percent of all youngsters in U.S. prisons are from single parent families, mostly mothers. (Tiger 109) Professor Abalos provides a more up-to-date statistics point of view concluding that “24 percent of all Latino families are headed by women, and 53 percent of all single-parent

Latino households headed by women live at or near the poverty level.”(35) It comes as a shock, yet probably thanks to the importance of family to the Latinos, the percentage of families headed by a woman is not horrendously high. Nevertheless, the fact that nearly half of those families hit the poverty level is dangerous and has clear implications on the prospects of children raised in such environment.

In all works studied for this thesis, little attention was paid to the dilemmas and hardships Latina women face when entering the new U.S. cultural environment. It seems as if the Latino male was the central figure once again, attracting the attention of experts by the trouble he causes. Yet there are matters that Latina women approach with difficulties, trying to find their own ways, such as the decision whether to break up with their male counterpart, not being able to see the disastrous consequences for their children, trying to figure out their priorities - whether to have children instead of building up a professional career - and there are no simple solutions. In the same package with the liberties comes the power and it is of crucial importance that Latina women learn to use it for the benefit of their personalities and also their families.

## ***Chapter Four - Children of Latino Immigrant Families***

The picture of the transformation a Latino family has to undergo once it arrives in the United States has already been drawn. Nevertheless, there is much more at stake – the future of the offspring of these families. So far, we have discussed the impact of the stressful transformation on the Latino family, yet little attention has been paid to what children go through both physically and emotionally.

### ***Separados***<sup>17</sup>

The frequent pattern among Latino immigrant families, as has been already stated, is that the father of the family crosses the border first, sometimes accompanied by his spouse “leaving the children in the care of grandparents, aunts, older siblings, and as a last resort, paid childcare. Once the mother or the parents get settled (which may take as long as 10 or 12 years), they will send for the children left behind.” (Artico 3)

Children therefore stay outside their own family, sometimes for years, developing bonds with other people than their parents. In many cases, the separation from their mothers causes psychological problems and frustrations throughout their lives. As a research carried out in Scotland affirmed that separation from a parent, especially in children between 10 and 14, strongly correlates with the percentage of such children within the groups of suicidal attempts, being 32% to 42% higher compared to children with “less problematic” past. There is no doubt about the effects of the separation of children from their mothers concerning depressions, conduct disorders and other personality disorders they carry as a burden for the rest of their lives. (Artico 15)

The above mentioned conditions are necessarily linked to the feeling of abandonment a child inevitably experiences once parents have departed. It is one of the major tasks of the carers of the child, but as the therapist Doctor Artico explains in her psychological study:

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<sup>17</sup> separated (working translation)

Caretakers not only took care of the children during the period of separation, but also had the very important task of preserving the image of the absent parent as caring and committed to the children. The messages, beliefs, and behaviours of caretakers during the separation helped these children process and integrate their experience. (100)

It is vital for the children to internalize the concept of the parent/s sacrificing its/their happiness (and to certain extent the happiness of children as well) for the sake of a better life for the next generation of the family. As we see above, they are then better equipped to cope with the fact that their parents are far as long as they care.

Apparently, the importance of presents, money and other material benefits sent from the parents to their children significantly improve the conditions of the future reencounter of the family. Children feel the support of their parents. (Artico 97) The fact that the parents of the child are married and living together in the United States was also of paramount importance to the children when trying to survive in the traditional environment of their school, being constantly poked by their peers. Especially the fact that the parents of the child were married seems to be crucial:

Alex also found it easier to protect himself from the sarcasm of classmates because he often had something to show his friends as proof that the parents cared for him. Finally, his parents were married and living together in the U.S. (Artico 98)

Even Junot Díaz, one of the writers whose work is explored in the scope of this thesis, in one of its interviews confirms such experiences from his childhood in the Dominican Republic:

Also, you know, when I was little we were special because we were the kids who had a father in the United States. Now the United States looms larger than Santo Domingo in everybody's conversation and imagination and space.

But in my youth we were freakish for having a parent in North America.  
(Céspedes, Torres-Saillant, Díaz 897)

Despite all the assurances the parents are able to provide their children with, the long distance relationship comes to its climax at the time of the reencounter with their parents.

### ***Unidos para siempre***<sup>18</sup>

Once the call from their parents comes, usually when they are able to bring their children legally over to the United States, the expectations on both sides are high, yet, to paraphrase and update the words of Oscar Wilde (a figure important for further analysis), both will be disappointed<sup>19</sup> In the study by Doctor Artico, one of the children describes her reencounter with her mother after nearly five years of separation:

When I was 6 years old ... I met her [my mother] for the first time [laughs] and it was so funny because they kept showing me pictures, but I never really actually see her, you know?

The picture from a person is different sometimes.... I saw her... I will never forget. She was wearing ... the first, first time she went... she was wearing a black dress and she looked like a ... [laughs] she looked like a turkey.... [laughs]. (66)

Not all the encounters are as cheerful and fun as this one, in fact, most of them are not happy at all. (Artico 66) Especially teenagers find it difficult to adjust to the new environment, having trouble learning English, the U.S. culture and building new relationships. As Junot Díaz put it in one of his many interviews:

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<sup>18</sup> together forever

<sup>19</sup> The original quote, "Men marry because they are tired; women because they are curious. Both are disappointed." is uttered by Lord Illingworth in the 3rd act of Wilde's play *A Woman of No Importance*. Available online from Gutenberg at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/854>

I have all these things in my mind, and these are all sort of vectors that you want to play with because learning English is such a violent experience as a kid. Well, when we're talking about English acquisition, one discovers very quickly as an immigrant kid that there's English acquisition and then there's English acquisition, that there is this almost endless array of vernaculars that you have to pick up. So that you can learn the Standard English, but then you realize, I don't know shit about sports—you got to learn the sports stuff. Then you realize, I don't know shit about American popular music, I don't even know who the fuck The Who is—you got to pick that entire thing up. (Celayo, Shook 14)

Many of them also blame their parents for not bringing them along much earlier, so they would be able to develop the skills needed to survive in an alien environment faster. For obvious reasons, by the time the children have arrived in the United States after a long separation, they have already forged a very strong bond with the surrogate family back home. They feel the need of talking about their loss, but at the same time fear to share their worries with parents. (Artico 143)

Children naturally expect that parents will finally have some time for them, so they will be able to enjoy each other's company. Unfortunately, what happens is the opposite – the pace of life in the United States differs very much from the calm Latino rhythm of life, so children are frustrated by the fact that their parents work long hours, come home tired and after the initial moments of bliss, they do not show much interest in their children. This situation is even worse in the case of single parent (mostly female headed) families. Children then frequently experience the feeling of abandonment. (Artico 138) As it happens, there are consequences.

### ***Pandillas***<sup>20</sup>

There is a constant fear among Latina mothers, no matter whether in the United States or back home in their native country that their child (mostly male, but sometimes

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<sup>20</sup> Gangs (working translation)

also female offspring) will get involved with the local gang, ergo with crime, thefts and, in particular, with violence. Single mothers are well aware of the danger that their sons could expose themselves to such groups, not having a male model at home. Professor Abalos explains that “they join a gang in an attempt to restore pride through power games. Or they carry out their own counterrevolution in the family, a choice that leads to violence.” (25) In a sense this is the affirmation of one’s masculinity according to the old ways (remember the mother patriarch and how she privileges her sons). In the environment of Latino *barrios*<sup>21</sup> of the USA, young Latino males deal drugs and commit atrocities, so their in-depth enrooted masculinity is restored. Unfortunately, this is the wrong way.

All in all, the role of Latino immigrant children is not to be desired. Torn between two cultures, sometimes between two families, since an early age, children of Latino immigrants try to reinvent themselves as someone living at the margins, struggling to understand their identity and serious problems such as racial discrimination, poor backgrounds (in all senses of the word) or frequent early separation from their parents, to name just a few. Despite all these disadvantages, they are sometimes able to “make it” in the American sense of the word and become successful in a prejudiced environment, working as doctors, lawyers or successful writers, as we will see bellow. Apparently, due to their experiences, when these people write, they never forget to include their experience of family life of the Latino immigrant family, sometimes giving us clues on what should be done better and why.

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<sup>21</sup> Neighbourhoods (working translation)

## Part Two - Literary Analysis

### ***Chapter Five – Brief Summaries of the Analyzed Books***

The books under our scrutiny were published fairly recently, so only very few potential readers can be expected to know the plot and the main characters of the works of these Latino authors (some of them may never be translated into Czech or become well-known for the expert public). Assuming it would be beneficial for the reader to possess some knowledge of the story in order to understand better the family dynamics described in all the works involved, the author decided to provide brief summaries of the analysed books as he considers these to be of vital importance.

#### ***Reyna Grande – Across a Hundred Mountains***

In two stories of two different women which at the end of the book merge into one person – Juana/Adelina, Reyna tells the story of a little girl, Juana, who fails to keep an eye on her little sister during floods. The little sister drowns and the father of the family has to go to *el otro lado*<sup>22</sup> to pay back the money he borrowed for the funeral of his daughter from Don Elías, the wealthy local usurer and, above all, abuser. There is no news of the father after his departure, so the mother of the family becomes sexually abused by Don Elías who wants his money back and is willing to accept other “currency”. She gives birth to a son, but Don Elías takes it away immediately. The mother suffers a nervous breakdown and starts drinking heavily. Juana decides to save money and look for her father in *el otro lado*, refusing to believe he would leave his family for another woman. After a painful journey, leaving her insane mother behind, Juana arrives in Tijuana, where she starts looking for the *coyote*<sup>23</sup> who took her father to the other side. In the course of events, she meets a young American prostitute, Adelina, who eloped from her parents in

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<sup>22</sup> the other side, ergo the United States (working translation)

<sup>23</sup> people who smuggle immigrants to the United States across the border (working translation)

the United States to live with her lover in Tijuana. He now abuses her and forces her into prostitution to support the couple. Juana lives as a prostitute for a while, only to finally decide to cross the border. Attempting to do so, the group is surprised by U.S. guards and sent back to Mexico. When Juana arrives back, she finds Adelina dead in her room, killed by her lover, so she assumes her identity (birth certificate) and arrives legally in the US.

Parallel to this, the story about Adelina (whose identity the reader discovers towards the end of the book) develops as she, lead by an old *coyote*, finds the place where her father died and was buried at the time of crossing the border. During her journey back to Mexico with the remains of her father in a small box she reminisces about her life in the US. She works as a counsellor there, helping women to restart their lives mostly after suffering abuse from their male counterparts. It is in a hospital where she meets a young and handsome Dr. Luna who falls in love with her, however, due to her life in frustration, she finds herself unable to maintain a serious relationship with a man. Once back home, she meets her brother (the child taken from her mum) and after a long hesitation she tells him what he already knows – that they are siblings. They visit her mum on her deathbed and she thinks her son is her lost husband. The story ends with the peaceful death of Juana's mother and the burial of the ashes in the sea, which her mother never had the chance to see, carried out by Juana/Adelina and her brother José Alberto.

### ***Stella Pope Duarte – If I Die in Juárez***

The book by Stella is a literary reflection of Juárez female homicides (Female Homicides in Ciudad Juárez), a terrible real story of serial murders of young women in Juárez, a city at the Mexican border with the United States. Similarly to Reyna Grande, the plot explores 3 parallel stories of three young women facing the reality of Juárez for various reasons. The oldest is the approximately 19 years old Petra who arrives in Juárez along with the entire family from rural settings where she has a lover, only to temporarily stay in Juárez due to her father's kidney illness and the need of treatment. She finds a job

in the local *maquilladora*<sup>24</sup> and thanks to her skills, exceptional beauty and the lust of her boss, she is quickly promoted and becomes the breadwinner of the family.

Evita is the only native to Juárez among the female protagonists, she lives with her mum who often has a new partner. Evita once goes selling goods her mother makes along with her mum's boyfriend Ricardo, they go to a restaurant where one of her mum's friends, a waitress, sees them and, assuming they have an affair, she reports it to Evita's mum. Once they come back, both Evita and Ricardo are kicked out by the hysterical mum. Evita, being only 13, ends up in the streets picked up by an old female pimp. After being violently brought back by the police, she escapes again, not ever returning into her house, but becoming a prostitute, eventually sleeping with Ricardo for money and living in a dangerous neighbourhood.

The third character is a village girl of Indian appearance named Mayela who incidentally ends up in an orphanage after coming to the city as a nanny along with a family with children. It is only there where her talents as a painter are discovered by an *anglo*<sup>25</sup> doctor who works in the orphanage, executing a research project. In the course of the book, it turns out that Petra and Mayela are cousins. All the way throughout this narrative, we are reminded of the appearances of disfigured bodies of young women working in *maquilladoras* who previously disappear, the police seem to be obstructing the investigations, trying to cover everything.

As Petra proceeds with her career, she eventually meets Agustín, a co-owner of the *maquilladora* in which she works. He is a very rich man, buys her a new car to take her father to the hospital. However, he and his perverted lust are the cause of the Juárez murders. His minions drag Petra to his house where he executes, in front of his similarly perverted friends, all types of disgusting pseudo-sexual assaults.

In the meantime, Evita starts working in a flower shop and dating an American soldier Harry from across the border. Mayela remains in the orphanage waiting for someone from her village to rescue her.

After the disappearance of Petra, the other two girls, partly by coincidence, unite their forces and figure out who the perpetrator is, ask for help from Harry and Luis (until

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<sup>24</sup> Assembling plant (working translation)

<sup>25</sup> A term frequently used for Caucasian Americans (working translation)

now a bystander secretly in love with Petra). Both men find Petra's barely alive body naked among rubbish and save her. There is a happy ending – Evita retains her job and her lover, Petra marries Luis and Mayela is rescued from the orphanage.

### ***Junot Díaz - The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao***

In terms of plot a very simple book, yet in general, an amazing work, tells a story of a young American of Dominican origin (born in the United States) who, since his early adolescence, struggles with his inability to have a sexual intercourse. We learn about his hobbies (sci-fi and fantasy literature and films) and his aspirations as a writer. Because he is immensely overweight, he is always the loser within the social group he finds himself in. Gradually and from different narrators, we learn about the history of Oscar's family in the Dominican Republic. About how the family of his grandfather was entirely wiped out (with the exception of his mum) by Trujillo<sup>26</sup>, his mum surviving and being raised, since her early childhood, by a distant relative called La Inca. Later, we learn about love affairs of Oscar's mother, Hypatía, with a man married to Trujillo's sister, her pregnancy and the disaster when Trujillo's sister discovers the fact, which leads to almost lethal beating of Hypatía by Trujillo's secret police and her miscarriage. The mother then flees to the United States, meeting the father of Oscar and Lola (his sister) on the plane. The father disappears later, leaving the mother of two to support her children.

We also learn about Oscar's feminist and handsome sister Lola, her elopement, return, lesbian experiences and a year of penitence in the Dominican Republic. Oscar concludes his studies, first at high school then at college, attempting a suicide in the meantime, and becomes a teacher. On his summer trip to the Dominican Republic, he meets an old prostitute (named Ybón) and falls in love with her. Unfortunately, the relation ends up by Oscar being beaten up by the lover of the prostitute, an agent of the Dominican secret police. Similarly to his mother's case, Oscar flees to the United States, but, unlike her, decides to pursue his love, eventually being assassinated by the reckless secret police of the Dominican Republic. At the very end, the narrator admits receiving a letter from Oscar saying that eventually "Ybón actually fucked him" (Díaz 334).

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<sup>26</sup> Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina – President and dictator of the Dominican Republic between 1942 - 1952

## ***Chapter Six - Across a Hundred Mountains – Analysis***

Unfortunately, there are no expert works analyzing the book by Reina Grande. However, thanks to extensive theoretical backgrounds, it should not by any means damage the insight of the following analysis. Similarly to the previous chapters, the analysis of Latino family will stem from the male characters that appear in the book.

### ***Latino Male Characters***

Since perspective (not the narrator) is of a little girl and later on of a young woman, it should be at all times remembered that the point of view of a daughter is always strongly present all the way through the narrative. In this book, all male characters are developed only perfunctorily and in the interview at the end of the book Reyna Grande admits that “I bring my characters to life by giving them a little bit of myself – my experiences, emotions, fears, etc. ... I just don’t know if I could render a male character as well as I render a female character.” (264)

### ***Apá<sup>27</sup> - Miguel***

*Apá* is the first male character Juana meets in her life. He is a hard-working person who, despite all the hardships his family goes through – deaths of two children, does not drink or beat his wife and is by all means trying to secure a bright future for his family as it is evident from this scene:

“Do you see those houses?”

Juana looked at *Apá* and nodded. “Sí *Apá*, I see the houses”

*Amá* didn’t respond.

“Wouldn’t you like to live in one?”

*Amá* stood up and walked over to *Apá*. She put her arm around him and tried to turn him around. He didn’t move.

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<sup>27</sup> a nice way of saying father (papá) (working translation)

“One day, we will live in a house like that,” he said. (21)

From the point of view of a little girl, her father is an idealized figure. His departure to *el otro lado*<sup>28</sup> affects her strongly when she learns about his plan. Subsequently, she internalizes a profound feeling of guilt which later on drives her actions.

“Why would you leave us? Don’t you love us anymore? Don’t you love me anymore? Apá, Apá... she thought, but said nothing.” (27)

It is also worth noting that at the very time and at the peak of the scene when the father leaves the family, all of the sudden, we learn about women whose husbands left for the United States and they never heard of them again, being abandoned in the small town forever.

Sometimes Juana and her mother would see women sitting by the door, embroidering servilletas<sup>29</sup> while waiting outside for the mailman, waiting for the letter from El Otro Lado that rarely, sometimes never, came. Those were the forgotten women, the abandoned women. *But Amá musn’t worry about that, Juana thought. Apá would never forget her. He would never abandon us.* (37)

The disappearance of the father has even more significant impact as Juana starts looking for him and never stops until finding his body in the desert years later.

The implications of her father’s disappearance not only affect the family economically, as Miguel is the only breadwinner of the family, causing much distress to Juana’s mother Lupe, but also socially, which shows the strong pressure on a family without a man (there is indeed no other male relative to help), without anyone to protect it in the strongly patriarchal setting of the rural areas of the Mexican state Guerrero. After some time, everyone in the town starts gossiping about how Lupe was abandoned by her husband.

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<sup>28</sup> The United States (working translation)

<sup>29</sup> handkerchief (working translation)

“He’s been gone for four weeks now, and he hasn’t sent word.”

“He has abandoned them, you think?”

“No, Miguel is an honest man. He wouldn’t do such a thing.”

“Honest or not, once they find themselves in El Otro Lado, surrounded by all those golden-haired gringas<sup>30</sup>, a man cannot help himself.” (48)

This quote points at two important issues suffered by Latina women. The first is the fear of being abandoned by their husband living in the United States and the second being the feeling of inferiority which is common when other Latin American races compare themselves to the Caucasian race, especially in countries where native Indian population is prevalent.

Juanita has also her fair share when being mocked by other children in school, experience many children living in Mexico with one or both parents in the United States have. (Artico 98)

Juana was tired of kids taunting her, making a mockery out of her pain.

“Your father abandoned you,” they said. “Poor, poor Juana, what would she do now without her papi?” (49)

To sum up, the father of Juana, after his early “physical” disappearance becomes a passive figure of major importance, indirectly shaping the way the story develops, leaving behind his wife, a small daughter and a barely payable loan.

### ***Don Elías***

Don Elías is the local ruler, the typical example of a *macho* whose desire to rule, impose fear on others and, above all, sexually abuse anyone near, seem to be multiplied by his position. It would not be a mistake to compare him to a dictator, as he does not

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<sup>30</sup> strangers (working translation)

hesitate to use the local police for his personal benefits whenever he sees it convenient. His physical description almost smacks of hyperbolic cartooning:

Juana opened it and stood almost at eye level with him. He was a short, fat man who reminded Juana of gorilla she had once seen in a book. His shirt was unbuttoned almost halfway down his chest, exposing hundreds of black hairs stuck together with sweat. (42-43)

It is certainly not a coincidence that Don Elías is not a particularly tall person, his height being yet another allusion to the fact that his character is an embodiment of a Latino dictator (or maybe any dictator). His lust for young pretty women is a typical sign of *machista* dominance in his case even further emphasized by his lack of other masculine features. When it becomes evident that Lupe's husband is not coming back, in extreme circumstances, she gives her concession to having sexual intercourse several times with Don Elías in order to pay her debt. In fact, it is more of a rape as Juana describes the scene she witnesses:

Juana watched her mother's face contorting in pain. Amá wasn't screaming, she wasn't groaning, she wasn't making any noise. But Juana covered her ears and imagined the squealing sow being raped. (72)

Reyna Grande could not have been more explicit. Her mother is abused, better to say raped, by a pig, a "supermacho" who is allowed to do anything within his proper realm. As a consequence of this constant abuse and later on of taking away her newborn son, the behaviour of this abuser leads to the complete destruction of the personality of Lupe through alcohol.

### **Gerardo**

Gerardo is a very simply developed character, both lover and a pimp to Adeline, useless and violent. There is no in-depth analysis of his behaviour and reasons for it in the

book. He is more of an emblem of the worst type of violent and abusive machismo and, of course, *mujeriego*. It is a confusing irony that he is originally from the United States, but given his name, he seems to be born into a Latino family.

When she came back she found Adelina crying in bed. Sometimes she had a black eye, other times a swollen cheek, bruises on her arms or legs, a cut or a scratch on some part of her body. (190)

These are the consequences of the first appearance of Gerardo in the book. As Reyna Grande admits in the interview at the end of the book:

“I had a difficult time getting social workers to talk to me about their jobs (...), I had to read some books about social work and go from there.” (263)

So immediately, a part which seems to be copy-and-pasted from counselling books follows:

“Why do you let him do this to you?” Juana asked her.

Adelina curled into a fetal position and bit her thumb as she cried.

“One day he will change,” Adelina said. “He’ll be like he used to be when we first met. I know he loves me. And I know one day he’ll change.” (190)

For Gerardo, a violent *mujeriego*, every woman represents a challenge which he gladly accepts. Once Juana acquired her status of a prostitute, he feels free to “give it a try” and eventually rapes her. When Adeline finally decides to leave the abuser, he resorts to radical measures and, in order to prove his masculine prevalence, kills her:

“I came home and found her blankets stained with blood,”

Juana said quickly. “Please, tell me-----“

“I’m sorry Juana.”

“Where is she? Is she ok?”

Veronica shook her head. “She is dead. Gerardo killed her. That son of a bitch killed her!”(223)

### ***Dr. Sebastian Luna***

A young doctor of Cuban origin Juana meets when working in a shelter for women suffering from abuse. He is a kind and educated person, able to express feelings, who genuinely loves her. However, after all the suffering, Juana is not ready to start a relationship and her encounter with Sebastian's family comes as a shock, because she does not know how to act in such a normal family environment:

"So what do you do for living, Adelina?" one of the aunts asked.

"I am a social worker. I work at women's shelter in downtown L.A."

"Do you? You and Sebastian have many things in common then. He, too, likes and helps others."

"And your parents, do they live with you in L.A.?" another aunt asked.

"No," Adelina said.

Susana noticed Adelina's discomfort and said, "Come, come mujeres<sup>31</sup>..."

(198)

It could not go unnoticed that the "Do you?" pronounced by one of the aunts might indicate or rather imply the high social status of the Luna family.

### ***José Alberto***

The lost brother of Juana whom she meets at the bus station of her hometown as she is coming back with the ashes of her father. Similarly to Dr. Luna, José is also a well behaved and educated person and again "has feelings", as we see from the way he handles social conversation:

"Mamá, aren't you going to say something?" her brother asked.

Doña Matilde looked down at the ground and didn't answer.

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<sup>31</sup> women (working translation)

“Juana, please excuse my mother. But I’m sure she’s very pleased to meet you. I’m José Alberto Díaz.”

Adelina shook her brother’s smooth hand. His was not the hand of a peasant, but that of a university student.” (229)

Gradually, the brother of Adelina proves to be a person of a nice character, even willing to play his father in front of his dying mother, out of compassion.

## **Latina Female Characters**

### ***Juana – Protagonist***

Juana, being a child first, turns into a woman sooner than she should have, leaving her childhood behind early to take care for her alcoholic mother. She suffers an emotional blow after causing the death of her younger sister and then another when her father has left, only to become the object of social and economic abuse from the patriarchal society. Except for her father, all men she encounters on her way to the United States are always presented as an imminent danger. Even a *coyote* as a paid service is seen as a potential danger when being substituted, at the last minute, by another one.

Juana stayed where she was, uncertain as to whether she should follow. She trusted Octavio. He was a regular client and she knew him to be honest and kind, which was unusual for a *coyote*. (206)

During her stay in Tijuana, she is virtually raped into her adulthood; chiefly because she works as a prostitute, losing her virginity, as she keeps looking for her father.

He was much older than she. He was probably as old as her father. Juana looked down at the floor while he kissed her slender neck. She saw a roach

pass by her foot and she instantly lifted it up and brought it down on the roach.

She didn't want anyone to see her shame. Not even roaches. (186)

Later on, as we have already seen above, when Gerardo assaults her in the tiny room she shares with Adeline. It is not until the burial of her mother's ashes that she reconciles with her own past, regenerated and ready to start a real life, not hiding her true self behind the name Adelina.

Despite of her complicated destiny, Juana, as a woman living in a very patriarchal society, is able to stand up to the stereotype and follow in the footsteps of her father, finally being able to build a new life in the United States.

### ***Lupe***

The mother of Juana, an orphan from a very poor background, is driven by circumstances into a situation without any solution. Stripped of all possibilities, she keeps fighting, but is not able to find her way out, eventually ending up as a half insane alcoholic, destroyed by the society she lives in. Out of despair, she kills Don Elías in church on the day of the baptism of the son they took from her, ending in prison and leaving Juana an orphan. There is a certain hint of the importance of a male offspring. The mother declares earlier in the novel:

I'm always going to be with you. I was made an orphan when I was very little. I know how painful it is not to have a mother to love you and care for you. I will not put you through that. (69)

However, later on, when her son is born and stolen, she does not consider the prospects of her daughter, taking her revenge in an attempt to rescue the son, eventually leaving her daughter on her own.

### ***Adelina***

A young woman suffering from abuse from her boyfriend who apparently previously tricked her into leaving her family and going with him to Tijuana, ergo entering a culture where he could execute his dominant role. Contrasted with the hard-working and deprived Adelina, Gerardo strikes the reader as a disgusting loafer.

### **Overall Picture**

The world of the novel by Reyna Grande seems to be very simple in terms of the characters and their development, especially the male ones, despite the fact that they play an important role in the novel. To certain extent, it is even surprising that such a simple book was awarded, as it is not special in any perceptible way. Only the description of the “immigrant experience” could be considered of certain value. There are features that quite aptly reflect the situation of Latino society, either in the United States or in Mexico.

There is no doubt about the author’s point of view concerning the traditional Latino society in Mexico which she finds deeply violent, patriarchal and to certain degree also without any legal platform, which might be typical of Mexico, as we will see later in the book by Stella Pope Duarte. The typical patriarchal male is epitomized by Don Elías who lives up to negative connotations of the Latino male (patriarch, violent, *mujeriego*). Similarly, Gerardo, despite allegedly living in the United States, has not subdued to the new role of male he was assumed to play in the North American society. Instead, once he is back in his “natural” Mexican environment, he immediately relapses into the traditional way which Adelina does not understand as we saw earlier (Grande 190). Apart from the similar *machista* behaviour, Gerardo and Don Elías also share one important feature – none of them is educated. This fact is not mentioned explicitly in the book, yet we are allowed to assume that neither Gerardo nor Don Elías (a small town businessman) have received university or maybe even high school education.

José Alberto and Dr. Sebastian Luna, on the other hand, are university educated male characters who, to a certain degree, are the role models of the new and healed male, as professor Abalos puts it. They are both able to express feelings and also guess

what others feel, they are able to talk and most importantly, they do not resolve any conflicts violently.

Women in the novel are generally victims either of the patriarchal society or the actual circumstances they find themselves in. For example, Lupe is the victim of an accidental death of her husband, then of the abuse of Don Elías and, finally, of the non-functioning legal system. Juana is victimized by the failure of her family as a social unit, later on abused by Gerardo and, last but not least, she is also made a victim of her own feeling of guilt. Adelina is the victim of Gerardo, her own youth and the environment in Mexican society that permits the perpetrator to abuse her with impunity.

All in all, the world of Grande's novel is a simple bipolar concept of a new educated male who brings the change to the Latino society, in contrast to the old (not necessarily referring to age) Latino male concept of abuser who constantly rapes and beats women. Female characters find themselves in the middle of this scenario, grasping for a will of their own, where only Juana finally succeeds. The issues in the life of the Latino family are touched on only at the beginning where when the family falls apart and all the trouble begins.

The entire story is underlined by sometimes shocking facts about the life in poor rural areas of Mexico, yet these do not redeem the quality of the book which is primarily focused on the character of Juana.

## ***Chapter Seven - If I Die in Juárez – Analysis***

Pope Duarte is a journalist and her style is amazing, just as much as the book she wrote. However, the theme and the contents strongly support the feminist ideology, sometimes to such degree that the book can hardly be called anything else but clever and well thought through feminist propaganda, yet, as there are no faithful statistics on violence in Juárez, it is hardly possible to assume that the book is so extreme. Despite the strong orientation on feminism, unlike the work by Reyna Grande, this book contains well developed male characters. The simple distinction between the good and bad male, or female, or the link between the good male coming from the United States and the bad one of Mexican origin is not established. To vary a little, let's start the analysis with the major female characters of the novel.

### ***Evita***

Evita is a young girl (thirteen at the beginning of the novel) who lives only with her mother (a single-parent family) who apparently changes partners quite often, which is frustrating for Evita. At the beginning, we also learn that Evita is not a particularly bright child due to her mother's drinking at the initial stages of pregnancy. Evita is kicked out of the house by her mother after the presumptuous affair with her mother's boyfriend that never takes place. Later on, her brother pays the local corrupted police to bring her back. A shocking scene follows:

“So, you want to be a whore and run on the streets, do you? Well, see if you like this!”

The policeman unzipped his pants and exposed himself to her. Then he took her face and forced it over his crotch. Evita struggling and crying, felt sticky wet fluid all over her face” (25)

Evita ends up living in the streets with prostitutes, eventually being tricked and raped by Ricardo, the former boyfriend of her mother.

She remembered how Ricardo had defended her the day her mother had thrown her out on the streets, and this made her embrace Ricardo as he gently kissed her lips. Then slowly, very slowly, while telenovelas<sup>32</sup> were playing in bright red colors, Ricardo calmed Evita down, opened her legs wide, and made her insides burn with pain. (80)

The rape at an early age, causes a shock to the young woman and she attempts to commit suicide almost immediately after the act. As her family, especially her brother, are trying to rescue Evita from the life in the streets, we learn the machismo ways from comments of other men, obtaining a picture of how Mexican society deals with women and children:

Your brother is too kind; he should have beaten her until she couldn't get up. That's the way to stop a woman who wants to run around like a whore. (229)

Needless to say it is not Evita's intention to "run around like a whore", but there is no other way for her. It is a paradox that by living as a prostitute at the margins of society, Evita gains a liberty she could never dream of when being a part of the traditional patriarchal family. In this sense, she becomes a free woman, but it comes at the price of constant danger and violence suffered from men.

After a severe drug overdose, she is rescued by her brother and starts working in a flower shop, flowers possibly being a symbol of innocence and the process of purification she goes through here. Subsequently, she retains her liberty as a woman with work (economically independent), but also gaining social status to be able to meet an American soldier Harry at the end of the book. She is rewarded for returning to the mainstream, but, at the same time, there is a way for her to keep her independence of men.

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<sup>32</sup> soap operas (working translation)

## **Mayela**

A young Indian girl, about 12 years old, who arrives in Juárez with her aunt Cina to attend school, yet the irresponsible behaviour of her aunt causes that Mayela not only fails to attend the school, but also suffers abuse from her aunt's lover Sebastian:

When he walked back past Mayela, he reached into the blanket under her skirt and put his whole hand over her bottom, pressing hard, and whispered that she would like what he would do to her, just like Cina did. (121)

Eventually, under such psychological pressure and due to the germs in the dirty slum she lives in, she becomes ill with meningitis. When she is diagnosed in the streets, her aunt is so afraid of her new violent man that she simply leaves her niece Mayela in laying in the street with her old aunt Concha who is obviously unable to carry her to hospital. Such is the fear the true *macho* imposes on the ones who subdue to him.

Cina wrung her hands in despair at the thought that Mayela could die and she would be to blame. She looked at tía<sup>33</sup> Concha with tears in her eyes. "Por favor<sup>34</sup>, yes, tía, take her to the doctor, and I'll forever be in your debt. Tomorrow, early in the morning, I'll go to see her at the hospital. You know how Sebastian is; he will be angry if I'm not home when he gets there. (123-124)

Mayela then ends up in an orphanage where she starts painting, trying to relieve her stressed and heavily burdened consciousness. She is discovered by the local American doctor as a real muralist talent and, under the playful pseudonym of *Niña Fridita*<sup>35</sup>, immediately becomes famous in Juárez and her paintings are sold to support the orphanage. Therefore, she acquires certain degree of liberty and independence from the male oppression thanks to her great talent (she has her own room in the orphanage

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<sup>33</sup> aunt (working translation)

<sup>34</sup> please (working translation)

<sup>35</sup> Little Frida (working translation)

which serves as a studio, and she is not forced to live and socialize with other children). Yet her safety turns out to be only imaginary, as she suffers another blow from a person she comes to love as a father she has never known and who tries to abuse her at Christmas time which she spends in his house:

Mayela walked away from the celebration, but Narciso followed her. He grabbed Mayela in the dark and lifted her up in his arms.

“You are beautiful, Mayela, more than my two other wives, more than any other woman I’ve ever seen. And your paintings are magic. You’re a goddess, for sure!”

Then he kissed Mayela on the mouth. (174)

She manages to escape from the abuser, but suffers from post-traumatic syndrome which prolongs her suffering. When the perpetrator is discovered, he is sacked from the orphanage as it is run by a female. For her suffering, Mayela is rewarded by her journey back home to her mother.

### ***Petra de la Rosa***<sup>36</sup>

As her name says, a beautiful young woman, nineteen years old, arrives in Juárez along with her family to save her father, suffering from a kidney disease. She is the best elaborated character of the novel and also its main protagonist. She “makes it” in the local *maquilladora*, as she is a clever and well performing young woman. However, Pope Duarte touches the painful issue of sexual abuse at the workplace. On one hand, Petra is clever and hard-working, on the other hand, she is also astonishingly beautiful, so when her career takes off, apparently it is more due to her amazing beauty rather than the skill. Is it therefore possible for a charming woman to justify her advances by her labour virtues? When Petra is promoted by her boss, Gusto Ríos, the scene is depicted in a very peculiar way:

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<sup>36</sup> Petra of the Rose (working translation)

“You graduated with honors from school. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“But you didn’t pursue any more education?”

“Only one year in la prepa. With my father’s illness, there wasn’t any money.”

“Too bad. An intelligent girl like you could be so successful.” He looked intently at Petra, his look boring holes through her clothing (160)

It is obvious here that her performance at school is only a pretext, for the man bringing her closer to him, albeit to his office.

Engaged to her childhood village love Antonio, with the new liberties, status (speaking English) and money Petra obtains as an office worker, she finds the idea of returning to her village when her father’s health improves problematic, each time thinking more and more about her own life and career – an attitude typical of the women of United States rather than the above-mentioned scapegoatish life attitude of the traditional Latinas. It is probably an intention of the author that the maquilladora is called Western Electronics Inc. and owned by someone from the United States, as if it were a glimpse of a better life from the North.

During the Christmas meeting of company executives, Petra meets Agustín, one of the owners of las maquilladoras and one of the richest people native to Juárez. His description shows how Petra falls for him immediately:

The man brought a presence into the room like a change in the weather. Petra could feel it from where she stood. The Lavernes were at his side, walking him in. The man was wearing a three-piece white suit with a red rose on his lapel. He was light complexioned, with light eyes and a muscular body that stopped short of being heavy. Petra noticed his hair, golden red under the lights. (216)

Despite various warning from people around her, Petra turns away from her lover Antonio and pursues the glamour of Agustín, only to be trapped by the devil himself in his lair and nearly killed. As we will see later, Petra is punished for her foolishness and

excessive ambitions. She has to suffer in order to purify herself from the sin and finally find her happiness with Luis Ledezma.

### ***Agustín Cortés Miramontes Guzmán, the Conquistador***

At the very beginning of the book, we learn about the unsuccessful *conquista*<sup>37</sup> of the area around Montenegro by Cortés and how the indígenas<sup>38</sup> fought back:

They dug wells and stored water in huge iron tubes called tinacos and laughed at the rich and powerful who set themselves up as gods when they were only men. Cortés was vanquished, they said, and from his defeat el mestizo had risen, the mixture of Spanish and Indian blood. (37)

The name of Agustín might be legitimately seen as an allusion to Cortés – a conqueror and abuser. The legacy of la conquista is deeply enrooted in Latin American societies as Abalos, professor of sociology and religious studies at Seton Hall University, confirms:

the Conquest and argues that this legacy of domination and oppression developed historically as a backdrop to contemporary society. The Spanish invasion of California began in 1769. With the founding of missions and presidios throughout California, both the military authorities and the clergy found it difficult to control the sexual exploitation of American Indian women by soldiers. (24)

When the story comes to its climax and Petra is fully under the control of the pervert Agustín, he explains his past:

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<sup>37</sup> conquer (working translation)

<sup>38</sup> native people (working translation)

“And look over here.” He pulled on her hair and spun around to face a fireplace with an elaborate mantelpiece. Over the mantelpiece was a fancy coat of arms with his family name etched in silver and gold: CORTES MIRAMONTES GUZMAN.

“He was my grandfather, el conquistador himself. Who knows which of his bastard sons I am! Do you like it? I’m a conqueror – there’s nothing you can do but submit, again and again and again!” (295)

In this stage, the person of Agustín, conquistador, becomes the embodiment of machismo, he is the ultimate and the worst machist, patriarch and abuser of all, but Petra fights, not only for her life, but for all women that has to subdue to this horrible concept conceived by the Conquistador Cortés himself.

And when he told her she would submit, and submit and submit, Petra resisted and became el Río Gris<sup>39</sup>, fighting the pride and arrogance of the ancient conquistador. She became, once more, el mestizo rising, and she lived for another day. (308)

This is an allusion to the beginning of the book where the rise of mestizo is described. Petra also fights for a better destiny of the mestizo, surviving day by day in her personal purgatory. By eventually surviving, Petra wins her fight against the ultimate macho of all, finding a path towards a better life for all women of Juárez.

### ***Agustín Cortés Miramontes Guzmán, the Devil***

The very appearance of Agustín – his immense beauty and, above all, the red hair, suggests he is not a human being, his immense power and charisma also imply his almost supernatural powers.

When he tortures Petra and other women, he frequently uses electricity, ergo fire, as a means of abuse. “El Junior” in the following quote obviously refers to Agustín.

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<sup>39</sup> Grey River

“There’s el Junior playing with electricity again!” Everyone laughed, and Evita heard people making comments about el Junior’s fascination with electricity. (191)

When Petra makes her decision to pursue the love of Agustín, charmed by his wealth and appearance, she promises to herself that she would go to church and pray, which she never does, the implication being that she turns away from God only to end up in the hands of the Devil.

Antonio mentioned Ash Wednesday. Petra had forgotten it was Cuaresma – Lent, a time of penance, of cleansing and sacrifice.

[...]

She resolved to hear mass at la Catedral as soon as she could. Maybe God would hear her prayers, see that she was not to blame for Agustín’s attention and the coldness she felt for Antonio. (265)

The reader is given the final and ultimate signification on Agustín’s infernal identity when he is holding Petra captive and an old servant approaches saying:

“Give up. He wants your soul. You must surrender.” (308)

If we chose to read Agustín in scriptural terms, who else would want to take your soul but the Devil? Who else would invite you to expensive restaurants, give you a car as a gift? Who else would always be perfect looking and perfectly dressed? Who else would you succumb to?

### ***Estevan de la Rosa***

The father of Petra, the breadwinner of a rural family, once a strong male, suffers from kidney disease, yet in spite of his illness he is able to retain his macho status:

He was irrational and hard headed, everybody who knew him was angry with him, but nobody could stand up to him. Estevan was a man among men, un macho, who was convinced he had the power to challenge the illness that possessed him and win back his health, like winning at a hand of cards. (38)

The above quote is an overt criticism of the machista behaviour and its meaninglessness, yet it is not clear whether or not it is also an ironical signification on the feminist standpoint and the description of being “a man among men” is not only a cruel sarcasm.

Estevan is a loving father of the family, but behaves irresponsibly and makes his disease even worse. He refuses to move with the family to Juárez to undergo a proper treatment – the only way of saving his life, and constantly proclaims his wish to stay and die in Montenegro, their village. Similarly to the father of Juana from the previous novel, he is also more of a passive figure within the story, his condition being the determinant of the development of the plot.

### ***Sebastian***

Sebastian is an abusive character who tricks Cina (Mayela’s aunt) into marrying him, by envisioning a bright future for both of them. Gradually, he turns out to be an obsessive and violent machista who does not hesitate to take out his machete, threaten women and nearly kill Mayela in an outburst of fury. There are several proofs of how silly, stupid and groundless the machista behaviour is.

Mayela didn’t see Tía Concha for weeks and worried the old woman wouldn’t ever come back to see her. She knew Cina wouldn’t come, as Sebastian controlled her with the messages from el Imán. (168)

The Imán is not a person, but a stone Sebastian obtained from a reportedly powerful witch. The Imán is a symbol – a symbol of the nonsense type of behaviour that

puts women on the pedestal and yet treats them as second class citizens. The intention of this comparison is to point out the fact that there is no real reason for men to execute any power over them except for such a chimera as Imán. Machismo is ridiculed as a concept more suitable for fantasy and sci-fi books than for real life.

At the end of November, Tía Concha visited Mayela and told her that Cina and the children had fled to Montenegro. She said el Imán had been telling Sebastian all kinds of crazy things, and Cina thought the next it would tell him to do was to kill her or one of the children. (170)

In fact, Cina is also to blame, not only for not standing up to such a ridiculous behaviour, but also for falling for such an insane person. Not only is their current situation the result of masculine oppression, but the women (not only the ones who appear in the book) also could and should do more and face the threat.

### ***Antonio, Luis and Harry – the new Latino Male***

The three men (particularly Luis and Harry) who eventually end up with Petra and Evita, respectively, are caring, non-violent, do not drink or take drugs and, more importantly, they are also brave (taking part in the Petra's rescuing) and masculine, ergo they retain the positive value of caballeros<sup>40</sup>, but at the same time do manage to escape all the negative stereotypes of the macho character. The definition of the new male was provided in the theoretical part and the concept Stella Pope reveals in the book fits well into what professor Abalos describes, so there is no need for further description.

### ***Nico, the Gangster***

Petra's brother Nico serves as a model of a child living in the streets of Juárez. He is very early on put under pressure by one of the street gangs with having no more

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<sup>40</sup> gentlemen

options but to join the gang. This is a standard scenario that happens in the barrios of the United States.

When Petra questioned Nico about Los Rebeldes, he told her there was nothing he could do about them. There were too many of them and they hated him.

“Why do they hate you?”

“Because I won’t join their gang, because I won’t steal and fight for them, even kill for them. They do drugs and works for mafiosos.”

Nico’s eyes filled with fear as he described who the gang members were.

(156)

His father being absent, he becomes the head of the family, at least in his mind, and protects the family from the gangs in the streets by eventually joining one of them as there are no other options left. From a well-behaved child, he turns into a sprat, even challenging his father’s authority.

“You’ll do nothing to me! You’re lucky nothing’s happened to this family. You know nothing about these streets! You lie around all day long and let everybody to support you...at least I bring home some money.”

“What money? From the gangs? From drugs? Get out of my sight with your filthy money!” (256)

Nico’s character changes as he becomes the gang member. Later on, he even starts taking drugs, becoming a really sad figure. In a way, Nico represents the destiny of many underprivileged Latino children, no matter where they live, who fall for the gangs, finally turning into criminals and ending up in prisons at a very early age. At the same time, the gang itself is the parting point of the reinforcement of patriarchal Latino male dominance.

### ***Female versus Male***

Stella Pope Duarte is a feminist and writerly perspective corresponds to her opinions. Several times in the book, she reminds the reader that it is actually the woman who is stronger and therefore superior to the man.

The problem had been that Chavela had twins in her womb. One was born dead – a tiny boy, purple and still. Right after the birth of the boy, the women heard a clap of thunder that seemed to split the heavens in two and rumbled on in the distant sky for several terrifying seconds. It shook el granero<sup>41</sup> and gave Chavela such a scare that she was able to bear down with a new strength. Out came the second child, a girl, born purple as well but squirming with life. Chavela named her Mayela. (50)

If we choose to read this gender-preferential miscarriage in universalist and metonymic terms, the implications are obvious: the woman is physically stronger than a man will ever be. Evita also has a younger brother (albino) who dies due to his physical weakness. It is the woman who survives.

Only a few pages before, Duarte adds yet another criticism of the male as a useless and unreliable when Gustavo Ríos, the future boss of Petra in la maquiladora, talks about why Americans want women.

They say women make for better employees. They're not out drinking every weekend and demanding higher pay. They work hard, they get paid, they make a living. It's that easy. I work in Western Electronics. You can apply there, I'll help you to get in. (45)

Considering the emblematic way in which Duarte constructs her book, it would be foolish to believe that this quote only includes the work for Western Electronics. It might as well be read as a description of the difference between the male and the female attitude to life and its implications in practice.

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<sup>41</sup> barn (working translation)

To sum up, *If I Die in Juárez* not only depicts the real history of murders of women, but also depicts the woman as a stronger element who only needs to free itself from the patriarchal Latino society, ideally through work which women can obtain and therefore become independent. Ironically, they can also free themselves by stepping outside the society – by becoming prostitutes. Subsequently, the novel deals with the situation of the woman who becomes economically independent as a skilled and valuable employee, and yet has to fight yet another battle at home, this time against her possessive and frustrated male companion who cannot bear the idea of not being the breadwinner of the family.

As Park put it in her article on Chicana intervention:

As the title implies, Juárez is not just at the limits of the nation, but also represents the edge of life, which is always already close to death. (171)

To take this thought even further, not only does it represent the ultimate periphery and margin of the Mexican nation both geographically and morally, but in a certain way it can also be seen as the Hell or the Purgatory (depending on how extreme the point of view), where the Devil Agustín and his minions rule.

He made a video that he played over and over again for Agustín and his friends, who sat and watched in the darkness, commenting on the most brutal parts, moaning with pleasure, and devouring the scenes with howls and shrieks that made Hilo feel as if he had descended to into Hell. (307)

The quotation above is the only explicit allusion to Hell, yet the concept could easily be extended from Agustín's mansion to the entire city of Juárez.

Despite all the downsides of the city, the women – Evita, Mayela and Petra are able to “make it” and eventually set up decent lives in the city full of danger, defeating the powerful evil. On the other hand, the men of Petra's family, the newcomers – her father and Nico, succumb to the city; her father dying of cancer (but as the book implies,

rather due to his inability to adjust himself to the new environment) and Nico falling for gang violence and drugs. At the end of the book, the writer leaves no space for speculation about which gender is stronger and where the bright future might lie.

## ***Chapter Eight - The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao – Analysis***

Despite the fact the book has been published only recently, many articles and studies have already been published about it. Regretfully, they mostly focus on other aspects than gender and family relations. In fact, this perspective is paramount in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, as Díaz challenges the traditional concept of male. The similar pattern for analysis will be applied.

### **Latino Male Characters**

#### ***Oscar de León***

One does not need to do too much reading to learn about the message Junot Díaz conceives in the character of Oscar. At the very beginning of the book, we learn that

Our hero was not one of those Dominican cats everybody's always going on about – he wasn't no home-run hitter or a fly bachatero<sup>42</sup>, not a playboy with a million hots on his jock. And except for one period early in his life, dude never had much luck with the females (how *very* un-Dominican of him). (11)

In other words, we learn straight at the beginning that Oscar lacks all the typical features of a Dominican macho – is not successful with women, cannot either dance or play baseball. To take this irony a little further, his surname is de León; León meaning Lion and it is only later that Díaz discloses Oscar's lion virtues.

By constructing such a protagonist, Díaz challenges the stereotype of the male concept deeply enrooted in the Dominican culture. As Barradas, professor of Spanish-American literature and Latin American Studies at the University of Florida, puts it, “la obra se centra en Oscar, “la antítesis del tigre [sic] dominicano” (Torres Torres): un joven

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<sup>42</sup> A dancer of bachata (dance from Dominican Rep.), ergo a good dancer (working translation)

obeso y obsesionado por la ciencia-ficción y la literatura fantástica, Oscar es un “nerdo” inadaptado en una comunidad de “tígueres”<sup>43</sup>. (100)

Oscar therefore represents not only a nerd of the barrio, but also an alternative to the typical macho character. Oscar, as a person, is not ideal, far from it, but his character definitely contains certain values for a new male, especially the Latino one, to be adopted. When Oscar loves, he loves truly and faithfully, not intending to have sexual intercourse with as many women as possible, betraying the object of his affection. The constant pressure on scoring and fulfilling his macho role from Dominican society, even his sister “Oscar, Lola warned repeatedly, you’re going to die virgin unless you start changing” (25), causes him constant feelings of inferiority and depression.

Another, and more in depth described perspective, is offered by Juanita Heredia, Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley:

Oscar de León (a.k.a. Oscar Wao), through a reconfiguration of race and genealogy between Africa, the Dominican Republic and the United States to insist on an alternative masculinity to traditional gender roles. Díaz not only evokes sympathy for the character of Oscar, but he also demonstrates that young Latino males can aspire to pursue their dreams and enter imaginary worlds despite the odds against them in a New Jersey working-class barrio, a place that may not afford them many opportunities as they grow older. (209)

The message of Oscar’s character points at a shift in the perception of masculinity within the Dominican diaspora in the United States. It is not easy for Oscar to follow his own path through constant bullying by classmates or family members, but it certainly seems possible. His condition of being an outcast of the society he lives in is well depicted in the scene where his nickname “Wao” is born.

When I saw him on Easton, with two other writing-section clowns, I couldn’t believe how much he looked like that fat homo Oscar Wilde, and I told him so.

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<sup>43</sup> “The book focuses on Oscar the antithesis of the Dominican tiger: an obese youngster, obsessed with science-fiction and fantasy literature; Oscar is a nerd maladapted to the community of tigers.” (working translation)

You look just like him, which was bad news for Oscar, because Melvin said, Oscar Wao, *quién es Oscar Wao*<sup>44</sup>, and that was it, all of us started calling him that: Hey, Wao, what are you doing? Wao you want to get your feet off my chair? (180)

The similarity of Oscar's life to the one led by Oscar Wilde, of an outcast, is obvious. Another allusion is made to the fact that Oscar is trying to write books and pursue the career of a sci-fi writer not ever being successful. Deresiewicz, until recently associate professor at Yale University, affirms that "Wao," which makes him sound Asian, isn't even his real name; it's just someone else's mishearing of "Oscar Wilde," another outcast, and the "wow" it suggests is, at least at the time, deeply ironic." (39)

His passion for sci-fi production, fantasy books, AD & D etc. is difficult to explain in the context of male-female polarity. These hobbies obviously point at Oscar's nerdiness, for example when Yunior, his college roommate, describes that "My favourite was the day on the E bus when he informed some hot morena<sup>45</sup>, if you were in my game I would give you an *eighteen* Charisma! (174). At the same time, however, his hobby serves as a means of contrasting the Trujillo regime with the quotes from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy.

When Oscar's studies come to an end, he starts working as a teacher and goes to the Dominican Republic to spend a summer there. Once again in his life, he falls in love, but this time with a prostitute in her forties called Ybón. As we learn, Oscar thinks that it is his last chance to restore his maleness and therefore also his Dominican identity, the two concepts being un-separable.

He was a not-so-fat fatboy who'd never kissed a girl, never even lain in bed with one, and now the world was waving a beautiful puta<sup>46</sup> under his nose. Ybón, he was sure, was the Higher Power's last ditch attempt to put him back on the proper path of Dominican male-itude. (283)

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<sup>44</sup> who is Oscar Wao (working translation)

<sup>45</sup> brunette (working translation)

<sup>46</sup> whore (working translation)

In other words, what the Dominican male ideology implies here is that one is not born a man, it is not an inherent feature such as race or gender, one is made a man (Riofrio 24) and this is exactly what was in Oscar's mind – achieving his own masculine status.

In order to “win” Ybón, the love of his life, Oscar has to challenge a secret police officer who by no means has forgotten the Trujillato practices (nothing changed within the Dominican Republic in this respect). It is impossible for Oscar to fight such a powerful man, so his life ends in the cane fields (do not forget Oscar is black) where he is shot by the minions of the police officer. Before his death, he gives an amazing speech.

He told them what they were doing was wrong, that they were going to take a great love out of the world. Love was a rare thing, easily confused with a million other things, and if anybody knew this to be true it was him. He told them about Ybón and the way he loved her and how much they had risked and that they'd started to dream the same dreams and say the same words. He told them that it was only because of her love that he'd been able to do the thing he had done, the thing they could no longer stop, told them if they killed him they would probably feel nothing and their children would probably feel nothing either, not until they were old and weak or about to be struck by a car and then they would sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there he wouldn't be no fatboy or dork or kid no girl had ever loved; over there he'd be a hero, an avenger. Because anything you can dream (he put his hand up) you can be. (321)

The virtues of Oscar as a hero, a man of faith, finally erupt here as a volcano to convince the reader that Oscar really is the Latino male. However, he is not a boasting macho, mujeriego and abuser, he is a deeply sensitive, compassionate person who sees clearly the consequences of his deeds and behaves accordingly, not wanting to hurt anyone. His ultimate pursuit is the true love of someone he feels affection for. His life and sacrifice (despite the fact it is unplanned) make sense. His attitude and behaviour are of Quixotic nature, he fights the windmills he cannot beat (the Dominican police), but at

least changes, little by little the world surrounding him, starting with convincing an experienced prostitute to fall in love with him, La Inca moving back to her home after his death and Yuniór only having words of appraisal for Oscar and his true feeling. He is an idealist or some might say a *Celestine*-like parody of amante cortés (courteous love). Be it as it may, Oscar's attitude is brave and not silly at all. It is only the idealists willing to sacrifice who change the world for the better.

### ***Tío Rudolfo and Yuniór – Dominican Machistas***

Both Oscar's uncle Rudolfo who lives with the fatherless Oscar family in New Jersey, has a decent criminal record and is the only male role model Oscar has, and Yuniór, the boyfriend of Oscar's sister and Oscar's college roommate, represent the traditional Dominican male at its best, which involves chiefly drugs and boundless sex with anyone available.

Tío Rudolfo is, above all, presented as an expert in sexual relationships which contrasts with Oscar's inability to "get laid":

Anywhere else his triple-zero batting average with the ladies might have passed without comment, but this is a Dominican kid we're talking about, in a Dominican family: dude was supposed to have Atomic Level G, was supposed to be pulling in the bitches with both hands. Everybody noticed his lack of game and because they were Dominican everybody talked about it. His Tío Rudolfo (only recently released from his last and final bid in the Justice and now living in their house on Main Street) was especially generous in his tutelage. Listen palomo<sup>47</sup>: you have to grab a muchacha, y metéselo<sup>48</sup>. That will take care of *everything*. Start with a fea<sup>49</sup>. Coje<sup>50</sup> that fea y metéselo! Tío Rudolfo had four kids with three different women so the nigger was without doubt the family's resident metéselo expert. (24)

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<sup>47</sup> meaning dove in Spanish, in this context probably a reference to Oscar's virginity (working translation)

<sup>48</sup> put it in, ergo have sex with the girl (working translation)

<sup>49</sup> An ugly one (working translation)

<sup>50</sup> grab (working translation)

The irony could not have been more explicit. Not only was Rudolfo in prison, but he also “managed” to fail in three attempts of establishing a family, leaving four children and three women behind to carry on with his *mujeriego* spree. Rudolfo also lives in the house of Oscar’s mum, but probably does not work at all, being supported by his cousin, the mum of Oscar which underlines the uselessness and destructiveness of the traditional Dominican-Latino male and the imminent need for a reshaping of the concept.

In the course of the book, Tío Rudolfo constantly pokes Oscar about his “bad luck” with women and, as the family “*metéselo* expert”, often gives a true picture of the machista Dominican society, for example when contradicting the opinion of Abuela<sup>51</sup>:

His abuela steady gave him shit, told him that not even God loves a puta<sup>52</sup>.

Yeah, his tío laughed, but everybody knows that God *loves* a puto<sup>53</sup>. (286)

Yunior, similarly to Tío Rudolfo, is also an expert in “*metéselo*”, but at the same time the boyfriend of Lola, Oscar’s sister. On many occasions, he realizes his behaviour hurts Lola and he should not be doing what he does, yet he is not able to help it.

Looking more beautiful than I ever saw her. I want us to try again. Of course I said yes, and went out and put a cuerno<sup>54</sup> in her that very night. Díos mío!<sup>55</sup>  
Some niggers couldn’t have gotten ass on Judgement Day; me I couldn’t not get ass, even when I tried. (195-196)

The concept of Dominican male and the *mujeriego* are so strongly linked that it is impossible for the Yunior to separate one from the other.

### ***Oscar’s father***

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<sup>51</sup> grandmother (working translation)

<sup>52</sup> whore (working translation)

<sup>53</sup> womanizer (working translation)

<sup>54</sup> horn (working translation)

<sup>55</sup> oh my God (working translation)

It is not a coincidence that his name does not even appear in the book. He only inseminated Oscar's mother who then gave birth to two children – Oscar and Lola and then, after two years, he moved on. All we learn about the father is just a few lines.

What else she doesn't know: that the man next to her would end up being her husband and the father of her two children that after two years together he would leave her, her third and final heartbreak, and she would never love again. (164)

The reader does not learn anything about the father at all. Díaz cunningly creates the situation a child without a father has to live in – there is no information available about him, there is no path to follow for the son.

### ***Trujillo, the Dictador***

Men are not indispensable. But Trujillo is irreplaceable. For Trujillo is not a man. He is ... a cosmic force .... Those who try to compare him to his ordinary contemporaries are mistaken. He belongs to ... the category of those born to a special destiny. *La Nación* (Díaz 204)

Similarly to Don Elías from the book by Grande or Agustín from the book by Pope Duarte, Trujillo is the macho of the book, the machista among machistas, but this time, unfortunately, he is a real person. As most dictators in Latin American countries, also Trujillo based his machista position on being the best “metéselo” expert of his time:

Trujillo might have been a Dictator, but he was a Dominican Dictator, which is another way of saying he was the Number-One Bellaco<sup>56</sup> in his Country. Believed that all the toto<sup>57</sup> in the DR was, literally, his. It's a well documented fact that in Trujillo's DR if you were of a certain class and you put your cute

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<sup>56</sup> miscreant (working translation)

<sup>57</sup> Girl, but could not have been verified (working translation)

daughter anywhere near El Jefe<sup>58</sup>, within a week she'd be mamando<sup>59</sup> his ripio<sup>60</sup> like an old pro and there would be nothing you could do about it! (216-217)

A lot could be written about Trujillo and his reign, but while maintaining the focus on the female – male relationships, his role in the book is merely simple. He represents the ultimate macho type, the superior alpha style male that have been discussed above.

## **Female Latina Characters**

### ***Hypatía Belicia Cabral***

There are two faces of Hypatía, the mother of Oscar and Lola. One of the teenage beauty who keeps falling in love with the wrong people, repeatedly tricked into relationships which always end in a disaster, the last one almost killing her – a naive young woman. The other one of the terrifying mother of two children who supports them on her own and is both father and mother to them, constantly fighting her daughter Lola. As Lola puts it:

As kids, me and Oscar were more scared of our mother than we were of the dark or el cuco<sup>61</sup>. She would hit us anywhere, in front of anyone, always free with the chanclas<sup>62</sup> and the correa<sup>63</sup> (54-55)

From the perspective foreshadowed in the theoretical part, for the purpose of this thesis, only the second “face” is valuable and will best be explained through the character of Lola, her daughter.

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<sup>58</sup> boss (working translation)

<sup>59</sup> suck (working translation)

<sup>60</sup> Probably penis, but could not have been verified (working translation)

<sup>61</sup> The Hispanic version of Bugbear (See Wikipedia- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuco>)

<sup>62</sup> sandals (working translation)

<sup>63</sup> belt (working translation)

## **Lola**

The daughter of Hypatía, lives in the typical position of the daughter of Latino patriarchal family (Abalos 119). Has to work hard, care for Oscar and work hard in school, her position being inferior to Oscar's, no matter how hard she works and how successful she becomes.

I believed her and because I believed her I was the perfect hija<sup>64</sup>. I was the one cleaning, cooking, doing the wash, buying groceries, writing letters to the bank to explain why a house payment was going to be late, translating. I had the best grades in my class. (56)

As seen in the quote above, the frustration of Lola is huge. As it happens, their relationship arrives to a breaking point where Lola becomes disobedient and elopes with a lover. Obviously, there is no father to stop this from happening. Yet Hypatía is able to bring her daughter back by literally grasping her in a chase in the streets.

Only me. In the end I didn't have the ovaries. She was on the ground, bald as a baby, crying, probably a month away from dying, and here I was, her one and only daughter. And there was nothing I could do about it. So I walked back, and when I reached down to help her she clamped on to me with both hands. That was when I realized she hadn't been crying at all. She'd been faking! Her smile was like a lion's. (70)

What is the most astonishing about the quote is the word "ovaries", which playfully recreates the masculine phrase "I didn't have the balls to do s.t.", as if Lola was becoming a man in a sense which is confirmed later when she turns to lesbianism for a while. At the same time, by using this expression, Díaz gives the woman a status equal to the man's.

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<sup>64</sup> daughter (working translation)

Yet another textual evidence of the inferior status of Lola within her own family, contrasting with the position she enjoys at her college, appears after she arrives from Spain to see Oscar after his attempted suicide.

A day later Lola arrived from Madrid. Didn't have a chance even to say a word before her mother launched into a standard Dominican welcome. So now you come, now that your brother's dying. If I'd known that's what it would take I would have killed myself a long time ago. (191)

I would be perfectly possible to substitute the word "Dominican" for the word Latino. The point would be the same. Lola is trapped in her role of the responsible daughter (and even an older daughter) who should have taken care for her loser brother regardless her own intellectual and career pursuits, but she is an American, needless to say she does not put up with such outdated patterns.

The final judgment of the relations in de León family is uttered when the mother arrives in the Dominican Republic to pick up her daughter after a year of penitence:

And then the big moment, the one every daughter dreads. My mother looking me over. I'd never been in better shape, never felt more beautiful and desirable in my life, and what does the bitch say?

Coño, pero tú sí eres fea.<sup>65</sup>

Those fourteen months gone. Like they'd never happened. (209)

### ***De León Family***

To conclude the analysis, the roles of the members of the de León family should be summarized. Both Lola and Oscar are very far from being the typical Latino male and female characters. In the case of Lola, professor Heredia affirms that

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<sup>65</sup> Shit, but you really are ugly. (working translation)

Unlike a traditional Latina who stays within the confinements of her home, her family, and her neighbourhood, Lola desires to travel to see the world by studying abroad or teaching English in Japan. Intelligent, independent, confident, and physically attractive, Lola is not afraid to break with family traditions which is why she ran away temporarily to live with her alternative boyfriend. With an absent father and working mother, Lola has set the rules for her life. (216)

Oscar's position is different, due to the fact that he is the son. Throughout Oscar's character, Díaz argues how "the African diaspora in the Spanish Caribbean survived and resisted monologic models of masculinity (e.g., dictator, helpless immigrant, drug dealer) when Oscar represents a departure from the limited models available to young males such as himself." (Heredia 217).

In a sense, both Oscar and Lola live somewhere in the grey zone between the Dominican and the US identity as all immigrant children do, according to Assistant Professor of English at Vassar College Friedman:

The children find themselves in a midpoint between the ideal of America and the ideal of their homelands; even as they are fully American citizens, they still hear and speak their native languages, still eat the foods of home, and still mingle with older generations who recall the old country in vivid detail. These children experience contact with their homelands through the older generation; they cross virtual borders by witnessing their elders' behavior, which shatters both family unity and the concepts of national identity to which their parents cling. (80)

The mother, as has already been stated, is the typical matriarch of professor Abalos discourse, overseeing her realm, but at the same time not being able to prevent the change her children undergo and the way they escape the traditional Latino (Dominican) family patterns to pursuit their happiness within a substantially different cultural frame.

## Conclusions

Apparently, there is no simple panacea to the current change the Latino family and its members are undergoing, being more or less influenced by the paradigm of the United States. Yet there are many features Latino male and female characters in the analyzed novels share and should be regarded as the paramount parting point for the possible change.

### ***Oppressed Latina – Independent Latina***

All authors state the importance of the independence and freedom the Latina woman can and should obtain. As foreshadowed by the writers, there are essentially two possible ways of achieving autonomy; first being to become independent through economic emancipation (the case of Juana, Evita, Petra and Hypatía Belicia Cabral), the second by acquiring a new status within society through achievements in education (Lola, Juana). Ideally, both factors should be combined. Ironically, one of the means of getting rid of the shackles is prostitution. However, all three authors consider this behaviour highly risky for women and point out at the inherently destructive nature of such an emancipationist strategy in the cases of Lupe, Adelina, Evita and Ybón; and at the same time emphasize the importance of a real job with “normal” social status (Evita, Juana). Moreover, the woman is supposed to be an active element, taking her destiny into her own hands in order to avoid the role of passive figure and the subsequent victimization by Latino men (Cina, Lola).

### ***Machista – New Latino Male***

The range of Latino male characters in the analyzed novels varies. On the one hand, the character of the ultimate macho – ruler and ruthless abuser – is present in all the three works (Don Elías, Agustín, Trujillo). It is the role model for the worst abuse of power and status of alpha male. In all novels, all of these characters commit disgusting

acts, yet, in time, all of them perish, leaving nasty stains on the destinies of people they got involved with. Only one of them, however, is directly challenged and defeated by women (Agustín). The disappearance of this fearful rulers points at the possibility of dismantling the machista society they embody and constitute as guarantors of its legitimacy. As the authors indicate, it is high time that dictators and abusers are finished along with the Latino machista paradigm.

On the other hand, there is the new man, the new Latino male. Every writer depicts his or her own understanding of such a concept. Grande points at the education as a possible way towards transformation (Dr. Luna, José Alberto) which might be seen as a rather naive concept as such a simple solution is not universal and cannot tackle the problem in its entirety. Duarte offers a more complex view, concluding that regardless education, citizenship (the Latino x US male polarity), it is crucial that the new Latino male arises as an emphatic, non-violent and socially responsible being, shaped by its female counterpart into an equal relationship, stressing the active role of the Latina female and the man as a person that at all times must be regarded, above all, as an imminent threat. Díaz, free of overtly feminist attitudes, depicts a seemingly comic and anti-heroic character of Oscar de León as yet another possibility and alternative. Yes, Oscar is empathic, Oscar is also non-violent, but, above all, Oscar has moral integrity and his ideals about love he lives up to and dies for. Oscar escapes the archetype to put a new “Quixotic” Latino male in place. However, Oscar is not a real role model, Oscar is only a possibility, a glimpse of a better future.

### ***The Matriarch – Social Ponzi Scheme***

In all books, single mothers enforcing the patriarchal models can be found (Hypatía, La Inca, Lupe, Evita’s mother). The most apparent is the case of Evita, Lola and Oscar; the matriarch model is presented as a failing scheme where the mother is not able to handle the situation either economically or socially. The single parent female headed family constitutes the crucial paradox of the shift from the old patriarch order to the new one. Latina females are being sold the feminist ideology that in extreme cases gives them a free pass out of any relationship when they feel only slightly uncomfortable. However,

the very same ideology at the same time demands responsibility from the Latino male, which would be perfectly legitimate, had it worked. Consequently, neither the male nor the female are willing or able to hold the family together. As it falls apart, the Latina female usually takes care of the children, but becomes more vulnerable economically and socially the fact of which gives a free path to an even worse abuser to step in and devour it's prey (Don Elías, Sebastian, Agustín), therefore enforcing the old patriarchal rule, not moving a single step further towards a better world. There is no doubt that the change in Latino male behaviour is absolutely vital, yet by vigorous application of the overtly feminist schemes, all former family members inevitably suffer, children being affected most severely and then often resorting to undesirable behaviour patterns such as getting involved with gangs (Abalos 88).

Ending on a very moralizing note, we might add that it is fairly obvious that a moderate attitude is the right path. Not only the Latina woman shall pursue her happiness, but the Latino family should become a laboratory within which the relationship between the man and woman is equalized without the undesirable side-effects which ultimately stop or even reverse the right course of the process of "demachismation" of Latino societies. The fewer single mothers, the more role models for young men to follow and avoid unnecessary relapses to the violent patriarchal red zone. And this Aristotelian urge for moderation seems to be envisaged (though not yet fully enacted) by the three Latino writers whose works were considered in the scope of this thesis.

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