Sampling and Identity

Amidst the political upheaval of the Cuban Revolution, members of the Del Pino family find themselves facing abusive lovers, oppressive societies, and one other. Celia is the first to be heartbroken by her husband Jorge, and the depression that she endures afterward is eventually echoed by her children Felicia and Javier. Different political conditions leave some in support of the revolution, while some (Lourdes in particular) *must* embrace a foreign way of life due to the horrifying experiences endured at the hands of revolutionaries. Throughout Dreaming In Cuban*,* the development of the characters (and their personas) are heavily influenced by a myriad of factors, including cultural traditions, economic systems, and political upheaval. As these characters seek acceptance on the social and family levels these discrete identities serve to inform one another, allowing each to (hopefully) learn from the others’ experiences, or identify their own unique path to freedom.

Despite being raped and having a semi-useless husband after moving to New York, Lourdes refuses to let her life be spoiled by such difficulties. As a self-made woman Lourdes prides herself on her success; her respect for the economic system that allowed this can be seen reflected within her family interactions. She uses her wealth to smother her nephew Ivanito, attempting to draw his affection through gifts, fearing he will become too heavily influenced by the rebellious Pilar. She implores him, “Anything is possible if you work hard enough”, telling him stories of the “farm boy who grew up to be a billionaire”, and other tales that cherish the American Dream. This sharing of stories reminded me of School Boys, and the way in which the indigenous populations were filled with stories of foreign worlds, almost impossible to entertain. In this sense, Lourdes’ stories may not impact Ivanito to the degree that she desires, alluding to how he will form his own perspective through a similar process to her own, engaging trial-and-error, meditating upon the experiences of others, and sampling wisdom from his own experiences.

The repeated abuse and absence by male figures *could* be interpreted (again) as a metaphorical representation of the relationship between say, Spain and Cuba, and the dangers that come with colonization and eventual revolution. The father figures in the story tend to appear, impregnant, and disappear, only entertaining a relationship with their female counterparts when it is convenient for them, or they have something (sexual pleasure) to gain. Felicia’s reception of syphilis from Hugo epitomizes these neglective relationships - these women are left to deal with the difficult task or childbearing on their own, and suffer mental deficiencies as a result of their abuse. While some are able to transcend this repression, some are unable to free themselves from the emotionally oppressive chains imposed upon them by their husbands.

Despite differences in political views, spirituality, and modus operandi, the Del Pino still share ties of blood, and do not deny the importance of family. One example of this is when Lourdes requests that Pilar paint a mural for the opening of her second bakery; despite her daughter’s defiance, Lourdes respects her creative expression of what she believes to be of importance. In this instance the punked out Statue of Liberty that Pilar paints serves as a double symbol for freedom, representing both Lourdes capitalistic success via the American Dream and Pilar’s own punk perspective, which encapsulates anti-establishment views and an emphasis on individuality. Felicia’s lonely death is the antithesis of these family bonds - she had become ostracized due to her mental condition, unable to function due to the repeated emotional trauma that she sustained. While Felicia is assaulted by madness, she is able to find some solitude and penance through Santeria, expressing her connection with native Caribbean culture. The book underscores this notion repeatedly; despite the many influences that surround a person, he or she will ultimately bring his or her own agenda to the table, reacting to experience instead of simply adopting the viewpoint of another.