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An Alternative Global Dialogue: The Creation of Active Literary Spaces as a Means of Political Resistance in the Short Narrative of the Twenty-First Century.

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A comparatist always needs to reach elsewhere to make his point. We all should be comparatists, let's explore other "worlds" to create our own.

Francisco Fuentes Antrás



Elion, Michael. *Perceiving Freedom*. 2014, SeaPoint Promenade, Cape Town.

(Tribute to Nelson Mandela)

*“My heart expanded, he’d said. And now, it was something,
wasn’t it something, to be able to walk together”*

Jackie Kay, “The Smuggled Person’s Tale”

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INTRODUCTION

The study of literature as a potential political document has a long tradition in academia. In her book *Resistance Literature* (1987), Barbara Harlow argues that all literary genre can be political as long as it gives “a voice to the people who have long been deprived of the right to speak for themselves” (1987: 99), since “the language skills of rhetoric, together with armed struggle, are essential to an oppressed people’s resistance to domination and oppression and to an organized liberation movement” (Harlow 1987: XV). Following this argument, Jacques Rancière stresses the political nuances in literature by understanding both politics and literary writing as disciplines that “leave the common stage of the conflict of wills in order to investigate in the underground of society and read the symptoms of history” (2004: 19-20). He adds that both disciplines take “social situations and characters away from their everyday, earth-bound reality and display[s] what they truly are, a phantasmagoric fabric of poetic signs, which are historical symptoms as well” (19-20).

Building on these theories, fictional literature has also been considered an outstanding device for oppressed individuals to raise their voices and resist tyrannical governments and hegemonic ideologies. In this regard, Frederick Mayer states that fiction is “an empowering tool of mind, on the role of stories in cognition, emotion, identity, and action” (2014: 79). In fact, Harlow also establishes an almost intrinsic connection between postcolonial literature and political resistance based on the fact that postcolonial countries have been dominated by “a hegemonic discourse of an occupying or colonizing power” (1987: 15) and that this cultural dominion “has produced a significant corpus of literary writings” (1987: xvi) that reflects the resistance and national liberation movements. More recently, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has narrowed the relation between fictional writing and political power since, as she puts it, power is “the ability of not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definite story of that person”

(Adichie “The Danger of a Single Story”). In a similar fashion, Julia Borst has supported the potential of literature to unsilence “immobile voices” (Borst 2019: 113), echoing scholars such as Robert Sack and Frederick W. Mayer, who acknowledge that “territoriality is a primary geographical expression of social power” (Sack 1985: 5) and that “fictional narratives can be as powerful as non-fiction in establishing ideological interests” (Mayer 2014: 92).

In addition, I argue that the role of literature as a potential weapon for political resistance stems from its ability to create spaces and, consequently, shape identities. Firstly, in this Ph. D dissertation, I will be using Ludger Pries’ definition of space, approaching this concept as “different from place in that it encompasses or spans various territorial locations” (Pries 1999: 67) and “not only refers to physical features, but also larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values and meanings that the specific and limited place represents to immigrants” (1999: 40). In this regard, I base myself on Ian Chambers’ belief that writing is a key activity when it comes to the construction of alternative spaces, as he claims that “to write is, of course, to travel. It is to enter a space, a zone, a territory (...) writing opens up a space that invites movement, migration, a journey” (Chambers 1994: 10).

Secondly, some scholars, such as Stuart Hall, have understood the notion of space as a site for political resistance in that it is closely attached to identity and power. They argue that the negotiation of a subcultural and alternative identity within a hegemonic order requires winning “a space (...) to mark out and appropriate territory” (Clarke et al. 1976: 45). Gillian Rose or J. Agnew have highlighted the relevance of space in the construction of identities, asserting that “identities themselves, our self-definitions, are inherently territorial” (Agnew 2008: 179), and that “the meanings given to a place (...) become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them” (Rose 1995: 88). Along the

same lines, Rose has also pointed to the clash between the nationalist attempt to homogenize the citizens' identity within the same national territory when arguing that identities are currently more and more defined by experiences of migration and cultural changing and mixing (1995: 116). Significantly, Manuel Castells supports this point of view when he claims that "the reconstruction of national identity is challenged by plural identities as defined by autonomous subjects" (Castells 1997: 243).

Building on this theory, I argue that the authors under consideration here use their literature to construct literary voices that resist oppressive forces in the form of nation-states and the border and institutional systems on which they are based, imperialist, sexist and other social hegemonic ideologies, and tyrannical governments. To attain this goal, these literary voices (either in the form of narrators or characters) deploy a variety of resistance mechanisms that result in the creation of active literary spaces. This concept is inspired by Massey's notion of "activity spaces" (Massey 1995: 54), which refers to spaces "within which a particular agent operates" (54). Indeed, these narratives themselves are active literary spaces, in the sense that they constitute resistance spatialities where "dynamic spaces of cultural change characterized by shifting identities" are celebrated. Subsequently, the literary voices are given the chance to build a space from where they can resist "oppressive accounts of their identities constructed by others who hold power over them" (Buckingham 2008: 7).

Significantly, these spaces are also "in-between spaces," since they "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood -singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha 1994: 1), thus allowing the resistant literary voices to define themselves. In this light, I will be using Bhabha's concept of "third space," Foucault's "heterotopia," Anzaldúa's "borderland" and Jones' "spaces of refusal" to address the interstitial spaces that are built within the narratives. Indeed, they are "countersites"

where the boundary that marks the nation's selfhood (...) disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous" (Bhabha 1994: 198), and "the frontier between differences also operates figuratively as a conceptual space for performative identities beyond the fixed essentialisms of fundamentalist or absolutist identity politics" (Friedman 2007: 273).

In this dissertation, I will use a comparative approach to analyze twenty short stories, written by nine authors between the years 2000 and 2017, in order to explore the ways in which the literary voices projected in the narratives use resistance weapons to construct spaces where they can redefine their identities. Interestingly, despite the variety of geographical scenarios where the literary voices are located and from where the authors write (Nigeria, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, U.S.A, Spain, South Africa), the borderland spaces mentally and physically evoked, and the fact that the texts are written in both English and Spanish, I argue that all these texts present common themes and motifs to evoke similar resistance mechanisms, and advocate for a common goal of liberation and self-definition against the same authoritarian powers. Indeed, as scholars such as Juliane Tauchnitz and Julia Borst have put it, "transcending geographical, cultural, and linguistic delimitations in studying (...) literatures may offer revealing insights into both the literary texts and the underlying theoretical concepts" (2017: 7).

It is also noteworthy that the selected texts have been published in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, since I intend to explore the political and social nuances of contemporary narratives that deal with some of the global socio-political issues of today, such as the rising migration flows, current intergroup conflicts, and problems that result from rigid national borders and other modes of power in opposition to human rights, such as patriarchy, racism, or xenophobic and homophobic attitudes. In addition, I argue that all these texts are written for an international imagined audience, understanding the term "imagined audience" as "a mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are

communicating” (Litt 2012: 331), and supporting the belief that an imagined audience can be as influential as the actual audience when it comes to determining behavior (Fridlund 1991). No less importantly, the selection of this set of short stories in digital or print format, in English and Spanish, and from different geographical places, ties in with the innovative transnational and interdisciplinary perspective that builds on the discussions about the state of comparative literature studies that Michael Swacha, Ursula K. Heise and other comparatists are triggering in ACLA (American Comparative Literature Association) and other academic circles.

While Heise hopes that “the mix of formats and styles (...) helps to convey a sense of the lively spectrum of possibilities that comparative literature encompasses today” (2017: 2), Swacha refers to the most recent State of the Discipline Reports to point out their emphasis on broadening the scope for comparison within the field (Swacha 2015). Indeed, recent studies have called for literature to be conceived of as a window into human experience, the idea that Comparative Literature “would benefit from *expanding the scope* of its direct engagement with structures of knowledge” and “from *more deeply articulating such structures themselves*, rather than merely gesturing toward them in service of some other claim” (Swacha 2015). My comparative research informs this argument in that by employing theories from diverse disciplines (such as social psychology, political or border studies) in the analysis of the texts, and treating these disciplines on a par with the literature itself, I can explore the narratives in such a way that affords a more comprehensive view of human experience.

Thus, aiming for a broader and more accurate perspective, I turn my attention to a group of contemporary literary texts that are united by, and exemplify, the transnational character of a network of resistant voices that deny hegemonic powers the right to define subjects. Accordingly, both the authors and the literary voices in this study establish a

global dialogue that informs a transnational framework characterized by “the new globalization (...), the effects of deterritorialization, new modes of travel and communication, and the issues of national borders and citizenship” (Friedman 2007: 267).

Therefore, this dissertation follows the latest comparatist approaches in literature developed by comparatists such as Apter (2006) and Spivak (2006), since by comparing narratives beyond national and language demarcations, comparative literary studies face “a challenge compounded by the new mandate in literary studies for planetary thinking” (Friedman 2007: 261) to foster the human being without frontiers as the archetypal of our age (Rushdie 2002: 81). In this context, this dissertation supports Wilson’s “critical regionalism,” which argues that academic study regionalizes the history and politics of particular spaces (such as “the Middle East,” “America,” or “the West Indies,” which are understood as cohesive areas for academia) and fosters “a contemporary revision and reconstruction of regions based on new political and cultural realities and new theories and methodologies in the general field of international studies in both humanities and social sciences” (Wilson 2002: 248) that better reflect the current globalized and interconnected world.

No less importantly, all the texts selected for this study belong to the short prose fiction genre because the features of this genre fit the purpose of my analysis. In her work *El estudio literario de la narración breve y su utilización en el contexto docente* (2014), Asunción Barreras Gómez bases herself on Imbert’s studies on the short narrative genre to claim that there has always been a strong connection between this genre and marginal authors because it emerged as critically unheralded yet popular literature and, in many occasions, it was the only vehicle many unprivileged writers had to make their works public (2014: 15). In this regard, she approaches this kind of literature as an effective tool for writers who have never formed part of the dominant narrative, such as exiles, women,

and migrants, and adds that many writers in this genre focus more on marginal themes than on mainstream interests (2014: 19-20).

Considering Barreras Gómez's definition of short prose fiction as a genre that gives more importance to actions and themes than to characters, and that is characterized by its briefness, intensity and the fact that keeps the reader focused (2014: 20-28), it is my belief that this genre becomes an ideal means for marginal authors to denounce certain political and social situations. Thus, they can present facts in a more compact, and consequently, more intense way, whereby the themes that are been dealt with reach the readers more effectively and trigger their reflection. In this light, I argue that the short narratives proposed for this study encompass common features that meet the purpose of my research, since my literary analysis concentrates more on the exploration of themes and how social and political messages are conveyed through the depiction of subjugated characters, with intensity and immediacy, and with the intention of providing "marginal" realities with visibility.

Importantly, in order to provide a clearer framework of my overall analysis, the stories are grouped in chapters according to the resistance mechanisms they use to achieve their goals.

Chapter one provides a broad theoretical framework of the questions I deal with in this study.

Chapter two deals with the ways in which the literary voices in Adichie's "Imitation" (2009) and Valencia's "El ojo del cíclope" (2004) defy an oppressive patriarchal ideology and the Cuban government, respectively, through the relationship they establish with valuable objects and the influence these items have on the development of their subjectivities.

In chapter three, the literary voices find themselves subjugated to institutional powers. In the first part, the characters in Coro Montanet's "Odiar el Verano" (2013) and in Adichie's "The American Embassy" (2009) confront visa interviewers and custom officers by refusing to dance to bureaucracy's tune and showing these workers up as servants of the state apparatus. In the second part, the narrative voices in Alomar's "The Union of Our Home" (2014) and Abogo's "El sueño de Dayo" (2007) raise their voices to criticize institutions from a broader perspective. While the former directly denounces the rigidity of the Arab border system, the latter evidences global institutions' hypocrisy and inability to assist underprivileged individuals like the black African character that the story depicts.

Chapter four analyzes how the narrative voice in Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013) and the Nigerian character in Adichie's "Jumping Monkey Hill" (2009) make use of fictional writing to construct an alternative reality to that imposed by the Cuban Revolutionary government in the former, and by the British organizer (as the epitome of a Western imperialist ideology) in the latter.

Chapter five looks at how the narrative voices in Abogo's "La espesura de la Noche" (2007), Alomar's "Love Letter" (2017) and Carrazana's "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011) resist the oppressive national borders of Equatorial Guinea, Syria and Cuba, respectively, through the transnational love of a woman who dwells beyond or within the national demarcations they are unable to trespass. The depiction of the love that the respective narrators feel towards a foreign woman in Abogo's and Carrazana's stories, together with the depicted love in Alomar's story towards a Syrian woman in spite of the narrator's exile, contrasts with the negative image that they show towards the countries that confine them (Cuba and Equatorial Guinea) or to which they cannot return (Syria) due to the mental and physical immobility imposed

on them for political reasons. In this respect, I argue that the exaltation of this transnational love over that of the nation constitutes a rejection of the nation-state's "unique discourse," based on a binary national border system in favor of a more transnational way of understanding the world, since it is the love towards nation-states that constitutes a way of perpetuating a nationalist ideology and the reinforcement of national borders (Morrison et al. 2012).

In chapter six, I highlight the establishment of an intergroup relationship as an effective weapon through which the interracial couple in Abogo's "Hora de partir" (2007), the characters in Adichie's "On Monday of Last Week" (2009) and "A Private Experience" (2009) resist dominant ideologies around group categorization (based on race, religion and social class). They do this by establishing a close peaceful relationship with an outgroup member.

In chapter seven, I explore how the narrative voices in Ndongo's "La mirada de la niña Tasia" (2013), Alarcón's "Los sueños inútiles" (2009) and Adichie's "The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction" (2016) use humor to defy a powerful and authoritarian political leader who constitutes a threat to their individual freedom. More specifically, they offer a caricature of the tyrant based on enhancing of their clumsy sexual behavior and physical weakness, their immature attitude, the constant need for praise and, ultimately, the revocation of any kind of messianism.

Chapter eight deals with border-crossing and transnational movement as a means of resistance. Indeed, Kay's "The Smuggled Person's Tale" (2017), Alomar's "Journey To Me" (2017) and Carrazana's "Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid" (2015) shape the literary voice of a refugee who takes advantage of his/her placelessness and dislocation to avoid territorial demarcations and a fixed identity that the nation-state

imposes on national subjects. I demonstrate how the three authors employ natural images to portray the challenges the literary voices have to confront. The resulting liberation leads to the development of a nomadic consciousness and their empowerment as individuals.

Finally, chapter nine serves as a conclusion in which I will argue that all the analysed resistance mechanisms deployed by the literary voices are meant to construct an alternative space. In turn, I show how this space enables them to define themselves, since identities, in order to be strongly defined and empowered, need a spatiality that allows subjects to develop (Sack 1986; Rose 1995). In this light, I postulate that these literary voices take advantage of their interstitial status to build “active literary spaces,” that is, “third spaces” where they can resist the oppression of tyrannical governments, national borders, sexist and imperialist practices, demarcations around group categorization, and social and political institutions.

Significantly, even though the narratives that make up this corpus can be approached as examples of postcolonial literature that deal with “people who have been dominated by white, Euro-American cultures, and which explore the various modalities of power, identity, subjectivity as informed by race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual preference” (Nayar 2008: 8), it is my belief that they cannot be framed under the traditional binary thinking in the field, such as West / the rest, Europe / its Others, colonizer / colonized, and so on. In this regard, I side with academics such as Stephen Slemon (1990) or Homi Bhabha (1994), who maintain that these traditional principles in postcolonial criticism are at a heart insufficient, simplistic, and present multiple inconsistencies. For instance, the author of “The Smuggled Person’s Tale,” Jackie Kay, is a European citizen writing about a postcolonial issue: the political exile of Hazaras in Afghanistan. Also, most literary voices in the narratives, albeit adopting the figure of the colonized as traditionally

understood in terms of their nationalities and struggles, are not only depicted in confrontation with Western powers like the American embassy in Adichie's "The American Embassy" (2009) or the British organizer in "Jumping Monkey Hill" (2009). They also rebel against the institutions and governments in their own postcolonial territories, such as the Cuban Revolutionary regime in Valencia's "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004) or the oppressive Arab border system in Alomar's "The Union of Our Home" (2014). Therefore, I suggest that these postcolonial texts avoid the simplistic traditional understanding of the field (limited to the focus on colonialist and neo-colonialist power relations). In fact, they carry us "into the figurative domains of other modes of power (...) and are concerned with the problem of privilege through racism and patriarchy (...), homophobia, nationalism and adultism," as well as other modes of power that undermine individual's social equality and their right for self-definition" (Slemon 1990: 40).

Therefore, this dissertation provides an original analysis, given that academic works focusing on literary comparison in postcolonial studies have generally revolved around the sources of oppression, the ways postcolonial literary voices are subdued, or the acts of liberation. Instead, I focus on the ways in which these literary voices resist and challenge hegemonic powers within a transnational framework, thus highlighting an ongoing global dialogue in literature. This leads me to my last point, which is the need for more comparative literary studies dealing with current narratives within this globalized context, since the analysis of the political and social struggles as portrayed in contemporary fictional texts will help us to understand the current socio-political circumstances and the ways in which they affect citizens and societies. In this light, my research follows a tradition of scholars, such as Barbara Harlow (1987) or Ranci re (2004), who claim a strong relation between literature and politics, and build on Frederick Mayer's understanding of narrative as a fundamental device for enacting subjectivities

and the call for political activism (2014: 79). Indeed, he regrets the lack of attention given to literature in political science and stresses the importance of considering fictional literature as a relevant socio-political document, in the sense that it can convey powerful ideological messages and work as an interesting reflection of the ongoing politics of the world.

CHAPTER 1:

**WEAPONS OF RESISTANCE IN THE SHORT NARRATIVE OF THE
TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY. EMPOWERED LITERARY VOICES
WHO DEFY POLITICAL, TERRITORIAL AND SOCIAL
CONSTRAINTS.**



Gerald, Machona. *The Monolith*. 2012, Zeitz MOOCA, Cape Town.

The concept of “resistance” has been one of the most relevant expressions of the twentieth-century political imagination and action, and it is also key in the struggles of the present century (Caygill 2013: 6). In his book *On Resistance. A Philosophy of Defiance* (2013), Caygill understands resistance as “an implacable demand for *justice* with actions characterized by *fortitude* or the ability to sustain courage over a long period of time without any certain outcome, along with a *prudence* in the choice and deployment of limited means” (97). In this regard, he also envisages contemporary resistance within a global profile, that is, an “insurgent capacity to resist able to operate on a global scale,” with new forms of co-ordination resulting “from new communications technologies” (2013: 173).

In addition, he focuses on the presence or absence of violence to define the two dominant types of endurance in resistance studies. On the one hand, he mentions Clausewitz’s understanding of the term as inseparable from body-force, which leads to the belief that war is politics by other means, and he highlights some famous personalities who embraced this form of resistance, such as Lenin, Mao or Che Guevara. On the other hand, he remarks the existence of a position that, although maintains a connection with enmity, takes distance from the Clausewitzian understanding of resistance by rejecting any form of physical violence. This latter approach enhances the capacity to resist by other means and is practiced through the creation of resistant subjectivities (Caygill 2013: 76).

In this context, Caygill claims that “the practice of resistance contributes to the formation of exemplary resistant identities who inhabit and foster a broader culture of defiance” (2013: 12). The non-violent resistant subjectivity has mainly been informed in the works of Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Ghandi, who have become two of the most important defenders of this type of endurance, fostering the American Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr and the Greenham Common

Women's Peace Camp's resistance to military violence, among other social protests. In this respect, within resistance studies, non-violent resistance is addressed as a creative space where human agency is vital and individuals "fight and defend themselves from the multiple aggressions" through the rebellion against social injustice, tyrannical governments, and new forms of colonialism and imperialism for the recognition of their identities (López-Martínez et al. 2016: 2). Similarly, Caygill argues that civil disobedience is a creative exercise that enhances activity and innovation as a means to achieving freedom, since it allows individuals to break with the dependence that prevents them from enjoying the plenitude of their identities (2013: 74-75).

Importantly, this research focuses on the construction of resistant subjectivities at a narrative level. Even though the relation between literature and political resistance and their mutual impact have been explored by several academics, such as Barbara Harlow (1987), Jacques Rancière (2004), and Frederick Mayer (2014), literary texts are still not sufficiently considered in political studies and are often regarded as not important social and political sources because, as Mayer puts it, "the implications for politics of the human impulse to think and communicate in stories (...) are profound. But, perhaps because narrative is so ubiquitous, like air, it is hard to see" (2014: 3). In this respect, Jacques Rancière asserts that narratives can carry a deep political significance, and that it "does a kind of side-politics or meta-politics" where:

politics is to leave the common stage of the conflict of wills in order to investigate in the underground of society and read the symptoms of history. It takes social situations and characters away from their everyday, earth-bound reality and displays what they truly are, a phantasmagoric fabric of poetic signs, which are historical symptoms as well (2004: 19-20).

In this regard, Rancière also stresses the connection between politics and literary writing when adding that:

explaining close-to-hand realities as phantasmagorias bearing witness to the hidden truth of a society, the pattern of intelligibility was the invention of literature itself. Telling the truth of the surface by travelling in the underground, spelling out the unconscious social text lying underneath- that also was a plot invented by literature itself (2004: 20).

Likewise, in her book *Resistance Literature* (1987), Barbara Harlow takes up a stance when claiming that “the language skills of rhetoric together with armed struggle are essential to an oppressed people’s resistance to domination and oppression and to an organized liberation movement” (1987: XV), and that it gives “a voice to the people who have long been deprived of the right to speak for themselves” (99). She ultimately defines her study as an examination of certain representative aspects of resistance literature, specifically postcolonial literature, that have been (and still are) largely ignored in traditional language departments in the West. In this sense, Harlow establishes a direct relation between fictional literature and politics, basing her study on the understanding of the former as a battle ground where the struggle for liberation is core.

More recently, in his work *Narrative Politics* (2014), Frederick Mayer also regrets the lack of attention to narrative in political science. He acknowledges the importance of stories because they trigger our actions, asserting that “when we act we are often to a great extent enacting, we are acting out the story as the script demands, acting in ways that are meaningful in the context of some story and that are true to our character’s identity” (2014: 7). In this light, Mayer argues that narrative is a fundamental device for constructing our identity and that it is “an empowering and enabling tool of mind, on the role of stories in cognition, emotion, identity, and action” (79).

Following these arguments, I propose that the literary voices in the narratives selected for this dissertation (in the form of a first person narrator or a character) belong to the group of non-violent resistant subjects, since they become active individuals who confront external oppressors through the deployment of weapons different from violence. In fact, their freedom of choice is constrained by different external threats, such as nation-states, based on oppressive hegemonic discourses in the form of physical (Jones 2012) and/or social boundaries (Anzaldúa 1987), and institutions (Hodgson 2006; Mayer 2014). As a result, they pursue the reconstruction of their identities, which mainly relates to a resistance towards racism, gender, sexual, and ethnical inequality, and gives shape to groups of individuals who struggle “to resist oppressive accounts of their identities constructed by others who hold power over them” and claim the right to self-determination (Buckingham 2008: 7).

In fact, the nation as a controlling device has been hugely studied in the last decades (Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Stanford Friedman 2007, Jones 2012). Reece Jones informs the theory of J. Agnew and S. Corbridge (1995) by approaching the sovereignty of the State as sustained by the idea that “the entire territory of the world is divided into separate spaces, which have distinct sovereign governments that make and enforce laws in those territories. This perception has been dominant since the modern era and spread through the world via colonization” (Jones 2012: 688). Even though the nation has been studied as a resisting device to globalization (Sparke 2008) and as “an imagined community” (Anderson 1983) that “has enabled post-colonial societies to invent a self image through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression” (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 117), other scholars have exposed a negative side of the State by looking at the physical borders between nations as rigid pillars on which the nation’s hegemony is sustained (Stanford Friedman 2007, Jones 2012).

In this regard, certain institutions such as schools, prisons or factories have been addressed as tentacles of the government, while pointing at the claustrophobic and unmovable borders of bureaucracy and institutionalism as a perpetuation of the nation-state's power (Jones 2012, Mayer 2014). Along these lines, Frantz Fanon was one of the earliest to warn about the pitfalls of a postcolonial discourse that, to disprove imperialist oppression, adopts a nationalistic discourse which in most cases serves the interest of the colonized elite (Fanon 2006).

The tendency to praise certain values identified as native is known as “nativism,” and its danger lies in the fact that “the nativist re-actualizes the imaginary cultures and identities that the dominant discourse had forged on him” (Benito Sánchez 1999: 322), and that “it frequently takes over the hegemonic control of the imperial power, thus replicating the conditions it rises up to combat” (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 117). Nevertheless, nativism as an oppositional weapon to systems of domination has been partially displaced over the last two decades in favor of Anzaldúa's (1987) or Bhabha's (1994) theoretical approaches, that propose cultural hybridity (such as *mestizaje* and creolization) “as more valid means of self-assertion and resistance” (Benito Sánchez 1999: 323). In this sense, Benito Sánchez argues:

against the search for an undisturbed native culture, supposedly lying unchanged outside history, the proponents of cultural hybridity highlight their present cultural crossings as an integral part of their identity (both personal and cultural) (...) These theories have discentered the notion of identity, which is no longer seen as a fixed essence, as much as an unstable point of convergence of different discourses (1999: 323-24).

Building on this critical focus, I suggest that, by rejecting the dominant ideology of the national territory, some characters in the stories confront the nation-state and the fixed social and political identity, since as Torpey (2000) or Jones (2012) highlight, “most

nation- states base their claims to sovereignty on the notion that their people, however defined, have always lived in that particular place,” and thus, hold themselves on unmovable, rigid, and closed borders (Jones 2012: 689). In order to illustrate this idea, Jones echoes the words of Torpey (2000) when claiming that “people who move disrupt the clean territoriality, based identity categories of the state by evading state surveillance systems and crating alternative networks of connection outside state territoriality” (2012: 689).

Nonetheless, the literary voices in the narratives that conform this study do not only challenge the nation-state but also social impositions on identity formation. Renato argues that:

social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste... such borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation (1993: 207-208).

Whereas Renato speaks about the multiplicity of subjectivities (as essential for analyzing the politics of difference under State citizenry), Anzaldúa advocates for “una cultura mestiza,” her right for self-definition (based on her white, Mexican, and Indian roots), and focuses on the multiplicity of “borderlands” (the psychological, the sexual, and the spiritual), which coexist within every human and give shape to his/her individuality (1987).

In this light, both scholars challenge the idea of an intact identity and understand the self as an incomplete entity that remains open to “outside” cultures on an unclosable border between the inside and outside. In this sense, the impermeability of social borders is also questioned, since:

the borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she [la mestiza] able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes (Minh-Ha 2006: 209).

On a broader scope, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Brilliant Mhlanga understand the term “border” as “a myriad of visible and invisible demarcations that have underpinned the divisions of human population into variegated identities” (2013: 4), addressing them as the roots of homophobia, racism, nationalism, xenophobia, religious wars and other conflicts and phobias (3). In this context, Stanford Friedman points at physical borders as “lines on a map backed by armies and law” (2007: 273) which regulate structures of exclusion and inclusion. In addition, she draws upon the theory of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Homi Bhabha (1994) to argue that, in the last two decades, border studies have evolved into “the exploration of the metaphoric and dimensions of borders and borderlands as tropes for regulative and transgressive patterns in the cultural and social order” (2007: 273). In order to illustrate this idea, Stanford Friedman establishes a clear differentiation between border and borderland. On the one hand, she defines the former as a “fixed, fluid, impermeable and porous” structure used to “exercise power over others” and that “insist[s] on purity, distinction, difference but facilitate[s] contamination, mixing, creolization” (2007: 273). On the other hand, she understands borders as “imaginary lines of separation with real effects, as in geographical boundary between nation-states” (273). Building on these broad approaches to the notion of border, I argue that the limits that constrain the literary voices in this corpus are not only national, but

also constitute invisible demarcations that lie in parameters around the question of race, gender, nationality, power relations and social class.

Therefore, the underlying argument is that the interracial couples, individuals who rebel against the constraints of patriarchy and imperialism, those who establish intergroup relationships, nomadic subjects who are constantly moving across national borders, and those who confront institutional and governmental powers in the analyzed stories constitute outstanding examples of resistance to hegemonic ideologies. These literary voices take advantage of the liminal spaces to which the oppressive forces confine them to enhance their need for reaffirming their identity since, as Stanford Friedman puts it, “a frontier between differences also operates figuratively as a conceptual space for performative identities beyond the fixed essentialisms of fundamentalist or absolutist identity politics” (2007: 273). By doing so, they demolish rigid social and political boundaries by the deployment of resistance weapons that question the dominant discourse. In this respect, my Ph. D dissertation relies on the work of Fanon, Anzaldúa, and Bhabha to offer the literary analysis of individuals who are limited by the inflexible borders of bureaucracy, social, geographical and political parameters and that, according to Mayer, “constrain their choice, alter incentives, and limit information” (2014: 37).

In another vein, despite the narratives in this dissertation are written by authors with varied nationalities and who depict literary voices in diverse geographical scenarios, they can be compared under a common discourse of self-discovery and liberation from ideological impositions. In this light, I support an internationalism where national essences are rejected “for the more refractory and syncretic complexes of ordinary experience as a way of approaching literary production” (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 118). Therefore, my research also informs the works of comparatists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2006) or Emily Apter (2006), who have brought comparative studies

closer to non-Western literatures as a consequence of the new globalization, thus focusing on a more global scope. This new comparativism looks to “the interpenetration of the global and the local,” the transgression of “the institutional structures that often separate literature and language studies by nation and region” and states “the effects of deterritorialization, new modes of travel and communication, and the issues of national borders and citizenship” (Stanford Friedman 2007: 260-93).

Basing myself on these studies, I argue that my research opens the scope in comparative literary studies, since there are not many academic works in this field that have focused on the literary analysis of individuals who resist political and social impositions in the frame of a new comparativism carried out at a global scale. Indeed, in the last ACLA report of the discipline (American Comparative Literature Association), published in 2017, many scholars have highlighted the need of the comparative literature studies to transcend national and linguistic boundaries (Saussy 2017: 24; Thomsen 2017: 119), within what Jessica Berman calls a “trans” orientation, that is, the need for the transdisciplinary scholarship to become “importantly transnational by examining texts outside national or imperial circuits of travel, nonprivileged migrations of people and texts, or trajectories outside the usual metro-centric routes of travel” (Berman 2017: 106). In this regard, scholars within the field state that comparativists should support “the members of the profession who (...) fit together unaccustomed bodies of work” (Saussy 2017: 28) and that literature has to be approached as a window that can “reveal specific types of content beyond the literary” (Swacha 2015) by considering other disciplines and domains of knowledge at the same level of the literary text.

Therefore, this dissertation follows the new mandate of comparative literary studies to the conduct of more research from an international and an interdisciplinary perspective, as it encompasses a cross-sectional comparative analysis of literary texts with diverse

origins and authors that, despite the physical and language barriers that separate them, surprisingly advocate for a common goal of liberation and share similar themes and motifs to evoke this act of resistance. Through this innovative comparative methodology, this analysis fosters “new forms of comparative work” (Stanford Friedman 2007: 282) based on “a planetary thinking and the decline of the nation-state model” (261). Indeed, I focus on a group of contemporary texts which are defined by transnational literary voices and, as Paul Jay suggests, “push beyond national boundaries to engage the global character of modern experience, contemporary culture, and the identities they produce” (Jay 2010: 92). This transnational and global context not only allows the authors to engage in a global dialogue through their literature. It also encourages the literary voices in their narratives to open their individual horizons and hope (Appadurai 1996: 43).

In fact, this comparative analysis encompasses a variety of narratives that work as a launching point, since it is through the application of social and political theories that my literary corpus *speaks*. The interdisciplinarity and planetary character of my study illustrate Michael Swacha’s and other comparativists’ point of view because, although literature has a key role in this dissertation, I also consider “various disciplines and domains of knowledge” at the same level of importance (Swacha 2015), and thus, “the study of literature is not necessarily for the sake of literature itself,” but feeds some larger socio-political questions (Swacha 2015) that contribute to a better understanding of some of the ongoing issues in the world today.

No less significantly, the literary corpus that conforms this study belongs to the field of postcolonial literature, understanding it as:

writings of and by people who have been dominated by white, Euro-American cultures, and which explore the various modalities of power, identity, subjectivity as informed by race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual preference. (...) Cast as the “other” by and within regulating Euro-American discourses the literatures

from these zones of contest (imperial), conflict (internal) and collaboration (neo-colonial) reveal common concerns and themes (Nayar 2008: 8).

In this light, in her book *Resistance Literature* (1987), Harlow establishes a connection “resistance” and postcolonial literature, and understands resistance as recurrent feature in postcolonial literature. In this sense, she points out that:

the struggle for national liberation and independence (...) on the part of the colonized peoples in those areas of the world over which Western Europe and North America have sought socio-economic control and cultural dominion has produced a significant corpus of literary writings (...) This literature, like the resistance and national liberation movements which it reflects (...) presents a serious challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and practice of literature and its criticism as these have been developed in the West (Harlow 1987: xvi).

Indeed, Harlow establishes an almost intrinsic connection between the postcolonial literature and political resistance on the fact that postcolonial countries have been dominated by “a hegemonic discourse of an occupying or colonizing power” and still are, since “on the periphery of [the] fantastic architectural structures of United States [and Europe] capitalism, surrounding them, if not actually laying siege to them, is a “Third World city” of Hispanics, Asians, blacks, and other minority populations and it is against them that these edifices have been constructed” (1987: 15). Thus, she believes that, by means of the resistance literature, individuals in disadvantaged positions can expose and challenge these hegemonic structures. Building on this theory, I argue that, by questioning social and political realities, the characters and narrative voices in the texts analyzed in this study offer an alternative version of events dictated by History or Politics (counter-narratives to the unique discourse) or, in the words of Homi Bhabha, “alternative histories of the excluded” (1994: 6). In this respect, I conceive of them as valuable samples of

resistance literature that allow their authors to negotiate the literary voices' identity in order to promote democratic values.

It is noteworthy that despite the fact that all the pieces of literature included in this research can be addressed as postcolonial for the reasons previously exposed, it is my belief that they escape from the traditional binary thinking in the field, based on divisions such as Europe / its Others, colonizer / colonized, the West / the rest. Indeed, some academics such as Stephen Slemon have claimed that this binary approach shapes a foundational principle in post-colonial criticism that is at a heart insufficient, simplistic, and “has a marked tendency to blur when it tries to focus upon ambiguously placed or ambivalent material” (Slemon 1990: 34). Thus, I suggest that these postcolonial texts do not just focus on colonialist and neo-colonialist power relations, but also carry us “into the figurative domains of other modes of power (...) and are concerned with the problem of privilege through racism and patriarchy (...), homophobia, nationalism and adultism” (Slemon 1990: 40), which are core in my analysis.

Therefore, the oppressors in the narratives are not only depicted in the form of Western dominant figures, such as the British organizer in Adichie's “Jumping Money Hill” (2009). They are also portrayed through postcolonial governments and institutions like the Revolutionary Cuba in Leonardo Valencia's “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004), or the postcolonial Nigerian government in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's “The American Embassy” (2009). In this sense, my study takes distance from the traditional postcolonial dichotomies that have informed the base of relevant theories in the field. Instead, it follows academics such as Homi Bhabha (1994), Eleke Boehmer (2002), or Michal Frenkel and Yehouda Shenhav (2006), who have supported that postcolonial studies have traditionally relied on a neat and binary division that does not acknowledge that the line that differentiates oppressor from oppressed can be easily blurred, and argue that the

hybridization between western and non-western entities needs to be accepted. In this vein,

Benito Sánchez says that:

both Foucault's and Said's theories have been criticized for allowing no space for dissidence. They simply fail to envision the possibility of resistance to the impositions encoded in discourse. Since the subject is seen as a product of discourse- more so in the case of the subaltern- there seems to be no one capable of adopting a consciously oppositional position. (...) Contrary to Edward Said's perception of the dominant discourse as all powerful (...) Homi Bhabha has repeatedly explored the capacity of the ethnic other to turn against itself (Benito Sánchez 1999: 323-24).

The literary voices in the texts act as agents who are either in confrontation with the West or with the so-called "peripheries" (their countries of origin and their governments), thus remaining in Anzaldúa's "borderlands" and Bhabha's "third space," on the border between here and there, the West and its others. For instance, Victoriano, the main character in Leonardo Valencia's "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004), remains in a sort of spatial limbo, symbolized by the room where he stays, taking care of the possessions that his friends have handed him before escaping from a Cuba ruled by Castro. This room constitutes a "third space" that stays between the political control of the Cuban government and the outside world, and consequently, becomes an island within an island. In this respect, my analysis informs Fanon's and Bhabha's theory, which postulate "the failure of hegemonic discourses to create stable and complete subject positions for the subaltern, who are instead seen not as victims but as individuals capable of agency" (Benito Sánchez 1999: 324).

Consequently, one of the most striking aspects in this study is the question of space. The spaces these resistant voices occupy in the stories are hostile to them. For instance, the obstacles that the interracial couple in César Mba A. Abogo's "Hora de Partir" (2007) encounter when trying to have a successful interracial relationship, are the product of the

xenophobic environment full of prejudices in which they live. Similarly, the narrative voice in Osama Alomar's "The Union of Our Home" (2014) complains about his restricted mobility across nations and thus points at the international space he inhabits as the source of his affliction, while the narrator in Lien Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013) lives in a Revolutionary Cuba that imprisons her. As a result of the hostility that the narrative settings instill on them, I approach these literary voices as resistant agents who have a need for building alternative interstitial spaces to *survive*.

In fact, the concept of space as a site for resistance has been broadly explored in academia. Jones coins the term "spaces of refusal" to define a zone of contact where sovereign states practices interact with alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and being (2012: 687). In those spaces, people adopt various means for avoiding the sovereignty of the state, even when the traditional response of flight is not available (Agnew 2005; Scott 2009; Jones 2012). On his part, Marc Augé employs the term "no lugares" to refer to interstitial spaces, defining them as:

un espacio que no puede definirse ni como espacio de identidad ni como relacional ni como histórico", (...) mundos donde se multiplican, en modalidades lujosas o inhumanas, los puntos de tránsito y las ocupaciones provisionales. (...) Un mundo así prometido a la individualidad solitaria, a lo provisional y a lo efímero, al pasaje" (Augé 2008: 83-84).

Augé highlights the need for rethinking the notion of space, for "el concepto sociológico de lugar, asociado por (...) toda una tradición etnológica con el de la cultura localizada en el tiempo y el espacio" (Augé 2008: 40-41) gives way to new perceptions of space as "non-places," that is, "tanto las instalaciones (...) para la circulación acelerada de personas y bienes (vías rápidas, empalmes de rutas, aeropuertos) como los medios de transporte mismos o los grandes centros comerciales, o también los campos de tránsito

prolongado donde se estacionan los refugiados del planeta” (41). Importantly, as an analogous and precedent term to Augé’s “non-place,” “heterotopias” are defined as

locations that because of their specificity, problematize the various functions typically associated with “like” locations (...) These are unusual places (...) in which the rules of everyday life that prevail elsewhere across places within national territory are replaced by some very particular and peculiar ones (Agnew 2008: 183).

Thus, the spaces that the literary voices occupy constitute heterotopias in relation to their ambivalence and oppositional stance towards the imperant national border system and social or political constraints. They can be approached as “non-places” or “countersites” in the sense that they are not delimited by national or other “invisible” demarcations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and B. Mhalanga 2013: 4), and the political and social hegemonic rules that repress individuals are replaced by peculiar ones.

In the same vein, I draw upon Stanford Friedman’s (2007), Anzaldúa’s (1987) and Bhabha’s (1994) relevant studies about the borderland to define the space that the characters inhabit as a “contact zone” “where fluid differences meet, where power is often structured asymmetrically but nonetheless circulates in complex and multidirectional ways, where agency exists on both sides of the shifting and permeable divide” (Stanford Friedman 2007: 273). Stanford Friedman remarks that both borders and borderlands have been approached as “spatial metaphors for the liminal space in between” (273) and points at Homi Bhabha as “the preeminent theorist of the interstitial, of the examination of culture in the moment of transit” (274). Indeed, the latter coins the term “third space” to define “countersites” that result from the interstitial, erratic movements that signify culture’s transnationality.

Thus, hotels, resorts, refugee camps, immigration offices, or stations are examples of “no lugares,” in opposition to the notion of “lugar,” understood as “lugar de identidad, relacional o histórico” (Augé 2008: 83). Nevertheless, I argue that the “no lugares” that constitute the setting of the stories, such as embassies, immigration offices, national borderlands, or luxurious resorts in underdeveloped countries among others, do not problematize the literary voice’s aim for self-definition but foster it.

In this regard, I claim that these interstitial spaces that the characters create to redefine their identities differ from Marc Augé’s notions of “non-place,” for it is defined as “un espacio que no puede definirse como lugar de identidad” (Augé 2008: 83). By contrast, I support Bhabha when asserting that these “in-between spaces” “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity” (Bhabha 1994: 1). Bhabha draws upon Victor Turner’s idea of liminality, together with its symbolic registers (rite of passage, limen, communitas, etc) to claim that the symbolic registers “are located in ritual, to explain the vexed, non-dualistic and shifting nature of identity in the modern world” (Kalua 2009: 23). More specifically, I approach these interstitial spaces that the literary voices build as “activity spaces” (Massey 1995: 54), that is, a space “within which a particular agent operates” (54). Importantly, for this research, I also employ Ludger Pries’ definition of space to approach this concept, understanding that “space is thus different from place in that it encompasses or spans various territorial locations” (Pries 1999: 67), bearing in mind that “space here not only refers to physical features, but also to larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values and meanings that the specific and limited place represents to immigrants” (40).

In addition to Homi Bhabha’s (1994) and Doreen Massey’s (1995) studies, much literature has been written about the relation between the concepts of space and identity.

Agnew asserts that “identities themselves, our self-definitions, are inherently territorial” (2008: 179). On his part, Gillian Rose argues that “identity is how we make sense of ourselves, and geographers, anthropologists and sociologists, among others, have argued that the meanings given to a place (...) become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them” (Rose 1995: 88). Manuel Castells has highlighted that “the reconstruction of national identity is challenged by plural identities as defined by autonomous subjects” (Castells 1997: 243). Building on the idea that identity is defined by space, I remark the literary voices’ need for constructing new alternative spaces to redefine themselves. In this way, they take advantage of their dislocation and the consequent habitation of alternative spaces (“third spaces” or “counterspaces”) to avoid the identity politics imposed by nations and social and political institutions and pursue their right of self-definition. In this sense, they empower themselves, since “territoriality is a primary geographical expression of social power” and a claim to control people by controlling their space (Sack 1986: 5).

In this respect, the process of constructing their own alternative spaces constitutes a final goal to resist oppression. They all transcend imposed boundaries and fixed identities by inhabiting what Bhabha calls “the realm of the beyond” or “third space” (2004), since according to Bhabha:

in place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation “in-itself” and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the “in-between”. The boundary that marks the nation’s selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous. The problem is not simply the ‘selfhood’ of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *it/self* (...) becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference (Bhabha 1994: 198).

Basing myself on these theories, I argue that the narratives in this dissertation celebrate “dynamic spaces of cultural change characterized by shifting identities” where the characters’ identity is “fluid, relational, and always in flux” (Kalua 2009: 23). Even though this space of inbetweenness brings vexation and ambiguity, it also “points up the immense freedoms which come out when contradictions are synthesized and overrun in the Third Space” (Kalua 2009: 25). As a result, the literary voices in these narratives take advantage of their interstitial status to build personal territories in search of a place of comfort in which they can develop themselves freely.

Significantly, the underlying argument is that, in order to achieve this final aim, they draw upon a variety of resistance weapons to confront oppressive powers. Thus, the texts in this research are grouped according to the mechanisms of resistance that they employ to raise their voices and that, as previously mentioned, constitute examples of non-violent resistance.

Given that academics have generally centered on the reasons for these individuals’ oppression, the ways in which they are repressed, or the final act of liberation, the fact that I direct my analysis towards the methods that these literary voices use to resist constitutes an innovative perspective. The exploration of how these resistance mechanisms are deployed to combat oppressive forces works as the central pillar of my analysis and, by doing so, I approach these narratives from an angle that has traditionally been ignored or overlooked. These weapons come in the form of objects or commodities, refusing to dance to bureaucracy’s tune, interracial romantic and sexual relationships, transcultural intergroup relationships, turning the political leader into a caricature, transnational travellers who avoid territorial entrapment through their mobility, and the creation of fictional writings. By the deployment of these resistance mechanisms, the voices depicted in these narratives challenge the parameters of the dominant discourse

on national identity, gender, race, and sexuality, and establish a transnational and intergroup dialogue that transcends geographical and social boundaries.

Firstly, the relationship between objects and identity formation, as well as their mutual influence, has been a broadly discussed topic in academia. Arjun Appadurai or Igor Kopytoff have explored the way in which objects become recipients of identity formation, understanding the term commodities as “things that have use [generally social] value and that can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for a counterpart (...) that has, in an immediate context, an equivalent value” (Kopytoff 1986: 68). In this sense, Alison P. Watts claims that “anthropologists, sociologists and literary theorists have long recognized the role of material culture in individual and societal negotiations and performance of identity politics” (P. Watts 2011: 3). More specifically, she argues that “items of clothing, cooking implements, religious beliefs and traditional crafts bear witness to elements of identity performance and help re-present our social identifications to the outside world” (2011: 3).

Furthermore, Appadurai and Kopytoff claim that these commodities can be understood as story-tellers, in the sense that they possess life histories that are open to individual interpretation and manipulation. In this respect, Kopytoff applies the same type of questions that are used for human beings' identity formation to the construction of biographies for things. He asserts that in developed societies “a person's social identities are not only numerous but often conflicting,” which causes “uncertainty of identity,” and adds that “in the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography becomes the story of various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context” (1986: 89).

Therefore, my point is that the repressed literary voices in Adichie's "Imitation" (2009) and Valencia's "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004) take advantage of the items that surround them, as well as the uncertainties of evaluation and of identity attached to these commodities, to rebuild the biographical narratives beneath the objects imposed by the dominant discourse. Consequently, the re-articulation of the meanings that these objects emanate encourages the characters' reflection upon them and establishes a strong bond between the two. This connection results in a mutual influence which ultimately leads the literary voices to the redefinition of their identities away from their sources of oppression.

Secondly, the rejection of the administration and institutions also constitutes a powerful weapon when it comes to undermining the authority of the nation-state. I understand the term "institution" as an established or inherent system of political and social rules that give structure to social interactions (Hodgson 2006: 44). In his article "What are institutions?" (2006), Hodgson revisits some of the most relevant approaches to the concept of institution, encompassing organizations, social structures, socially transmitted normative rules, and inherited behaviours or dispositions under this term. In addition, he draws on the work of D.C. North to highlight the institutional character of organizations such as universities, armies, schools and unions.

In this framework, Armando Rendón Corona has pointed at the no-cooperation with the institutional authorities as one of the most striking features in Ghandi's passive resistance. To quote Rendón Corona, "el concepto de desobediencia civil tiene una primera acepción negativa, desmitifica el acto de obedecer a la autoridad, rompe con la concepción de la obediencia como valor universal" (Rendón Corona 2011: 79). Following Ghandi's ideology, he asserts that the legal authority can be questioned by civil disobedience and understands the no-cooperation as a form of protest against anything humiliating for the human being. The characters who turn their backs on civil servants or who confront

security guards break with the implicit collaboration with the State through their decision of stop complying with its institutions, since the authority of the State finds its expression in juridical codes and institutions. In this sense, Max Weber remarks that modern States legitimize their monopoly on violence through various ways among which he highlights “a body of rationally created rules we call the law” (Weber 1991: 79). This theory is informed in the works of Reece Jones and Frederick Mayer, who point at bureaucracy and institutionalism as pillars of the nation-state and conceive of individuals as “embedded in institutions that constrain their choice” (Mayer 2014:37).

Furthermore, international and/or intergroup relations among the characters in the stories also work as subversive acts against hegemonic discourses such as heteropatriarchy or homogamous relationships. Aneeta Rattan and Nalani Ambady assert that the relationships between individuals who belong to distinct social, racial and religious groups constitute outstanding examples of how individuals exert an active civil resistance towards dominant attitudes in sex and love and resist group categorization through intergroup contact (Rattan and Ambady 2013: 15-16). Building on this theory, I claim that some of the literary voices in these narratives rebel against their group categorization and, consequently, undergo an *individuation* process that leads them towards the demolition of social lumps and the releasing of their agency (Ross 1920: 469).

Moreover, in the introduction to *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed draws upon the work of feminist and queer scholars who have explored how emotions are subject to politics, in the sense that feelings and some social forms derived from them, such as family, heterosexuality, and the nation, can act as devices of control (Butler 1997; Berlant 2011). She understands the fact of not following these imperant narratives as an act of disobedience and highlights the psychological consequences and the social costs that can result from “loving a body that is supposed to be unloveable (...) or a body that

I am ‘supposed to’ repudiate” (Ahmed 2004: 146). Therefore, the social tension resulting from interracial and queer encounters and intergroup relationships in the narratives analyzed in this dissertation can be understood as part of “the negative effects of ‘not quite’ living in the norms” and implies “how loving loves that are not ‘normative’ involves being subject to such norms precisely in the costs and damage that are incurred when not following them” (Ahmed 2014: 146).

Similarly, bearing in mind that the transference of love onto nation-states constitutes “a way of bonding with others in relation to particular ideals and hegemonies” (Morrison et al. 2012: 515), the literary voices’ admiration for women on the other side of territorial borders, and their negative view towards their nation in “Love Letter” (2017), written by Osama Alomar, “En la espesura de la noche” (2010) by César Mba A. Abogo, and “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2011) by Lien Carrazana, reveal these literary voices’ resistant attitude, since they evade the geographical impositions and the fixity of nation-states through their emotions.

Importantly, Ahmed also relates the concept of emotion to movement, when reminding that the word “emotion” (*emovere* in Latin) shares the same root with the verb “to move.” She claims that “attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others” (2014: 11). This interrelation between love and space has been widely explored in the work of feminist, social and cultural geographers, who have acknowledged the mutual effects between the two. Love, space and place are mutually influenced since “space is experienced through the loved and loving body, and the body is situated in space. Sometimes spaces are ‘real,’ sometimes discursive, sometimes psychoanalytic and imaginary” (Morrison et al. 2012: 513). Following this line of argumentation, I argue that in some of the stories that I analyze, love and sex have a significant political burden (Berlant 2011; Morrison et al. 2012), since the homosexual

and interracial sexual and romantic relationships depicted in some of the stories are kinds of love different from the heteronormative. Consequently, they destabilize “the binary logic that underpins the institution of love,” such as the divisions between black / white, men / women, but also proximity / distance, inside / outside, self / other, and so on (Morrison et al. 2012: 516).

Yet, emotions are not the only empowering force that turns some of the characters into entities in motion. The depiction of nomadic subjects who question fixity as a legitimizing tool of the nation-state (Hall and Paul du Gay 1996) becomes an exemplary portrayal of resistant subjectivities. In *The Power of Identity* (1997), Manuel Castells claims that “state control over space and time is increasingly bypassed by global flows of capital, goods, services, technology, communication and information (...) and the reconstruction of national identity is challenged by plural identities as defined by autonomous subjects” (Castells 1997: 243). Thus, some literary voices in my analysis belong to this category, as their multiple moves across rigid boundaries blur the boundaries between nations and enhance reflection upon multiple spatialities of identities in motion.

In another vein, in recent years, scholars have started to highlight the potential political side of humor to counter oppression (Abulhassan Hassan 2013: 551) and its relevance as a powerful strategy of nonviolent resistance against tyranny (Sorensen 2008: 167). In this light, Egon Larsen claims that “the political joke is a safety valve... a way in which an oppressed people preserve its sanity” (Larsen 1980: 3). Along these lines, Jul Sorensen argues that “humor’s main source of power is its ability to turn things upside down and present them in a new frame” (Sorensen 2008: 185). He remarks this function of humor as that which makes it an effective way of political resistance, for it changes the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed by altering it. Indeed, (a) the humor

exerted has a confrontational nature because it is intended to feed the conflict by means of provoking and ridiculing, (b) it reduces fear among the resistant subjects, and (c) the oppressor's options to respond in a way he can later justify are reduced (Sorensen 2008: 180).

In this light, the narrative voices in Donato Ndongo's short story "La mirada de la Niña Tasia" (2013), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction" (2016), and Daniel Alarcon's "Los sueños inútiles" (2009) confront oppressive political leaders characterized by their egocentrism and messianism through the use of humor. More specifically, the literary voices in the stories can penetrate the most intimate aspects of their oppressor to mock them. My point is that this humoristic portrayal constitutes an effective resistance weapon because it allows the caricature of the powerful political figures, and their consequent desmytification, through the deployment of diverse satirizing strategies (Noguerol Jiménez 1992: 91-102).

In addition, continuous mobility can also work as a way of resisting spatial fixity and a consequent forced identity. Whereas Reece Jones defines borders as drawn "lines on the ground and in the popular imagination" (Jones 2012: 690), in his essay "DissemiNation," Homi Bhabha points at national borders as an oppressive force over its citizens and makes emphasis on the need of a borderline negotiation (1994: 291-322). Some academics such as K. Mitchell or Susan Stanford Friedman have underlined the connection between borders and power relations, understanding borders as "the power to keep in or out" (Mitchell 1997: 101) in order to enframe the limits of the imagination.

As Jones puts it, "the potential of cross-border movement to be a form of resistance to the nation-state has been a topic of keen interest for many scholars of transnationalism for a few decades" (Jones 2012: 693). Given that the power of nation-states and its borders

comes from the process of enframing, or “the ability to define the categories that order daily life and create the either” (694), those individuals who defy this enframing through cross-border movement can be approached as resistant subjects to national and territorial entrapment. These individuals “disrupt the clean, territorially based identity categories of the state by evading state surveillance systems and creating alternative networks of connection outside state territoriality” (Jones 2012: 689). On his part, Peter Kabachnik remarks that recent studies have shifted from an emphasis on place to the study of mobility and processes of deterritorialization, and believes in the need for highlighting mobilities, and not only place, as a vital factor in identity formation (Kabachnik 2012: 211).

Based on these arguments, I postulate that Jackie Jay’s “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), Osama Alomar’s “Journey to Me” (2017), and Lien Carrazana’s “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015) portray literary voices who rebel against the sovereign State system by avoiding territorial fixity through mobility and a constant border-crossing. In fact, they resist “the fixed essentialisms of fundamentalist or absolutist identity politics” imposed by the nation-state (Stanford Friedman 2007: 273) by means of “refusing to accept a binary framing of the state that attempts to create a world of us-them, here-there” (Jones 2012:687) and “not accepting a binary division of space and identity” (696). Thus, my point is that these literary voices move and think outside the binary enframing of the State and, by doing so, deny the State the right to define them (Jones 2012) because “the territorial and identity categories of State subjectivity are not the only option, despite maps and state discourses that attempt to foreclose these other possibilities” (Jones 2012: 698).

Finally, I explore art, specifically fiction, as another weapon that the literary voices in Adichie’s “Jumping Monkey Hills” (2009) and Lien Carrazana’s “Grafomanía” (2013)

use to counterattack dominant powers. Even though it can be asserted that all the narratives included in this research are fictional, and consequently, all their authors are using literature to construct fictional individuals who speak up against authoritarian forces, I argue that, in some of the narratives, fiction is more explicitly depicted as a resistance weapon. In these stories, the main characters deliberately write in order to raise their own voices, and by doing so, the authors enhance fiction as a democratic tool to fight external political and social powers. Basing his assertion on Carlo Ginzburg's theory, Rafael Rojas claims that "la literatura (...) produce indicios de una subjetividad, de una ciudadanía cultural y política" (Rojas 2006: 420). Therefore, it could be claimed that the literary voices in this short stories use their fictional writings to promote the shaping of an individual who aims at being independent from "the deadening forces of society, whether they come in the form of political ideologies, social pressures, or rampant consumerism" (Lewis 2008: 664).

In this vein, Lewis echoes Milan Kundera's words in *Testaments Betrayed* (1996) to assert that fiction is "an essential shaper of our moral imagination" and "indispensable to our conception and defense of rights" (Lewis 2008: 655). He further paraphrases Kundera when saying that for a man to have rights, he needs to constitute himself as an individual first, and he points at the European arts (particularly literature) as the main promoters of the construction of the self, since it is through them that the individual learns how to be inquisitive about his inner emotions and those truths that differ from his own (Lewis 2008: 655). Thus, the constitution of fictional characters in some of the stories, such as Lien Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013), where individual developing selves build their own voice and their own fictional spaces, finds its importance in Kundera's belief that fiction becomes a powerful device to question certain authorities.

In fact, it is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the literary voices employ it to speak up and, on the other hand, to allude to their sources of constraint as fictional and just one point of view among many others. Many academics and writers have pointed at words and story-telling as important devices for control and repression. In the TED talk “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie asserts that “like our economic and political worlds, stories are defined by [...] how they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told” (Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story”). According to her, their relevance lies in the fact that “they are very dependant on power” and defines power as “the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definite story of that person” (Adichie). More specifically, in the introduction to the online anthology where Lien Carrazana’s short story “Grafomanía” (2013) is included, the Cuban writer Pardo Lazo addresses the nation-state as “el Máximo Narrador” (Pardo Lazo 2013). Both authors agree with Mayer, who claims that “fictional narratives can be as powerful as non-fiction in establishing ideological interests” and that “engrossed by a powerful fictional narrative we accept its premises and its meaning” (Mayer 2014: 92).

In this way, the literary voices in some of the stories, despite being inserted in a hostile context where the governmental and the imperialist powers exert control and set ideological parameters, find their way to express themselves by means of fiction. Through their writing, they construct their own fictional spaces that trigger the re-thinking of their identity and establish a counter-discourse that resists geographical and ideological entrapment. The creation of their own spaces in their literature constitutes the triumph of the individual over external forces of control and an act of resistance towards the unique political discourse that tries to spread their narration as the only “plausible” one and rejects the heterogeneity enhanced in both stories.

In short, I propose that the deployment of a variety of resistance mechanisms fosters the construction of “active literary spaces” where the literary voices in the narratives can claim their right for self-autonomy, and consequently, empower themselves against social and political hegemonic forces, for “the negotiation of a subcultural and alternative identity within a hegemonic order requires to ‘win space (...) to mark out and appropriate ‘territory’” (Clarke et al. 1976: 45). This conclusion induces me towards the understanding of these short narratives as spaces themselves, created by the authors to combat the same sources of constraint that harass the characters in the stories. In this sense, Ian Chambers (1994) acknowledges the role of writing in the construction of alternative spaces:

for to write is, of course, to travel. It is to enter a space, a zone, a territory, sometimes sign-posted by generic indicators (...) but everywhere characterized by movement: the passage of words, the caravan of thought, the flux of the imaginary (...) to write (and read) does not necessarily involve a project intent on “penetrating” the real, to double it and recite it, but rather entails an attempt to extend, disrupt and rework it. Although allegorical, always speaking of another, of an elsewhere, and therefore condemned to be dissonant, writing opens up a space that invites movement, migration, a journey (Chambers 1994: 10).

As a result of this existing relation between fictional narrative and space creation, he also highlights the power of fictional writing in self-definition:

identity is formed on the move. (...) Just as the nation involves the construction of an “imaginary community,” a sense of belonging sustained as much by fantasy and the imagination as by any geographical or physical reality, so our sense of our selves is also a labour of the imagination, a fiction, a particular story that makes sense (Chambers 1994: 25).

Indeed, my belief is that the authors give shape to these literary voices, or resistant fictional subjectivities, and provide them with a powerful voice in their narratives as a means of resistance, while offering a negative portrayal of the nation-state and social and

political demarcations that afflict them and taking advantage of this literary space to reshape their identities according to their will. In this way, I support Gillian Rose (1995) when he claims that “one way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place. It’s a place in which you feel comfortable or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place” (Rose 1995: 89). Therefore, these literary voices aim for the construction of their own spaces to feel more at home, understanding it as “where one best knows oneself – where ‘best’ means ‘most,’ even if not always ‘happiest”” (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 9).

In this sense, the analysis of how these fictional individuals are shaped and the ways in which they confront hegemonic powers and the unique discourse within the narratives leads me to the understanding of fictional literature as a relevant ideological corpus that needs to be taken more in consideration within political studies. I argue that there is a strong connection between literature and politics, understanding the latter as “a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear (...), some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them” and that constitutes “a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking” (Rancière 2004: 10). In short, this connection is based upon the potential of literature to, as Julia Borst puts it, unsilence “immobile voices” (Borst 2019: 113).

Significantly, all the selected texts for this study belong to the genre of short narrative because the features of this genre fit the purpose of my analysis. In order to set its common characteristics, I base myself on the work of Asunción Barreras Gómez, titled *El estudio literario de la narración breve y su utilización en el contexto docente* (2014), based in turn on outstanding studies of this genre, such as Enrique Anderson Imbert’s *Teoría y Técnica del Cuento* (1979). Barreras Gómez sets the birth of short narrative in the United

States during the XIX century and claims that there has been a strong connection between this genre and marginal authors since its origins, because it emerged as critically unheralded yet popular literature and, in many occasions, the only vehicle many unprivileged writers had to make their works public (Barreras Gómez 2014: 15). In addition, she defines the short narrative as a genre that (1) gives more importance to the actions than to the characters, (2) gives importance to the themes, (3) because it is brief, it is intense and keeps the reader focused from beginning to end, and (4) tends to concentrate much information in less space (2014: 20-28).

By reproducing the words of Clare Hanson (1989), Barreras Gómez approaches short narrative as marginal literature, as it has been often used by writers who have never formed part of the dominant narrative, such as exiles, women, and migrants, and adds that many writers in this genre focus more on marginal themes than in mainstream interests (2014: 19-20). Therefore, my interests in resistance literature has led me to the analysis of this genre, since the existence of short narratives that deal with marginal realities and the presence of “outsiders” and oppressed individuals is extensive within this type of literature.

Furthermore, due to the briefness of short narratives, actions need to be presented with immediacy and instantaneousness, triggering and expecting an uninterrupted attention from the reader (Barreras Gómez 2014: 20-22). These two features make this genre ideal for marginal authors to denounce certain political and social situations, for they can present facts in a more compact, and consequently, more intense way, so that the themes that are been treated in their writings reach the readers more effectively and enhances reflection on them. Thus, I argue that the short narratives proposed for this study encompass common features that serve the purpose of my thesis, since my literary analysis concentrates more on the exploration of themes and how social and political

messages are conveyed through the depiction of subjugated characters in an intensive and immediate way with the intention of providing alternative realities with visibility.

CHAPTER 2:

**THEIR POSSESSIONS WILL FOSTER THEIR FREEDOM:
MATERIAL OBJECTS AS PROMOTERS OF RESISTANT
SUBJECTIVITIES IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S "THE
THING AROUND YOUR NECK" AND LEONARDO VALENCIA'S
"EL OJO DEL CÍCLOPE."**



Tirado, José Luis. Cover endorsement. *La luna nómada*, by Leonardo Valencia, Cádiz: Algaida, 2004.

The relation between objects and identity formation, as well as their mutual influence, has been broadly explored in sociology studies. Arjun Appadurai or Igor Kopytoff have studied the way in which objects become recipients of identity formation, and have approached the term commodities as “things that have use [generally social] value and that can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for a counterpart (...) that has, in an immediate context, an equivalent value” (Kopytoff 1986: 68). In this sense, Alison P. Watts claims that “anthropologists, sociologists and literary theorists have long recognized the role of material culture in individual and societal negotiations and performance of identity politics” (P. Watts 2011: 3). More specifically, she argues that “items of clothing, cooking implements, religious beliefs and traditional crafts bear witness to elements of identity performance and help re-present our social identifications to the outside world” (2011: 3).

Furthermore, Appadurai and Kopytoff argue that these commodities can be understood as story-tellers in that they possess life histories that are open to individual interpretation and manipulation. In this respect, Kopytoff makes use of the same type of questions that apply to human beings’ identity formation for the construction of biographies for things. He asserts that in developed societies “a person’s social identities are not only numerous but often conflicting,” which causes “uncertainty of identity,” and he also adds that “in the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography becomes the story of various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context” (1986: 89).

Building on these theories, in this chapter, I argue that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Leonardo Valencia, in their short stories “Imitation” (2009) and “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004), respectively, depict an individual in confrontation with authoritarian powers that

force an identity on them and suppress their right to self-determination. My argument is that both narratives portray the process that the main characters undergo towards their liberation from the dominant accounts on gender and politics, and I analyze the ways in which they draw upon the surrounding material objects to achieve this goal.

To start with, the short story “Imitation” was first published in *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), a collection of short stories written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that mainly explores the lives of Nigerian women and their struggles as wives, immigrants, and victims of religious or political violence. In my view, the female protagonist in “Imitation” (2009) undergoes an identity formation process that leads her to a resistance stance towards the patriarchal system, for she develops from a submissive and dependent wife to a self-autonomous individual who defies the impositions of social and marital boundaries. The story begins when Nkem receives a call from a Nigerian friend who tells her about her husband’s infidelity. Nkem finds out that, while she stays in the United States taking care of their children, her partner stays in their second residence in Lagos with another girl instead of travelling for business as he says. The third person narrator guides us through the acts and thoughts that she undergoes as a result of this revelation. In addition, we are given access to some details of her past, such as how lucky she felt when she married Obiora, since she thought that his privileged social and economic position would offer her a new luxurious life away from the poverty conditions she suffered in Nigeria. As the story unfolds, her view about her marriage changes dramatically while leaving her innocence behind, facing reality and adopting a critical stand towards her husband. Eventually, Nkem becomes more rebellious towards her marriage, which results in her decision of changing her lifestyle and moving back to their second home in Nigeria.

Importantly, the title “Imitation” (2009) makes a reference to the art pieces (imitations of the originals), concretely an African mask, that her husband brings home from his journeys. The arrival of these objects to the house encourages Nkem’s reflection upon their meanings, origins and imitational nature, thus establishing bonds between the items and herself. Indeed, the important role that objects play in the formation of human identity has broadly been explored by academics. Alison P. Watts asserts that “anthropologists, sociologists and literary theorists have long recognized the role of material culture in individual and societal negotiation and performance of identity politics. Items of clothing, cooking implements, religious beliefs and traditional crafts bear witness to elements of identity performance and help re-present our social identifications to the outside world” (P. Watts 2011: 3). Basing myself on the idea that things become recipients of identity formation, I argue that Nkem’s evolution towards a more independent and self-sufficient woman is hugely attached to the Benin mask that her husband brings to their house. Her inner growth reaches its peak when at the end of the story Obiora brings her an original art piece for the first time: the Ife bronze head. At this moment, she finds the opportunity to be critical and express herself, as if she was influenced by the authenticity and uniqueness of the item.

In another vein, as Alison P. Watts suggests, Adichie depicts Obiora as the owner and transporter of things between his houses in Nigeria and Africa (P. Watts 2011: 18). In this sense, he embodies the role of the colonizer, because he decontextualizes these art pieces by not only dislocating them at a geographical level, but also at a conceptual level when he infuses them with a new meaning. Following Appadurai and Kopytoff terminology, it could be said that Obiora diverts these commodities, understanding by commodity “a thing that has use [generally social] value and that can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for a counterpart (...) that has, in the immediate context, an equivalent value”

(Kopytoff 1986: 68), and by diversion, the metamorphosis through which objects are “placed into a commodity state though originally specifically protected from it” (Appadurai 1986: 16).

In this light, the Benin mask that he brings to the United States undergoes a process of diversion since, although it is intended to have a religious and sacred role in its original context, it is ultimately diverted from its transcendental meaning when Obiora acquires it for a decorative and tyrannical purpose. Thus, by approaching his actions as acts of appropriation that make him become a dominant figure, I support P. Watts, who claims that it is by means of assigning biographical narrative to the art pieces that he constructs his identity as a ‘specially chosen [...] custodian’ of the items (2011: 18). Ironically, in telling the significance of the masks to his wife, Obiora describes British (epitomizing the figure of the colonizer) as looters when he says that they stole “the original masks in the late 1800s during what they called Punitive Expedition,” and that they “had a way of using words like ‘expedition’ and ‘pacification’ for killing and stealing” (Adichie 2009: 25). He also adds that “the masks (...) were regarded as ‘war booty’ and were now displayed in museums all over the world” (Adichie 2009: 25). Thus, the parallelism between the colonizers and Obiora is intensified as he himself becomes a collector, turning his house into a “museum” where he “displays diverted commodities with newly contextualized significations” (P. Watts 2011: 19).

Furthermore, his dominant role is doubly emphasized. Firstly, Obiora and Nkem’s American neighbours imitate him when they start decorating their walls with the same type of art pieces. According to the most conservative postcolonial discourse, the act of turning indigenous Nigerian objects into mere decoration is traditionally attached to Western dominant individuals (in this case, their white American neighbours). Yet, it is Obiora who assumes the role of colonizer when carrying out the African pieces of art’s

diversion and transforming them into commodities for possession and display. At this point, he epitomizes “the Western taste for the things of the past and of the other” (Appadurai 1986: 27).

Secondly, his role as story-teller strengthens his domineering position. Many academics and writers have approached words and story-telling as important devices for control and repression. In this light, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie asserts that “like our economic and political worlds, stories are defined by [...] how they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told” (Adichie, “The Danger of A Single Story”). According to her, their relevance lies in the fact that “they are very dependant on power,” and defines power as “the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definite story of that person” (Adichie).

Therefore, I argue that Obiora exerts this power every time he tells her wife the story of the art pieces that he brings home, because he projects his subjectivity on the items as well as on Nkem’s imagination. As Nkem acknowledges at the beginning of the narrative, it is only her husband who makes the apparent lifeless objects look alive. Even though sometimes she doubts about what he says, she is impressed by the passion Obiora transmits when telling his stories:

We never appreciate what we have, Obiora always ended by saying, before repeating the story of the foolish head of state who had gone to the National Museum in Lagos and forced the curator to give him a four-hundred-year old bust, which he then gave to the British queen as a present. Sometimes Nkem doubts Obiora’s facts, but she listens, because of how passionately he speaks, because of how his eyes glisten as though he is about to cry (Adichie 2009: 25).

As it happens throughout the narrative, Obiora is here assuming the role of story-teller, and by doing so, he projects a subjective biography upon the art piece. It can be argued

that it is precisely by means of his art collection that he exerts his power over his wife, fostering a subjective unique version and point of view of history.

While this analysis establishes a link between Obiora and the figure of the colonizer as traditionally understood, a parallelism between Nkem and the objects for possession works, in my view, as the core of the narrative. This correlation can be perceived in the fact that both are diverted and “commoditized.” In this sense, Arjun Appadurai claims that in many societies women are regarded as commodities. She says that “marriage transactions might constitute the context in which women are most intensely, and most appropriately, regarded as exchange values” (Appadurai 1986: 15). In the same way that Obiora does with the items that he brings from Nigeria, he can also be approached as the responsible for imposing a “single story” on his wife. As a result, she is dislocated, since marriage is the only reason why Nkem moves to the United States before being partly abandoned by her husband, and her voiceless and dependent condition in the marital relationship highlights her passive role:

Nkem picks up the mask and presses her face to it; it is cold, heavy, lifeless. Yet when Obiora talks about it- and all the rest- he makes them seem breathing, warm (2009: 25).

In this excerpt, the passivity of the female protagonist is remarked. Nkem, like the art pieces, remains speechless, and it is only by means of her husband that she acquires a voice. The connection between the mask and Nkem is evidenced through the union of both faces (maybe in a visceral desire to express), and the use of the epithets “cold,” “heavy” and “lifeless,” which seem to allude to an state of metaphorical death. They could also be depicting her lack of free will and autonomy while remaining in clear opposition to the epithets “breathing” and “warm,” possibly related to Obiora.

As Kopytoff points out, a person can be commoditized in the sense that he/she can be materialized (Kopytoff 1986: 65). The individual can be taken out of a certain society or group and then resocialized and rehumanized by receiving a new social identity. Nkem is objectified after being desocialized from Nigeria and resocialized in America in the form of a wife in a marital status. In this sense, Nkem becomes a possession and a decorative piece displayed not only in the eyes of Obiora (who has a girlfriend in Lagos and visits Nkem just on little occasions), but also in her white American neighborhood due to racial and cultural differences: "...the neighbors didn't start to ask about him until later. Where was your husband? Was something wrong?" (24), or "...her accent, her foreignness, made her seem helpless to them" (24). These sentences evidence how she turns into another art piece, a commodity, fostered by Obiora's actor role.

Accordingly, Appadurai and Kopytoff support that commodities can be approached as having life histories, and "the commodity phase of the life history of an object does not exhaust its biography; it is culturally regulated; and its interpretation is open to individual manipulation to some degree" (Appadurai 1986: 17). Nkem's materialization is emphasized by the analogy established between the art pieces and herself in terms of their speechless condition. The commoditization of both Nkem and the items prevent them from having a strong and authoritarian voice, which gives Obiora the space for manipulating his wife while imposing his own historical view on the art pieces. In the same way, Nkem's biography is subjugated to certain cultural and social restrictions that silence her individual voice:

They never decided that she would stay with the children- Okey was born three years after Adanna. It just happened. She stayed back at first, after Adanna, to take a number of computer courses while Obiora said it was a good idea. The Obiora registered Adanna in preschool, when Nkem was pregnant with Okey. Then he found a good private elementary school and told her they were lucky it was so close. [...] She had never imagined that her children would go to school, sit side

by side with white children whose parents owned mansions on lonely hills, never imagined this life. So she said nothing (2009: 27).

The sentences that open and close this paragraph are remarkable because they stress her lack of participation in family decisions, or even decisions concerning her own life. The narrative voice tells us how she is imposed a passive role and accepts it, mainly as a result of all the luxuries that her marriage offers her and that she never imagined she would have as a low-class Nigerian girl. When at the end of the story Nkem rebels against Obiora and communicates him her decision of leaving the United States, she realizes that “he has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand” and wonders if the reason why he liked her is that ‘she deferred to him, that she let him speak for both of them’ (2009: 41).

Additionally, the interconnection between Nkem and the art pieces can be explored under the light of the theme of imitation. The contraposition of real and imitational things is constant throughout the narrative. Nkem watches the art pieces, “imagining the originals” (26). She also wishes her children say “daddy” “to someone real, not a voice on the phone” (26). While she cuts her hair, she remembers a woman she once met, who had short natural hair without any relaxer or texturizer. She discusses with Amaechi, her house girl, how hard it is for her to find real African yams in the United States and “what Rugrats character the children mimic best” (33). As the story develops, she seems to realize about the fakeness of her life, and starts aiming for a “real” husband, a “real” dad for the children, “real” African products, even for the “real” her that was lost once she got married and moved to America:

She does miss home (...) She has sometimes thought about moving back home, but never seriously, never concretely. She goes to Pilates class twice a week in Philadelphia with her neighbor; she bakes cookies for her children’s classes and

hers are always the favorites; she expects banks to have drive-ins. America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin (2009: 37).

The nostalgic tone adopted in this excerpt suggests that her longing for home might be partly caused by living a fake and imitational life in the United States. The need of being in contact with her “original” self is triggered by the imitational art pieces that constantly foster her reflection. For this reason, she spends her time “imagining the originals, imagining the lives behind them” (Adichie 2009: 26).

The correlation between Nkem and the African items in terms of their imitational status can be further developed, since both suffer a recontextualization in America that problematizes their authenticity and, thus, their value. In the introduction to *The Social Life of Things* (1986), Appadurai argues that in premodern times it was the exclusivity what gave value to a commodity, because distances were longer and the production was limited. However, he adds that in current modern West, “the reproduction of objects in a mass basis becomes possible, the dialogue between consumers and the original source becomes more direct, and middle-class consumers become capable of vying these objects. The only way to preserve the function of these commodities in the prestige economies [...] is to complicate the criteria of authenticity” (Appadurai 1986: 44-45). Even though, as I have previously argued, the fake art pieces that Obiora brings to the house carry an important role in the redefinition of his patriarchal dominance, their value is low in practice due to their imitational nature. Nkem can be depicted likewise, because although she constitutes one of the relevant pieces that conforms Obiora’s patriarchal “museum,” her value in the house or in the family is diminished through her voiceless condition and her little participation in decisions concerning her marriage.

Similarly, her authenticity and valuable status as a woman and as a wife is questioned when she finds out about her husband's infidelity. Her friend tells her on the phone that the girl with whom Obiora is living in Lagos has short and curly hair. She adds that she has "small tight curls. Not a relaxer. A texturizer" (Adichie 2009: 22). The detail of the texturizer (used for softening thick hair) becomes relevant, since it evidences the fact that Obiora's lover imitates a type of hair that she does not originally have. Nkem decides to follow the same steps when she "picks up the scissors" and leaves "hair about the length of a thumb nail, just enough to tighten into curls with a texturizer" (28). It can be claimed that this change of style constitutes a desperate attempt to recover Obiora by imitating his lover's hairstyle, which can be translated into an urgent need for stressing her authentic and original status as Obiora's wife.

Nonetheless, I argue that despite the decontextualization of Nkem and the items, together with the consequent diversion and appropriation that they undergo, Nkem finds the chance to evolve as an individual by means of the art pieces. Kopytoff asserts that biographies for things can be constructed when applying the same types of questions that apply to human beings. He deepens into this question by claiming that in developed societies "a person's social identities are not only numerous but often conflicting," which causes "uncertainty of identity," and adds that "in the homogenized world of commodities, and eventful biography becomes the story of various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context" (Kopytoff 1986: 89). In this respect, in her analysis of the story "Imitation," Alison P. Watts remarks that 'social hierarchies and power differentials suggest that many "established" object biographies and historical narratives speak in the voice of the dominant, hegemonic discourse' (P. Watts 2011: 17).

Following Kopytoff's theory, I approach Nkem as a subject who takes advantage of the uncertainties of valuation and of identity in commodities to re-articulate the dominant biographical narratives beneath these objects. This allows Nkem "to engage in simultaneous relationship with multiple ghosts in order to locate and embrace the biographies that best speak to and influence her identity formation process" (P. Watts 2011:17).

Therefore, while the relation with the objects releases Nkem from her voiceless condition and drives her towards a rebellion against the patriarchal constraints, the objects in "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004), written by Leonardo Valencia and included in his short story collection *La Luna Nómada* (2004), seem, by contrast, to reduce the main character's free will by imprisoning him behind the claustrophobic limits of Cuba. Significantly, "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004) takes place in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, and the narration depicts the urge of Victoriano Masdeú's friends to leave the island, presumably because of their political ideas against the Castro's revolutionary regime. Before escaping from Cuba, they entrust him those valuable objects they cannot take with them, and moved by this responsibility, Victoriano locks himself up in a secret room to store and take care of these items. The story focuses on the process of isolation that Victoriano gradually undergoes, which seems to be parallel to that experienced by the island because of Castro's politics.

In this light, the title "El Ojo del Cíclope" is a symbol of political control. Luis, a poet who stays with Victoriano until he dies due to a heart failure, utters one of the most remarkable sentences in the narrative: "-No Podemos irnos de Cuba (...) La Ananké, la fatalidad está ahí, con su ojo fijo de Cíclope" (2004: 17). Indeed, the Ananké is, according to the Greek mythology, the representation of fatality and the inevitable (Geller). Thus, the author could be establishing a connection between the cyclop eye and the political

control exerted by the Castro's regime, addressing the cyclop eye as a metaphor of repression that they cannot escape.

Furthermore, the sense of fatality and the inability to avoid the Cuban national borders is reinforced when Luis gives some of his literary manuscripts to Victoriano and tells him "me voy a la Última Thule" (2004:17). Once more, the author employs the Greek mythology to represent the difficulty of avoiding political repression and of crossing national borders. These limits are symbolized by the Thule, a mythical name used for denoting a place located beyond the known world (Geller). Eventually, the reader finds out that the fatality lies in the fact that Luis dies in the island without having overstepped the Cuban borders.

As it happens in Adichie's "Imitation" (2009), strong bonds between Victoriano and the items that his friends entrust him are established at the core of Valencia's narrative. I suggest that, unlike Nkem, the items affect negatively to the main character in "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004). Ultimately, under the influence of his strange collection, Victoriano turns into a dependant man imprisoned among the walls of his room, of his country. His inner decadence reaches its peak with the death of his friend Luis who, also influenced by the claustrophobic fixity of the objects, seems to find in death the only way to walk beyond the limits of Cuba.

On another note, while in Adichie's "Imitation" (2009) I have argued that Obiora assumes the role of colonizer and Nkem that of the colonized, in "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004) this analogy is not as clear, although the poet Leoncio Luna can be approached as the former and Victoriano, as the latter. Firstly, albeit unconsciously, both characters divert some of the commodities that they receive. For instance, the tiny Chinese dragon Pi-Hsieh or the Peruvian teacups, originally used in a sacred and pragmatic way, are possessed by them

for an only decorative purpose. In this sense, both characters can be regarded as dominant figures by understanding their actions as acts of appropriation, and because it is by means of assigning new meanings to these objects that Luna and Obiora shape their identity as custodians. However, despite their acts of appropriation lead them to an authoritarian position highlighted by the depiction of their room as “un depósito fiel y seguro de la calle Trocadero” (Valencia 2004: 14), the narrative voice is clear from the beginning in revealing that Victoriano does not exert this domination purposely: “Como no podía llevárselo, le pedía que lo guardara para cuando volviera a la isla. El coleccionista accedió. Pero lo hizo sin ninguna alegría” (14).

Secondly, the fact that both characters become collectors and owners of a private “museum” emulates Obiora’s actions and stresses the analogy between these three characters and the figure of the colonizer. Their authority comes from the treasuring of the objects and their consequent diversion. Whether Nkem’s husband fills up his house with African art pieces to reinforce his authority, their collection of valuable items as the product of their decontextualization gives Victoriano and Luna a privileged position.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, Victoriano’s depiction as a dominant figure is, at times, deconstructed, since his speechless condition approaches him to Nkem, and his subjugated condition is enhanced at some points throughout the story:

Victoriano limpiaba los objetos con fruición de numismático y repetía los datos curiosos de las causales enseñanzas de su amigo. Leoncio Luna contemplaba placenteramente las antiguallas y evocaba otras de su propia familia. De cuando en cuando, fabulaba sin reticencias sobre la pieza de turno que Victoriano desempolvaba y pulía, mientras impregnaba con el humo de sus cigarros los breves metros cuadrados de la habitación (Valencia 1995: 16).

In this excerpt, the parallelism between Leoncio Luna and Obiora becomes more evident. By assigning new meanings to these objects, Luna makes them his own (“evocaba otras de su propia familia”) and shapes his identity as a story-teller. Arjun Appadurai paraphrases Igor Kopytoff when pointing out that commodities can be approached as having life histories, and in that cases the commodity is culturally regulated, and its interpretation is open to individual manipulation (Appadurai 1986: 17). In this light, Luis’s domineering status is highlighted by his performance as fabulist, thus echoing Obiora in the sense that both impose a narrative on the objects, which leads them to assume the colonizer position. While Victoriano cleans the objects, Luis *fabula*. The author might be taking advantage of the ambiguity of this term in Spanish (to narrate or to make things up), in order to emphasize Luis’ ability to force definite stories on the objects. Therefore, this excerpt suggests that, while Luis emulates Obiora when it comes to using story-telling as an effective weapon to exert his power, a correlation between Victoriano and Nkem can be traced in terms of their role of passive listeners. In this respect, the objects’ stories reach Victoriano through Luis, placing the former in a less powerful position. His perception of the items depends on his friend, and their relationship reminds to that of Obiora and Nkem. Thus, both Obiora and Luis are the ones who make apparent lifeless objects look alive, who turns them into items with “habla erudita” (Valencia 1995: 15).

Consequently, as evidenced in the excerpt shown above, Victoriano takes a passive role. He is a mere listener, and his speechless and motionless condition is accentuated throughout the narration by means of phrases such as “compensar los años de silencio” (18) or “habitación intransitable” (16) used to describe his situation. The former might be addressing his political silence because of holding ideas against the Castro’s regime. The latter establishes a relation between the character and the space he occupies, whose

impassability could be evidencing Victoriano's inability to move, his fixity, and the fatality of not being able to leave Cuba.

Additionally, this fixity enhances his submissive character, as it leads him to the same materialization process that Nkem undergoes in "Imitation" (2009). The analogy established between the objects and Victoriano is supported by his immobility, both physical (as the responsibility of custodian prevents him from leaving the room), and mental (as the stories Luis tells him about the objects attest his dependence on him when it comes to verbalizing all the items that conform the room). The fact that he understands them through Luis's point of view prevents him from having a strong voice and an active participation. Hence, although he can be approached as a powerful figure due to his role of collector, he also ends up becoming one more object, establishing a strong bond between himself and the possessions in terms of their commodization. His physical and mental attachment to the objects leads him to the impossibility of escaping the system of control established in the island.

In another vein, the relation between Victoriano and the objects is also encouraged by the nostalgic tone adopted throughout the narrative:

Limipaba las joyas, conservaba las reliquias y merodeaba en sus recuerdos, colocándolo todo en un hacinamiento furtivo que le servía para afianzarse en desorden a un mundo cifrado en el pasado. Nunca supimos cómo se sentía frente a la memoria de quienes pusieron en sus manos aquellos objetos (2004: 17).

The nostalgia that Victoriano feels might be related to the longing for "his Cuba," that one before the Revolution. In this sense, it can be pointed out that Victoriano's and Nkem's reflection is fostered by the objects. Both spend their time imagining the lives

behind every item, missing the days when they felt more authentic, freed from the political and social constraints that limit their free will.

Significantly, despite all the similitudes presented, the value hold by the objects in the two stories reveals itself in different ways. As I mentioned before, the relation between Nkem and the art pieces finds its reason in the fact that both are “imitational,” as the Nigerian female character is living a fake life in the United States with a husband who does not allow her to raise her authentic voice. Whereas at the end of “Imitation,” Nkem is influenced by the authenticity (and not exclusivity) of the only original African mask that her husband brings home, I assert that the objects in “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004) influence Victoriano in terms of their exclusivity (and not authenticity). Arjun Appadurai states in the introduction of *The Social Lie of Things* (1986) that, although in premodern times the value of things was marked by their exclusivity and the difficulty of making items travel because of long distances, currently it is the criteria of authenticity what provides the value (Appadurai 1986).

Even though none of the objects that Victoriano treasures in his room are fake or imitational, their authenticity does not affect Victoriano positively as it happens to Nkem. By contrast, Victoriano’s value diminishes throughout the story and his role of collector, depicted as a relevant responsibility at the beginning of the story, turns into something ephemeral and with no transcendency whatsoever as shown in the last lines of the narrative: “Creyó en herederos y viudas repentinas que vendrían a agradecerle su fidelidad (...) Pero solo Anita Growley fue a retirar el Breguet, al apuro y sin reminiscencias” (2004: 18).

Thus, as stated before, even though the female protagonist in “Imitation” (2009) conforms a valuable “piece” in Obiora’s “museum,” her value is diminished through her lack of

voice and activity. Victoriano can be approached likewise because, although he is a key element when it comes to guarding his friends' objects, his role as custodian is presented as purposely and worthless at the end of the narrative. The value of Victoriano as a loyal friend and that of the objects decreases together. Victoriano resembles the Breguet watch and the rest of the items in terms of their exclusivity. He becomes the only one in the island with such a valuable "museum" and who anti-Castro people can trust. In this sense, Victoriano can also be approached as a strong voice who challenges the Castro's government by collecting all these valuable items. His strength and rebelliousness emerge from possessing the items and, consequently, building a small capitalist space on the margins of the Cuban Revolution. However, his responsibility and exclusivity turn against him, as they generate his fixity and impossibility of escaping from the island. In short, unlike Nkem, Victoriano is negatively influenced by the exclusivity and immobility that the items emanate.

Indeed, in the words of Arjun Appadurai, the interest of regimes of control is to "freeze the flow of commodities by creating a closed universe of commodities and a rigid set of regulations about how they are to move" (Appadurai 1986: 57). Therefore, both Luis and Victoriano unconsciously end up allying with the Cuban revolutionary regime by stopping themselves and all the objects from circulating. By doing so, they become their own jailers under "la condena de no salir jamás de Cuba" (2004: 16), and the incapability for crossing borders, with the consequent isolation, drive Victoriano to his decadence. Therefore, the first conclusion that I extract from the texts is that both authors are problematizing the traditional postcolonial binomial colonizer / colonized. In "Imitation," Obiora, despite being Nigerian, acts as the traditional Western-European figure in the way in which he builds up the relationship with his wife and the art pieces in terms of dominance. In the same way, Victoriano and Luna, despite belonging to a postcolonial

country, adopt the colonizer position when appropriating foreign objects and imposing their own discourse on them through their diversion.

In this respect, the binomial colonizer / colonized that has characterized the traditional postcolonial theory is blurred in both narratives. In this sense, I support scholars such as Michal Frenkel and Yehouda Shenhav, who have argued that postcolonial studies have traditionally relied on a neat and binary division that does not recognize “that the history of management and organizations should include the fusion between the colonizer and the colonized and their mutual effects on each other” (Frenkel & Shenhav 2006: 855). Both Adichie and Valencia challenge conventional postcolonial theory by depicting Obiora, Valencia and Luna as personifications of the colonizer in terms of the imposition of biographies that they exert on the objects and the consequent diversion.

The second conclusion is based on the belief that, by establishing bonds between the objects and the main characters in “Imitation” and “El Ojo del Cíclope,” Adichie and Valencia give shape to a literary voice who aims at liberating himself from the social and political borders that limit his free will. I argue that these borders are represented in the form of patriarchy (in the case of Nkem) and the nation-state (in the case of Victoriano), since both conform controlling devices that impose certain behavioural patterns on individuals (Butler 1997; Jones 2012). The demolition of the rigid boundary between commodities and people, and the consequent chance of the characters to project their own subjectivities on the items, allow Nkem and Victoriano to question the source of power that oppresses them and to develop towards a more authentic and free version of themselves. While I have supported that Nkem achieves it encouraged by the authenticity of the African mask that fosters her rebellion, Victoriano fails, as he succumbs to the objects’ immobility through which, according to Appadurai, tyrannical powers are nurtured (Appadurai 1986: 57). Yet, despite of this differentiation, both characters form

part of a network of voices that deny the hegemonic power the task to define subjects by claiming their right to self-determination.

The non-cooperation with the institutional authorities constitutes a powerful resistance weapon when it comes to undermining the authority of the nation-state (Rendón Corona 2011: 79). In his article “What are institutions?” (2006), Hodgson revisits some of the most relevant approaches to the concept of institution and encompasses organizations, social structures, socially transmitted normative rules, and inherited behaviours or dispositions under this term. In this regard, Max Weber remarks that modern States legitimize their monopoly on violence through various ways among which he highlights “a body of rationally created rules we call the law” (Weber 1991: 79). This theory is informed in the works of Reece Jones (2012) and Frederick Mayer (2014), who point at bureaucracy and institutionalism as pillars of the nation-state, and understand individuals as “embedded in institutions that constrain their choice” (Mayer 2014: 37).

In this chapter, I will be examining the short stories “Odiar el Verano” (2013) by Gleyvis Coro Montanet, “The American Embassy” (2009) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Union of our Home” (1999) by Osama Alomar, and “El Sueño de Dayo” (2007) by César Mba A. Abogo. I argue that these narratives contain a literary depiction of anti-institutional individuals who, by refusing to dance to bureaucracy’s tune and confronting security guards, break with the implicit collaboration with the State by deciding to stop complying with its institutions, for the authority of the State finds its expression in juridical codes and institutional organizations (Weber 1991; Jones 2012; Mayer 2014). More specifically, I base myself on North’s theory to differentiate between formal and informal institutional constraints, understanding the former as “rules, laws and constitutions” and the latter as “norms of behavior, conventions, self-imposed codes of conduct” (North 1994: 360) in order to support the argument that these literary voices challenge both formal and informal institutions for the purpose of acquiring self-

autonomy and freedom, since according to rational institutionalism, “individuals are embedded in institutions that constrain their choice” (Mayer 2014: 37).

Following these arguments, I suggest that the confrontation against the institution constitutes an act of empowerment in favour of the global citizen, while this non-cooperation with the institutional authorities represents one of the most striking features of Ghandi’s passive resistance (Rendón Corona 2011: 79). In this regard, Rendón Corona asserts that the legal authority can be questioned by civil disobedience and points at the non-cooperation as a protest directed towards anything humiliating for the human being (2011: 79). Therefore, the literary voices analyzed in this chapter carry out a subtle attack to political and social institutions by rejecting bureaucratic processes and social conventions. In other words, by confronting or denouncing the abuse of the institutional authority in diverse ways and not complying with it, these literary voices erode social impositions and the the nation-state’s boundaries.

3.1 Refusing to Dance to Bureaucracy's Tune: An Unsuccessful Dialogue between the Individual and the Administration in Gleyvis Coro Montanet's "Odiar el Verano" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The American Embassy."

"Odiar el Verano" (2013) is a short story written by the Cuban writer Gleyvis Coro Montanet and included in the Cuban anthology *Nuevarrativa Cubana*, published in the online magazine *Sampsonia Way* in 2013. The story adopts the form of a dialogue between, presumably, a mature married couple, who goes to a custom office in order to ask for asylum due to the high temperatures of their country. The officer behind the pane does not accept that the reasons why they are requesting the asylum are climatic, instead of political or economic. After some humorous discussion that, although starts calmly ends up aggressively, the woman tells her husband to give up as "hundido en es acabina y con ese uniforme, debe estar más fastidiado con el calor que nosotros" (Coro Montanet 2013).

From the beginning of the story, the figure of the officer is depicted in very negative terms. His authoritarian and inflexible attitude is reinforced through the rigidity that his words convey: "las variantes son "económicas" o "políticas". Nadie pide asilo por motivos climáticos," (Coro Montanet 2013), "¿Pero..., serán imbéciles?!- estrujó la plantilla el oficial." (2013), or "-Usted echó a perder la planilla- dijo el oficial y les ofreció una nueva-Escribió "climáticas" y esta es una encuesta de meras cruces, que no admite caligrafías" (2013). Based on this evidence, it could be asserted that the narrative constitutes a criticism towards institutionalism, and that the officer epitomizes the rigidity of national borders, as he blocks the entrance of the couple in the new territory:

-Claro que lo creo- el oficial acercó la boca al agujero del vidrio. Les hizo una señal misteriosa, como pidiéndoles que también ellos se aproximaran, por su lado, al cristal de la cabina- ¿Por qué verdadera razón están pidiendo asilo? (Coro Montanet 2013).

This excerpt shows the impossibility of reaching an agreement because the officer does not believe their climatic reasons. In this sense, I argue that the discussion between the couple and the officer symbolizes the dialogue between the individual and the State, which encompasses the struggle for mutual understanding due to the rigidity of the latter. The two individuals participate in a brief argument with the officer, in which any attempt to convince him about their climatic reasons for the request of asylum fails. Thus, the couple remains imprisoned in a bureaucratic cage where their free will is subjugated to the State apparatus that the official embodies. In this regard, the superiority of the official and the power that he exerts over the couple is evidenced when, already showing a feeling of resignation, the wife tells her husband the following: “Marca lo político. [...] debe ser culpa del gobierno” (Coro Montanet 2013).

Likewise, the officers and visa interviewers in “The American Embassy” (2009) represent the institutionalism that according to Mayer enhances the nation-state. The story takes place in the American embassy in Lagos and depicts a Nigerian woman who is queuing because she needs to get a visa in order to leave the country. Her son and her husband, a well-known journalist, have been killed due to the opposition the latter showed towards the General Abacha’s regime. The narration alternates the description of the mistreatment the Nigerian people receive by the North- American administration in the embassy with flashbacks of the traumatic moment when three men in black trousers burst in her house in Nigeria looking for her husband and killed their son.

Importantly, while the officer in “Odiar el Verano” (2013) shows an authoritarian attitude by keeping a strict point of view and yelling at the couple (“¿Pero...serán imbéciles?!”), the visa interviewers and the soldiers in “The American Embassy” (2009) are depicted similarly, as they behave in the same way when exerting their power over the immigrants who apply for a visa:

At the next window, the American visa interviewer was speaking too loudly into his his microphone, “I’m not going to accept your lies, sir!”

The Nigerian visa applicant in the dark suit began to shout and to gesture, waving his see-through plastic file that bulged with documents, “This is wrong! How can you treat people like this? I will take this to Washington!” until a security guard came and led him away (Adichie 2009: 141).

As this excerpt reveals, both figures act as tyrannical forces that oppress visa applicants while serving the State. The interviewer shouts at the solicitant and the security guard expels him from the embassy. In fact, the negative image of the soldiers is further developed as the main character finds similarities between the soldiers who killed her child and those at the door of the embassy:

“Sometimes I wonder if the American embassy people look out of their window and enjoy watching the soldiers flogging people”, the man behind her was saying. (...) She looked across the street again; the soldier was walking away now, and even from this distance she could see the glower on his face. The glower of a grown man who could flog another grown man if he wanted to, when he wanted to. His swagger was as flamboyant as that of the men who four nights ago broke her back door open and barged in (2009: 131).

Thus, the narrative voice establishes a connection between the killers of his son and the soldier who works for the embassy in terms of the “glower on his face” and his flamboyant swagger. This explicit parallelism, as well as the action of flogging people, accentuates a negative portrayal of the guards. Sentences such as “if he wanted to, when

he wanted to” show the soldiers’ superiority and power, who at some points in the narration are explicitly referred as tyrants who use their power to patronize Nigerian visa applicants: ““see how the people are pleading with the soldier,’ the man behind her said” (Adichie 2009: 129).

In a similar vein, visa interviewers appear as oppressive figures in control. Following Reece Jones’ idea of bureaucracy as a fundamental pillar for the nation-state (Jones 2012), I argue that in both stories the administrative worker is also depicted in authoritarian terms. In “Odiar el Verano” (2013), the sentence “Usted echó a perder la planilla (...) esta es una encuesta de meras cruces, que no admite caligrafías,” (Coro Montanet 2013), uttered by the guard, poses the administration’s inability to understand the real reason why the characters want to request asylum. In this sense, the author uses humour (since asking for asylum due to climatic reasons is clearly a humorous device) to expose the uselessness of bureaucracy when it comes to meeting people’s needs. This point is further supported by other sentences along the story such as “pero es una pregunta muy cerrada, si al menos tuviera líneas donde uno pudiera explicar” (Coro Montanet 2013) or “ya les dije que es una encuesta de meras cruces...” (Coro Montanet 2013). The authority that the template emanates becomes more obvious when, eventually, the characters give up in their attempt to request asylum, since the box for climatic reason simply does not exist.

Similarly, the criticism towards institutionalism is present in “The American Embassy” (2009) from the first lines, when the narrator describes the main female character standing “in line outside the American embassy in Lagos” while holding “a blue plastic file of documents tucked under her arm” (Adichie 2009: 128). Thus, we approach the character as unmovable, fixed in a line while awaiting her turn, and the words “tucked under her arm” seem to depict the paperwork as an extension of her body. Accordingly, the supremacy of visa interviewers is evidenced through the atmosphere of tension that the

narrative voice portrays among those who stand in line. The fact that they all regard the interviewer as the person who holds the power and accepts or refuses their requests, is made clear when the narrative voice claims that most of them have not slept at all thinking that they had to arrive earlier, for they were afraid “that the American embassy might decide not to open its gates today, and they would have to do it all over again the day after tomorrow since the embassy did not open on Wednesdays...” (2009: 130). This sentence carries a strong criticism towards institutionalism in terms of its slowness and lack of empathy, thus placing the institution over people with words such as “might decide not to open its gates today” (2009: 130).

Furthermore, the atmosphere of tension that emerges from the confrontation between individuals and the administration is perceived in the words of the man who stands in line behind the main character, who claims that “they don’t give our people immigrant visas anymore, unless the person is rich by American standards” (2009: 134) or when, after asking her for the reasons why she is there, he answers: “Asylum? That will be very difficult to prove” (2009: 134). The clash that at the end of the story takes place between the main character and the woman behind the pain emerges precisely from the fact that she needs some piece of evidence to demonstrate that her child has been killed due to political reasons if she wants the asylum:

“Can you prove it? Do you have any evidence to show that?”

“Yes. But I buried it yesterday. My son’s body”

“Ma’am, I am sorry about your son”, the visa interviewer said. “But I need some evidence that you know it was the government. (...) I need some evidence of the government’s involvement and I need some evidence that you will be in danger if you stay on in Nigeria” (Adichie 2009: 140).

This conversation points at the administration as an accomplice of government and an entity unable to help the Nigerian character. Also, it suggests the superiority of the bureaucratic evidence and paperwork over any kind of humanity. As it happens in “Odiar el Verano” (2013), the tyranny of the civil servants is highlighted by their yelling against the requesters: “at the next window, the American visa interviewer was speaking too loudly into his microphone, ‘I am not going to accept your lies, sir!’” (Adichie 2009: 141). Significantly, at the end of the story, pushed by this mistreatment that she witnesses, the main character decides to leave without completing her request, in a clear parallelism with the couple in “Odiar el Verano” (2013). Therefore, I argue that both narratives attack national formal institutions, that is, administrative obstacles based on local “rules, laws and constitutions” (North 1964: 360) by deciding not to collaborate with them.

3.2 Unheard Voices Behind Institutional Bars: A Critique to Global and Social Institutions in Osama Alomar’s “The Union of Our Home” and César Mba A. Abogo’s “El Sueño de Dayo.”

In the narratives “The Union of our Home” (2014), written by the Syrian author Osama Alomar and included in his short story collection *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), and “El Sueño de Dayo” (2007), by the César Mba Abogo and included in *El Porteador de Marlow* (2007), the authors also highlight the failure of a security and bureaucratic system when it comes to meeting individual needs. Even though they use the same literary tools to carry out this task, I argue that these stories attack political and social institutions in a more global way and from a broader perspective than Coro Montanet and Adichie in their narratives.

To begin, Osama Alomar uses his fiction to criticize the lack of unity among Arabian countries in comparison to the European Union. The narrative voice in “The Union of Our Home” (2014) denounces that Arabian citizens cannot cross borders “without opening their luggage, without security’s inquisitive gaze” (Alomar 2014: 15), in opposition to EU citizens, who “only needed to flash their identity card and quickly return it to their jacket pocket, as smiles and polite words surrounded them like golden belt...” (15).

Accordingly, as in the narratives analyzed in the previous section, he offers a negative picture of security guards by underlining their “inquisitive gaze” (15), which depicts them as accomplices of a rigid border system. Also, the author portrays bureaucracy as another obstacle for the free flow of citizens in the last sentence: “I thought about the Union of our home where I was obliged to submit to searches and surveillance and questioning

whenever I wanted to cross the border of my brother's room" (15). The strength of these lines lies in the juxtaposition of the concept of home and "searches," "surveillance" and "questioning." The relation of "home" with these terms shocks the reader and points at "home" as a hostile place where individuals need to confront fixed regulations that divide them from their neighbours. In this sense, I suggest that in Alomar's narrative, bureaucracy is referred to through the words 'searches,' 'surveillance,' and "questioning," consequently represented as a powerful source of repression.

On another note, "El Sueño de Dayo" (2007) can be divided into two parts. The first one introduces the reader to an African boy called Dayo and his thoughts and experiences as he grew up in Africa and, afterwards, as an immigrant in Europe. This character is depicted as a man who finds himself anchored to Africa and the prejudices and limitations attached to this continent. The narrative voice adopts a critical stand towards the determinism in Dayo's life, imposed by family, friends and teachers in his country of origin as well as by Europeans. In the article "What are institutions?" (2006), Hodgson revisits some of the most relevant approaches to the concept of institutions. He draws on influential scholars within this field to remark History and social inherited habits as institutions. He claims that "by structuring, constraining, and enabling individual behaviours, institutions have the power to mold the capacities and behaviours of agents in fundamental ways: they have the capacity to change aspirations instead of merely enabling or constraining them" (Hodgson 2006: 7).

Thus, along the narrative, the narrator constantly alludes to Dayo's feeling of being dependant to different social conventions. These social conventions are based on social institutions that, in words of Allan Wells, "form an element in a more general concept, known as social structure" (Wells 1970: 3). Indeed, it is from his early childhood that Dayo starts suspecting of his limitations, since he feels that his life is "anclada en alguna

parte” (Abogo 2007: 17). As he grows up, Dayo continues perceiving himself as anchored and limited, as well as feeling different from the rest of the people in his hometown. It is in school where teachers eventually can see his uniqueness and intelligence and encourage Dayo’s mum to send his son to Europe in search of a better future:

Pero pese a que Dayo estaba loco, el origen de la supuesta locura era desconocido y como los profesores no paraban de alabar su inteligencia, todos llegaron a la conclusion de que Dayo había nacido para ser científico. Dayo, dijo Rigoberto, un profesor de Física (...) siente casi de una manera física la gravitación de la ciencia. Con la certeza de que en Europa Dayo se iba a convertir en científico, su madre, aconsejada por todos los notables del clan, decidió mandar a Dayo a estudiar río abajo (Abogo 2007: 18).

According to Hodgson, “institutions are perpetuated not simply through the convenient coordination rules that they offer. They are perpetuated because they confine and mold individual aspirations and create a foundation for their existence upon the many individual minds that they taint with their foundations” (2006: 7). As this excerpt shows, Dayo’s aspirations are defined by external agents, his teacher and his mum, who impose social conventions on him: they decide that he needs to go to Europe and that he needs to become a scientist. I approach them as institutions, understanding them as informal norms (North) and “settled habits of thought common to the generality of men” (Veblen 1909: 626). As Hodgson claims:

Habits are the constitutive material of institutions, providing them with enhanced durability, power, and normative authority. In turn, by reproducing shared habits of thought, institutions create strong mechanisms of conformism and normative agreement (2006: 7).

Significantly, the convention supported on the belief that travelling to Europe and becoming a scientist automatically would improve his life is demolished once Dayo arrives in Europe. The loneliness and sadness that he feels since he was a child increases

and causes on him “una tristeza *ojos abajo*” (Abogo 2007: 18). This melancholy is not only the result of the impositions that he takes with him from Africa, but also of the limitations that he finds in the new land. Soon, Dayo realizes that:

África colgaba de sus espaldas, que era el color de su rostro y el calor de su cuerpo (...) conoció a chicos africanos, como él, desprovistos de la luz del corazón y los ojos, marchitándose en trabajos que eran como el uranio en la sangre; chicas africanas vendiendo sus cuerpos quiméricos como paradojas (2007: 19).

This epiphany shows the racial and social constraints that, in the form of institutions, hinder Dayo’s freedom for self-determination and action. The character feels limited by the prejudices that Europeans “hang on” him, and the narrative voice depicts a negative picture of the life of black people in the old continent. This negative portrayal is supported by the image of Africa hanging from Dayo’s back (symbolizing all the imposed social conventions), the deterministic fate in the blood of Africans, and the chimerical bodies of African prostitutes in European streets (these last two referring to the hard conditions blacks need to overcome as immigrants). As a result, while in “The Union of Our Home” (2014) the narrator views the security guards as institutions that act as puppets and instruments of the government, the narrative voice in “El Sueño de Dayo” (2007) remarks social conventions that are inherited by Dayo through the teachers and his mother in the form of habits or presupposed beliefs that lead him to his decadence.

In this light, “The Union of Our Home” (2014) and “El Sueño de Dayo” (2007) relate to “Odiar el Verano” (2013) and “The American Embassy” (2009) in the sense that they also criticize institutions, such as teachers, academics, family members and guards. However, they take distance from the other two stories when it comes to the depiction of an individual in confrontation with more abstract and global institutions that come in the form of “Las Potencias Unidas” and “El Consejo de Pureza” in Abogo’s story, and of

borders between Middle East countries in the case of Alomar's piece of writing. The fact of combating institutions at a bigger scale makes it harder for the literary voices to succeed in the attainment of their self-autonomy and movement aside the limits of institutional norms.

In this regard, the words "union" and "home," employed by Osama Alomar to provide his short story with a title, seem to purposely contrapose the lack of unity among Arabian countries that the author denounces. Borders in Europe are addressed as open and pledged to the defense of the free circulation of people, since their citizens have no need for "opening their luggage" and are not "subjected to a search" (2014: 15).

Moreover, in order to remark the rigidity of borders, the narrator tells us about his experiences in European and airports in the Middle- East. Whereas the former is depicted as a place where citizens are not asked to open their luggage and are surrounded by "smiles and polite words" (15), those in his part of the world are described differently, as he tells how he "was obliged to submit searches and surveillance and questioning" (15) every time he wanted to cross "the border of [his] brother's room" (15). By means of the juxtaposition of European airports and those of the Middle-East, the narrator highlights the limitations that individuals suffer in the Middle East and, having witnessed that the European border system works, he questions the reasons why the same situation cannot take place in his land. Therefore, rather than confronting a specific worker at the administration or a specific guard, the narrative voice in Alomar's story denounces the institution of Arab borders as a controlling device of the State in a direct way and from a broader perspective.

In a similar vein, the second part of "El Sueño de Dayo" (2007), the reader is introduced into Dayo's dream. He dreams about an African apocalipsis that starts with a famine that

asolates his continent, and African people fighting for the bags of food that are thrown from planes. He continuously recalling how in his dream “silbaban proyectiles, los machetes aplaudían y las expectoraciones de agonía componían una sinfonia que la BBC, CNN, TVE, TFI, Al Jazeera y otras cadenas emitían en directo” (2007: 20). Then the critical moment comes, and a Scandinavian doctor “con la piel tan blanca que daba pena mirarle” (20) announces that the manna thrown to the blacks transmitted a very catchy and mortal disease. Consequently, those Africans who had not eaten the manna start killing those who had “con machetes y trajes especiales suministrados rápida, diligente y eficazmente por las Potencias Unidas” (20), resulting in a very successful operation.

But some months later a Japanese doctor, “con la piel tan blanca que daba angustia mirarle” (21) claims that the disease has not been totally eradicated because some Africans had developed a resistance to the virus that any other human group cannot develop. To combat this discovery:

en el seno de la Asamblea de las Potencias Unidas se creó un panel de Limpieza ad hoc. La decision fue tomada inmediatamente y remitida al Consejo de Pureza. Había que exterminar a los negros. Cualqueir negro podía tener la dichosa enfermedad y pasar todos los tests. (...) Se armó una ponderosa aviación para llevar a cabo la tarea de abatir a los negros desde el aire. Los negros que estaban fuera de África, gracias a protestas de los grupos de los derechos humanos, fueron llevados a islas-prisión y esterilizados. En África se encendió el pánico. La noche no tenía mañana. La gente que podía se replegaba hacia el corazón del continente. (...) Durante los siglos de las tinieblas ya se había hecho así. (...) Pero aquella vez los africanos se equivocaron... (Abogo 007: 21).

In this light, Dayo’s dream works as a metaphor for the mistreatment of “una estirpe condenada a cuatrocientos años de agonía” (20) and summarizes the author’s point of view concerning how the rest of the world mistreats Africa. The destiny of the continent is in the hands of “Las Potencias Unidas,” “El Consejo de Pureza” (clearly alluding to the

United Nations and the WHO), Human Rights organizations and the army, that act tyrannically against African citizens by bombarding and exterminating them.

In this sense, the dream constitutes a battlefield where the character finds himself limited within the walls built around the African continent. No matter where he is, he will always feel that Africa is hanged from his back: Africa is in his color and his history. Thus, my point is that Abogo makes use of satirical images and language to evidence a negative depiction of global institutions and their view of Africa as a third category land. The creation of Dayo allows him to denounce the lack of ethics and hypocrisy in the United Nations, the WHO, the army, and the organizations dedicated to the protection of human rights when mentioning that “las Potencias Unidas aplaudieron la guerra contra la terrible enfermedad y se levantó un monumento delante de la sede central, en Virginia, en recuerdo de todos los sacrificados” (21) and “la decision [el exterminio] fue tomada inmediatamente y remitida al Consejo de Pureza. Había que exterminar a los negros. Cualquier negro podia tener la dichosa enfermedad y pasar todos los tests” (21). The narrator continues revealing that:

se armó una ponderosa aviación para llevar a cabo la tarea de abatir a los negros desde el aire (...) los negros que estaban fuera de África, gracias a las protestas de los grupos de los derechos humanos, fueron llevados a islas-prisión y esterilizados (Abogo 2007: 21).

These sections allude to the inability of global institutions to treat African citizens under the same parameters of respect and dignity that apply to other citizens. It is not until the end of the narrative that Dayo decides to confront the dream that “le acompañó todas las noches y empapó las ramas de su subconsciente” (22). In his attempt to face it, death reaches him, and when he is about to die Dayo realizes that “su vida estaba anclada en la historia” (22). In “What are institutions?” (2006), Hodgson also highlights History as an

institution that serves the State by arguing that “history provides the resources and constraints, in each case both material and cognitive, in which we think, act, or create” (2006: 8). Building on this theory, I argue that history constitutes, together with the United Nations, the WHO, organizations for human rights, and the army, one of the big institutions that the character tries to overcome. Thus, the end of the story presents a revealing moment in which the reader finds out that Dayo’s constraints are, apart from global political institutions, the History of blacks, which influences his present with his attachment to social and racial assumptions related to his black African identity.

3.3 The Rise of the Anti-Institutional Subject in the Twenty-First Century Short Story.

Having analyzed the four stories, I claim that all the authors give shape to literary voices who confront social and political constraints resulting from formal and informal institutions (North 1994). On the one hand, formal institutions appear in the form of security forces (the officer behind the cabin, the army, the soldiers at the embassy or at the airports of the Middle East), administrative spaces (the American embassy, a custom office) and international organizations such as the UN and the WHO. Accordingly, I argue that the negative image used to depict these institutions constitutes an effective attack to the nation-state and its political and territorial impositions on individuals, since institutionalism represents the empowerment of the state (Jones 2012; Mayer 2014). On the other hand, informal institutions, or “settled habits of thought common to the generality of men” (Veblen 1909: 626), are epitomized by the social impositions that Dayo experiences and that come from his family, teachers, and the History of black people. From his early childhood, his life is determined by the decisions of others: he is sent to Europe to become a scientist and, once he is there, he realizes that his race and origin are a big weight to carry due to social and racial prejudices.

Significantly, the negative depiction of formal institutions leads to an indirect attack towards the national governments in the narratives of Coro Montanet, Adichie and Alomar, which contribute to a negative propaganda of the State apparatus. In “Odiar el Verano” (2013), full of desperation as a result of the official’s inflexibility, the woman tells his husband to blame the high temperatures on the government: “marca lo político (...) Debe ser culpa del gobierno” (Coro Montanet 2013). In this regard, the two characters can be approached as being in confrontation with the political power, while the

narrator offers a derogatory image of the government through official's behaviour. Likewise, in the "The Union of our Home" (2014), Osama Alomar directly confronts Arab governments, since the story itself sheds light upon the difficulties that Arab people overcome when crossing borders in comparison to European members within the European Union. Similarly, Adichie writes about individuals who are in subordination to the nation, and explicitly addresses the Nigerian government as the cause of her affliction:

"Government" was such a big label, it was freeing, it gave people room to maneuver and excuse and re-blame. Three men. Three men like her husband and her brother or the man behind her on the visa line. Three men (Adichie 2009: 140).

The narrative voice makes a reference to the three murderers of her husband and son, three "government's agents" (140) as she explains to the visa interviewer. This excerpt allows the reader to access the character's reflection upon the word "government." It is thought as an excuse for evil and as a weapon that can have a devastating impact on people's lives. The moment in which they killed her son stalks the main character as an omnipresent ghost while awaiting her turn at the embassy. This traumatic memory remarks the fatality of people killing in the name of political power. Thus, once again, the figure of the agents is epitomizing the nation, which places the government as the ultimate murderer of her family.

No less importantly, the American government also fails her and, encouraged by the violent scene that she witnesses against one of the men asking for asylum, she decides to leave the American embassy without carrying out her request:

Was she imagining it, or was the sympathy draining from the visa interviewer's face? She saw the swift way the woman pushed her reddish-gold hair back even though it did not disturb her (...). Her future rested on her face. The face of a person who did not understand her, who probably did not cook with palm oil, or now that palm oil when fresh was a bright, bright red and when not fresh, congealed to a lumpy orange (Abogo 2009: 149).

As shown in the last lines of the narrative, the female protagonist does not feel understood by the American interviewer who shows a patronizing attitude. The author mentions the palm oil to remark the cultural differences between the two, pointing at them as the cause of their misunderstanding. In this sense, the Nigerian character remains in a political threshold, where neither her country nor the United States provides her with political recognition.

Consequently, the narratives analyzed in this chapter accentuate the inability of political and social institutions to protect and meet the citizens' needs. Rather, they represent the cause of their affliction. I argue that its existence is mainly based on the lack of understanding, the impossibility of a fluid dialogue between the individual and the institution. Such misunderstanding is triggered by physical or social borders in the form of gates, pains, territorial and social lines, which act as powerful metaphors in the narratives and problematize any possible dialogue between the institutional forces and the characters.

In "Odiar el Verano" (2013), the metaphorical depiction of national borders as fixed and inflexible is showed by the pane that separates the officer from the couple. The symbolism that Gleyvis creates in the narrative allows her to convey her ideology regarding national borders, focusing on the fictional pane (or barrier) that condemns the characters to their misunderstanding, as it is shown in the following extract:

-Claro que lo creo- el oficial acercó su boca al agujero del vidrio. Les hizo una señal misterosa, como pidiéndoles que también ellos se aproximaran, por su lado, al cristal de la cabina-. ¿Por qué verdadera razón están pidiendo asilo?" (Coro Montanet 2013).

Indeed, the pane that separates the officer from the couple can be analyzed as the tenor of a metaphor, whose vehicle is the frontier that dichotomizes the immigrant and any nation,

and whose ground is based on its inflexibility. Metaphors constitute an effective device to convey our views of the world because, as social constructivism argues, “human behavior is fundamentally a form of symbolic expression” and “human experience of reality is heavily mediated by symbolic constructions” (Mayer 2014: 44). Thus, the extract shown above exposes the impossibility for reaching an agreement, since the officer does not seem to believe their climatic reasons. It could be argued that the discussion between the couple and the guard symbolizes the dialogue between the individual and the State in terms of their lack of mutual comprehension due to the rigidity of the latter. Thus, by means of her fiction, Coro Montanet spreads a negative image of the authoritarian political force and ridicules the claustrophobic and unmovable institutional borders that constrain the couple.

Likewise, windows and gates constitute powerful images of borders in “The American Embassy” (2009). The embassy, epitomizing the U.S.A, is addressed as a fort that characters find difficult to trespass: “the American embassy might decide not to open its gates today” (130), “sometimes I wonder if the American embassy people look out of their window and enjoy watching the soldiers flogging people” (131). Gates and windows are used as tenors of a metaphor that points at borders as the vehicle and their rigidity as ground:

The embassy gates swung open and a man in brown uniform shouted, “First fifty on the line, come in and fill out the forms. All the rest, come back another day. The embassy can attend to only fifty today”

“We are lucky, *abi?*” the man behind her said (Adichie 2009: 138).

This excerpt shows the inhuman treatment that people waiting outside receive from the embassy workers, and highlights the differences between the two spaces divided by the wall of the American building. It can be asserted that the dichotomy in / out is present

throughout the narrative as an outstanding device to intensify the frontier that separates two realms. On the one hand, within the embassy, people are depicted as stable and in power: “she looked at the next window for a moment, at a man in a dark suit who was leaning close to the screen, reverently, as though praying to the visa interviewer behind” (139), or “she saw the swift way the woman pushed her reddish-gold hair back even though it did not disturb her, it stayed quiet on her neck...” (141). The first sentence describes a shocking image, in which a man in suit, apparently a high-class Nigerian, is regarded in a begging position, while the interviewer adopts the figure of the dominant, almost sacred figure.

The second sentence makes a reference to the calm that the visa interviewers enjoy, which contrasts with the applicants’ uneasiness. Words such as “stayed” or “quiet,” and the fact that her hair does not disturb the employee, remark the comfort that their positions provide them. Meanwhile, the outside world is described as chaotic and suffocating, with “air hung heavy with moist heat” (128), “beggars who walked up and down holding out enamel plates” (128), and people queueing under a sun which is “not gentle at all” (138).

In “The Union of Our Home” (2014), the security control at Arabian airports helps Alomar to expose the difficulties that individuals face when crossing the borders of their “brother’s room” (Alomar 2014: 15). His reflection upon the rigidity of national borders in the Middle Eastern area is alented by the easiness with which EU citizens travel across the European Union:

When I saw how the citizens of those countries move across borders without being subjected to research (...) when I saw all of this in the countries of the European Union, I thought about the Union of our home where I was obliged to submit to searches and surveillance and questioning whenever I wanted to cross the border of my brother’s room (Alomar 2014: 15).

The word “Union” has relevance in the text and shows its intention. The title of the narrative already alerts the reader about Alomar’s ideology: with his literature he aims at breaking borders in favour of the union of citizens. In this case, it is through the metaphor of the room that the author evidences the rigidity of borders, as he employs the word “room” as a symbol of the nation, built upon walls (or borders) that sustain it and problematize their crossing.

When it comes to Dayo, his limitations come in the form of social and racial conventions that prevent him from being in total control of his life. His family and teachers speak on behalf of the boy when they decide that becoming a scientist and sending him to Europe are the best choices for him. In the new continent, he finds out the terrible conditions under which many black Africans live, and how racial and social stereotypes that derive from History have a deterministic impact on his struggle for adaptation in Europe.

Consequently, the fight between the individual against an oppressive institutional power (where the former strives for an identity freed from political and social impositions) ends in the victory in favor of the individual in “Odiar el Verano” (2013) and “The American Embassy” (2009), whereas I argue that in “The Union of Our Home” (2014) and “El Sueño de Dayo” (2007) this victory is incomplete, for both stories offer a realistic portrayal of the difficulty in overthrowing such powerful institutions. While Alomar highlights the free transnational movement of European people in the EU but not his people across Middle-Eastern countries, Abogo’s narrative ends up with the death of the main character.

By contrast, I argue that “Odiar el Verano” (2013) ends with the symbolic victory of the citizen in confrontation with an imposed institutional power. Even though the official holds control all along the argument as the pane behind which he stands acts as a kind of

a tyrannical shield, the final line of the narration is uttered by the wife, who after preventing her husband from using violence as an answer, “el hombre fue a levantar el puño, pero la mujer lo detuvo a tiempo” (Coro Montanet 2013), claims “-déjalo (...) Hundido en esa cabina y con ese uniforme, debe estar más fastidiado con el calor que nosotros” (Coro Montanet 2013). Thus, although not achieving their goal, the couple hold the last word in the narration. Despite the writer victimizes them along the dialogue, they eventually become empowered individuals in a final and unexpected shift at the end of the story, when the wife directly confronts the officer by depicting him as a prisoner, locked up in a cabin and underneath his uniform.

In the same way, the Nigerian main character in “The American Embassy” (2009) decides, at the end of the narrative, not to request asylum, encouraged by how badly other immigrants are treated at the cabins next to hers:

She turned slowly and headed for the exit.

“Ma’am?” she heard the interviewe’s voice behind her.

She didn’t turn. She walked out of the American embassy, past the beggars who still made their rounds enamel bowls held outstretched and got into her car (Adichie 2009: 141).

As it happens in “Odiar el Verano” (2013), there is an unexpected shift at the end of Adichie’s story. I believe that the behaviour showed by the Nigerian character when ignoring the interviewer and stepping out of the embassy constitutes a rebellious act towards the national institution, since it can be regarded as a victory in the sense that she dissociates herself from the power, potentially meaning that she is not going to sacrifice her self and principles in favor of governments. In this way, both Adichie and Coro Montanet might be suggesting that these literary voices (although being in a underprivileged position) are freer than the officer and the interviewers, both entrapped

behind cabins, and the fact of turning and leaving works as a liberating act in both cases. In this sense, the final actions that these literary voices carry out can be regarded as outstanding examples of passive resistance.

On the contrary, Alomar's and Abogo's narratives depict unsuccessful individuals when it comes to overthrowing the border-system and social institutions. Whereas the narrative voice in "The Union of Our Home" (2014) cannot do other thing but denounce the rigid institutional borders in the Middle East and the impossibility of free movement, the narrative voice in Abogo's story goes further by depicting the death of Dayo after his attempt to release himself from social and political limitations:

Y cuando la muerte vino a rematarle, Dayo extendió las manos e hizo ademán de volar. Y voló, Dayo voló, pero cuando apenas se había levantado unos metros del suelo el ancla le atrajo otra vez a la tierra. Y fue en aquel momento, justo antes de morir, cuando Dayo vio donde estaba anclada su vida. Su vida estaba anclada en la historia (Abogo 2007: 22).

These impositions are symbolized by anchors which constantly stop him from flying. The act of flying might allude to the state of freedom, the chance to express himself and construct his identity away from political and social limitations. At the end of the story, the narrative voice reveals that Dayo's social demarcations and the mistreatment of political institutions that black people suffer in his dream are a consequence of centuries of abuse and stereotypical images attached to the black community and to the African continent. Consequently, the institution of History oppresses him and fences his free will. Nevertheless, even though these literary voices' agency is insufficient to achieve complete freedom from institutional demarcations, I believe that both Alomar's and Abogo's stories can also be read as narratives where these two literary voices manage to resist as active resistant subjects, in the sense that they react against their sources of

oppression when it comes to recognizing their limitations and speaking up against them. In this respect, the narrative voice in “The Union of Our Home” (2014) has the strength to denounce the rigid Middle-Eastern national border system: “I thought about the Union of our home where I was obliged to submit to searches and surveillance and questioning whenever I wanted to cross the border of my brother’s room” (Alomar 1999: 15). Likewise, it can be argued that the narrator in “El sueño de Dayo” (2007) provides Dayo with a voice and uses his story to fiercely question the social, racial, and global political institutions that lead the main character to death. Also, in the final part of the narrative, the criticism against the Western institutions becomes more evident and powerful:

Y se armó una ponderosa aviación para llevar a cabo la tarea de abatir a los negros desde el aire. Los negros que estaban fuera de África, gracias a las protestas de los grupos de los derechos humanos, fueron llevados a islas-prisión y esterilizados. (...) Pero aquella vez se equivocaron, el bosque ya no era el monstruo de tentáculos en el que habían encontrado refugio los hijos de Afrikara, la colonización y la poscolonialidad se habían llevado ocho décimas parates del monstruo verde. (...) Y así murieron todos los del continente. Y sobre la acumulación mas grande de carnes y espíritus, la de Mayombe, se erigió un anfiteatro (Abogo 2007: 21-22).

In this excerpt, the narrative voice addresses colonization and postcolonization as destructive and responsible of Dayo’s death. Significantly, the author makes use of irony to denounce the human rights global institution’s hypocrisy and its useless “help” when it comes to dignify African black people, since as an alternative solution to death, they are taken to prison islands and sterilized.

Encouraged by this dream, which acts as a subconscious reflection of the mistreatment that social and political institutions exert on Dayo, he eventually dares to face it:

Una noche Dayo decidió enfrentarse al sueño, vencer su miedo. Se sumo, cual aorta negra, a la muchedumbre que progresaba hacia el Mayombe. Sorteó obstáculos tupidos, tenaces, espinosos, verdes, cimbreo baluartes pululantes de ramas muertas, erupciones de limbos, farragos de inmundicias en suspensión. (...)

Y cuando la muerte vino a rematarle, Dayo extendió las manos e hizo ademán de volar (Abogo 2007: 22).

Therefore, from this excerpt it can be claimed that Dayo becomes a symbol of the resistant black African who, not finding refuge in political and social institutions, needs to face his harsh reality on his own while even sacrificing his life. His heroism lies in the fact that he takes on his dream, which encompasses the boundaries held upon History and global political institutions that oppress him. Thus, he bravely confronts his enemy despite its titanic power and dimension.

To conclude, the four pieces of writing constitute some outstanding criticism towards the institution, represented in the form of security forces, administrations, organizations and social conventions and beliefs that do not meet the literary voices' needs. This misunderstanding is caused by the dividing lines between citizens and political and social powers that act as borders whose fixity and rigidity creates a space of confrontation between the two and encourages the rebellion of the literary voices against different institutional sources of constraint. The limitations that impede them from developing as self-autonomous individuals are denounced and questioned through the raising of their voices and their agency and, for this reason, they can be understood as active resistant subjectivities at a narrative level.

CHAPTER 4:
NARRATING THEIR PATHS: FICTIONAL WRITING AS
POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN LIEN CARRAZANA’S
“GRAFOMANÍA” AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’S
“JUMPING MONKEY HILL.”



Fuentes Antrás, F. *A Literary Journey that starts in Canterbury*. 2015. JPG file.

In recent years, many scholars have pointed at the power of fictional literature to shape individualities that aim at being independent from “the deadening forces of society, whether they come in the form of political ideologies, social pressures, or rampant consumerism” (Lewis 2008: 664). Along these lines, Tess Lewis echoes Kundera’s words by claiming that fiction is “an essential shaper of our moral imagination” and “indispensable to our (...) defense of rights” (Lewis 2008: 655). He adds that for a man to have rights, he needs to construct his individuality first, and he mentions the European arts (particularly literature) as the main promoters of the construction of the self. In fact, it is through them that the individual learns how to be inquisitive about his inner emotions and those truths that differ from his own (Lewis 2008: 655). In this light, Rafael Rojas claims that “la literatura (...) produce indicios de una subjetividad, de una ciudadanía cultural y política” (Rojas 2006: 420).

Nonetheless, other scholars and writers have remarked that the potential of fictional literature cannot just be used in favour of the disadvantaged individual and, simultaneously, as a device for undermining different sources of constraint. By contrast, words and story-telling have also been understood as important devices for control and repression. In the TED talk “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie asserts that “like our economic and political worlds, stories are defined by [...] how they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told” (Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story”). According to her, their relevance lies in the fact that “they are very dependant on power” and defines power as “the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definite story of that person” (Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story”). More specifically, in the introduction to the online anthology where Lien Carrazana’s short story “Grafomanía” (2013) is included, the Cuban writer Pardo Lazo addresses the nation-state as “el Máximo Narrador” (Pardo Lazo 2013).

In this sense, Frederick W. Mayer claims that “fictional narratives can be as powerful as non-fiction in establishing ideological interests” and that “engrossed by a powerful fictional narrative we accept its premises and its meaning” (Mayer 2014: 92).

In this chapter, I will be exploring the ways in which Carrazana’s “Grafomanía” (2013) and Adichie’s “Jumping Monkey Hills” (2009) focus on fiction and its potential to influence over reality. Thus, both authors project their subjectivities on the narrative voices that they create in order to foster their own point of view over that of the Revolutionary Cuban State in Carrazana’s story and the Imperialist ideology that Edward epitomizes in Adichie’s narrative. Hence, while “Grafomanía” (2013) narrates the last days of a Cuban girl in La Habana previous to the attainment of the passport that will allow her to leave the country, Chimamanda’s story depicts the thoughts and feelings that a Nigerian woman called Ujunwa experiences in the African Writers Conference held by an arrogant and sexist Englishman called Edward Campbell, who believes himself in the right to tell the African attendees what a real African story is. My analysis leads me to the belief that both female literary voices use fiction to build a territorial and identity subjectivity that represents them more faithfully over that imposed by the Revolutionary Cuban government and the Western imperialism. Due to the construction of their own fictional spaces from where they challenge and question their source of constriction, these literary voices can eventually trigger the re-thinking of their identity and establish a counter-discourse that resists geographical and ideological entrapment.

Firstly, fictional narrative constitutes a core theme in these stories, for both characters attend to events where literature plays a central role. In “Grafomanía” (2013), the narrative voice goes to a book fair celebrated in La Habana, and the author provides continuous reference to literature (specifically fiction) in sentences such as “asalto las hojas con mi grafomanía, prostituyo el sueño en vigilia y lo transporto a estas cárceles

letradas” (Carrazana 2013), or “que muchas Cubas yo vea por cada ojo distinto no es más que la sutil trampa de este juego de ficciones” (2013). Simultaneously, the narrative voice highlights the metafictional character of the story when uttering lines such as “pero sé que abrir los ojos y llorar será parte del proceso de imaginármelo todo” (Carrazana 2013) or “tienes razón, la escritura es inútil, es repetición de aquello que ya fue hecho con la mente” (2013).

In fact, in “Grafomanía” (2013), the line between fiction and reality is demolished by the metatextuality of the narrative, thus providing a strong protagonism to fiction. When the female narrative voice claims that “yo no quiero vivir una vida de ficción, comprar una comida de ficción con un dinero de ficción en una tienda de ficción” (Carrazana 2013) and that “mañana se romperá el cordón umbilical que me ata a [...] mi ficción, mi muerte de palabras. Mañana tendré mi libertadacuñada en un pasaporte” (2013), not only is the fictional character of the story highlighted, but she also alludes to the association between the Revolutionary Cuba and fiction itself. I argue that this connection reduces the Revolutionary ideology to a mere narrative product of the nation-state, “el Máximo Narrador” (Pardo Lazo 2013) that, due to this fictional perspective, loses its totalitarian character and is consequently stripped from its authority.

In a similar vein, the fictional character in Lien’s short story is equally and ironically reinforced by the following sentence at the end of the narrative: “los hechos y/o personajes de esta historia son ficticios, cualquier semejanza con la realidad es pura coincidencia” (Carrazana 2013). Following Mayer’s idea that “fictional narratives can be as powerful as non-fiction in establishing ideological interests” (Mayer 2014: 92), the inclusion of this final explanatory note at the end of the story, which blurs any line between fiction and reality, can be viewed as an attempt to take distance from the political power to gain authority.

In “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2009), fiction is also a central theme from the beginning of the story, when the readers are told that Ujunwa participates in the African Writers Conference and that the attendees “are expected to produce one story for possible publication in the *Oratory*” (Adichie 2009: 99). As it happens in “Grafomanía” (2013), metafiction is significantly used as a literary weapon. Ujunwa’s pieces of writing are included within the narrative, and it is through their literature that other African attendees and herself share their personal experiences in Africa or, in other words, they use literature to depict their own realities: the Senegalese writes about her coming out as a lesbian, the Tanzanian about the killings in the Congo, and Ujunwa about the tough situation women go through in Nigeria due to a strong patriarchal society. However, in the eyes of the English organizer, only the Tanzanian’s story is really African, because he thinks that “homosexual stories of this sort weren’t reflective of Africa” (2009: 108) and that “women are never victims in that sort of crude way (...) in Nigeria” (2009: 113).

As it happens in “Grafomanía” (2013), I argue that the oppressive authoritarian power in “Jumping Monkey Hills” (2009), epitomized by the English organizer, is associated to fiction, as both the Senegalese’s and Ujunwa’ stories, which are depicted as real experiences, are wrongly regarded as not truly African by Edward. The main character defies the imposition of Western beliefs when at the end of the story she reveals that her fiction is true, thus contradicting the British organizer’s point of view. Furthermore, Ujunwa does not only use fiction to shape her own voice as an African woman, but also as a humorous weapon to indirectly combat racism and Western prejudices about Africa. When Isabel, the organizer’s wife, tells her that due to her “exquisite bone structure” she had to come from Nigerian royal stock, Ujunwa wonders if “Isabel ever needed royal blood to explain the good looks of friends back in London” (Adichie 2009: 99), and

instead of rejecting her royal origins she decides to humor her and make up a whole fictional story about her lineage.

Therefore, fiction occupies a central position in the debate created around the question both literary voices in “Grafomanía” (2013) and “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2009) have to face all along the story: does their writing work as an effective device for attacking political control? The narrative voice in Carrazana’s story addresses this question more explicitly through the sentence “tienes razón, la escritura es inútil, es repetición de aquello que ya fue hecho con la mente (...) ¿será mejor dejarlo todo a la imaginación y a la vida?” (Carrazana 2013). Thus, Carrazana, by means of the narrative voice, seems to echo the question that the famous Cuban writer Cabrera Infante presents in his work *Mea Cuba* (1994): “Is it worth it to write in exile?” (Cabrera Infante 1994: 480). Infante answers it positively when claiming “Of course nothing so kills a writer than to stop writing” (1994: 480), and so does the female narrative voice in “Grafomanía” (2013), who although refers to the act of writing as “cárceles letradas” (Carrazana 2013), she also understands literature as a potential liberating tool for the self when claiming that “yo, y solo yo, soy la culpable de mi vida, esa que nadie escribió para mí y por eso es tan difícil interpretar un papel improvisado” (2013).

Similarly, in Adichie’s story, fiction is depicted as a therapy when the Tanzanian tells the main character that “all fiction was therapy, some sort of therapy, no matter what anybody said” (Adichie 2009: 103). In addition, Ujunwa writes in her story about how the main character, Chioma (who we eventually get to know that it is the literary version of Ujunwa, who at the same time is the literary version of the author), celebrates the fact that her father introduced her to literature. The understanding of fiction as necessary and important for the self development of an individual cannot only be perceived in Ujunwa’s story. It is likewise proved in Adichie’s narrative, since the main character’s writing and

the wrong reading that the British organizer tries to impose on it finally encourages Ujunwa to speak up.

No less importantly, both stories can be approached as autobiographical pieces of writing. In “Grafomanía” (2013), a strong connection between the female narrator and Carrazana can be established, as the author herself reveals in the interview I did to her in Madrid (Carrazana 2015). This connection can be identified in the continuous allusion to Cuba, the reference to the narrative voice’s Chinese grandfather, her passion towards literature, depicted in sentences such as “asalto las hojas con mi grafomanía” (Carrazana 2013) or “compro un libro. Un librito de sonetos” (2013), and her desire of leaving the country expressed at the very end of the story, when she says that “mañana tendré mi libertad acopiada en un pasaporte” (2013).

In a similar fashion, Adichie has always claimed the autobiographical character of her story:

For me the story is about the larger question of who determines what an African story is. You have this workshop of African writers; it’s completely organized by the British, then this person (referring to the organizer) who has his own ideas... imposes them on these young impressionable people. I remember feeling helpless (Adichie, “The Interview: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”).

Therefore, the narratives invite to the postulation of an autobiographical subject who brings fiction and reality closer. By establishing bonds between the narrative voices and themselves, the two authors strengthen the connection of literature and reality, which in my view contributes to the enhancement of their fiction as a democratic tool that challenges external political and social powers.

Importantly, Rafael Rojas claims that “la literatura (...) produce indicios de una subjetividad, de una ciudadanía cultural y política” (Rojas 2006: 420). Along these lines,

Lewis asserts that, as Milan Kundera noted in *Testaments Betrayed* (1996), fiction is “an essential shaper of our moral imagination” and “indispensable to our conception and defense of rights” (Lewis 2008: 655). Indeed, I draw on these theories to claim that the projection of fictional literary voices in these stories, where individual developing selves build their own voice to show the power of fiction when it comes to questioning certain authorities. On one hand, the literary voices employ it to speak up and, on the other hand, to allude to the fictional characters’ sources of constraint and to highlight that the oppressive hegemonic narratives are just one point of view among many others. For this purpose, both Carrazana and Adichie support themselves in the metatextuality of the narrative to provide their writings with a shocking and evocative realism, while breaking the borders between fiction and reality and alluding to some elements that the narrative voices and themselves have in common.

Significantly, in both stories, fiction is used to create a territorial subjectivity from where the literary voices can express themselves freely, and the question of place acquires a relevant role in the characters’ quest for speaking up. Thus, the narrator in Carrazana’s short story depicts a claustrophobic and melancholic Cuba: ‘salgo. Comprimida en estas cuatro paredes no logro respirar’ (Carrazana 2013), “cálidas lágrimas [...] dejándose escurrir junto a los deseos desvanecidos...” (2013), “la Nación estaba inamovible como tortuga dormida sobre el mar Caribe” (2013). In a similar fashion, the narrative voice in Adichie’s story addresses Jumping Monkey Hill as “the kind of place where she imagined affluent foreign tourists would dart about taking pictures of lizards and then return home mostly unaware that there were more black people than red capped lizards in South Africa” (Adichie 2009: 95).

Thus, the resort and La Habana are equally depicted as isolated and tedious spaces: the former is described as “una Habana gris y conocida” (Carrazana 2013), while the latter is

described as a flippant place that is not representative of the real South Africa. From the first lines of the narratives, the narrators stress both settings, and their reference is continuous: "...como ahora que me miras sentada en este butacón (...) la ventana abierta a una Habana gris y conocida" (Carrazana 2013), "the chandelier of the main dining room of Jumping Monkey Hill hung so low..." (Adichie 2009: 101), "how other guests at Jumping Monkey Hill (...) looked at the participant suspiciously" (2009: 108), and the eighteen direct allusions to Cuba and its capital along "Grafomanía" (2013), such as "La Habana" (2013), "esta isla" (2013), "un malecón" (2013), or "la nación (...) dormida sobre el mar Caribe" (2013).

Therefore, I argue that both authors give relevance to the settings of the stories through the narrative voices. In this way, they highlight the importance of space in identity formation and imply the existence of "many Cubas and Africas" to distance themselves from the unique version imposed by the Cuban State and Western imperialism. In this regard, the narrative voice in "Grafomanía" (2013) claims that "muchas Cubas existen" (Carrazana 2013), and when in "Jumping Monkey Hills" (2009) Edward says that homosexual stories are not representative of Africa, Ujunwa answers back by asking "which Africa?" (2009: 108). Hence, following Rafael Rojas' understanding of literature as a promoter of "indicios de una subjetividad, de una ciudadanía cultural y política" (2006: 420), I believe that both literary voices deploy their fictional writing as a device for the construction of their own subjectivities in relation to their places of origin, which oppose the Imperialist and Revolutionary hegemonic ideologies and enhance the redefinition of these settings according to their own personal perspectives.

Accordingly, as previously mentioned, the narratives invite to the postulation of an autobiographical subject who I believe leads the reader to the direct association of both authors with Cuba and Africa. Given that, as Rojas puts it, "los cubanos de afuera son

exiliados del espacio” and subject to “la diáspora de la identidad, el rapto del espíritu nacional” by the Cuban Revolutionary government (Rojas 2006: 32), I argue that the Cuban narrator’s inclusion in the Cuba that the author creates in her literature challenges the Cuban government and reaffirms her identity as Cuban despite her political opposition to it. In other words, Carrazana’s fictional narrative allows her to establish an association between herself (a diasporic author) and the female narrator located in La Habana through the continuous demolition of the border that divides fiction and reality in her writing. This literary technique leads to the destruction of the Cuban / exile dichotomy that, according to Emma Staniland and Rafael Rojas, has been supported by the Cuban government since 1958 (Rojas 2006; Staniland 2014).

By doing this, the Cuban author echoes other Cuban writers in exile, like Cabrera Infante or Heriberto Padilla, who already fed the Martinian myth of a “patria portátil” (Rojas 2006: 42) by means of the “appropriation” of the island in their fiction to contradict the totalitarian belief that only one Cuba exists and it is located within the national borders. In the case of Alberto Padilla, he demolishes the line that separates Cuba from the exile in the verses “Yo vivo en Cuba. Siempre/he vivido en Cuba. Esos años de vagar / por el mundo de que tanto han hablado / son mis mentiras, mis falsificaciones” (Padilla). These verses underline the nexus between the author and his country while reaffirming his Cuban nationality in spite of being an *antirevolucionario* exiled in the United States. Rojas also underlines Cabrera Infante’s opposition to “el Gran Relato de la Historia,” that is, the imposition of a unique version of the Cuban history in favor of the *revolucionarios*, and points at the personal descriptions of the Habana of the fifties in *Tres Tristes Tigres* (1965) and *La Habana para un infante difunto* (1979) as an act of resistance to that only version (Rojas 2006). In the same way, Carrazana gives shape to a territorial subjectivity by means of her literature. “Grafomanía” (2013) can be approached as a piece of writing

that reflects upon the power of fiction (and imagination) to highlight a certain vision of a place, in this case, of La Habana, and to remark the existence of “many (subjective) Cubas.”

Similarly, the narrator in “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2009) has to face Edwards’ attempt to impose his own version of Africa among the attendees and herself. I suggest that this battle takes place in fiction at a metatextual level, since these conflicting relations of power are exposed by the pieces of literature that the African attendees write. When the Senegalese woman reads her homosexual story, she is said that it is not real enough. Influenced by this comment, Ujunwa oscillates between writing her story under Edward’s parameters or according to what she has experienced and felt as an African: “she sat there for a long time, moving the mouse from side to side, trying to decide whether to name her character something common, like Chioma, or something exotic, like Ibari” (Adichie 2009: 100).

Indeed, this sentence shows until what extent the attendees feel the pressure of pleasing Edward’s preassumptions about the African continent. She knows that, by including exotic names, her story will be more successful to the organizer. Sometimes some of the African attendees, in their desire to be liked by Edward, behave according to how the Imperialist vision of Africa dictates they should behave, both in their writings and outside of them. For instance, only Ujunwa refuses to eat ostrich when Edward urges everyone to do it as it is “an African staple” (101), and the only story that achieves the organizer’s approval is the Tanzanian’s, because its plot fits with Edwards’ expectations: the killings in the Congo from the point of view of a “man full of prurient violence” (109).

Therefore, Adichie also reflects upon the existence of “many Africas” through the questions and thoughts of the main character Ujunwa. She mocks Edwards’ stereotypical

and fictional idea of the continent along the narrative, and she finally decides to write about her own personal experience in Nigeria, despite its lack of those elements that are believed to be truly African. As it happens in “Grafomanía” (2013), the fact that there is an explicit parallelism between Ujunwa and Chimamanda leads the reader to the belief that the Africa represented in Ujunwa’s story, although presumably fictional, has a huge component of realism, and thus constitutes a valid version of Africa in detriment of Edwards’ statements.

At the same time, this fiction reveals a Cuba and an Africa that are portrayed as the products of an individual literary voice that allows Carrazana and Adichie to create their own “patrias portátiles” (Rojas 2006: 42), a fictional universe from where geographical borders are weakened, as shown in the following sentences: “salimos vestidos como si estuviéramos en Europa y estos no fueran nuestros únicos abrigos elegantes” (Carrazana 2013), “the white South African woman was from Durban, while the black man came from Johannesburg. The Tanzanian man came from Arusha...” (2009: 97). In the case of “Grafomanía” (2013) this globalism undermines the line that separates Cuba from the exile, and her vision of the city as grey and poor imposed over that of the State apparatus can be perceived in the lines “la Ventana abierta a una Habana gris y conocida” (Carrazana 2013), or “tomo la calle Habana a la derecha. Barrio de Belén. Barrio negro, barrio pobre, barríomío” (2013). In regards to “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2009), the enhancement of the African heterogeneity is achieved through the depiction of different accents, races, and points of view.

Nevertheless, the relation between the literary voices and fiction reveals itself as ambivalent since, although it is employed to give protagonism to their thoughts and ideologies, it also serves their source of oppression, for it is presented as a tool that authoritarian powers use to impose “a unique narration.” When the narrative voice in

“Grafomanía” (2013) claims that “el malecón traza bordes a sus ideas” (Carrazana 2013), she addresses her lack of freedom in the island and the feeling of imprisonment that she experiences. She compares herself with “una Muñequita irrompible” (2013) and adds “tómenme, hagan de mí lo que quieran, adoctrínenme, otórguenme un destino, una muerte, una ideología... Eso estaba escrito en mi frente desde el principio” (2013). Thus, Carrazana uses a powerful metaphor to denounce the Cuban regime: the narrative voice acts as a tenor, the doll as a vehicle, and the ground constitutes their lack of free will, since both are puppets of the State. The verb “escrito” alludes to fiction and connects it to the Cuban government, while the words “adoctrínenme” and “otórguenme” support this message by pointing at the political elite as the cause of her affliction.

The parallelism between Edward and the Cuban Revolutionary Regime finds its basis in the fact that both use fiction to impose their own subjectivity, which translates itself into an attempt to maintain the immutability and subordination of the main characters. Edward can be approached as the epitome of the Western imperialist thinking in the sense that he represents the narrow-minded and tyrannical nature of it. In fact, he dictates what is good and bad and acts as a critic all along the story. For instance, he decides what piece of writing is going to be published and is constantly offering feedback according to his own beliefs and parameters. It is by adopting the position of the publisher that he represses his guests and exerts his power:

Then Edward spoke. The writing was certainly ambitious, but the story itself begged the question ‘so what?’ There was something terribly passé about it when one considered all the other things happening in Zimbabwe under the horrible Mugabe. Ujunwa stared at Edward. What did he mean by “passé”? How could a story so true be passé? But she did not ask what Edward meant and the Kenyan did not ask and the Ugandan did not ask and all the Zimbabwean did was shove her dreadlocks away from her face, cowries thinking. Everyone else remained silent (Adichie 2009: 107).

Accordingly, the narrative voice offers a negative portrayal of the relationship between the British organizer and Ujunwa. Firstly, the former patronizes the latter with sexist comments and attitudes that are explicitly addressed at several points in the narrative: “at first, Ujunwa tried not to notice that Edward often stared at her body” (106), “his eyes were never on his face but lower” (106), ““would you like me to stand up for you, Edward?” ‘I’d rather like you to lie down for me’, he said” (106). Secondly, Ujunwa does not feel comfortable with the organizer’s tendency towards an authoritarian behavior, metaphorically portrayed through the smoke coming from Edward’s pipe in sentences such as “the smoke from Edward’s pipe hung over the room” (107), and its disturbing effect on some of the attendees, as shown in “the smell of his pipe was nauseating and he had to decide which he liked to smoke...” (112), which symbolizes how his influence reaches everyone’s mind.

However, even though fiction serves the Cuban State and Edward (epitomizing the Empire) when it comes to imposing their ideological parameters, both the narrative voice in “Grafomanía” (2013) and Ujunwa eventually find the way to use it in their own benefit. Thus, I argue that, at the end of Carrazana’s story, the narrative voice inclines herself towards Cabrera Infante’s notion of literature as necessary since, through the sentence “Me siento en el ordenador: No hay mayor lugar que uno mismo” (Carrazana 2013), she seems to suggest that literature is her refuge, and the liberating tool that she needs to create a place for herself away from the territorial exclusion that the Cuban government imposes on the Cuban diaspora (Rojas 2006). In this regard, the end of the story constitutes an ode in favour of the individual:

Mis ojos escrutan un instante al otro yo del espejo. Me miro queriendo entrar, fundirme, penetrar al centro de mí misma. Volver a mí. Salgo del baño. Me siento en el ordenador: “No hay mejor lugar que uno mismo” (Carrazana 2013).

In the last paragraph she continues describing her triumph over “the fiction of the State” and advances the attainment of a passport that will allow her to leave Cuba in the pursuit of freedom:

Mañana se romperá este cordon umbilical que me ata a este butacón y a esta, mi ficción, mi muerte de palabras. Mañana tendré mi libertad acuñada en un pasaporte y la sonrisa de mi abuelo dibujada en mi boca. Porque mañana, amor mío, se habrá acabado el tiempo de hoy” (Carrazana 2013).

In the same way, Ujunwa’s victory over Edward and what he represents results from her decision of raising her voice. When at the end of the story, Edward, after listening to her piece of writing, claims that “the whole thing is implausible” (114) and that her story is “not a story for real people” (114) since “Nigeria has women in high positions” (113), she blurts out and contradicts the organizer, revealing that it is her own story and she herself has suffered from sexism:

He was watching her, and it was the victory in his eyes that made her stand up and start to laugh (...) “A real story for real people?” she said, with her eyes on Edward’s face. “The only thing I didn’t add in the story is that after I left my coworker and walked out of the alaji’s house, I got into the Jeep and insisted that the driver take me home because I knew it was the last time I would be riding in it” (Adichie 2009: 114).

In conclusion, I have argued that the two narratives allow Carrazana and Adiche for the construction of literary voices who, despite being inserted in a hostile context where the governmental and the imperialist powers exert control and set ideological parameters, find their way to express themselves by using fictional writing. In this regard, they manage to construct their own subjectivities in relation to their places of origin, which are redefined according to their own personal perceptions and parameters. Their fictional writings provide them with the necessary self-confidence to speak up over external forces of control and lead them to an act of resistance against the unique political discourse that

tries to spread their narration as the only “plausible” one and rejects the heterogeneity of insights that these two stories precisely enhance.

CHAPTER 5:

**THE TRANSNATIONAL LOVER OF THE TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY. RESISTING THE NATIONAL BORDER SYSTEM
THROUGH LOVE IN CÉSAR MBA A. ABOGO'S "LA ESPESURA
DE LA NOCHE," OSAMA ALOMAR'S "LOVE LETTER," AND
LIEN CARRAZANA'S "UNA CAMARERA (EXPATRIADA A
CUALQUIER LUGAR DEL MUNDO)."**



Nyanhongo, Euwitt. *Counting the Years*. Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, Cape Town.

In her essay “A properly political concept of love: Three approaches in ten pages” (2011), Berlant approaches the concept of love as “properly political” and claims that “many kinds of interest are magnetized to the rhythm of convergence we call love” (2011: 684). Scholars such as Carey-Ann Morrison inform Berlant’s work by asserting that “love is political in that it cannot be extracted from contestatory relations but (...) it can also be used *explicitly* as a political concept” (Morrison et al. 2012: 516). In this light, Sara Ahmed also supports this political perception of love and acknowledges her indebtedness to the work of feminist and queer scholars like J. Butler (1993) when stating that “emotions matter to politics” since feelings “can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination” and “show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds” (2004: 12). Both scholars suggest that social norms (such as marriage, the nation, heterosexuality, or family) are the result of repetition, and that the repetition of these norms triggers the materialization of worlds where “boundary, fixity, and surface” are produced (Butler 1993: 9).

Along these lines, Ahmed examines “the ways in which love of an individual person, object or place can be transferred to a collective” (qtd. in Morrison et al. 2012: 514). She explores the politics of love and argues that all emotions are key for people in order to align themselves with an ideal and, consequently, can reinforce the concept of nation. Thus, according to Ahmed “love is narrated as an emotion that energizes the work of such groups; it is out of love that the group seeks to defend the nation against others, whose presence then becomes defined as the origins of hate” (2004: 122).

In this chapter, I will explore the interrelation of love and politics in “Love Letter,” written by Osama Alomar and published in *The Teeth and the Comb* (2017), “En la espesura de la noche,” by César A. Mba Abogo and included in *La palabra y la memoria: Guinea Ecuatorial 25 años después* (2010), and “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del

mundo,” written by Lien Carrazana and published in her website *Todo sobre Faithless* (2011). The analysis of these narratives concentrates on the depiction of an individual who is either “imprisoned” within the boundaries of his nation or unable to return to his country due to his condition of exile. For this purpose, I base myself on Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng’s concepts of *exilio espacial*, when the individual escapes from his homeland by being physically abroad, and *exilio mental*, if the individual escapes from his/her own reality without leaving the homeland (Mbomio Bacheng 2010).

To begin with, the three characters in the analyzed stories remain in a state of anxiety caused by the love of a woman who either lives beyond the borders of their nations or inside that country of origin to which they cannot return. In this sense, I argue that physical borders act as walls that undermine their freedom by preventing them from moving in the pursuit of their beloved ones. The emotions that these literary voices feel towards these agents on the other side of the boundary expose the rigid territorial borders and the imposition of the national unity promoted by the nation state (Jones 2012).

Thus, the multiple and explicit reference to Malabo as the setting of the story allows us to know that “La Espesura de la Noche” (2010) depicts a current Equatorial Guinea which, in the words of Landry-Wilfrid Miampika,

posee cuantiosos recursos petrolíferos y naturales. Sin embargo, paradójicamente, la vida cotidiana de los ciudadanos es una crónica anunciada de penurias. Y en medio de dichas penurias, las condiciones de escritura en el país siguen estando marcadas por un clima socio-político bastante hostil a todo tipo de veleidad intelectual o literaria desde la instauración del Segundo régimen de autoridad, instaurado por Teodoro Obiang Nguema desde 1979. La precariedad de las estructuras culturales- falta de reconocimiento del artista, baja tasa de escolaridad, analfabetismo, ausencia de editoriales y de bibliotecas, inexistencia de círculos literarios y de revistas, así como la ausencia de centros de investigación y de una prensa-, imposibilitan una dinamización cultural de contrapoder y mucho más la consagración de objetos artísticos y literarios (Miampika 2010: 12-13).

Likewise, Cuba is explicitly alluded as the place from where the narrative voice expresses his sorrow in “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2011). Similar to the way in which authors and scholars approach the exile of people from Equatorial Guinea, Rafael Rojas (2006) and Emma Staniland (2014) base themselves on the work of exiled Cuban authors such as Herberto Padilla and Cabrera Infante when claiming that “el exilio ha sido (...) una experiencia recurrente en la historia de Cuba” (Rojas 2006: 24) and feeding the Martirian myth of a “patria portátil” (Rojas 2006: 42), which contradicts the totalitarian belief that only one Cuba exists and it is located within the Cuban national borders.

By means of his verses “Yo vivo en Cuba. Siempre / he vivido en Cuba. Esos años de vagar / por el mundo de que tanto han hablado / son mis mentiras, mis falsificaciones” (Padilla), Herberto Padilla reaffirms his Cuban identity despite his exile due to the opposition to the Castro’s regime. Rafael Rojas mentions him as an example and goes further when referring to “los cubanos de afuera” as “exiliados del espacio” and to “los cubanos de dentro” as “exiliados del tiempo” (2006: 32). Interestingly, both Equatorial Guinean and Cuban writers and scholars have approached the totalitarian regimes of their countries as the seed of two types of exiles: those who remain within the national borders but are “mentally” abroad, and those who need to leave the country and settle themselves somewhere else.

In “Love Letter” (2017), despite the Syrian writer Osama Alomar does not explicitly mention Syria as the setting of his story, the narrative voice provides some information that alludes directly to this Middle Eastern country. The narrative adopts the form of a letter that starts with a “dear Minerva” (Alomar 2017: 12) and that can be divided into two parts. In the first part, the narrator recalls the moment when he met Minerva for the first time and that he fell in love with her immediately:

Do you remember how we met each other at a performance of *Waiting for Godot*? I was holding the playbill. You were carrying a stack of books. (...) I didn't feel like taking the initiative to talk to you, despite the captivating beauty. But, when you sat next to me by total coincidence just before the performance began, and asked in voice made of silk if you could take a look at my playbill, I felt the frost begin to turn into drops of dew at the dawn of something mysterious and enchanting (Alomar 2017: 12).

The image of the frost turning into drops of dew at the dawn of something constitutes an outstanding example of how Osama Alomar makes use of a romantic and emotional language to show the readers the feelings that the narrative voice experienced in the months after meeting her beloved. Significantly, he continues using images related to the spring and nature in order to achieve this goal: "all I know is that the flowers of my feelings blossomed in the spring of your beauty" (13) or "I would get lost in the rich forests of your green eyes..." (13).

However, the poetic and melodious tone of the first part of the letter differs abruptly from that used in the second part, which starts when the narrator let us know about the disagreement of Minerva's mother about the engagement and how she refused him "for the crime of poverty" (13). From this point, the story acquires a much more realistic and harsh tone. In fact, the narrative voice claims that, after a conversation where they "couldn't hear each other at all," he started "shivering from a terrible cold" (13). Afterwards, we are told how, although their meetings "became more intimate and more tender" (13) after the confrontation, there is a point in which the narrator starts being obsessed with the idea of emigration, "moving to a very faraway place" (Alomar 2011: 13). It is only once the narrator decides to move abroad for reasons that are never really clarified to the reader that some pieces of information are revealed in the narrative. Indeed, this information is fundamental, since it leads us to think that the country he has left is Syria:

When the revolution began, my heart lit up with a fire unlike any I had known before...a special kind of fire, a revolution against oppression and slavery... I swam in an ocean of happiness, drinking its strong, sweet water. Now the flowers of freedom had finally blossomed in the minds and hearts of the people.

But little by little the revolution against tyranny and oppression became something else... The tyrant who had been sleeping in the depths of the ordinary citizen began to wake up, baring his fangs. The country entered through the widest gate the hell of sectarian and civil war (Alomar 2017: 14).

In an interview made to Osama Alomar for the online magazine *Sampsonia Way* in April 2017, the writer revealed that after establishing himself as an author in pre-war Syria, he emigrated to the United States following his brother and mother. He explains that just before leaving Syria in October 2008, “the dictatorship had reached its highest peak in terms of corruption, nepotism, and censorship. Nobody could speak freely. Nobody could even think, say, or protest anything” (Alomar, “The Writer’s Block: A Q&A with Osama Alomar”). Significantly, three years after his arrival in America the Syrian Revolution began, and he witnessed from Chicago how his country was destroyed by civil war.

This information leads me to the postulation of an autobiographical subject that establishes a strong connection between the writer and the narrative voice. I argue that the revolution that is mentioned in the previous excerpt refers to the Syrian Revolution, and the association of “tyrant” with “ordinary citizen” works as a way to address the negative effects of the Arab Spring in Syria. This revolution started as a revolt against the tyranny of Hafez al-Assad, who ran unopposed for president in the elections of 2000. As in the first section of the narrative, the positive tone of the first paragraph is built upon the image of spring: “Now the flowers of freedom had finally blossomed in the minds and hearts of the people” (Alomar 2017: 14). This image contrasts with the visual and powerful images of the second paragraph, where he relates the concept of tyranny to ordinary citizens who bare their fangs, that is, citizens who show a little violent tyrant

dwelling within them, and describes how Syria then entered “the widest gates of hell” (14).

Therefore, the three literary voices speak from or to a country governed by tyranny: Equatorial Guinea, Cuba, and Syria. While the narrators in “La espesura de la noche” (2010) and “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2011) can be approached as *exiliados mentales* (Mbomio Bacheng 2010), the narrative voice in “Love Letter” (2017) writes from the United States and then, must be approached as *exiliado espacial*. Despite their condition of *exiliados mentales* or *espaciales*, the three voices show their anger towards the tyrannical governments of these countries by shaping a negative image of the places they live in (Equatorial Guinea and Cuba), or the places they cannot return to (Syria).

In “La espesura de la noche” (2010) and “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2011), the portrayal of Malabo and La Habana as decadent, static, and monotonous cities is evident from the beginning of both narratives. The narrator in Abogo’s piece of writing refers to Malabo in terms of “una ciudad sin viento” (93) where “la música de Nadie Duerme atraviesa las paredes igual que ayer y anteayer, el charco de aguas fecales que hay delante de mi casa sigue allí” (93). The stillness of the place is further reinforced by sentences such as “esta noche, igual que la noche de ayer, igual que la noche de mañana” (92) or “todo es igual que ayer (...), como todos los días, todo es igual que ayer” (93).

However, the negative representation of Malabo is not only alluded in terms of its monotony, but also in its decadence and precariousness: “El charco de aguas fecales” (92), the fact that “en cualquier momento se puede ir la electricidad” (93), and “las

oscuridades abismales de Malabo” (93) are examples of this gloomy representation of the city. In the same line, the narrator adds:

... en muchas partes de esta ciudad la gente está hablando del tiempo y criticando y criticando los tiempos telúricos que vivimos, están diciendo muchas cosas pero están callando lo que realmente piensan, están pensando en el dinero, en cómo hacerse con un buen fajo de dinero, en cómo salirse con la suya. (...) Mi gente piensa en el dinero pero habla del tiempo. Los pozos de petróleo calman su futuro como simples temas de adquisición. El silencio se vuelve bajío con el sonar de ecos que lanzan las traineras (Abogo 2010: 92-93).

Thus, the depiction of Malabo’s citizens is equally negative. They are alluded as passive people who do nothing to change their conditions, since they are “hablando del tiempo” and “criticando,” that is, doing simple and monotonous activities that refer to speaking rather than acting. The narrative voice also evokes hypocrisy and greediness as qualities of the people from Malabo through the sentences “están diciendo muchas cosas pero están callando lo que realmente piensan” and “están pensando en el dinero, en como hacerse un buen fajo de dinero, en cómo salirse con la suya” (92).

In addition, the narrative voice also alludes to Equatorial Guinea and Spain through the reference to “los pozos de petróleo” (92) and “las tarineras,” both elements suggesting a negative picture of the countries. The former refers to the discovery of petrol in the African nation in 1996, which although constitutes a huge source of wealth for the country, its benefits remain in the hands of a few (Miampika 2010). The latter is a boat, originally from Spain, presented as a historical promoter of the stillness and monotony of Malabo. Through this image, it can be claimed that the writer evokes the old Spanish dominance over Equatorial Guinea in order to suggest that it is still influencing the rigidity of the African country’s society.

In a similar fashion, the narrative voice in “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2011) presents a tedious and decaying La Habana. The male narrator associates negative elements to the city by depicting it as hostile in sentences such as “la lluvia que golpea la ventana” (72), and claustrophobic, “salgo a tomar un poco el aire, el que entra por la ventana ya no me alcanza” (74). He also describes his existence as a “tedio gigantesco” which is “lleno de noches televisivas, comida recalentada, lindas mujeres que se duermen en mitad de un filme de Almodóvar” while he is “hundido en un butacón, leyendo noticias pasadas, viendo bajar y subir la libra esterlina, perder al Real Madrid y crecer intolerablemente las plantas en el jardín” (72). In this sense, the narrative voice seems to be anchored in the past (“leyendo noticias pasadas”), unable to move on (“hundido en un butacón”) and more interested in foreign events, like the the performance of the pound or the Spanish football.

Even though the narrator in “Love Letter” (2017) goes through the same pain, caused by the struggle for reuniting with his beloved one, the story presents an opposite scenario since, instead of not being able to leave Syria, he is unable to return to it. The narrator makes clear his condition of exile when he reminds his lover how he “told her about [his] exile” (Alomar 2017: 14) and mentions the “thousands of miles” (14) that separate him from Minerva. The narrator keeps travelling back and forth in time, intermingling his memories of the last months he spent in his country of origin, when he met Minerva, and his current situation far from her and living in “a huge city” (14).

Therefore, La Habana and Malabo in Carrazana’s and Abogo’s narratives are depicted as dull and monotonous places. In the same fashion, Syria and its inhabitants are alluded in negative terms. Even though the narrative voice finds his love in Syria, we get to know that he is not comfortable enough in this place as he gets obsessed with the idea of emigration, “moving to a very faraway country” (13). It can be assumed that this

obsession is the result of being in a country where “oppression and slavery” (14) are the norm in the eyes of the narrator. It is also triggered by the fact that Minerva’s mother does not accept their engagement:

I remember how she opened the door for me with a coldness that let something of winter shiver into my soul. (...) When your mother found out that I was a third-level government functionary, her face became an arctic frown blowing icy wind around me. She asked in a strong voice, “Do you think that you will be able to provide for my daughter with your meager salary?” She refused me, because for the crime of poverty the court of society had sentenced me to hard labor (Alomar 2017: 13).

Minerva’s mother can be regarded as the epitome of the current Syrian society, depicted as a court that is formed by powerful figures who disdain others and sentence them “to hard labor.” This depiction of Syria is aggravated in the second part of the story, when the narrator tells how after leaving his land, the revolution against oppression and slavery (Arab Spring) “became something else” and points at “the tyrant who had been sleeping in the depths of the ordinary citizen” (14) as one of the causes of war. In this sense, he also presents current Syria as a deadly place where not only governors and high-class citizens, but also middle-class inhabitants, embody little tyrants within themselves. According to him, this has led the country to a situation of “chaos and insanity” (Alomar 2017: 14).

In short, the literary voices in the three stories project a suffering that results from their fatalistic connection to Cuba, Equatorial Guinea or Syria and, consequently, to the tyrannies that exert control over these countries. Importantly, I argue that, whereas in the case of “Love Letter” (2017) the emotional connection with Minerva mocks and challenges the forced exile of the narrator, the forced and almost deterministic connection between the narrative voices in “En la Espesura de la Noche” (2010) and “Una cubana

(expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2011) is likewise broken through the love towards a woman who is physically far from them and whose only contact takes place through emails, postcards, and letters.

In this way, the three nation-states are attacked through the depiction of these emotional bonds that shorten distances. The anxiety this situation causes on the characters is portrayed differently in the stories. The restlessness of the narrative voice in “La Espesura de la Noche” (2010) starts when he receives an email from Sandra Pujol after not having known anything about her in years since, as he states at the beginning of the narrative, “desde que recibí este maldito correo electrónico toda la espesura de las noches de Malabo ha caído sobre mí.” (Mba Abogo 2010:92). This email, often described with the epithets “maldito” and “puto,” destroys “la cápsula que [le] protegía contra [él] mismo” (95) and causes an inner emotional tsunami that fosters many tedious nights:

En las últimas noches he dado vueltas y vueltas en la cama y no sabía si era miedo o desasosiego lo que me invadía, sigo sin saberlo; mientras daba vueltas en la cama como un cuerpo lanzado desde un barco negrero yo veía a Sandra Puyol viéndome dar vueltas y vueltas en la cama y sudando un sudor frío (Abogo 2010: 94).

The repetition of “vueltas” highlights the tediousness and grief to which the narrative voice is subjugated, and words such as “invadía,” “lanzado” and “sudor” evoke the hostility that he needs to overcome after receiving the email. The image that compares his body to a “cuerpo lanzado desde un barco negrero” constitutes a compelling simile in which the narrative voice depicts himself as a person who does not have power over himself and who is completely stripped from his free will. Indeed, Sandra Puyol is the reason of his loss of self-control, being that who unexpectedly arrives in his life “como las aguas de un tsunami” (Abogo 2010: 95).

Similarly, the unrest that the narrator experiences due to the waitress in “Una camarera: expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo” (2011) is caused by the fact that he anxiously awaits her postcards from Europe, “fragmentos de vida en cada una de sus postales” (Carrazana 2011), which becomes their only connection between the two, as they are “figuras divididas por una barra” (Carrazana 2011). The bar, which symbolizes the national border, impedes the reunion of both lovers and, in order to deal with his pain, the narrative voice evokes the memories of the time where they were together in La Habana:

Por eso vengo siempre a este rincón... ese bar de La Habana donde tomamos cerveza por primera vez hace ya algunos años. Me siento en la barra e imagino que es mi camarera quien me sirve un trago (Carrazana 2011).

Also, the narrator looks desperately for her in the deepest corners of his mind:

Ay, camarera mía, cómo te busco, en cada mesa oliendo a cerveza negra, en cada sonrisa eslava, en algún rizo amarillo que alguna extraña dejó entre las sábanas, en cada poema nuevo, cada vaso de vino, en una mirada oriental, en una libreta de pedidos, bajo las manos de alguna mesera en un restaurante de cuarta (Carrazana 2011).

The interjection that opens the sentence remarks his consternation, the disgrace of imagining her in every element of his daily routine. This anxiety comes from the fact that his “encounters” with her are just a product of his imagination. In this sense, I argue that the dichotomy fantasy / reality becomes the core of the narrator’s suffering, since he oscillates from those daydreams caused by his platonic love with the waitress and his real life next to his wife in a tedious La Habana.

In this regard, the narrative voice is aware of the fact that the bar “no contiene su sonrisa ni sus manos ágiles, que ahora danzarán como olas, sobre la madera inocua de algún café parisino” (Carrazana 2011) and, as it happens to the narrator in “La Espesura de la Noche”

(2010), his restlessness invades his nights: “me pregunto por qué esa mujer de éter me sigue dejando insomne cuando su rostro se diluye sin que pueda retenerla” (Carrazana 2011). Importantly, his fantasies clash with the presence of his wife:

Las postales viajan la mitad del mundo y van a parar a mis manos. Tengo que esconder los ojos, no quiero que mi mujer descubra mis lágrimas de hipopótamo triste, ante las suaves caricias de tinta que mi camarera manda (Carraza 2011).

This excerpt encompasses how the narrator stays between two unreconciled worlds, the former represented by the waitress and the latter by his wife. In fact, she embodies the monotonous and claustrophobic character of La Habana:

Salgo a tomar un poco el aire, el que entra por la ventana ya no me alcanza. Mi mujer me trae un té, me da un beso en la mejilla y dice: *buenas noches*. Sé que va a dormir como si el mundo cupiera dentro de un sueño. Yo me quedaré aquí, pensando en esas musas perdidas en largas madrugadas (Carrazana 2011).

Therefore, while the waitress is depicted as the woman he loves as if “nunca otra mujer hubiera tocado [ese] cuerpo que se hace Viejo” (Carrazana 2011), his wife is interestingly associated to routinary actions such as bringing the tea or saying good night, and she is described as someone who remains in a constant state of lethargy, thus symbolizing the monotony that prevents the narrator from “breathing” and condemns him to “largas madrugadas.”

In a similar vein, the narrative voice in “Love Letter” (2017) remains in a state of anguish that is made manifest in the last part of the narrative. As stated in the first part of this chapter, the idealistic and romantic tone adopted in the first section of the letter contrasts remarkably with the inner decadence that the narrator experiences in the end. Unlike the

narrator in Abogo's and Carrazana's stories, his suffering emerges from stop having news from her. The narrator claims in his letter to her that "[they] stayed in constant communication by email" (Abogo 2017: 14) until the Syrian revolution began, and he expresses his inability to face this abrupt silence between them:

Oh my love... since news from you stopped coming I am looking for you everywhere, asking our common friends... in vain. In what direction have the claws of insane war thrown you? (...) I look for you everywhere. I look for my soul. I will send you this message for the hundredth time... Should I send it by mail or e-mail... or put it in a bottle and throw it into the sea? (Alomar 2017: 15).

This fragment alludes to the anxiety he undergoes as a consequence of the lack of news from her. This desperation is portrayed in the interjection that opens the paragraph ("oh my love"), that reminds to the narrator's interjection "ay, mi camarera" (2011: 3) in "Una camarera: expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo" (2011), and that is accentuated by the unanswered questioning, the sentences "I look for you everywhere" (Alomar 2017: 15), "in vain" (2017: 15) or "I will send you this message for a hundredth time..." (2017: 15), as well as the repeated suspension points, which transmit a feeling of uncertainty and desolation.

Moreover, the narrator directly blames the war for his situation with the question "in what direction have the claws of war thrown you?" (2017: 15). He explicitly relates a violent lexis to the concept of war, specifically "claws" and the verb *to throw*, evoking war as an animalistic creature that, despite of lacking logic, exerts its force to control people's destiny. This portrayal of war as something that manipulates and subjugates human beings is further developed in the last part of the narrative, when the narrator describes what happened in Syria after the Revolution:

when the situation had gone so far down the road of destructive chaos and insanity, I came to understand that the enslavement of humans to deadly and destructive

notions and ideas is far more dangerous than the enslavement of humans to other humans... (...) I watch the great ship of humanity steered by oppression (Alomar 2017: 14-15).

The end of the narrative becomes an antibellic discourse where he points at dogmatic and extreme ideologies as the cause of war and highlights the dangers that the enslavement to these ideas carry. Accordingly, when the narrative voice asserts that he watches “the ship of humanity steered by oppression” (2017: 15), he evidences repression as a driving force that deprive people from their free will. The striking image of the ship of humanity being directed by oppressive forces encompasses the message that the narrative voice conveys throughout the whole final part of the letter to his missing love. This message is based on an individual who suffers because he has lost control over “his vessel,” being unable to see her lover again due to political impositions.

On another note, I argue that the three authors employ nature, concretely the ocean and the forest, as an omnipresent and powerful image to evoke the literary voices’ struggle, emotions and perceptions. For instance, Osama Alomar draws upon the image of the ship in “Love Letter” (2017) to address to the narrator’s lack of self-autonomy, while the narrative voice in Abogo’s “En la Espesura de la Noche” (2010) depicts himself as “una nave sin rumbo entre las revueltas olas de oscuridad de esta ciudad” (96), and his life in Malabo as “un océano sin orillas” (92).

Yet, most of the sea-related images employed by Abogo in his short story have a positive connotation, since they address the effects of receiving the email from Sandra Pujol. The reception of this email reignates the emotions of the narrator, which reach him “como las aguas de un tsunami” (95) and save him from his tedious reality in Malabo. He feels alive again after a long time:

Todo es igual que ayer, mis ojos brillan de cansancio y agobio, como todos los días, todo es igual que ayer, pero esta noche es diferente, en realidad ayer también fue una noche diferente, lo cierto es que desde que recibí este maldito email mis noches y mis días han sido diferentes. (...) Sandra Puyol, siento como las burbujas de oxígeno burbujean en mi sangre (Abogo 2010: 93).

In this sense, sentences such as “como un cuerpo lanzado desde un barco negrero” (94), “un cuerpo negro descendiendo hasta las profundidades del Atlántico” (94), or “2002 llegó a mi vida como las aguas de un tsunami” (95) refer to a violent awakening as a consequence of receiving news from her old lover:

... cuando nadando iba por fin en las oscuridades abismales de Malabo, ahora va y me llega este email que es como un barco de papel, ahora que me había convertido en el ultraje de los años. ¿Qué debo hacer? ¿Debo lanzarme al mar con ese barco de papel? (...) Desde que leí este email no paro de preguntarme ¿para qué te viniste aquí, desgraciado, para qué te has dado estos años en los que tu cara ha tenido todas las formas de la tristeza? (Abogo 2010: 93).

The words “el ultraje de los años” work as a symbolic reference to his decadent life in Equatorial Guinea, whose negative image is reinforced by sentences such as “las oscuridades abismales de Malabo” and the question that closes this paragraph. The narrative voice remains in a state of anxiety that is evoked through the constant questioning and the need for making a decision between staying in the “darkness” of Malabo or travelling abroad. The email, being core in the story, is alluded with “el barco de papel” in terms of his lack of consistency. Also, Abogo makes a reference to the ocean in the question “¿debo lanzarme al mar con ese barco de papel?” and, by doing so, recreates the uncertainty the narrator is facing as a result of having to make the decision of leaving his country having an email as the only incentive. Despite the violence and desperation that the sea-related images transmit (“lanzarme al mar,” “océano sin orillas,” “como las aguas de un tsunami”), they remark the revealing character of the email, which eventually

promotes the inner shake of the narrator and, ultimately, the awareness of his political and geographical entrapment in Malabo.

In addition, the images of nature in the three stories carry a positive connotation when it comes to describing the women and the longing for freedom they trigger in the narrators. In “Una camarera: expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo” (2011), when the narrative voice claims “pero sé que esta barra no contiene su sonrisa ni sus manos ágiles, que ahora danzarán como olas, sobre la madera inocua de algún café parisino” (Carrazana 2011), he establishes a comparison between his lover’s smile and the hands and the sea waves to evoke dynamism, intensity and freedom. Indeed, the lexis related to nature alludes to freedom when he admits looking for his lover in “las bocas de los sucios marineros que hablan de tierras donde las mujeres son como peras que caen de los árboles” (Carrazana 2011). Thus, in Alomar’s story, liberty is alluded through a natural imagery, such as the sea waves or “mujeres son como peras que caen de los árboles” (Carrazana 2011). Both similes work around the comparison of the woman with natural elements, where pears are compared to women in terms of their maturity and experience, and the hands of his lover are compared to waves in terms of their agility. By the deployment of this imagery, not only does the author address a sexual freedom, but also a physical independence that is evoked in the movement of the waves or the separation of the fruit from its tree.

In the same light, the two lovers in Abogo’s “En la espesura de la noche” (2010) and Alomar’s “Love Letter” (2017) are associated with natural elements that point at them as sources of liberation. Whereas in the former story the eyes of Sandra Pujol are depicted as “dos botones azules como el Mediterráneo” (2010: 94), in Alomar’s narrative, the green eyes of Minerva are compared to “the rich forests” (2017: 13) in the latter. These metaphors highlight the beauty and purity in the lovers’ attributes, who are addressed in a way that at times echoes the Renaissance depictions of the midons. Sandra Pujol’s eyes

are also described as “ojos de gata” (2010: 94), while the image “the rich forests of your green eyes” (14) is repeated twice in Alomar’s narrative. In the same way, the narrator in “Love Letter” (2017) uses natural elements to describe what she makes him feel: “when you spoke about literature, I climbed on a board a mythical ship making its way on a magic ocean always shining under the spring sun” (2017: 12). Significantly, this comparison contrasts with the natural terminology used to depict the narrator’s situation in Syria before knowing Minerva: “that night I felt like I would finally get out of the pit of my loneliness full of gloomy insects and poisonous creeping reptiles” (2017: 12).

In short, the negative picture of Cuba, Equatorial Guinea and Syria, as well as that of their inhabitants and governments, differs strikingly from the positive depiction of the beloved ones. The three women are related to the notion of freedom, an association evoked through the use of nature, concretely the ocean and the forest, as an omnipresent and powerful theme in the pieces of writing. Importantly, the imagery of nature associated to the women points at them as a source of escapism from their tedious realities and as a vehicle to acquire their independence from political and social constraints.

Following this idea, I argue that both the ocean and the forest, symbolizing territorial and individual freedom, enhance the union of distanced lands by the constant reference to them. In this light, the relevance of the transnational adoration the narrators show towards these women radicates in the fact that their feelings help them avoid the limitations on their mobility by causing an inner revolution within them. Ultimately, these transnational romantic bonds encourage their opening to the world beyond geographical borders and ideological entrapment.

Thus, the narrative voices in Alomar’s and Carrazana’s stories remark their stillness when describing their existence as “un tedio gigantesco” (Carrazana 2011), and as a “pit of [my]

loneliness” (2017: 12). In the same way, the narrator in “La espesura de la noche” (2010) speaks about his existential rigidity:

Malabo es una ciudad sin viento, arderé hasta consumirme. Llevo dos años caminando sin avanzar ningún centímetro (...), y ahora me llega este email, ahora que mi vida ya era de minutos y no de proyectos, cuando nadando iba por fin en las oscuridades abismales de Malabo (Abogo 2010: 93).

Nevertheless, the three narratives also contain multiple international references that, in their allusion to foreign elements, resist localism and challenge any form of territorial and political constraint. Indeed, in “La espesura de la noche” (2010) Sandra Puyol is conceived to as the narrator’s connection to the world:

Sandra Puyol, su nombre es como un ruido mecánico más allá de estas olas de oscuridad. Seguramente ya no es quien fue, yo tampoco soy el que era, somos como el polvo, nos dispersamos, nos vaciamos. Es universal. Los tibetanos los saben, morimos día a día, no sé la gente pero lo que es *moi*, no le pido reportes periódicos al tiempo, pero esta noche es diferente, esta noche siento una fatiga de fin de mundo (Abogo 2010: 92).

In this excerpt, it can be asserted that the narrator fantasizes with being dust in his desire of the property of intangibility to *dispersarse*, or travel, more easily beyond national borders. I argue that his lover embodies this goal, based on his ideological and geographical freedom, as she is “universal” and dwells “más allá de estas olas de oscuridad.” He acknowledges a feeling based on “una fatiga de fin de mundo,” which evokes the narrator’s awareness of having been swallowed by the darkness of Malabo and his need for reaching other worlds. In addition, the French word “moi” or “los tibetanos” add the internationality that the narrative voice pursues. His endeavor to avoid local immobility is combatted by other global elements included in the narrative such as “el medico chino que vive al lado” (92), ‘sayonara baby” (93), “nos convertimos en alpinistas

en el Sahara” (93), or “sudando un sudor frío como la nieve en las películas de Kurosawa” (94).

Global references are also present in “Love Letter” (2017) and “Una camarera: expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo” (2011). In the former, the international allusions such as “Do you remember how we met each other at a performance of *Waiting for Godot*?” (Alomar 2017: 12) and “its shining radiance in all parts of the globe all at once” (12) appear always in relation to Minerva. They reveal the narrator’s desire of expanding himself to other parts of the planet, which becomes a necessity after being rejected by Minerva’s mother: “but a new idea began to obsess me day and night: emigration-moving to a very faraway place” (13).

Furthermore, in his letter, the narrative voice shares the text message that his lover sent him before departing: “Wherever you go... my spirit will be with you, guarding you and protecting you from bad people” (Alomar 2017: 14). This message alludes to their attempt to be together beyond any physical separation due to the political reason of their spatial and mental exile: “I told you about my exile, and you told me about yours, at home among the people closest to you” (14). The word “spirit” reminds to the image of the dust employed in “La Espesura de la noche” (2010) because both work as a symbol of intangibility that releases both narrators from their territorial imprisonment.

In fact, the sudden cessation of their mutual communication causes the narrator’s anguish, which leads him to wonder at the end of the narrative whether he should send the message “for a hundredth time” (2010: 15) or “put it in a bottle and throw it to the sea” (15). The narrator closes the letter with the use of the sea as a natural element that brings lands together, showing his eagerness for a more reconciled world where war and “the enslavement of humans to deadly and destructive notions and ideas” (14) had no place.

In a similar vein, the allusion to international references in “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2011) constitutes a relevant device to avoid territorial limitations. The title of the short story already announces the author’s intention, as it refers to the depiction of the waitress as an expatriate to anywhere in the world. In this light, to combat the “tedio gigantesco” (Carrazana 2011) of his existence and to shorten the distance that divides him and the waitress (who is in Europe), the narrator evokes all kind of foreign products, “un posavasos griego” (Carrazana 2011), “una cerveza Marx” (2011), “un filme de Almodóvar” (2011), “Real Madrid” (2011), and makes a reference to some European cities such as “Londres, Hungría, Viena, Berlín o Malta” (2011). Also, there is a point in the story where the narrator evidences his envy:

Me pregunto por qué esa mujer de éter me sigue dejando insomne cuando su rostro se diluye sin que pueda retenerla (...).

La envidia, porque no sufe como yo si no tengo esas líneas esbeltas que me hablan de calles añejas, de luces hoscas que se hacen remolinos y ventiscas en su cabeza, de paisajes mitológicos, cuencas doradas, pájaros que chocan contra los vidrios de las guardillas de París, murciélagos que delinear los techos de palacios transilvanos.

Ay, camarera mía, como te busco, (...) en cada sonrisa eslava, (...) en una mirada oriental, en una libreta de pedidos, bajo las manos de alguna mesera de un restaurante de cuarta, en los ojos de los perros que caminan de un lado a otro del planeta (Carrazana 2011).

I argue that this envy relies on the fact that she can move, and thus, she defies the territorial fixedness that nation-states impose on their citizens (Jones 2012: 689). Her depiction as “una mujer de éter” echoes the association of Sandra Puyol and Minerva with the dust and the spirit in terms of their resistance to physical entrapment. Additionally, all the foreign references allude to Europe and carry a positive connotation that is translated into their magnificence and the attractiveness of their exotism. As the narrators in the other two stories, the waitress symbolizes the narrative voice’s desire of transcending

boundaries, since she is reached through oriental looks, Slavic smiles or black beers that transport him to other worlds. Consequently, her messages allow him to avoid his isolation and to connect with the outside world: “las postales viajan la mitad del mundo y van a parar a mis manos” (Carrazana 2011). In the same way, she acts as his passport to save him from the stillness of La Habana because, as the narrator expresses it, “la camarera y yo vivimos dos mundos que no se juntan nunca, pero ella escapa de vez en cuando, llega para rescatarme de este tedio gigantesco que es mi existencia” (2011: 72).

To conclude, these narratives contain a strong emotional burden, transmitted through the central themes, an emotive lexis and literary figures built upon natural elements. Bearing in mind that the transference of love onto nation states constitutes “a way of bonding with others in relation to particular ideals and hegemonies” (Morrison et al. 2012: 515), the lack of appreciation towards these nations on behalf of the narrative voices, together with their admiration for women on the other side of territorial borders, turn these literary voices into resistant individuals, since they evade the geographical imposition and fixedness of nation states (Jones 2012: 689) by means of their emotions. More specifically, these emotions, which are materialized in the form of emails, postcards and letters, challenge the solid national borders, and their subsequent isolation. Given that tyrannical regimes base themselves on an unconditional and forced love for the nation, the transnational love that these literary voices experience and a harsh picture of La Habana, Syria and Malabo lead them to an act of rebellion that demolishes the “unique discourse” in favor of a more democratic way of understanding the world.

CHAPTER 6:

**THE RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSITES: CHALLENGING GROUP
CATEGORIZATION AND STEREOTYPES IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI
ADICHIE'S "A PRIVATE EXPERIENCE" AND "ON MONDAY OF LAST
WEEK," AND CÉSAR MBA A. ABOGO'S "HORA DE PARTIR."**



Unknown author. Unknown title.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1969; Tajfel & Turner 1986) is rooted in the premise that individuals construct their own identities based on social categorization and group membership. As Dovidio puts it, “social categorization primarily involves the perception of a person in terms of his or her own group membership rather than with respect to their individual, unique characteristics” (Dovidio et al. 2009: 4). Thus, the perception of a person as a member of a group has a profound impact on how people process information about others and act towards others (Brewer 1988; Fiske et al. 1999).

Consequently, this attachment of people to groups can lead to potential constraints for “minority group members” (Dovidio et al. 2009), since it is sufficient “to produce prejudices both in favor of members of one’s own group and sometimes against members of another group” (Dovidio et al. 2009: 4). In this light, when people are categorized into groups, not only do the differences between members of the same category tend to be minimized (Tajfel 1969), but also individuals cease to be free agents. By contrast, when people rebel against their group categorization they undergo a process called *individuation* that leads them towards the demolition of social lumps and the releasing of their agency (Ross 1920: 469).

Social psychology has widely explored intergroup relations (Allport 1954; Goffman 1963; Tajfel & Turner 1986), focusing on core questions such as how individual interactions are conformed by group membership and why intergroup conflict arises and persists (Sherif 1966; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Some research has illustrated the negative effects of categorization into groups (Tajfel 1969; Tajfel and Turner 1986) when pointing at categorization itself as a primary cause of intergroup conflict. In this sense, given that the categorization into social groups is a basic process to intergroup bias, social psychologists have approached it as a starting point for improving intergroup relationships (Dovidio et al. 2009). In addition, academics such as Aneeta Rattan and

Nalini Ambady have highlighted the importance of diversity ideologies for social psychological research on intergroup relations, and specifically point at the ideologies of multiculturalism and *colorblindness* as fundamental theories when it comes to undermining interracial relations, stereotypes, prejudices, and other issues related to intergroup conflict (Rattan & Ambady 2013). While the multicultural ideology advocates for group memberships and the need of valuing them to achieve equality and diversity (Schofield 2007; Plaut 2010), the colorblind ideology argues that equality among groups is best attained by undermining group distinctions and recognizing people as unique individuals (Rosenthal & Levy 2010; Peery 2011; Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers 2012).

In this chapter, I draw on the colorblind ideology to analyze how the characters in “A private experience” (2009) and “On Monday of last week” (2009) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and “Hora de partir” (2007) by César Mba A. Abogo, resist group categorization and minimize stereotyping and group distinctions by experiencing intergroup relations. The three narratives present a religious, racial, or social class intergroup conflict as background that hinders their free agency. I argue that by means of establishing intimate relationships with members of outgroups, these literary voices delegitimise intergroup conflict, enhance their individuality, trigger a transcultural dialogue and find an effective way of resisting the social constraints imposed by group categorization.

To begin with, I claim that strong emotional bonds emerge between the characters in the narratives, which enhances an atmosphere of intimacy that grows as the story develops. In Adichie’s short story “A private experience” (2009), a Hausa Muslim and an Igbo Christian woman end up hidden in a store as a consequence of a riot. An atmosphere of intimacy is alluded from the first lines of the narrative through the image of the shutter:

Chika climbs in through the store window first and then holds the shutter as the woman climbs in after her. The store looks as if it was deserted long before the riots started; the empty rows of wooden shelves are covered in yellow dust, as are the metal containers stacked in a corner. The store is small, smaller than Chika's walk-in closet back home. (...) Chika's hands are trembling, her calves burning after the unsteady run from the market in her high-heeled sandals. She wants to thank the woman, for stopping her as she dashed past, for saying "No run that way!" and for leading her, instead to this empty store where they could hide. But before she can say thank you, the woman says, reaching out to touch her bare neck, "My necklace lost when I 'm running" (Adichie, "A Private Experience" 43).

It is noteworthy that there are some elements in this excerpt that favor the construction of an intimate atmosphere. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the shutter acts as a metaphor of coziness since it is the object that, once closed, provides the two women with a refuge away from the violence outside. The store itself, described as "deserted long before the riots" and as an unkempt and small place, also transmits this feeling. Likewise, the fact that the space where the two women are, is addressed as smaller than "Chika's walk-in closet back home" works as a very visual image that locates the characters in a place where an intimacy between the two seems inevitable.

Although the closeness between Chika and the Muslim woman is more heavily evidenced in this first paragraph of the narrative, their relationship becomes closer as the story advances. For instance, when the Muslim woman tells Chika "come and sit" (46) or that her "nipple is burning like pepper" (49), the communion between the two characters develops. In this light, Chika also fosters this intimacy when "she lowers herself and sits, much closer to the woman than she ordinarily would have, so as to rest her body entirely on the wrapper (...) and smells something on the woman" (48). Such smell reminds her to "the bar soap their housegirl uses to wash the bed linen" (48), that is, something that is familiar to her. This sense of familiarity is further showed when the woman, after getting

to know that Chika is a doctor and not able to put up with the pain, “unhooks the front clasp” (49) of her bra. Her nipple reminds Chika to her mother:

“It was the same with my mother. Her nipples cracked when the sixth child came, and she didn’t know what caused it (...). Besides, her mother always had Dr Igbokwe, with his British training and affectation, a phone call away.

“What is your mother rubbing on her nipple?” the woman asks.

“Cocoa butter. The cracks healed fast.”

“Eh?” The woman watches Chika for a while, as if this disclosure has created a bond. “All right, I get it and use” (Adichie, “A Private Experience” 50).

Indeed, this disclosure contributes to the tightening of the bond between the two characters, likewise stressed at the end of the narrative, when the Muslim woman cries to her as a consequence of not knowing where her child Halima is. Surprisingly for the reader, the narrator describes the woman’s crying as private, and although her regret is addressed to as if ‘she is carrying out a necessary ritual that involves no one else’ (51), she somehow makes Chika participant of this “private experience” when crying and praying in front of her:

Chika looks away. She knows the woman is on her knees, facing Meca, but she does not look. It is like the woman’s tears, a private experience, and she wishes that she could leave the store. Or that she, too, could pray, could believe in god, see an omniscient presence in the stale air of the store” (Adichie “A Private Experience” 52).

In the eyes of Chika, the intimacy that the Muslim woman is sharing with her is so intense that she feels the need for looking away despite wishing she could participate from her praying. Hence, it is the Muslim woman who opens up first, and the sense of familiarity and closeness that she creates towards Chika reaches its climax when, at the end of the story, they find out that Chika’s leg is bleeding and the woman uses one of her scarves in

order to treat it. Eventually, once the danger outside is over and they decide to leave the store, the Muslim woman allows Chika to keep the scarf, which constitutes the ultimate symbol of the sisterhood that results from the bond that they have built.

In “Hora de partir” (2007) from César Mba A. Abogo, crying also becomes a metaphor of intimacy. The narrative begins at the end of the story with the moment of departure between the two main characters, Ariadna and Ka, an interracial couple that, after realizing that their relationship is over, have to say goodbye. In the first lines of the narrative, the narrator reveals that Ka’s eyes are wet because of the sadness that *la hora de partir* produces him. In addition, an atmosphere of closeness between the two is established when mentioning that both have lived together and that have enough confidence to nickname each other: “Ariadna, la Nefertiti Blanca, como la apodó al cabo de unos meses de convivencia Ka” (Abogo 2007: 63). Indeed, the author uses the beginning of the narrative to present an intimacy between the two characters based on their romantic relationship.

As it happens in Adichie’s short story “A private experience” (2009), the closeness between Ariadna and Ka is further displayed throughout the narrative as their love relationship is described more in detail. For instance, their mutual urge to know more about each other’s life can be translated into a desire to become closer. While Ariadna asks Ka about African places and recites aloud Tennyson’s poetry, Ka explores some neighbourhoods in his lover’s city and watches her attitude towards life:

Ka, deseoso de leer todos los espacios de la vida de Ariadna, se sumergió con alegría hiperbólica en los ritos y las actitudes de la existencia de Ariadna (...) Después de una semana de convivencia en la que sus formas se juntaron y se dispersaron como rayos de sol, Ka descubrió que la vida para Ariadna era una fruta madura que había que morder y masticar a dos carrillos (Abogo 2007: 67).

Interestingly, both excerpts portray Ka's interest in going deeper into Ariadna's routine and world. This urge for intimacy is fostered in the depiction of their sexual encounters. Consequently, I argue that sex is evoked as another means by which they achieve their close union, and the depiction of their sexual relationship constitutes an outstanding narrative tool for the construction of this intimacy:

Ambos querían morir el uno dentro del otro, convertirse en sustancias inanimadas, recorrer toda la gama de la existencia pre-orgánica y post-orgánica, y renacer una y otra vez, un millón de veces, ad infinitum, para volver a amarse (Abogo 2007: 67).

The trope of sex as a relevant means to achieve their complete union is further developed at the end of the narrative:

A pesar del ensueño su cuerpo había recibido el mensaje y respondía con temblores de deseo, intensos, envolventes. Su cuerpo se sublevó. Se ofrecía latente a la espera de un dedo que lo incitara. Empezaron a besarse y a susurrarse frases cardíacas. Sin prisa fueron perdiendo la noción de todo cuanto les rodeaba, tensando sus cuerpos para encadenarse hasta el infinito (Abogo 2009: 69-70).

Words such as “envolvente,” “besarse,” and “susurrarse” allude to the act of getting both physically and spiritually close. Significantly, in these excerpts, their interconnection is depicted as infinite, beyond time and existence, evidencing their sexual encounters as the outmost act of intimacy.

Likewise, the intimate atmosphere that surrounds the characters is also present from the beginning of the story in “On Monday of last week” (2009) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The narrative starts with the main character, Kamara, in front of the bathroom mirror. We are told that “she would turn from side to side, examining her lumpy middle and imagining Tracy caressing it with those paint-stained fingers” (Adichie 2009: 74).

Thus, the reader is introduced to Kamara's inwardness through the depiction of a moment of intimacy. This moment is evoked by her presence in the bathroom, looking at herself in the mirror and fantasizing with Tracy.

Kamara is a young girl from Nigeria that starts working as Josh's nanny, Neil's and Tracy's son. Her job works as a narrative element that contributes to a gradual process of intimacy with the American family, since being a nanny implies the cohabitation of the employee and the employer. However, at the beginning of the narrative, the couple remains in an aura of mystery and keeps the distance with Kamara. Tracy is depicted as an enigmatic character who spends her days working outside and in the house's basement when she is at home. As the story develops, Kamara's urge to meet Tracy increases but, unlike the characters in the other two stories, it takes longer for Kamara to create a bond with Josh's mum and her family.

In this regard, the distance between her and the couple is maintained until Tracy asks Kamara if she would take her clothes off for her. Until that moment, Kamara can just imagine Tracy and fantasize with her, for she has explicit instructions from Neil, Tracy's husband, not to disturb her for anything whatsoever. From that time, Kamara starts thinking of her as an intriguing person that increases her curiosity:

Kamara wondered if and when Tracy left the basement. Sometimes she heard sounds from down there, a door slamming shut or faint strains classical music. She wondered whether Tracy ever saw her child. When she tried to get Josh to talk about her mother, he said: "Mommy's very busy with her work. She'll get mad if we bother her", and because he kept his face carefully neutral, she held back from asking him more (Adichie "On Monday of last week" 79).

In this regard, the moment in which they finally meet constitutes the most striking point of the story, as Tracy stops being "inconsequential, a background reality like the wheezing on the phone line when Kamara called her mother in Nigeria" (Adichie, "On Monday of

last week” 79) to turn into a tangible person to whom Kamara develops a passionate sexual attraction. Moreover, this moment marks the beginning of Kamara’s desire of getting closer to her: “...what happened in the kitchen that afternoon was a flowering of an extravagant hope, because what now propelled her life was the thought that Tracy would come upstairs again” (2009: 80).

Simultaneously, Kamara stops being an alien element to Josh and Neil, since she gradually integrates into the family as the story develops. Her integration is evidenced when Josh’s father confesses her his concern about the participation of his child in a competition, since he thinks that this kind of events are not healthy at his young age. In addition, Neil finishes this conversation by inviting her to come with them to Zainy Brainy. In terms of her relationship with Josh, it can be assumed that their connection reaches its climax when in one of his tasks for school he presents Kamara as part of his family. However, I consider noteworthy that, although Josh and Neil also play a relevant role when it comes to Kamara’s integration into the family, Tracy becomes her real goal, and it is her with whom she acquires a more intense level of intimacy. When Kamara eventually dares to go to the basement to see Tracy, the latter informs her nanny again about her desire to see her naked: “You will take your clothes off for me” (Adichie, “On Monday of last week” 92).

Therefore, the three narratives share the depiction of characters who, despite their differences in terms of religion, social class, nationality and race, become closer by establishing bonds based on an intimacy that emerges from their aim to know more about each other. However, their disparities are presented as obstacles they need to overcome in their attempt of a transcultural coexistence, since powerful political, social, and racial conflicts conform the background of the stories and hinder intergroup relations by highlighting their differences rather than their common features.

In “A private experience” (2009), once the Muslim woman and Chika hide in the store, the latter notices “the woman’s strong Hausa accent,” the unfamiliar “narrowness of her face” and “rise of her cheekbones” that reveal her Northerner condition (Adichie 2009: 44), and the scarf around her neck showing that she is Muslim. Similarly, Chika wonders “if the woman is looking at her as well, if the woman can tell, from her light complexion and the silver finger rosary her mother insists she wears, that she is Igbo and Christian” (2009: 44).

Thus, their physical and ideological differences are made evident to emphasize the fact that both belong to distinct groups. In this sense, whereas the characters develop a close relationship between the two, the narrative voice also presents the existent conflict between the religious and social groups they belong to: “Later, Chika will learn that, as she and the woman are speaking, Hausa Muslims are hacking down Igbo Christians with machetes, clubbing them with stones” (44). The enmity between Igbo Christians and Hausa Muslims in Nigeria is further addressed in other parts of the narrative:

She will find out it [the riot] had all started at the motor park, when a man drove over a copy of the Holy Coran that had been dropped on the roadside, a man who happened to be Igbo and Christian. The men nearby, men who sat around all day playing draughts, men who happened to be Muslim, pulled him out of his pickup truck, cut his head off with one flash of a machete, and carried it to the market, asking others to join in; the infidel had desecrated the Holy Book (Adichie, “A Private Experience 45-46).

Also, most of the information that Chika has about Hausa Muslims is not the product of her own experiences, but comes from pieces of information that she reads in the media:

Chika wants to ask the woman how many riots she has witnessed but she does not. She has read about the others in the past: Hausa Muslim zealots attacking Igbo Christians, and sometimes Igbo Christians going on murderous missions of revenge (2009: 49).

Later, Chika will read in the Guardian that “the revolutionary Hausa-speaking Muslims in the North hav a history of violence against non-Muslims” (2009: 55).

Importantly, the causes of intergroup conflicts have been widely explored by scholars within a wide range of disciplines (M. Warner et al. 2013). On the one hand, some academics point at religion and ethnic differences as an excuse for conflict where tangible resources and power are the real goal (Toft 2007; Berman 2009). On the other hand, others view incompatibilities between groups’ values and religious ideologies as the motivation for conflict (Huntington 1993; Barker et al. 2008). Additionally, intergroup conflict has been portrayed by indicators of prejudice, group and individual violence, interpersonal discrimination, and symbolic aggressions (M. Warner et al. 2013).

In this light, academics such as Oluwaseun Bamidele have studied the reasons behind the difficulty of structuring Nigeria under a national identity, and attributes this problematic to the multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic society that exists in the African country (Bamidele 2015). More specifically, Bamidele points at the Muslim-Christian conflict, the Northern region- Southern region difference, and the fact that ethnic groups in Nigeria have little in common and still fight for the question of land ownership, as the main reasons for Nigeria’s fractured society (Bamidele 2015: 7). In this respect, the woman’s Northern origin, as well as her Hausa and Muslim identity, work as features that strongly differ from Chika’s Southern origin and her Igbo Christian condition. They are presented as individuals who belong to opposed groups and that should be, in principle, in confrontation due to intergroup conflict.

Therefore, I argue that religious intergroup conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria acts as the core conflict of the narrative. Religion is highlighted as the main source of violence since, as Chika finds out after the attack, all starts at the motor park “when a

man drove over a copy of the Holy Koran (...), a man who happened to be Igbo and Christian” (Adichie, “A Private Experience” 46) in front of Muslim men. The connection between religion and conflict has been further studied (Toft 2007; Berman 2009), predominantly reaching the conclusion that religious infusion predicts greater intergroup conflict and that highly religiously infused groups are closely related to extreme forms of conflict such as riots (M. Warner et al. 2013).

However, although religious intergroup conflict is central in the narrative, social class also constitutes an important difference the two women need to overcome if they want to establish a communion beyond group categorization. Given that establishing bonds with a person with dissimilar social and economic characteristics implies crossing a social boundary (Mäenpää & Jalovaara 2014), the relationship between two characters with distinct socioeconomic status can be regarded as conflicting.

In this vein, the fact that Chika thinks of herself as different from the woman in social terms becomes evident at certain points in the narrative. At the beginning of the story, the items that both women lose work as an indicator of their socioeconomic status: whereas Chika is wealthy enough to have a designer purse, the Muslim woman regrets the loss of a cheap piece of plastic jewelry. In this sense, Chika views herself as being wholly different from her companion as “she knows nothing about riots” (2009: 44), and “the closest she has come is the prodemocracy rally at the university a few weeks ago” (44). In addition, their social status is revealed when they ask each other about their jobs. Chika is studying to become a doctor in the University of Lagos, while the Muslim woman is a trader:

“I am a trader”, the woman says, “I’m selling onions.”

Chika listens for sarcasm or reproach in the tone, but there is none. The voice is as steady and low, a woman simply telling what she does.

“I hope they will not destroy market stalls,” Chika replies; she does not know what else to say.

“Every time when they are rioting, they break market,” the woman says (Adichie, “A Private Experience” 48-49).

The socioeconomic distinction between the two women is more remarkable when the narrative voice depicts how Chika adopts a patronizing tone towards the unnamed woman. The fact that Chika expects the woman’s answer not to be true shows the condescending and naïve attitude of the Christian girl, further reinforced at some points in the narrative, such as when “Chika wonders if the woman even knows what going to university means” (47), or when she thinks that “she and her sister should not be affected by a riot” because “riots like this were what she read about in newspapers. Riots like this were what happened to other people” (47). This attitude is underlined by the vision of a Northern Nigeria as a problematic area due to historical reasons. As Bamidele puts it, “the one single government established for the whole North as one entity remained in existence and operation until 1967 when (...) it was broken into six states” (2015: 16). He also mentions the disadvantaged situation of the Hausa / Fulani ethnic groups since they “are the largest single group, but they are, population-wise, a minority vis-à-vis the rest of the ethnic groups” (16), and that:

the thought of one “Northern Nigeria” has prevailed (...), even after it (Northern Nigeria) has stopped being a governmental entity, with a firm hold on the thinking and vocabulary of the ruling elite and political class in that region of the country, conditioning their attitudes and views in the matter of management of the social, political, and even economic relations between the two segments of the country (Bamidele 2015: 15).

Hence, despite sharing the same nationality, Chika seems to see herself as completely different from the Muslim woman. Indeed, she thinks that it is normal that her companion

regularly experiences riots due to her social category, while she views herself as someone who should be not experiencing such violence.

On another note, nationalism as the source of social distinction and as a cause of intergroup conflict is also key in Abogo's "Hora de partir" (2007) and Adichie's "On Monday of Last Week (2009). As it happens to the Muslim woman in "A Private Experience" (2009), Ka is depicted as a second-class citizen due to his condition of African immigrant, while Kamara's second category condition is only linked to the fact of being an African immigrant. The narrative voices in both stories evidence how both characters are patronized and struggle to be seen as equals because of their origin. Negative attitudes towards immigration have been academically explored by studying the ways in which national group boundaries are established, and social psychological theories of prejudice and intergroup conflict have been successfully applied to immigration (Bobo 1983; Esses et al. 1998; Stephan & Renfro 2003; Pehrson & T. Green 2010).

Significantly, the first paragraph of "Hora de partir" (2007) reveals that, once in Europe, Ka has the need for shortening his African name, Karaevini Ekang, "como una formula ritual para acortar la historia (...) de su vida" (Abogo 2007: 63). In this light, it can be claimed that he is pushed to change part of his identity to fit European's parameters due to his disadvantaged immigrant position. This second-class citizen condition is further reinforced when the narrator mentions how he is treated as "un agente patógeno" that "se vio arrastrándose por las calles de Europa como una cosa desvaída sin órganos, envejeciendo delante de histerectomizadas expresiones..." (2007: 70).

Likewise, in "On Monday of last week" (2009), Kamara is patronized because of her immigrant status:

Neil had sounded surprised that she was Nigerian.

“You speak such good English,” he said, and it annoyed her, his surprise, his assumption that English was somehow his personal property. And because of this, although Tobechei had warned her not to mention her education, she told Neil that she had a master’s degree, that she had recently arrived in America to join her husband and wanted to earn a little money babysitting while waiting for green card application to be processed so that she could get a proper work permit (Adichie, “On Monday of last week” 76).

Unlike Chika and the Muslim woman, what differentiates Kamara from Neil or Tracy is not her lack of education but her immigrant status. Both Kamara and Ka are forced into a categorization made according to their foreign condition of immigrants that attaches certain prejudices to them, since ideas around national belonging are often connected to anti-immigrant prejudice (Pehrson & T. Green 2010). Despite their high level of education, both characters are automatically placed in an inferior group category, outside of the national group boundary, where lack of education is assumed. In this regard, as national immigration policies can be approached as national boundary demarcations (Sassen 1999; Brochmann 1999), Kamara’s lack of green card also causes a social intergroup conflict that hinders an alienation between her and the family she works for. Indeed, she needs to achieve some bureaucratic criteria if she wants to have the same rights than Neil and Tracy, which favors an unequal relationship between them.

In another vein, race constitutes the other source of intergroup conflict that enhances group categorization. I argue that the race-related conflict is only present in “Hora de partir” (2007), since Ka and Ariadna need to overcome racial prejudices and attitudes as an effort to protect their relationship. Thus, race is presented as a decisive obstacle for their love:

Pero, finalmente, el timbre del mundo cruel y cruento había encontrado un hueco por el que penetrar y apagar la utopía de los cronopios. Y el timbre trajo a las patrullas policiales que le preguntaban, en plena calle, por los papeles de Ka, el miedo justificado de Ka de no conseguir nunca un trabajo que se ajustara a sus capacidades, el miedo y la vergüenza de Ka a tener que demostrar siempre de

buenas a primeras que él era un “negro diferente”, la rabia de Ariadna de tener que enumerar los méritos intelectuales de Ka de buenas a primeras para que su relación con “el chico negro” no fuera vista como una aberración (Abogo 2007: 74).

This excerpt evidences that the intergroup conflict depicted in this narrative is not only due to a categorization based on social parameters, but also on a racial question. Ka acquires a second category citizenship because of his immigrant condition and his black skin, and Ka’s categorizations as an immigrant and as a black man trigger prejudices such as the belief that he cannot have intellectual merits. On her part, Ariadna, who belongs to the privileged white and European group categorizations, feels the need for facing all “las miradas inquisidoras tipo ¿Cómo puedes estar con ese negro?” (2007: 74). In this regard, race is pointed as the main source of conflict that hinders the characters’ love relationship, and, significantly, the allusions to skin color are constant throughout the narrative: “las raíces del rechazo pigmentado” (66), “mientras veían Gato Negro, Gato Blanco” (67), “viajando entre las tinieblas de su memoria negra” (73), “durante meses ambos habían jugado a despigmentarse” (74).

Therefore, the three narratives allude to an intergroup conflict based on religious, socioeconomic, social and racial distinctions, which provides the stories with dramatism and present a very realistic portrayal of actual existing conflicts. However, these conflicts are counterattacked by the intergroup relationships that the individuals fuel, and the consequent interaction of their realms, which favors the minimizing of category boundaries and a transcultural coexistence that enhance their common features.

Firstly, I believe that the narrative voices allude to an amalgam of transcultural elements that prompts the connection between different. Such amalgam is achieved through the constant evocation of this transculturality. For instance, in “A private experience” (2009),

Chika loses a Burberry handbag “that her mother had bought on a recent trip to London” (43), and she also wears a T-shirt “embossed with a picture of the Statue of Liberty” (46) that she bought in New York. Moreover, she listens to BBC radio, reads *The Guardian*, and the market where both characters were before the riot started is depicted as an international collage: “Just half an hour ago, she was in the market with Nnedi. She was buying oranges and Nnedi had walked farther down to buy groundnuts and then there was shouting in English, in pidgin, in Hausa, in Igbo” (44).

Similarly, in “Hora de partir” (2007), African and European elements intertwine, thus evoking an intercontinental atmosphere that works as the narrative frame of the story. The heartbeats that Ka feels when seeing Ariadna for the first time are compared to “una batucada” (2007: 64). In the same way, Ka shares African authors with his lover and both listen together to “los sanadores espirituales de llaga Africana” (69). Elements from the African imagery are further alluded when depicting Ariadna’s curiosity about Ka’s culture: “Ariadna no paró de hacerle preguntas a Ka, con los ojos brillantes como un felino agazapado tras un arbusto en una noche negra de mayombe, sobre África” (68). In this light, the narrator also mentions some European elements, such as “guitarra Española” (65), “decorado de una película independiente” (65) to describe Ka’s feeling about his neighbourhood, the Tennyson’s verses that Ariadna reads aloud while she is at home, or the Hundertwaser’s collage painted on their headboard. Sometimes the narrative voice transcends geographical borders by referring to an explicit universality:

Un argentino, con una voz rasposa y profunda, guitarra española en mano, (...) a ritmo de un tango de Obango, al ilustre Sarava de forma inadvertidamente feliz. Unos camareros fácilmente irritables entraban y salían del local con unas coquetas bandejas. Unos niños magrebíes jugaban al fútbol en la plaza. Un grupo de Muyahidines formaban un círculo en uno de los extremos de la plaza, charlaban amigablemente, y de vez en cuando el suave viento aterciopelado sacudía sus barbas exuberantes. Velos islámicos. Turbantes sijs. Gente paseando abrazada. Balcones adornados con macetas y sabanas que gritaban su repulsa a la guerra de

Iraq. (...) Con los ojos puestos en muchas partes del planeta... Todo parecía tener una belleza frágil. Indescriptible (Abogo 2007: 65).

In this excerpt, the narrative voice transmits Ka's idea about his European neighbourhood. It can be claimed a parallelism between the depiction of this street and the market in "A private experience" (2009) in terms of the allusion to both multicultural contexts as peaceful. While the market in Adichie's narrative is addressed as a quiet place where "shouting in English, in pidgin, in Hausa, in Igbo" (2009: 44) intertwines, the multiculturalism of Ka's neighbourhood is depicted through international elements such as "guitarra Española," "turbantes," "velos," "tango" or "niños magrebíes." Importantly, both scenarios of diversity are associated to peacefulness and joy. In Abogo's story, the terms "inadvertidamente feliz," "charlaban amigablemente," "gente paseando abrazada," or "belleza frágil" transmit a positive image of the street, while the market in "A private experience" (2009) is depicted as a quiet place where Chika and her sister Nnedi buy oranges and groundnuts safely until the riot starts.

In the same way, the house where Kamara and the American family live together in "On Monday of last week" (2009) epitomizes this transcultural amalgam. However, at the beginning of the story, Kamara's and the family's realms remain separate, and the former feels misunderstood for cultural reasons. For instance, Neil assumes that the nanny does not have any higher education, and he also tells Kamara not to mention the word "half-caste" since, unlike Nigerians, North-American people consider that it is a bad word and use "biracial" instead. In addition, she disagrees with certain aspects of Josh's education, as she thinks that parents in the United States are obsessed with the "healthy parenting" and with the idea that they have the right to protect their child from disappointment and want and fail.

Yet, Kamara's gradual integration into the family is further supported by the interweaving of African and North American elements that conform the prevailing transcultural atmosphere in the narrative. In this regard, at the same time as Kamara starts using American expressions for Josh like "all set" and watches the Rugrats DVD with him, she eats "fried plantains" and has "her hair braided in the Senegalese place on South Street" (2009: 80).

As a result, the depiction of a transcultural context in the three narratives fosters the intergroup relations between the characters. Indeed, they resist group categorization by their peaceful coexistence, which establishes intergroup bonds and releases them from categorization entrapment. In Adichie's story "A private experience" (2009), despite belonging to warring religious and ethnic categories, Chika and the Muslim woman develop a sisterhood based on their similarities. First, the riot is introduced as an event that affects both women negatively, as it breaks their peace and forces them to run away. In fact, the Muslim woman shows Chika where to hide from the attackers, and the latter shows her gratitude: "Thank you for calling me. Everything happened so fast and everybody ran and I was suddenly alone and I didn't know what I was doing. Thank you" (Adichie 2009: 44). In this sense, the riot brings bad consequences for the two women, since they lose their sister and daughter respectively because of all the chaos caused by the attackers.

Thus, their worry comes from the fact that they do not know if their relatives are alive. Whereas Chika claims that she left her sister buying groundnuts in the market just before the riot started, the unnamed woman tells her companion that her first daughter was selling groundnuts at that time. Their communion emerges from their desperation, and when the Muslim woman wishes that Allah keep Chika's sister in a safe place, Chika

avoids answering with an “amen” and simply nods as a sign of respect for her religious practices.

As a result of their fear and anxiety, both women pray in a desperate attempt to raise their hopes. At some point in the narrative, the Muslim woman kneels and prays facing Mecca. Although before the riot Chika thought that “offering Masses is a waste of money” and “just a fund-raising for the church” (52), the prayers of her companion encourage her to “touch the finger rosary that she still wears (...) to please her mother” (52) and, when she leaves the store once the riot is over, she prays that a taxi appears with her sister Nnedi inside. Interestingly, although religion constitutes the basis of the conflict between their groups, it also becomes their point of union, as both pray to calm their anxiety. In this sense, religion establishes a sisterhood between the two triggered by their similar way of fighting their fears.

Furthermore, this communion between the two women is based on the mutual interest they have towards each other’s lives, as they ask one another about their jobs, relatives and past experiences. For instance, Chika wonders whether her companion has witnessed many riots, and the Muslim woman shows interest in Chika’s mother and sister. Therefore, their attachment to their group categorization is broken by the mutual acceptance and embracement of their lifestyles and beliefs, which are shown as more similar than it could be thought. Also, the handing-over of the scarf to Chika so that she can use to stop the hemorrhage constitutes a metaphorical act of choosing to feed their individuality and sisterhood over religious and ethnical bias.

In fact, this intergroup bias is combatted by presenting the riot as negative for both sides:

The streets where she ran blindly, not sure in which direction Nnedi had run, not sure if the man running beside her was a friend or an enemy, not sure if she could stop and pick up one of the bewildered-looking children separated from their

mothers in the rush, not even sure who was who or who was killing whom (Adichie, "A Private Experience" 45).

As this excerpt shows, the narrative voice adopts a neutral perspective in the religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, and attacks intergroup bias through the employment of sentences that highlight the violent event as pointless and harmful for both sides, such as "children separated from their mothers in the rush" and "not even sure who was who or who was killing who." The unfounded nature of the riot is further underlined when the narrative voice reveals that, after the violent episode, Chika "will look at only one of the corpses, naked, stiff, facedown, and it will strike her that she cannot tell if the partially burned man is Igbo or Hausa, Christian or Muslim, from looking at that charred flesh" (2009: 53). Also, intergroup conflict is approached as only convenient for rulers when the narrator reproduces Nnedi's opinion about it and mentions that "religion and ethnicity are often politicized because the ruler is safe if the hungry ruled are killing one another" (2009: 48).

This communion and truthful interest between members of distinct groups can likewise be perceived in "Hora de partir" (2007) and "On Monday of last week" (2009). According to Edward A. Ross, "the diversification which is going on in each culture in consequence of its penetration by elements from other cultures widens the range of individual choice" (Ross 1920: 479). Thus, the intergroup relations and their transculturality affect positively to the individual as opposed to group categories. The romantic relationship between Ka and Ariadna and the effort they make to maintain it despite the multiple obstacles implies a huge interest in each other's thoughts and way of living. As previously mentioned, whereas Ka is "deseoso de leer todos los espacios de la vida de Ariadna" (2007: 67), she

asks his lover about Africa. Ka's interest in his partner is showed from the moment he meets her for the first time:

La primera vez que Ka vio a Ariadna fue en la terraza de un café que languidecía a los pies de un horrible edificio que hacia de Museo de Arte Contemporáneo. (...) El aire tenía un aroma fresco y húmedo. La tarde aflojaba, la luz se adormecía bajo los párpados del sol. El sol, sin apenas hojas, languidecía. Los contornos de las cosas se desvanecían. (...) En aquel instante, mientras la descifraba, Ka se preguntó cómo es que aquella chica no estaba maravillada de si misma (Abogo 2007: 64-65).

Ka's desire of deciphering Ariadna, together with his admiration for her beauty, evidences his curiosity towards the European girl. In this light, the sentence "los contornos de las cosas se desvanecían" constitutes a revealing metaphor that illustrates how they cross group categorization boundaries (based on the white / black and native / immigrant binaries) to start a relationship. This act of resistance towards group categorization culminates when they decide to live together and "sus formas se juntaron y se dispersaron como rayos de sol" (Abogo 2007: 67). Indeed, they rebel against homogamy, a practice that supports the fixity of individuals within their group categories, and which consists in the romantic and sexual union of people based on ethnic, racial, ideological, and socioeconomic similarities between them (Brynin et al. 2009; Killian 2012; Mäenpää & Jalovaara 2014). According to Killian:

choosing to marry a partner from a different racial and/or ethnic background can carry serious social and psychological implications for interracial couple's relationships with friends and family. By violating social expectations of homogamy, social conformity, and segregation along racial and ethnic lines, interracial couples appear to represent a site of social and political resistance to larger social forces and institutions (2013: 190).

In this sense, the decisive role of homogamy in the construction of racial categories and boundaries among races is based on the historical perception of interracial couples as a threat to racial purity by white supremacists (Sexton 2002; Childs 2005). In the same way, interracial sex can be understood as deviant and as a form of resistance to the notion of homogamy. In fact, the sexual scenes between Ka and Ariadna that take place in the story play an important role in the achievement of their union and evoke the breaking of racial and social boundaries:

Se amaron de una forma completamente libre, libres de todas las nomenclaturas segregacionistas y los temores geométricos. Ambos querían morir el uno dentro de la otra o la una dentro del otro, convertirse en sustancias inanimadas, recorrer toda la gama de la existencia pre-orgánica y post-orgánica, y renacer una y otra vez, un millón de veces, ad infinitum, para volver amarse (Abogo 2007: 67).

In fact, their conversion into “sustancias inanimadas” alludes to their liberation from the rigid lines that fence both characters in racial and social categorizing parameters, evoked through “las nomenclaturas segregacionistas” and “los temores geométricos.” Ka and Ariadna travel towards “la gama de la existencia,” that is, the amalgam of colors. Thus, their fusion transports them to “un espacio nuevo” (68) where group distinctions are minimized in the name of their love by the construction of their “burbuja particular” within “la gran Burbuja en la que los fanatismos de unos (...) abren las puertas del infierno de otros” (74). This metaphor refers to the bias they have to confront and that results from group categorization.

In the same fashion, the sexual attraction between Tracy and Kamara in “On Monday of last week” (2009) also works as a bond between outgroup members. Even though the beginning of the narrative shows Tracy’s existence as “inconsequential, a background

reality” (2009: 79) for Kamara due to Tracy’s absence, it eventually materializes when they meet in the kitchen:

Their eyes held and suddenly Kamara wanted to lose weight and wear makeup again (...) because what had happened in the kitchen that afternoon was a flowering of an extravagant hope, because what now propelled her life was the thought that Tracy would come upstairs again (Adichie, “On Monday of last week” 79-80).

This moment marks the beginning of her integration into the family. The sexual attraction she feels towards Tracy initiates a closeness between the two women that diminishes the native / immigrant group distinction. In this sense, the relationships between Ka and Ariadna, and Kamara and Tracy, function as a form of resistance against dominant social forms such as heterosexuality and homogamous racial couples (Butler 1997; Brynin, Simonetta Longhi & Martínez Pérez 2009).

The fact of not following these hegemonic narratives is considered an act of disobedience and highlights the psychological consequences and the social costs that can result from “loving a body that is supposed to be unloveable” or a body that people are supposed to repudiate” (Ahmed 2014: 146). Therefore, the social tension that emerge from interracial and queer encounters and intergroup relationships in “Hora de partir” (2007) and “On Monday of last week” (2009) can be approached as part of “the negative effects of ‘not quite’ living in the norms” and implies “how loving loves that are not ‘normative’ involves being subject to such norms precisely in the costs and damage that are incurred when not following them” (Ahmed 2014: 146).

Besides their sexual connection, Kamara’s and Tracy’s interest in each other reminds to that between Chika and the Muslim woman, or between Ka and Ariadna. Indeed, in their first encounter, Tracy’s curiosity about Kamara can be perceived through her constant

questioning: she asks the nanny about her country, the meaning of her name, her master's degree, whether she has recently moved to the United States or whether she has been a model before. In turn, Kamara's interest in Tracy comes with her desire of seeing her again and with her continuous fantasies about her.

To sum up, although in the three narratives the main characters are able to establish intergroup relations, thus minimizing category boundaries, the stories portray a very realistic framework when depicting the complete communion between groups as a hard process that remains unfinished at the end of the stories. I argue that, whereas in "A private experience" (2009) the communion among different is successful, in "On Monday of last week" (2009) and "Hora de partir" (2007) the characters' triumph is incomplete. This partial success comes with the fact that, despite Ka, Ariadna and Kamara carry out intergroup relations successfully, constituting resistant subjects that trigger the coexistence among different, their willingness to embrace each other is eventually interrupted. As Julia Borst claims in her analysis of Abogo's short story, "the 'mixed' couple as a trope of transcultural coexistence (...) is slowly deconstructed throughout the story" (Borst 2017: 43). She highlights a firmly rooted racism in society as the cause of Ka's and Ariadna's struggle to overcome differences, and understands the legacy of colonialism and prejudices as the main consequences of this racism, as showed in the following excerpt:

Su voz, amarga y salvaje, era como un grito triste y frío, aunque hablaba en un tono bajo.

-No podemos seguir así, eso no puede seguir así. Te niegas a enterrar a tus muertos, quieres vivir bajo su sombra, quieres destruirte.

Las palabras de Ariadna rebotaron contra las paredes, pintadas de azul cielo (Abogo 2007: 71).

Therefore, Ariadna blames Ka for not being able to separate himself from a group categorization marked by his race. In turn, Ka blames Ariadna for treating him as “one of those African objects of curiosity and desire she wants to acquire knowledge about” (Borst 2017: 44): “Ariadna no paró de hacerle preguntas a Ka (...) sobre África” (Abogo 2007: 68). Consequently, at the end of the story, both characters realize that “los estigmas de la historia” are more powerful than their love, and the protagonists’ efforts to “despigmentarse” (74) are made in vain. (Borst 2017: 44).

Similarly, although a sense of intimacy between Kamara and Tracy (together with Kamara’s integration into the American family) is partially achieved, Kamara is eventually depicted as a naïve character once she finds out that Tracy starts also flirting with Maren, Josh’s French teacher:

Neil introduced them. Maren extended her hand and Tracy took it.

“Are you wearing contacts?” Tracy asked.

“Contacts? No.”

“You have the most unusual eyes. Violet.” Tracy was still holding Maren’s hand.

“Oh. Thank you! Maren giggled nervously.

“They really are violet.”

“Oh... yes, I think so.”

“Have you ever been an artist’s model?”

“Oh ... no...” More giggles.

“You should think about it,” Tracy said.

She raised the apple to her lips and took a slow bite, her gaze never wavering from maren’s face. Neil was watching them with an indulgent smile, and Kamara looked away. She sat down next to Josh and took a cookie from his plate (Adichie, “On Monday of last week” 94).

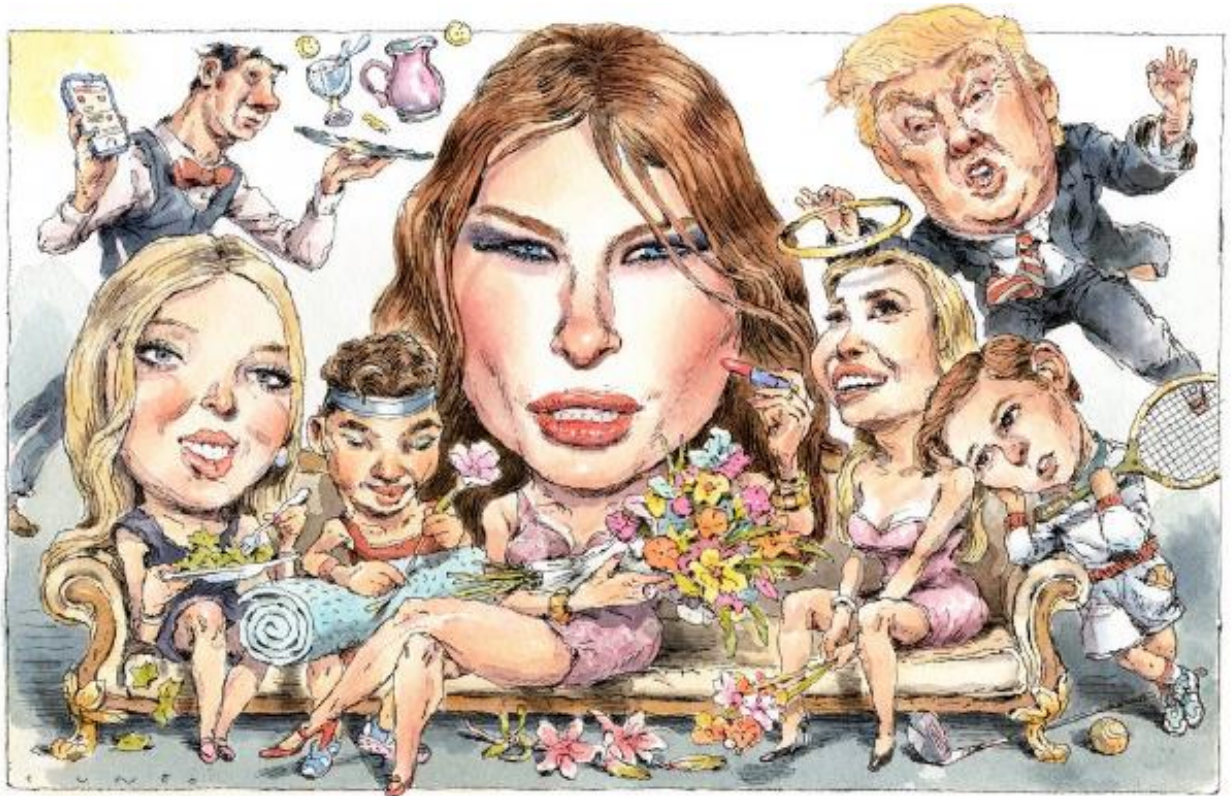
In this sense, I believe that Kamara's integration into the family is just an illusion since, as this excerpt shows, Tracy treats all her female employees in the same way. She seduces them by praising their physical attributes and making similar questions such as whether they have been an artist's model. Thus, Kamara's belief that a real intergroup relation could take place between herself and Tracy turns innocent in this last part of the story, and her naivety is symbolized by her childish reaction to Tracy's behavior: she just joins Josh and eats a cookie.

Importantly, unlike the two previous stories, I believe that the total connection between intergroup members in "A private experience" (2009) is accomplished since, although they eventually leave the store separately, the success and genuinity of their communion is materialized at the end of the story. When the Christian girl asks the unnamed woman whether she can keep her scarf, the narrative voice reveals that "there is perhaps the beginning of future grief on her face, but she smiles a slight, distracted smile before she hands the scarf back to Chika and turns to climb out of the window" (55). Thus, despite her grief, the Muslim woman decides to confide her scarf to the Christian girl, ignoring religious and ethnical differences in favor of human generosity and sisterhood.

Nonetheless, although I am aware of some of the character's failure concerning their relationships, my analysis focuses on the heroicness that all the characters embody in the selected narratives. Indeed, these pieces of writing constitute outstanding examples of resistance literature, since the character's gallantry is marked by the courage that they show when it comes to defying the boundaries based on hegemonic racial, social, and national group categorizations for the attainment of their free agency. Therefore, to conclude, I argue that, despite the impossibility for reaching a complete and real communion among differentials in "On Monday of last week" (2009) and "Hora de partir" (2007), the three stories analyzed in this chapter portray individuals that resist group

categorization by means of achieving a close relationship between outgroup members. Even though they belong to distinct racial, social, religious and class categorization groups, the literary voices' interest in each other and their desire of creating bonds between them constitute effective devices to minimize stereotyping and a way of delegitimising intergroup conflict. In this sense, their penetration into theoretically opposed groups leads them to a process of *individuation* that provides them with a critical voice detached from the bias thinking that the group categorization imposes on individuals. Consequently, the interrelation of intercultural elements and the mutual interest among the characters, based on a sexual attraction, love, and friendship, widens their free agency and demolishes category boundaries in favor of the coexistence of different.

CHAPTER 7:
WHEN A SMILE BACK IS THE BEST OF THE ATTACKS: HUMOR
AS POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN DONATO NDONGO NGUEMA'S
"LA MIRADA DE LA NIÑA TASIA," CHIMAMANDA NGOZI
ADICHIE'S "THE ARRANGEMENTS: A WORK OF FICTION" AND
DANIEL ALARCÓN'S "LOS SUEÑOS INÚTILES."



Cuneo, John. Caricature of Trump's family. New York Times, 28 Jun. 2016,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/books/review/melania-trump-in-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-short-story.html>.

The potential of humor as a political tool has not received the necessary attention in academic studies. Even though some scholars have approached it as a resistance weapon to political authority (Scott 1990) and explored the potential of humor to resist oppression (Johansen 1991; Stokker 1995; Henman 2001; Sorensen 2008), very few have paid the necessary attention to humor as a form of active (Benton 1988) or even passive resistance (Sharp 1973). Nevertheless, in recent years, scholars have started to understand it as an effective political device that can counter oppression (Abulhassan Hassan 2013) and a powerful strategy of nonviolent resistance against tyrannical powers (Sorensen 2008).

In this light, Egon Larsen claims that “the political joke is a safely valve... a way in which an obsessed people preserve its sanity” (Larsen 1980: 3) and Stephen Brigham suggests that the absurdity can offer people new insights that are more difficult to reach through reason and logic (Brigham 2005). Indeed, the latter claims that incongruity and absurdity are essential elements in the construction of political humor. In this regard, although Jul Sorensen acknowledges that the importance of humor as a device to resist oppression should not be exaggerated, he argues that “humor’s main source of power is its ability to turn things upside down and present them in a new frame” (Sorensen 2008: 185). Sorensen points at this function of humor as that which makes it a powerful way of political resistance, because it changes the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed by altering it. When this function works, three things happen simultaneously: (a) the humor exerted has a confrontational nature because it is intended to feed the conflict by means of provoking and ridiculing, (b) it reduces fear among the resistant subjects, and (c) the oppressor’s options to respond in a way he can later justify are reduced (Sorensen 2008: 180).

In this chapter, I will be working with Donato Ndongo’s short story “La mirada de la Niña Tasia,” first published in English in 2013 and later included in *El Sueño y otros relatos*

(2013) in its Spanish version, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction," published in *The New York Times* in 2016, and Daniel Alarcón's "Los sueños inútiles," included in his book *El rey siempre está por encima del pueblo* (2009). I analyze how the oppressed literary voices portrayed in these stories use humor to empower themselves against a political authoritarian figure.

Firstly, I approach these narratives as satires that show "things upside down" (Sorensen 2008) since they offer a caricature of the oppressive governors built upon satirical strategies that pursue the demystification and ridiculization of the tyrant. To define the satire, I draw on Isabel Stein's definition, who at the same time bases herself on the theory of Michael Issacharoff (1989) and Dustin Griffin (1994) to address this genre as a "highly-sophisticated and intellectually-demanding display of wit" (Stein 2000: 26) that "conveys an ideological commitment or necessary moralistic critique" (27), that aims at "provoking as much controversy and disagreement as possible" (29), and whose impulses are more vertically than horizontally, in the sense that the satirical voice wants to place itself above the object of its mockery (28). In this light, Van der Linde & Carlos-Germán understand the caricature as a core element of the satire, since the latter leads the satirist to play with certain humorous resources in order to offer a caricature of enhanced figures or institutions (Der Linde and Carlos-Germán 2007: 22). Thus, the three short stories analyzed in this chapter can be grouped under the term satires because, in addition to conveying an ideological commitment and being a source of controversy and a mockery towards a political figure, they present a caricatured governor at the core of their narratives.

Importantly, the narratives that conform this analysis are built around three powerful figures who constitute the source of the characters' affliction. "La mirada de la Niña Tasia" (2013) narrates the erectile dysfunction that the despot suffers while being in bed

with her young and beautiful sexual companion, and the conspiracy against the tyrant that the commander Mbi Mologo starts preparing after knowing about the president's sexual problems. The story opens with the depiction of a young girl dancing for the fictional tyrant, Don Gumersindo Nze Ebere Ekum, to honour him. His authority is alluded to through the girl's thoughts while dancing:

La súbita calma tranquilizó la tarde de manera tan brusca como las sombras que desplazaban la luz, y un irreprimible terror supersticioso invadió el ánimo de la bailarina y erizó su piel aún convulsa, sobrecogida ante la convicción de que había concluido su breve existencia; ahora quedaría fulminada, traspasada o paralizada por los temibles ojos de aquel ser sin par, señor de su vida y de todas las vidas, tan lúgubre era la leyenda que envolvía al personaje homenajeado, infundida desde el nacimiento (Ndongo 2013: 75).

Indeed, this excerpt evidences the supremacy of the dictator and the control he exerts over the population. The fear that the young dancer feels is based on the intuition that the old tyrant will select her as his sexual companion. Her concern becomes real after the dance, when he caresses her breasts and asks for her name. Anastasia knows that “el amo estaba complacido” (76) and the omen is eventually concreted at the end of the day, once an official vehicle from the government arrives to her parents' house carrying a huge amount of food and “un abultado montoncito de billetes nuevecitos” (76). Similarly, the tyrant's power is likewise showed when the narrator mentions how he kills many innocent citizens for the only reason of being “opositores y discrepantes” (92), and the fear that he transmits to the population of the country, alluded to in sentences such as “ya nadie era capaz de decirle la verdad a Ese Hombre” (92).

In the same way, the power of the tyrant depicted in Daniel Alarcón's “Los Sueños Inútiles” (2009) is evidenced throughout the narrative. The story portrays a fictional situation in which past and future are intertwined to depict a hypothetical futuristic Second

Civil War in a United States under a dictatorship. The conflicting situation that the author depicts in “Los sueños inútiles” (2009) can be understood as a reflection of the United States’ political tension during G.W. Bush presidency, since in an interview made to *Diario Correo* in 2014, Daniel Alarcon refers to his short story collection *El rey siempre esta por encima del pueblo* (2009) as a book where:

Hay preocupaciones muy norteamericanas de la coyuntura política de EE.UU. No es por nada que aparezca la Guerra Civil dos veces. Y eso tiene que ver con lo que se vivía en EE.UU. del 2004 al 2008. Son cuentos que si bien no lo dicen directamente son muy de la época de Bush, de su segunda gestión. Un momento en el que yo sentía que el país se venía abajo (Daniel Alarcon 2014).

At the beginning of the story we are told how, during the second year of war, the president is severely wounded after receiving an accidental shot while he was hunting. As, at first, he rejects any medical care, the seriousness of the wound increases to the point that a specialist recommends him the immediate amputation of his left leg. The problem acquires a bigger dimension when the subversives manage to get hold of it. Then the president starts a witch-hunt to find out who stole the leg from him and his tyrant status becomes more evident through some of his actions. For instance, he orders the closure of newspapers after his amputation appears on the tabloids’ covers. He also orders the execution of the specialist that treats him as he suspects that the doctor has threatened him, together with the execution of the guard who fires the doctor for killing him too quickly and thus preventing the tyrant from enjoying his death. Similarly, the African doctor who treats him after the killed one is send to jail and fired after daring to confront the president:

-Fue un buen consejo- dijo Céphas al ser confrontado-. Un consejo médico sensato, y mi posición al respecto sigue en pie.

En su silla de ruedas, el rostro del presidente mostró el odio más puro.

Céphas sintió que su rostro se sonrojaba.

-No, no- se disculpó-, fue una frase torpe, señor presidente, se lo ruego. Mi inglés no es muy bueno.

-Me llegaron sus informes- dijo el presidente-. Su inglés es mejor que el mío- arrojó al africano una pila de papeles que se derramaron como confeti por el piso alfombrado (Alarcón 2009: 162).

Therefore, as it happens in “La mirada de la Niña Tasia” (2013), the tyrant’s political control is showed by the fear he instils in people. Those who work for him (the engineer, the doctors and the government spokesman), together with his wife, are depicted as people who hinge on the president and are constantly pleasing him by obeying his orders. For instance, when speaking with the press, the spokesman does not mention the president’s wound and mocks the subversives, who “fueron despojados del derecho al sufragio” (159). In the same way, one of the doctors exalts him before the operation when, in an attempt to please him, he says that the president “llevará su herida por todo este gran territorio como un testimonio de sacrificio” and that he will embody the nation (159). Also, once the president loses his hopes and claims to be a failure, his wife answers back by addressing him as “el nuevo Lincoln” (161).

In this regard, the dictator’s sovereignty in both stories is further supported by the use of diverse names to address them, such as “su Excelencia” (76), “Egregio Prócer” (77), “Máximo Dignatario” (76), “Gran y Único Líder” (79), or “señor” (79) in the case of Don Gumersindo Nze Ebere Ekum, and “jefe de Estado” (149), “señor presidente” (161), “señor comandante en jefe” (161), and “el nuevo Lincoln” (161) in reference to the president in “Los sueños inútiles” (2009). I argue that these different ways of naming them also contribute to exalt their power and reinforce their image as superior beings.

In a similar fashion, even though “The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction” (2016), by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is narrated from Melania’s perspective, I argue that the story

likewise hinges on a strong political figure: Donald Trump. As it happens in the two previous short stories, he is presented as the sovereign of his house, in contraposition with his wife, who from the first paragraphs of the narrative is depicted in an inferior position. The narrator reveals that Melania is ignored by a husband who is “too busy” (Adichie 2016) to dedicate her some attention. She is constantly looking for his complacency and, for this reason, she does things like her husband prefers them: she buys some flowers with her own money because “Donald might like that” (Adichie 2016), she takes Tiffany to lunch “so that she could tell Donald that she had taken Tiffany to lunch” (Adichie 2016), and accepts the fact that her husband is winning the election polls in silence although she is scared about the idea of him becoming a president. She even feeds his ego and encourages him with sentences such as “it makes no sense what they want to do. You have many votes. Look at the polls. People love you” (2016). In the same way, Donald Trump’s daughter Ivanka, is depicted as a clever woman who is also constantly pleasing and supporting her father. When Trump finds out that people from the Republican Party want to sabotage him, her position is made clear: “It’s utter sabotage and unacceptable” (2016). Also, she gives her father further support throughout the narrative: “You do have to hit them back, totally (...). We have to figure out the best way” (Adichie 2016); “we can’t keep them think that you are going to be Caligula when you become president, Dad” (2016).

Therefore, despite the striking difference between the political figures in the other two narratives and Donald Trump due to the democratic condition of the latter, the three political characters enjoy a privileged and central position in the narrative while those surrounding them meet their desires. I argue that this superior status is fed by the egocentrism that the three characters have in common. Basing herself on the work of Julio Calviño Iglesias in *La novela del dictador en Hispanoamérica (1985)*, Francisca

Noguerol Jiménez establishes some attributes, such as the messianism and the megalomania, to define the fictional tyrant, and highlights the egocentrism as a central characteristic in this type of characters (Noguerol Jiménez 1998). Interestingly, although Trump cannot be considered a dictator, these characteristics are present in the way he is depicted in Adichie's fiction. In this regard, I also find interesting that the fact that none of the political figures in the narratives have a Latin American origin does not impede that the scheme employed to characterize Latin American tyrants fits the analysis of the literary representation of these North-American and African fictional leaders.

Thus, the tyrant's "oligarquía egocéntrica" (2013:91) in "La mirada de la Niña Tasia" (2013) is made evident from the first lines of the narrative, when he is being honored by the crowd, and is further exposed at different moments in the story. For example, once his sexual impotence shows up in his first encounter with Anastasia, his main worry is that "tan ingrato contratiempo jamás debía trascender" (82), and blames the incident to:

sus magnas e infinitas preocupaciones y responsabilidades como Conductor Vitalicio y Protector Perpetuo de aquella nación de montaraces sinvergüenzas y traidores dispuestos a alterar el orden y la paz y la armonía felizmente reinantes en el país (...) a una momentánea indisposición debida a un exceso de condimento en la comida ofrecida por los aldeanos, esos zoquetes y rústicos comemierdas (Ndongo 2013: 83).

Similarly, the North-American governor's egocentrism in "Los sueños inútiles" (2009) becomes one of the main driving forces of the narrative, as the story is built upon the president's missing leg and every character in it desperately attempts to solve the leader's physical and political problem. Funnily enough, the president's tyranny, with its consequent narcissism, turns his amputation into a matter of State.

In Adichie's short story, the fictional character of Donald Trump is so focused on himself that he forgets about Melania's desires because "he [is] not eager to please her" (Adichie

2016). His little care about those who are not him can be perceived along the narrative. When Ivanka suggests that Melania should use less contour makeup and smile less to be more relatable in Donald's campaign, her father just agrees without consulting his wife. Also, in the moment in which he is back home "red-faced" because "all the top guys at the R.N.C have decided to focus on 2020 and put very little money and effort into [his] campaign like he does not have a chance to win the elections" (2016), Melania tries to praise him but "he barely seemed to hear her, consumed as he was, typing furiously on his phone" (2016). His narcissistic attitude is further alluded when he utters sentences such as "I'm leaving the Republican Party. That's it. If they are going to treat me this way. It's not nice" (2016), or through the patronizing way in which he treats his wife: "This isn't Europe, honey. You don't know anything about this" (2016).

In short, these leaders enjoy a superior position and receive some sort of adoration from the people who surround them. Their power comes in the form of a messianism, fed by their vanity and megalomania, in the sense that they transcend the mere recognition as political figures to establish themselves as a figure of adoration and a potential savior of the nation. What connects Trump to the fictional tyrannical leaders in Alarcón's and Ndongó's stories is that they believe themselves indispensable "para la buena marcha de la nación" (Noguerol Jiménez 1992: 94) and act as independent and solitary political governors who do not find support in political parties or organizations.

In another vein, I argue the necessity to postulate an autobiographical subject in order to establish a connection between the oppressed narrators and the authors' voices in terms of their desire of mocking these political figures. In this light, the confrontational purpose of the stories is enhanced, and the privileged status that these governors enjoy can be extrapolated to reality. My point is that the connection between the narrative voices and

that of the authors becomes evident since, despite the fictional character of the stories, they contain a huge dosis of realism enhanced by the presence of realistic elements.

Accordingly, I claim that “La mirada de la Niña Tasia” (2013) contains strong parallelisms between the fictional tyrant that the story depicts and Teodoro Obiang Nguema and his oppressive regime in Equatorial Guinea. International Amnesty has recently published a report pointing at the continuous harassment and detention that the government exerts over the opposition, the reclusion of political activists, and the strong control of the State over the press as the main causes for conceiving Equatorial Guinea as a country under a dictatorship (“Guinea Ecuatorial 2017/2018”). In this context, Ana Lúcia Sá also stresses the oppressive character of Teodoro Obiang Nguema:

Tras haber llegado al poder en 1979, después de derrocar en un golpe militar a su tío y primer presidente del país Francisco Macías Nguema, Teodoro Obiang Nguema es el rostro de un régimen dictatorial personalizado que subsiste en un país cuyas dinámicas económicas se implican de manera radical en el capitalismo hegemónico. Debido a la vitalidad geopolítica y geoestratégica del Golfo de Guinea (...), el actual régimen político es sostenido, entre otros actores, por grandes corporaciones norteamericanas que explotan los recursos petrolíferos (Lúcia Sá 2014: 204).

Bearing in mind this political situation, it can be argued that Ndongo’s purpose is to exert a political resistance through the literary negative depiction of an African tyrant who, in many ways, reminds to Teodoro Obiang Nguema. Firstly, the name of the fictional tyrant in Ndongo’s “La mirada de la Niña Tasia” (2013), Don Gumersindo Nze Ebere Ekum, clearly evidences the African origins of the dictator. Secondly, at the end of the story, the narrator mentions that he has been almost four decades in power, and his old age is repeatedly addressed along the narrative: “todopoderoso y precario anciano” (76), “abuelete ansioso” (80), “vetusto embaucador” (90). Indeed, Teodoro Obiang was an old man by the time this short story was published, being 71 years old by then. Although he

had not been the president of Equatorial Guinea for the almost 40 years by the time the narrative was published, he has been in power since 1987, and still is, being the man who has governed the country for the longest period of time.

Another parallelism between the fictional tyrant and Teodoro Obiang Nguema is the type of government they impose on the population. The narrator depicts a country where everyone fears the president and the population lives under a regime of repression.

According to International Amnesty:

En las elecciones legislativas y municipales celebradas en noviembre, el Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial, en el poder, obtuvo 99 de los 100 escaños en la Cámara de los Diputados, todos los escaños elegidos en el Senado y todos los escaños excepto uno en las elecciones municipales. Los partidos de la oposición denunciaron irregularidades electorales e intimidación. El acceso a Internet se vio gravemente interrumpido durante al menos cinco días (“Guinea Ecuatorial” 2017 / 2018).

Given all these facts, I argue that Ndongó’s fiction evokes the political situation in Equatorial Guinea, and the tyrant depicted in the story shares important similarities with Teodoro Obiang Nguema. In the same way, despite past and future are intermingled in a very fictional way, Alarcón’s short story “Los Sueños Inútiles” (2009) poses a question approached by many scholars in the historical field nowadays that holds a very realistic component: the political and social decadence of the United States. In fact, the narrative constitutes a fictional omen of the American decadence, which is made more evident at the end of the story through the narrator’s reflection “¿en qué momento se jodió Estados Unidos? Hoy, por supuesto, ya era demasiado tarde para salvar algo de esta nación enferma. Pero, ¿y ayer? ¿La semana pasada? ¿Hace un año? ¿Una década atrás?” (Alarcón 2009:165).

Indeed, scholars such as Noam Chomsky (2012) or A. Pozzi and Fabio G. Nigra (2009) have approached the United States as a country in decadence for various reasons. On their part, A. Pozzi and Fabio G. Nigra claim that this decadence is global, and that the emergent States from the Industrial Revolution and the formation of national markets are today insufficient to respond to the necessities of a “capital sin bandera” (A. Pozzi and Fabio G. Nigra 2009: 10). In a more specific note, Chomsky argues that the industrial and economic power achieved by the country after the Second World War has been gradually reduced over the last decades due to the economic and social growth that Japan, Europe or China have acquired from the 60’s (Chomsky 2011). He also points at the recent economic crisis as an excuse to destroy social programs that precisely protect many citizens in the country, and asserts that politicians in the United States are asking private companies for financial support, which implies the movement of the country towards a fierce corporatocracy with less social welfare (2011).

In addition, the allusion to other existing elements in the story contributes to the reinforcement of its closeness to reality through which Alarcón achieves a strong grade of veracity. Thus, the revealing of some information, such as the fact that the tyrant president lives in the White House, or the bombs falling in Los Angeles or Montana, the explicit reference to other real places like Brooklyn, Oregon or California, and to real historical facts and figures like the Crimean War and the president Lincoln, enhances a parallelism between this piece of fiction and the actual decadent situation of the United States defended by some scholars.

In a similar vein, the fictional character of Donald Trump in Adichie’s “The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction” (2016) shares many similarities with the real Trump. Thus, as suggested before, despite Don Gumersindo Nze Ebere Ekum might be evocating Teodoro Obiang Nguema, their parallelism is not as explicit as the connection between Adichie’s

character and the actual president of the United States. First, this connection is evoked by means of the common physical features, and the language used, by both the fictional and the real Trump. The American president recreated by the Nigerian author uses the same language that his real counterpart: words such as “terrific” and “losers,” together with features referring to Trump’s body such as “his pale, slack belly, and the sprinkle of bristly hair on his back” (Adichie 2016). Also, the writing contains many elements that make a reference to real people and events. Adichie gives shape to the characters of Melania Trump, Ivanka, Tiffany, Hillary Clinton, and of course Donald Trump. The way they are portrayed in the story echoes the idea that the general public has conformed about them through part of the media. For example, the relationship between Melania and Ivanka is presented in a tense way, Trump is showed as a selfish and childish man, and Melania as a submissive woman who depends on her husband. In this light, the narrative contains elements with a big dose of realism, such as Melania’s Slovenian origins mentioned at some points in the story, the conflict between the Republican Party and the former president, or Trump leading the national polls.

Importantly, the postulation of an autobiographical subject evidences that the real political figures these characters allude to and the characters themselves share a condition of oppressors. While Teodoro Obiang Nguema and the fictional president in “Los sueños inútiles” (2009) are clearly tyrannical governors and act like one by exerting their coercitive force, I argue that Donald Trump, despite being a democratic leader, can be approached as an oppressor of certain minorities. According to Brenda Major, the triumph of Trump represents a social regression, since they believe that his election as president constitutes a serious threat to the racial and cultural diversity that has always characterized the United States (Major et al. 2016). More specifically, Kristina Daugirdas and Julian Davis Mortenson point out that:

On January 27, 2017, President Trump issued an executive order that (1) prohibited nationals from seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the United States for ninety days; and (2) prohibited individuals from entering into the United States as refugees for 120 days (Daugirdas and Davis Mortenson 2017: 764).

Furthermore, in an article published by the New York Times in January 2018, David Leonhardt and Ian Prasad Philbrick assemble some of the most controversial sentences uttered by Trump to highlight his racism and xenophobia (Leonhardt & Philbrick 2017). In a news conference given on August 28th in 2017, he pardoned- and even praised- Joe Arpaio, an Arizona sheriff sanctioned for racially profiling latinos and treating immigrants in prison brutally (“President Donald Trump defends pardon of Sheriff Joe Arpaio” 2017). In the same way, they accuse Trump of enhancing a racial conflict in the United States through his declarations. They assert that he is always “quick to highlight crimes committed by dark-skinned people, sometimes exaggerating or lying about them (such as a claim about growing crime from ‘radical Islamic terror’ in Britain)” (Leonhardt & Philbrick 2017), and that “he is very slow to decry hate crimes committed by whites against dark-skinned people (such as the killing of an Indian man in Kansas last year)” (2017).

Bearing in mind that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a black Nigerian author who lives in the United States, it can be claimed that Donald Trump’s politics can translate into coercitive actions against her in terms of her race and immigrant status. In interviews made for diverse newspapers, Adichie has highlighted the racist character of Trump’s government and its dangers: “the point is, the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) exists. The KKK endorsed Donald Trump. The KKK stands for white supremacy, and that has to be acknowledged” (“Is Donald Trump racist?” 2016). Also, in a conference held in Boston in 2018, she points out that:

Parts of the world that have political power are increasingly moving rightward, and while I think there are some worthwhile ideas on the political right, it's also on the political right that you have ideas about what kind of person deserves dignity and what kind of person doesn't (Stokel-Walker 2018).

In this light, she highlights that liberal democracy is in danger and suggests that the presidency of Donald Trump, supported by White supremacists, constitutes a risk for the rights of black and immigrant citizens in the United States.

To sum up the first part of my analysis, the three political figures in the narratives (with Donald Trump and Teodoro Obiang Nguema as their real counterparts), can be regarded as oppressors. Importantly, with the postulation of an autobiographical subject, I also establish an interconnection between the authors and the narrative voices in the stories, as they create these literary voices to release themselves from a state of oppression and resist against these powerful figures by caricaturing them.

Indeed, as previously mentioned, the three political figures' caricature is central in the narratives. This humorous portrayal constitutes an act of resistance because it combats their messianism as fundamental feature of the tyrant (Noguerol Jiménez 1992) through their demystification. Thus, the authors project themselves in a literary voice that is able to penetrate the most intimate aspects of the oppressor to mock him. Basing themselves on the study of Mathew Hodgart *Sátira* (1969) and on Isabel Rodríguez's readings (1988) about the "sátira marquiana," Van der Linde and Carlos Germán establish four satirizing strategies: 1) the demystification of the absolute power by means of a carnival image; 2) the depiction of the tyrant from an animalistic perspective, that is, the enhancement of his instincts instead of his intellect; 3) the recreation of his sexuality and obscenity; 4) and the denigration of the institution he represents (Der Linde and Carlos Germán 2007). Also, according to Hodgart,

El objetivo del satírico es dejar en cueros a los hombres, y, aparte de las diferencias físicas, un hombre desnudo es lo que más se parece a otro hombre (...) La finalidad del satírico consiste frecuentemente en desinflar a los falsos héroes, los impostores, y los charlatanes, que pretenden un respeto que no les es debido (Hodgart 1969: 27-28).

First, I argue that the desmytification of the power held by the political figures in the stories is the result of a caricature based on their victimization. The fictional Trump in “The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction” (2016) and the dictators in Ndongó’s and Alarcon’s narratives are portrayed as weak figures, both physically and mentally speaking. This weakness triggers the reader’s compassion and, consequently, strips these characters of their powerful condition. For instance, the allusion to the decadent bodies is constant in the three texts. The narrative voice in “La mirada de la Niña Tasia” (2013) addresses Don Gumersindo Nze Ebere Ekum in derogatory terms that contrast strongly with names like “Egregio Prócer” (77) or “su Excelencia” (76). Indeed, despite in the eyes of Tasia he is “el único hombre poderoso, del más rico del país (...) el que más se [acerca] a la figura de un príncipe de cuento en aquella república de negros palurdos y toscos” (77), the constant pejorative reference, such as “un vejete” (77), “carcamal” (77) or “abuelete ansioso” (80) in allusion to his old age, emphasize his physical weakness. In fact, Tasia’s vision of the tyrant changes as the story moves forward:

De cerca, con su pecho peludo bajo la bata de seda, su cabello negro y muy brillante del que se deslizaban churretones del tinte por el efecto de la transpiración, sin el uniforme ni las condecoraciones imponentes que le otorgaban una hierática gallardía, desprotegido de toda aureola oficial, ella sentada sobre sus muslos, mecida por el ritmo sincopado de su barriga prominente al compás de su respiración anhelosa, Su Excelencia (...) no se parecía a la bestia fiera y despiadada (Ndongo 2016: 80).

This excerpt shows that the goal of the satirist narrative voice is “dejar en cueros a los hombres” (Hodgart 1969: 27), and it is by means of Anastasia that the narrator gets closer

to the dictator and delves into his intimacy. Without his clothes and decorations, the tyrant is reduced to an average old man with physical flaws, like a big belly and a fake black hair whose dye comes upon his face.

Indeed, the deterioration of his body is more strongly evidenced when he is unable to consummate the sexual act due to his erectile dysfunction:

Pero era aquella una naturaleza muerta. Porque el Líder Máximo fue incapaz de consumir el acoplo. No se izó su falo mustio. Recurrió a mil triquiñuelas estimulantes, ensayó perversidades inimaginables, en vano. Primero fue la turbación ante la inutilidad del empeño. Supo que el Sol que iluminaba el universo se apagaba. Su fuste epicúreo se marchitaba sin remedio (Ndongo 2016: 81).

The satirical narrative voice associates “naturaleza muerta,” “falo mustio” and “fuste epicúreo” that “se marchitaba sin remedio” to the governor’s physical aspect. The story adopts a humorous tone that ridicules and humiliates the tyrant, as “el Líder Máximo” is unable to “consumar el acoplo.” In addition to the negative references to his old body and his lack of capacities, the narrator also alludes to certain aspects that transform his figure into a source of pity and compassion. The inability to satisfy Anastasia torments him and brings him back to old complexes and traumas:

Desde su lejana adolescencia, cuando sus condiscípulos ¡canallas! Le martirizaron ridiculizándole y mofándose y llamándole panoli por su proverbial torpeza pese a su traza de grandullón, el Astro más potente de la constelación no se había sentido tan humillado. ¿Dónde estaban ahora esos listillos? O criando malvas en los cementerios, o pudriéndose en las mazmorras, o ateridos de frío en el lóbrego invierno de Europa, donde mendigaban en el exilio (...) Pero... Resurgía de repente los complejos de antaño (Ndongo 2016: 81).

Thus, through the indirect speech, the reader attends the mental martyrdom of the tyrant as a result of his physical decadence. He is stripped of a messianism, showing him as a human being with fears and anxieties, tormented by “la glacial, petulante, escrutadora

mirada de una chicuela apenas quinceañera (...), cuyos ojos inclementes reflejaban con nitidez la ruina humana en que se había convertido” (2016: 82). Moreover, the sickness that Tasia feels when the old man touches her also contribute to the depiction of a pathetic and deplorable tyrant:

Le repelía el contacto sobre su piel, reluciente y tersa, de los manoseos temblorosos de aquel patético y extravagante abuelete ansioso de complacerla, de mimarla, de hacerla sentirse a gusto. Los susurros de fogosos y soeces requiebro, y sus indecentes y desmañados toqueteo, le asemejaban a un muñeco enorme y descompuesto, tronado, sádico. Recibía con desgana e indiferencia las ternezas y arrumacos, reprimiendo la náusea (Ndongo 2016: 80).

This excerpt reflects a vulnerable and shameful old man who is “ansioso de complacerla, de mimarla, de hacerla sentirse a gusto,” in vain. This depiction of the tyrant contrasts hugely with his powerful image at the beginning of the narrative, when he is honoured by his subjects and presented as an authoritarian leader.

Furthermore, he is presented as a childish man when he starts giving Tasia an explanation to his sexual incident, excusing himself in “el cansancio de la agotadora jornada, a sus magnas e infinitas preocupaciones y responsabilidades como Conductor Vitalicio y Protector Perpetuo de aquella nación de montaraces sinvergüenzas...” (83), because “tan ingrato contratiempo no debía trascender” (82). His complexes, together with the fact that he feels weak and humiliated by the compassionate “mirada de una chicuela apenas quinceañera” (82) lead him to a feeling of desperation in which he acts ridiculously and puts himself at the same level of a fourteen- year-old girl.

In a similar fashion, the short story “Los sueños inútiles” (2009) opens with a victimized president. The narrative voice depicts how the president is accidentally fired while he is hunting with some of his guests, and the verb *desplomarse* in the sentence “hubo una gran conmoción cuando el president se desplomó” (Alarcón 2009: 149) works as a conclusive

and visually powerful omen of his decadence. Thus, this tyrant is humanized from the beginning of the story, since the narrator deploys a blunt lexis to refer to the accident and words referring to his physical body to describe how “la bala se alojó en la parte superior del muslo y le destrozó el fémur” and “hubo mucha sangre y enorme sangrado” (149). In this sense, he is likewise stripped of any kind of messianism and equaled to the rest of human beings.

This episode opens the process of physical deterioration that the president suffers along the narrative as a result of the shot in his leg. Indeed, his amputated leg, stolen by the subversives, becomes the center of his caricature and triggers the pathetic and childish president’s behavior that evidences his weakness. As it happens in Ndongo’s story, the narrator addresses the president in derogatory terms, such as “nuestro paticojo” (151) or “tullido” (158), that contrast strongly with the ways in which his workers and his wife address him: “señor presidente” (158) or “señor comandante jefe” (161). With this contrast, the author emphasizes the demystification of the tyrant and achieves his ridiculization through this humorous and pejorative terms.

As a matter of fact, his decadence is not only fostered by his physical weakness, but also by his depiction as a terrified and insecure man. In this sense, there is also a strong parallelism between him and Don Gumersindo Nze Ebere Ekum, because both characters show a mental fragility that leads to the tyrant’s demystification:

Por supuesto que hay peligros, señor presidente. Es cierto que la tasa de mortalidad conjunta de las amputaciones realizadas por los británicos en la Guerra de Crimea y por los franceses en la Guerra Franco-Prusiana fue un alarmante 76%. (...) Pero usted tiene razón al considerar que 10.000 muertos de un total de 13.173 son inaceptables (Alarcón 2009: 155).

This excerpt shows until what extent the president was afraid before the amputation, as he asks the doctor about the dangers of the surgery. His fear is likewise based on the suspicion that his doctors are revealing some information about his health to the media and the rebels: “Enfurecido, ordenó la detención del especialista francés, convencido de que el arrogante médico lo había traicionado. (...) Una semana más tarde, aún atormentado, el presidente ordenó la ejecución del médico” (151). Thus, the narrative reveals a paranoid tyrant who is constantly in a state of fear and vigilance. This fear instals in him a childish and desperate attitude which is similar to that showed by the tyrant in “La mirada de la niña Tasia” (2013). His fickle character is evidenced when the president kills one of his guards just because he shoots a prisoner without him being present, and thus preventing him from enjoying his death.

In this regard, both the doctors and his wife treat him like a child. His first doctor starts praising him as an effort to relief his depression: “Me han dicho, señor presidente, que es usted descendiente de irlandeses. ¿Es eso cierto? Anímese, señor presidente: ¡los irlandeses son unos fieras!” (156). In the same fashion, when the president shares the terrible complex that the lack of a leg produces him and the consequent fear of being left by his wife, the doctor replies:

¿No somos todos simples navíos cargando a cuestas en nuestra humanidad muchas heridas y cicatrices de la vida? ¿Acaso el verdadero carácter de un hombre no se forja en sus momentos más difíciles? Y aun así, puede usted considerarse afortunado: las cosas han cambiado desde que el soldado Thomas A. Perrine del Regimiento Michigan (del Ejército de la Unión) compuso estos melancólicos versos:

Le ofrecí mi otra mano

llesada durante la lucha;

era todo lo que me quedaba.

‘sin dos mano- respondió ella-,

Guapo no puedes ser”.

La guerra me dejó con una manga vacía,

Pero ella, ¡ay!, me dejó vacío el corazón (Alarcón 2009: 158).

As a matter of fact, this constant encouragement takes the form of the reassurance targeted to a helpless child full of anxieties and fears. The doctor continues his speech by saying that “en estos tiempos, una amplia variedad de tullidos son aceptados en sociedad” (158), and tries to calm the president when he mentions that “los matrimonios de hoy se construyen sobre cimientos más sólidos” (158) and, therefore, his wife will keep on loving him because “en su caso, los relatos sobre la devoción de su esposa han llegado hasta el mismo París” (158). Eventually, he adds that, if he is allowed to operate on the president, the latter “llevará su herida por todo este gran territorio como un testimonio de su sacrificio” and “encarnará a la nación” (159).

Similarly, his wife feels the need of reassuring her husband:

La esposa del president masajeaba su muñón. Lo envolvió en toallas calientes. Él luchaba por contener las lágrimas. El cuarto brillaba con reflejos anaranjados a la luz de las velas.

-Soy un fracaso- dijo él.

¡Oh, dígame primera dama!

-Señor presidente-le susurró-. ¡Señor comandante en jefe! ¡Usted es el nuevo Lincoln! -grito ella (2009: 160-161).

The strong parallelism between the president and the tyrant in “La mirada de la niña Tasia” (2013) lies in the vulnerability and shamefulness of these two characters, together with the pity they ultimately transmit to the reader. In this sense, they adopt a childish attitude triggered by their mental and physical weakness and the need of being continually encouraged by those who surround them. As a result, they eventually adopt the role of victims.

Likewise, the narrator in “The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction” (2016) depicts a childish, insecure and vulnerable fictional Donald Trump who needs constant reassurance. In this sense, through the narrative voice, Adichie also delves into the president’s intimacy to abolish any messianism and fake strength to reveal a more puerile and defenceless side of his persona:

“Great. Did you see the polls, honey? Can you believe this?” His voice had an ebullient pitch. He still did not entirely believe this was happening- his lead in the polls, the new veneer of being taken seriously. She could tell from the disbelieving urgency of his actions, and from the way he flipped through cable channels and scanned newspapers for his name.

“Remember I told you: You will win,” she said (Adichie 2016: 5).

Even though, at the beginning of the narrative, Melania is victimized because of constantly revolving around her husband for his complacency, she gradually starts adopting a maternal role as the story develops that empowers her. Indeed, in this excerpt, Trump’s tone is childish, while Melania’s words “you will win” show how she acquires a strong role in the relationship, the one who offers support and infuses her husband with the confidence he lacks.

Furthermore, she knows that the fact of being on every channel and newspaper feeds Trump’s ego and makes him happy:

They were drawn to Donald’s brashness and bluster and bullying, his harsh words, even the amoral ease with which untruths slid out of his mouth. She viewed these with a shrug- he was human, and he had his good points, and did Americans truly not know that human beings told lies? But they had followed him from the beginning, breathlessly and childishly (Adichie 2016).

Importantly, Trump’s human nature is highlighted and, hence, his messianism is demolished. The narrative voice reveals Melania’s perception of her husband’s supporters as childish, which also enhances the infantile side of the president. This excerpt

constitutes one of the most explicitly political parts of the narrative, since the narrator addresses Trump as a character who lies, and indirectly views his supporters as immature people. In addition, the protective and maternal role Melania exerts on Trump is evidenced in the following lines:

There were days when every television channel she switched to had his image on the screen. They did not understand that what he found unbearable was to be ignored, and for this she was grateful, because being in the news brought Donald the closest he could be to contentment. He would never be a truly content person, she knew this, because of his primal restlessness that thrummed in him, the compulsion to prove something to himself that he feared he never would. It moved her, made her feel protective. Even the way he nursed his grudges, almost lovingly, (...) made her protective of him. She often felt, despite the age gap of more than two decades, that she was older than Donald (Adichie 2016).

The excerpt offers the picture of a victimized and defenceless Donald Trump. The fact that Melania feels older than him despite the age gap constitutes a potent thought that points at Trump as immature and not intellectually brilliant. This childish image of the president is further showed in other parts of the narrative, as when he gets mad at Republicans for not supporting him enough, calling them “losers” (2016) and needing constant comfort from his wife and daughter.

Moreover, as it happens in Alarcón’s and Ndongo’s narratives, a negative portrayal of the president’s body works as part of the demystification process these characters undergo in the stories:

She undressed and examined herself in the mirror. There was a dimple in her thigh. Donald would say something if he noticed it. “you need to get these fixed soon,” he had said a few months back, cupping her breasts, and when he got up from bed, she looked at his pale, slack belly, and the sprinkle of bristly hair on his back (Adichie 2016).

The negative connotations of the epithets “pale,” “slack” and “bristly” in a reference to Donald’s body contribute to the victimized image of the president. Whether Gumersindo is presented as a weak old man, and the president in Alarcón’s narrative as a disabled person, the narrator reveals a sloppy and pathetic Trump who is unable to attract to his own wife.

Ultimately, Melania’s feeling of pity towards her husband, and the derogative physical description of Trump, echoes Tasia’s feeling towards Gumersindo in “La mirada de la niña Tasia” (2013) or that felt by the president’s wife towards her husband in “Los sueños inútiles” (2009). The three powerful political figures are reduced to mere average human beings in the fictions, and their demystification is enhanced by their victimization. Indeed, they behave as defenceless children who need the care and the approval of the the women next to them. These women, although are clearly depicted at the service of these male figures at the beginning of the stories, evolve into strong individuals upon whom the male characters depend. In this sense, the tyrant’s caricature is achieved by turning things upside down or, in words of Jul Sorensen, presenting things “no longer as we usually perceive them” (2008: 171).

Thus, the victimization of these political figures, together with the depiction of the three women as powerful show a new challenging perspective based on an inverted situation where the tyrant is fragile, because “al permitir la visualización de nuevas perspectivas, la inversión paródica del mundo rompe con los tabúes, con los prejuicios y presupuestos, así como con la inmutabilidad de la visión del mundo impuesta por el poder” (Vieira 2003: 85).

In a similar vein, the caricature of these figures is achieved by the portrayal of the tyrant from an animalistic perspective, that is, the enhancement of his instincts instead of his

intellect by means of the recreation of his sexuality and obscenity. In “La Mirada de la niña Tasia” (2013), the beastly side of the oppressive political figure is evident from the first lines, when after watching her dance, he holds the girl in his arms, caressing “sus pechos desnudos” for his “gozo exultante” (76). Further on, once both are in bed, the narrator highlights the tyrant’s “respiración anhelosa” (80), his “manoseos temblorosos” (80), “grotescas efusiones” and “inhábiles sobos” (80), which constitutes an allusion to his pathetic sexual behavior. Indeed, throughout the narrative, he is reduced to “un simple macho en celo” (80), thus presenting an image of him that is stripped of intellect. However, far from depicting the tyrant as a powerful sexual animal, his impotence portrays him as a weak and shameful old man unable to please the young girl:

Pero era aquella una naturaleza muerta. Porque el líder Máximo fue incapaz de consumir el acoplo. No se izó su falo mustio. Recurrió a mil triquiñuelas estimulantes, ensayó perversidades inimaginables, en vano. Primero fue la turbación ante la inutilidad de su empeño. Supo que el Sol que iluminaba su universo se apagaba. Su fuste epicúreo se marchitaba sin remedio. (...) Resurgían de repente los complejos de antaño (Ndongo 2013: 81).

I argue that this moment constitutes the climax of his humiliation, since the reader gets access to the most intimate part of Gumersindo. Therefore, Ndongo’s fiction humanizes the tyrant and destroys his messianism by reducing him to a mere human being controlled by the irrevocability of his natural instincts.

Consequently, his demystification is presented by the inability to have sex with Tasia, as if he was removed from any sense of masculinity and strength, rescuing “complejos de antaño” (Ndongo 2013: 81) and, ultimately, providing an image of the governor based on his insecurity and fearfulness. He understands his sexual impotence as the sunset of his Sun, that is, the end of his government, also in connection to his physical decadence,

alluded through the words “naturaleza muerta,” “se marchitaba” and “se apagaba” (2013: 81).

In the same way, the president in “Los sueños inútiles” (2009) and the fictional Donald Trump in Adichie’s narrative acquire an animalistic image mainly because of constant allusions to their bodies and a poor sexual performance. Concerning Trump, the reference to his decadent sexual life is also key in his demystification:

The last time, he kissed her, eager and dramatic and sweaty as he often was- he hated her initiating things, “aggressive women make me think I’m with a transsexual,” he’d told her years ago- and then fumbled and shifted and suddenly got up and said he had a phone call to make. Only then did she understand what had happened. They did not talk about it, but for a few days he had sulked and snapped, as though it were her fault (Adichie 2016).

This scene might be indirectly referring to Trump’s inability to get an erection. His impotence causes him shame and the couple avoids talking about it. Like Gumersindo, Trump’s animal instincts are evidenced through some epithets such as “eager,” “dramatic” and “sweaty,” which transmit a negative image of the president, far from a skilled and heroic depiction that should be used for describing a messianic tyrant’s sexual performance. The reduction of Trump to an animalistic being who is not able to please his wife is evoked through his pathetic sexual behavior and performance, not only showed in the excerpt above, but also when the narrator reveals how, in bed, Melania “had learned to gauge Donald and know when he expected her to gasp. (...) ‘It is not a good night today,’ and he would kiss her cheek and leave” (Adichie 2016).

In a similar fashion, although there are not allusions to the president’s sexuality in Alarcón’s narrative, his animalistic image is likewise achieved through the continuous reference to his decadent body, which stands out his human condition and deteriorates his messianism. Whether in Adichie’s and Ndongo’s stories the core of the tyrant’s

humiliation is their unsuccessful erection, the president's crippled state constitutes the evidence of his feeble condition.

Therefore, the animalistic image that the narrative voices transmit to depict the three leaders causes laugh, shows a pathetic and shameful side of them, and minimizes any sort of messianism in favor of their humanization. Importantly, these characters appear in fiction as representatives of their nations, since Gumersindo is depicted as “el Padre y Benefactor de la Nación” (Ndongo 2013: 93), the president in “Los sueños inútiles” (2009) is the one who “encarnará la Nación” (Alarcón 2009: 159), and Donald Trump is the most voted candidate in the national elections according to the polls. Consequently, the tyrants' humiliation triggers another satirizing strategy based on the denigration of the institution that they represent, always associated to the nation, and hence, forcing a decadent image of the national territories that they embody. Ultimately, the authors, by means of the construction of these critical literary voices, generate an interesting counterdiscourse where they reach an empowerment that is fostered by the caricature of the political figures who constrain them and the territories that they represent. This counterdiscourse emerges from the ability of humor “to turn things upside down and present them in a new frame” (Sorensen 2008: 185) and constitutes a powerful way of political resistance because it changes the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed by altering it.

In conclusion, the three satires analyzed in this chapter contain a caricature based on the victimization of a mystified political leader, the enhancement of their clumsy sexual behavior and physical weakness, their childish attitude, the constant need for other's praise that evidence their lack of self-confidence and, consequently, the deteriorating image of the nation that they intend to embody. The fact that this fiction provides the narrative voices with access to the intimacy of the political figures exposes a more

humanizing picture of them, striped of their messianic condition, and builds a resistant voice who finds in humour the necessary legitimacy to speak up against these tyrants.

CHAPTER 8:
**A MOVING TARGET IS HARDER TO HIT: BORDER-CROSSING
AS A WEAPON OF RESISTANCE IN JACKIE KAY’S “THE
SMUGGLED PERSON’S TALE,” OSAMA ALOMAR’S “JOURNEY
TO ME,” AND LIEN CARRAZANA’S “UNA PLANTA TROPICAL
EN UN INVERNADERO DE MADRID.”**



Placencia L., Lien Carrazana en el Jardín Botánico de Madrid. 2015, *La china fuera de la Caja*, lachinafueraadelacaja.wordpress.com/2015/07/26/soy-una-planta-tropical-en-un-invernadero-de-madrid/.

Sovereignty as a bounded, territorially defined notion was institutionalized in Europe in the modern era and “spread throughout the world via colonization” (Jones 2012: 688). The sovereign State system relies on the idea that all the territory of the world is divided into separate spaces, which are controlled by distinct sovereign governments that make and enforce laws in those territories (Agnew and Corbidge 1995; Jones 2012).

Academics such as Homi Bhabha (1994), Mitchell (1997), Stanford Friedman (2007) and Reece Jones (2012) have exposed the porosity of the State by looking at the physical borders between nations as essential pillars on which the nation is sustained. While Reece Jones understands borders as drawn “lines on the ground and in the popular imagination” (Jones 2012: 690), in his essay “DissemiNation,” Homi Bhabha points at national borders as an oppressive force over its citizens and makes emphasis on the need of a borderline negotiation (1994). Also, Mitchell establishes a strong link between borders and power relations, understanding borders as “the power to keep in or out” (1997: 101) and to enframe the limits of the imagination.

In this context, Stanford Friedman approaches physical borders as “lines on a map backed by armies and law” (Stanford Friedman 2007:273) which regulate structures of exclusion and inclusion. In addition, she draws on the theory of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Homi Bhabha (1994) to argue that, in the last two decades, border studies have evolved into “the exploration of the metaphoric and dimensions of borders and borderlands as tropes for regulative and transgressive patterns in the cultural and social order” (2007: 273). Importantly, Stanford Friedman establishes a clear differentiation between border and borderland. She defines the former as a “fixed, fluid, impermeable and porous” structure used to “exercise power over others” and that “insist on purity, distinction, difference but facilitate contamination, mixing, creolization” (2007: 273). Ultimately, she defines borders as “imaginary lines of separation with real effects, as in geographical boundary

between nation-states” (273). As a matter of fact, Stanford Friedman relies on Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) and Homi Bhabha’s (1994) relevant studies about the borderland to approach it as “contact zones” “where fluid differences meet, where power is often structured asymmetrically but nonetheless circulates in complex and multidirectional ways, where agency exists on both sides of the shifting and permeable divide” (2007: 273). Despite their difference, she highlights that both borders and borderlands have been approached as “spatial metaphors for the liminal space in between” (2007: 273) and points at Homi Bhabha as “the preeminent theorist of the interstitial, of the examination of culture in the moment of transit” (274).

Similarly, as Reece Jones puts it, “the potential of cross-border movement to be a form of resistance to the nation-state has been a topic of keen interest for many scholars of transnationalism for a few decades” (Jones 2012: 693). As the power of nation-states and its borders comes from the process of enframing, or the ability to define the categories that order daily life and create the either (Jones 2012: 694), those individuals who defy this enframing through cross-border movement can be approached as resistant subjects to national and territorial entrapment. In fact, these individuals “disrupt the clean, territorially based identity categories of the state by evading state surveillance systems and creating alternative networks of connection outside state territoriality” (Jones 2012: 689). Following this line of argumentation, Peter Kabachnik points out that recent studies have shifted from an emphasis on place to the study of mobility and processes of deterritorializations, and believes in the need of highlighting mobilities, and not only place, as a key aspect in identity formation (Kabachnik 2012: 211).

In this chapter, I will analyze the short stories “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), written by Jackie Kay and included in the short story collection *Refugee Tales*, “Journey to Me” (2017), written by Osama Alomar and included in *The Teeth of the Comb and*

Other Stories, and “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015), written by Lien Carrazana and published in her blog *La China fuera de la Caja*. I argue that these three narratives portray literary voices who rebel against the sovereign State system by avoiding territorial entrapment through mobility and a constant border-crossing. Consequently, they resist “the fixed essentialisms of fundamentalist or absolutist identity politics” imposed by the nation-state (Stanford Friedman 2007: 273) by means of “refusing to accept a binary framing of the state that attempts to create a world of us-them, here-there (Jones 2012: 687) and “not accepting a binary division of space and identity” (2012: 696). Thus, my point is that these literary voices move and think outside the binary enframing of the State and, by doing so, deny the State the right to define them (Jones 2012) because “the territorial and identity categories of state subjectivity are not the only option, despite maps and State discourses that attempt to foreclose these other possibilities” (Jones 2012: 698).

In addition, one of the most striking aspect of these characters is that they share the condition of migrants and exiles. Such condition results from a process of dislocation that evidences the ruling political State system and the national conflicts back in their countries of origin as the sources of their suffering. In *Migrancy, culture, identity* (1994), Iain Chambers defines migrancy as “a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable and certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation.” (Chambers 1994: 5). Chambers also problematizes the term “migrancy” when differentiating between literal and metaphorical migration, understanding the latter as a metaphor for the very process of dislocation and thus “granting the immigrant a status as a figure (of speech)” (Ahmed 1999: 333). In fact, the literary voices analysed in this chapter are not only physical but

metaphorical migrants, in the sense that I understand their migracy as attached to their processes of dislocation.

Importantly, I draw upon Said's and Chambers' understanding of exiles and migrants as empowered individuals to claim that, despite the affliction that the narrative voices experience as a result of their dislocation, they take advantage of their forced movement, since:

the exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience (Said 1990: 365).

In this sense, my interest is not to victimize the literary voices in these narratives. Instead, I approach them as privileged and empowered individuals who escape from the territorial prison that the nation-state imposes on subjects through their constant movement. As a result, they achieve the right of self-determination, that allows them for a more open and fluid identity since, as Chambers says it, "thought wanders. It migrates, requires translation. Here reason runs the risk of opening out on the world, of finding itself in a passage without a reassuring foundation or finality: a passage open to the changing skies of existence and terrestrial illumination" (1994: 4).

To start with, the three narratives revolve around the experience of dislocation that the characters suffer as a result of their condition of refugees. In the *1951 Refugee Convention*, a legal document supported by the United Nations, a refugee is defined as

someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (The UN Refugee Agency 1951: 14).

Following this definition, I postulate an autobiographical subject to claim that the narrative voices in Alomar's and Carrazana's stories are inspired on their own experiences as refugees. Both authors are, or have been, unable to return to their countries of origin due to their political opinions. In an interview held by Caitlyn Christensen, Alomar claims that just before he left Syria in October 2008, "the dictatorship had reached its highest peak in terms of corruption, nepotism, and censorship. (...) Like many people, I thought that something would happen. But I could not have predicted it would be this much" (Alomar "Writing in Blood and Soul" 2017). Three years later, while being an immigrant in the United States, the Syrian Revolution began. In this interview, he also reveals that, before leaving the country, the Syrian intelligence contacted the editor of the local newspaper that had published his short story "The Boot," in which he criticizes the government's violence by describing "a military boot that can determine the map of an entire country" (Alomar "Writing in Blood and Soul" 2017). When this happened, he was ready to leave Syria, and although he thought that he would be stopped by the government forces before his departure, he managed to leave the country before being detained. Nowadays, the reason why he cannot go back to Syria is not the tyrannical government of Bashar al-Assad, but civil war and its devastating consequences. For this reason, he is currently a City of Asylum's writer-in-residence. "City of Asylum" is a North-American organization founded in 2005 in Pittsburgh (U.S.A) that provides support to endangered literary writers, so that they can continue writing and their voices are not silenced.

On her part, Carrazana asserts that the reasons why she left Cuba in 2007 were more experiential and visceral than political, and that she moved abroad not to be punished by the Cuban government, as she felt that her intellectual development was leading her to an oppositional stance. (Carrazana, Personal Interview 2015). In addition, she claims that

her decision of leaving Cuba turned out decisive in her career as a writer, as despite having arranged the publication of her book with an editor in Cuba, such editor contacted her while being already in Madrid and gave her a final reason why her literary project could not be eventually published: “tú ya no vives en Cuba” (Carrazana, Personal Interview 2015). At this moment, she knew that she was “a different type of Cuban,” subject to “la diáspora de la identidad, el rapto del espíritu nacional” (Rojas 2006: 32) and the marginalization imposed by the Cuban government since 1958 (Rojas 2006; Staniland 2014) to those who move beyond the national limits. Nowadays, the reasons that impede her return to Cuba and give her the condition of political refugee are her public and blunt opposition to the Castros’ Revolutionary regime in numerous writings included in her blog *La China fuera de la Caja*, and her participation in the oppositional journal to the Cuban government *Diario de Cuba* and in the online anthology *Nuevarrativa cubana* (2013). This literary initiative was led by the political refugee Orlando Luís Pardo Lazo and contains a collection of short stories whose aim was the recognition and visibility of the literature from Cuban exile authors around the world.

Indeed, as I approach these first person narrators as projections of the author’s voices, I claim that these stories draw upon Alomar’s and Carrazana’s experiences of exile. In “Journey To Me” (2017), the narrator rushes the reader into a journey across his past times and spaces. From the beginning of the narrative, both the reader and the narrator get assaulted by a hurricane of memories that go from happy times in school to the trauma of war and the desintegration of his family. This painful exploration into the narrative voice’s inner bowels leads him towards an eventual liberating feeling. Similarly, in Carrazana’s story “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015), the narrator reveals that, although she maintains an inevitable connection to Cuba, her opposition to the government’s tyrannical policies and her condition of political refugee forces her

uprootedness. Indeed, she assures that she needs to inhabit a microclimate where she can breath “libertad en el aire” (Carrazana 2015).

On his part, the narrator in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017) depicts the arrival of a Hazara refugee from Afghanistan to J’s house in Manchester. Jackie Jay and the other authors of the short story collection *Refugee Tales* (2017) base their narrations on real stories they heard when talking “at length with the person or people whose tale it was,” that is, “the tale had to be grounded in the reality of the experience that the person’s original telling presented” (Herd 2017:113). This literary project constitutes the outcome of a walk in solidarity with refugees, asylum seekers and detainees, organized in 2014 and 2015 by the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, “as a response to the silence that surrounded indefinite immigration detention in the UK” (Herd 2017:113). As the purpose of the Hazara character’s visit is to tell his story to J, it can be assumed that J stands for the author’s name Jackie, and that Anna, the girl who comes along with him to the house, works as an aid worker who, as the narrator reveals at the end of the story, “was the one person who had helped smuggle his story into the world,” and that “for months in the dark windowless detention centre (...) had been his lifetime” (Kay 2017: 112).

Significantly, the story revolves around the Hazara character’s search for his story of border-crossings and struggle, a story that he believes lost once he arrives in the house. He finally finds his own narration in J’s dark basement, and its revelation to the world constitutes a liberating action, symbolized by the conversion of the story into a bird that flies into the sky. According to the *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*’s report:

systematic discrimination, as well as often repeated targeted violence and resulting displacement, has led the Hazara community to lose much of their standing in the social hierarchy of modern Afghanistan (...) With the increasing presence of foreign Islamist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS),

active in the country for a number of years, attacks against religious minorities have been on the increase. Being Shi'a and therefore both a religious and a visible ethnic minority, Hazaras are particularly vulnerable. Suicide bombings targeting Hazara public events have taken place with increasing regularity, most of which have been claimed by groups stating allegiance with ISIS. These include, in July 2016, the killing of 85 people at a peaceful protest comprised of mostly Hazaras. (...) Other attacks include a December 2017 bombing that left at least 41 dead and another 80 injured in a Hazara neighbourhood of western Kabul and an assault in March 2018 that resulted in the deaths of at least nine people ("Afghanistan Hazaras").

Thus, it can be pointed out that the persecution towards this minority group and the violence they face in their homeland are the reasons why the main character in Kay's narrative is pushed to a constant flee across borders.

In fact, this displaced condition is shared by the main characters in the three narratives, and it is alluded as the source of their affliction from the beginning of the stories. In other words, their depiction as unsettled and perturbed individuals in the first lines of the narratives immerses the reader in their experiences of dislocation and a forced constant movement. The narrative voice in Carrazana's writing adopts a tone of unrest from the first sentence, which echoes the narration's title: 'soy una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid' (Carrazana 2015). This statement provides her argument with strength and epitomizes her feelings towards her displacement. Then, she continues saying that, although she can live all her life "dentro de este microclima" (Carrazana 2015) as a clear reference to Madrid, she will always need the Cuban weather. When claiming that "tengo sueños y pesadillas con mi lugar de origen. Lo deseo y lo rechazo. Lo anhelo y lo desprecio. Lo amo, pero no lo odio; odio todo lo que me aleja de sus márgenes" (Carrazana 2015), the narrative voice is further showing the uneasiness and perturbation that this displacement causes her, consequently providing the writing with a schizophrenic mood that keeps the reader in a disquiet feeling.

Likewise, in the first paragraph of “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), the narrator mentions that the Hazara character:

had a bad time in Turkey, had caught a boat to Greece, crossed the border to Italy, spent months in Rome. He’d slept under bridges, in train stations, under berths of trains, in the back of lorries. Austria, France. Calais – Christmas 2009. Cold. Very cold. Big snow (Kay 2017: 105).

This excerpt shows the conditions of uneasiness and struggle that the character has undergone as a result of displacement. His forced dislocation is made evident through the purposeful connection between the continuous border crossing and the constant allusion to adverse situations causing his struggle like “he’d had a bad time,” “he’d slept under bridges,” “under berths of trains,” or “cold. Very cold.” In addition, his uneasiness is also highlighted in the second paragraph of the narrative, where his arrival to J’s house in Manchester is narrated. Sentences such as “he’d been lost” (2017:105) and “he was out of breath,” (105) although referring to the difficulty of finding J’s house, can be applied to the dislocation he suffers along the entire journey to England.

In parallel, the first two paragraphs in “Journey To Me” (2017) are mired in restlessness. The narrative voice transmits his anxiety from the opening sentence in the narration: “terrible gusts of air from within beat on the door of my soul” (Alomar 2017: 47). Thus, he makes evident that the source of his affliction emerges from himself, and the words “terrible,” “gusts,” and “beat” initiate a violent lexis that is present throughout the narrative. The narrator also evokes this aggressiveness when depicting the feeling that invades him as “a forest trembling in the jaws of a desert of pulverized dignity,” (47) the sun as a blinding dazzle, or the reference to “iron mountains” and “volcanoes of anger” (47). In addition, as it happens in Kay’s short story, the sentence “coming back over a great distance, through life’s iron mountains, I open it with dread,” (2017: 47) points at

the forced movement and placelessness experienced by the narrator as the cause of his despair. The metaphor of the iron mountains stands for the struggle the character has undergone as a consequence of displacement, and as the rest of the violent language employed in the narrative, alludes to the narrator's past experiences around war, conflict and exile.

Importantly, the characters' displacement constitutes a consequence of being forced to the act of border-crossing. As I have previously mentioned, territorial dividing lines among nations can be translated into powerful devices for the restriction of individual agency (Stanford Friedman 2007; Jones 2012). In addition, "they not only *limit* movements of things, money, and people, but they also *limit* the exercise of intellect, imagination, and political will" (Agnew 2008: 176). This limitation is even more pronounced when it comes to oppressive governments where freedom of expression is more restricted. Thus, the border-crossing accomplished by the narrative voices in Carrazana's and Alomar's stories represents an act of resistance to the enframing of borders, since they avoid the ferocious territorial entrapment exercised by the Cuban and Syrian restrictive governments. In the case of the Hazara character in "The Smuggled Person's Tale" (2017), his continuous trespassing of physical borders as an illegal immigrant constitutes a resistant act against the nation-state border system. Indeed, he resists despite sleeping under bridges, train stations, berths of trains, or the back of lorries in his journey to Manchester, and mocks border surveillance by travelling for seven years across Europe and crossing "countless borders" (Kay 2017: 105).

Furthermore, the doors in Kay's and Alomar's narratives and the panes in Carrazana's piece of writing are powerful images that allude to their liminality and contribute to the portrayal of the firm obstacles they have to overcome in the form of borders. In this sense, the explicit reference to closed doors at the beginning of "The Smuggled Person's Tale"

(2017) and “Journey To Me” (2017), and to panes in “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015) work as metaphors to illustrate the difficulties that these displaced characters experience when moving across the impermeable and inflexible territorial lines.

As a matter of fact, Alomar’s and Kay’s stories focus on the opening of doors as a leading path to their personal success, in the sense that this aperture allows them to leave their traumatic journey behind. The narrator in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017) highlights the look in the Hazara character’s face when “he crossed the threshold into [J.] house” (Kay 2017: 105), understanding the house’s entrance as a liminal space that he trespasses. Indeed, the opening of J’s front door makes the narrator feel at home for the first time in a long time:

His eyes first searched for kindness. It was the same thing he always looked for; he could tell right away if people were kind or not. She opened the front door. It was a simple enough thing for her- to open the front door to her home. But to him it was quite something. Over these years of travelling, he’d not often been invited into many homes. Detention rooms, prison cells, hostels, on the floor of various churches, yes, but he’d not been invited into people’s houses (Kay 2017: 105-106).

Therefore, the entrance to J’s house constitutes a different act of border-crossing. The Hazara character breaks into a new space in which, opposite to other places where he has been in past years, he perceives as a peaceful place. The quietness in J’s house contrasts with the hostility that the refugee has suffered in other spaces, such as detention rooms or prison cells. In the same way, the entrance into J’s dark cellar in search for his lost story can be analyzed as another act of crossing:

The story was in the bag, he could have sworn it! He couldn’t believe what had happened after all the miles and the countries and the crossings, all the borders and hidings, all the smuggled nights and hidden mornings of hunger, thirst and fear, that now it should suddenly be lost. (...) And it was then that he heard

something under the room that all three were sat in. (...) Under the room was a cellar. It had no natural daylight, J said. (...) Alone, he crept down the steep stone steps and wove his way through piles of empty suitcases and brimming full plastic bags, old paint pots and brushes, step ladders, boxes of books and papers, and right in the corner, huddled under the fuse box, was his story. He had no idea how it had got there (Kay 2017: 107-108).

Both the entrance in J's home and this quick journey to the cellar echo and epitomize his whole journey across nations. The struggle is evoked in his walking through "steep stone steps," through the darkness to access the cellar, and the multiple obstacles that he overcomes during his journey are symbolized by "piles of empty suitcases and brimming full plastic bags," (108) ladders and boxes that he needs to avoid on the way. Indeed, he is somehow walking in someone else's space by coming into J's house and cellar, as a reverberation of what he had done when travelling across borders. Thus, the house may be working as a symbol of a country, in the sense that it is limited by rigid walls that separate it from the outside and limit a specific territorial space. However, this time differs from others in the sense that he is welcomed in the house and in the cellar, since "over these years of travelling, he'd not often been invited into many homes" (2017: 105). Contrary to what the Hazara character experiences in his journey, J. welcomes him and allows the refugee into her house:

When he came out of the toilet they let him have a shower. They said don't worry everyone that comes here from under the lorries is that colour. And they gave him clean clothes. He hadn't expected that. (...) His eyes regularly filled with gratitude, shining and dark (Kay 2017: 107).

Thus, J's generosity allows him to find his story and, as a consequence of this metaphorical act, he finds himself again and embraces an identity freed from national conflict and entrapping borders.

In a similar fashion, the narrative voice in “Journey To Me” (2017) tells how his past traumatic experiences, symbolized by “terrible gusts of air from within” (2017: 47), beat the door of his soul. The title of the narrative already announces an inner journey that is alluded to as hostile and painful as the story moves forward. Indeed, it is the story of a man who falls “into his self’s sands” (Alomar 2017: 49), someone who penetrates into himself to trespass the limits of time and space. During this journey, he starts revisiting those moments in his childhood when his teacher Sahar gives him “an ornate box of sweets (...) on a beautiful summer evening” (48) or nice moments with his father in the public park. Suddenly, happy memories merge into the sadness of war, exile, and family conflict. The narrative voice travels through “crowded streets that flood [me] with loneliness” (48), neighbourhoods “chewed up by war, without a breeze of hope” (48), a teacher slapping and insulting him in school for arriving late, or his father beating his mother. The misery that war and exile bring to his life is made evident by the reference to “electrified wires of malice everywhere” (49), “the victims’ torn limbs” (48), the loss of money, soiled water under the garbage and “deep darkness” (49). The image of the door is also alluded after mentioning all these bad memories:

I go back and forth within my four seasons, dazed with fever at the contradictions. The pressure penetrates every cell of my body. My head begins to hurt, I turn around to see the door, but barely hear its rebuke. I turn to the disheveled directions, dazzling lights of cars driven by unknown people. (...) I turn to face different stages of my life, feeling always for the oxygen tank... the pressure... the pressure! Where are you, door?... Where are you? I am lost inside myself (Alomar 2017: 49).

This retrospection leads the narrative voice to delve into the traumas that the constant crossing through time (childhood, adolescence and adulthood) and space (in the park, at school, in the city, in the camp) produces him. The excerpt shows how he is desperately in search for the door that separates his inner world from the outside, and points at the

struggle along his journey through the evocation of loneliness and chaos in the image of “dazzling lights of cars driven by unknown people” (49) and “disheveled directions” (49). The hostility encountered during his walking is likewise elicited with the image of the icy surface that appears to him while travelling through his memories and that hinders his desire of moving forward: “An icy surface catches me by surprise. I try to slide on it slowly and deliberately, but my foot slips out from under me” (48), or “another icy surface appears before me. I try to slide on it... I try...in vain” (49).

However, the opening of the door is finally achieved, as revealed in the last lines of the narrative:

Finally I reach the door. I push it open with all the terror that was in me. I tear off my diving suit. I breathe in, filling my two lungs. I sit on the ground. I look around as sweat pours off me in profusion. Night has fallen. I look at the stars. Surprise catches me and I scream, “How small you are, O universe!” (Alomar 2017: 50).

This final excerpt depicts the liberation that the narrator experiences once he opens the door that separated him from the outside. It can be claimed that the traumas and contradictions that remained encapsulated within himself represent territorial entrapment and were impeding his walking. In addition, the crossing he undergoes throughout the narrative allows him to come across a whole universe, that is, a space freed from territorial constraints. The acts of tearing off his diving suit, filling his lungs with air, looking at the stars, and screaming, evoke a feeling of liberation similar to the one the Hazara character feels when he accesses J’s cellar and find his story of border-crossing among the darkness.

In a similar fashion, Carrazana uses the image of the pane in her story to allude to territorial dividing lines, and the narrative voice takes a stance against the Cuban government and national borders when claiming that she hates “todo lo que me aleja de sus márgenes” (Carrazana 2015). However, rather than having the need of opening it as

in the other two stories, the narrative voice chooses to live within the microclimate created inside the panes because, as a “tropical plant” (in allusion to her Cuban nature), it is the only way in which she can survive in a European country. Indeed, despite of being closed, it can be regarded as a symbol of freedom in the sense that the narrator does not allow the Cuban or the Spanish government to decide where her limitations are. Therefore, it can be pointed out that her rebelliousness towards national borders does not only lie in the crossing of Cuban national boundaries to escape the oppressive government and its ideological impositions. Indeed, her resistant stance also results from her statement ‘soy una planta cubana en un invernadero de Madrid’ (Carrazana 2015), which seems to intertwine both territories through the correlation of the terms “planta cubana” and “Madrid,” thus undermining and ignoring the Cuban and Spanish national demarcations.

In this light, in her study of Anzaldúa’s work, Marisa Belausteguigoitia Rius claims that:

las fronteras separan, unen, delimitan, marcan la diferencia y la similitud, pero también producen espacios intersticiales, nuevos espacios que inauguran relaciones. Pueden ser burladas, acatadas, cruzadas, transgredidas, imaginadas, reales, reinventadas y destruidas. Confinan y liberan. Protegen y torturan (Belausteguigoitia Rius 2009: 775).

As a matter of fact, the narrative voice in Carrazana’s story mocks Cuban and Spanish national borders by avoiding their territorial limitations. When claiming that she is a Cuban plant in a Spanish greenhouse, not only is she extending Cuban borders but defying the dichotomy created by them. In this sense, Victor Konrad asserts that:

dichotomies create borders and they are created by borders. Difference, others, opposites and extrinsicality all are constructed both as polarities between people, institutions and places (...) Different energies are evident: the separation and division of space through dichotomization and the dialectic surrounding the spatial differentiation. As people construct boundaries they are engaged in the practice of drawing lines and erecting barriers just as they constantly evaluate and rationalize the meaning of the constructs (Konrad 2015: 5).

In this context, Mitchell establishes a strong link between borders and power relations, understanding borders as “the power to keep in or out” (Mitchell 1997: 101) and to enframe the limits of the imagination. Thus, the explicit simile in which the narrator compares herself with a tropical plant constitutes a challenge to the Cuban government in the sense that she vindicates her Cuban identity in spite of opposing the Castro’s regime and living beyond its constraining borders. By claiming that she will always need “un jardinero experto que sepa como tratar [su] naturaleza” (Carrazana 2015), she embraces her Cuban roots, despite her condition of exile, and thus resists “the fixed essentialisms of fundamentalist or absolutist identity politics” imposed by the nation-state (Stanford Friedman 2007: 273). In this regard, she empowers herself by “refusing to accept a binary framing of the state that attempts to create a world of us-them, here-there” (Jones 2012: 687) and “not accepting a binary division of space and identity” (696).

In “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017) and “Journey To Me” (2017), the characters also defy the dichotomization imposed by national borders, although they do it differently from the narrator in Carrazana’s story. The Hazara character avoids borders through their constant trespassing, for he crosses “countless borders” (Kay 2017: 105) before arriving in Manchester. Therefore, I postulate that his entrance into J’s house and his warm welcoming challenges a binary division of space, in the sense that he is treated as an insider despite of being an illegal immigrant. On his part, the narrative voice in Alomar’s story eliminates spatial and time borders through the journey he undertakes towards his inner authentic self, eventually released from those limitations created by past traumatic experiences of war and exile. Ultimately, the narrator gets rid of a tight diving suit symbolizing oppression, and walks “forward guided by the light of hope” (Alomar 2017: 50) to encounter a whole boundless universe within himself.

Consequently, I argue that, due to a forced national border crossing, the literary voices in the narratives have to experience the traumatic separation from their homelands and a subsequent placelessness. There is a prevailing feeling of uprootedness in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), evoked through the sentences “he’d travelled for seven years and crossed countless borders,” “he’d taken on different names” (105), and “one journey had blended with the other” (107). Likewise, “Journey To Me” (2017) is itself a story of continuous displacement through time and space. The narrator’s uprooting feeling is transmitted through sentences such as “in places I am grown up... and in others I am a child,” “I try to see the passengers... in vain” (48) or the image of the icy surface evocating the struggle for settling down. In both stories, there is an almost constant allusion to a strained and inevitable movement due to conflict, which provides the narrations with a feeling of anguish. In the same way, this perception is present in “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015), as the very title points at the narrator’s experience of displacement. Moreover, the simile formed by the tropical plant and the narrative voice suggests her unnatural rootedness in Spain as a consequence of her exile. Indeed, certain words in the narrative contribute to the construction of the central image of the tropical plant by eliciting the character’s dislocation: “puedo vivir toda la vida dentro de este microclima, pero no soy de aquí,” “quizás, si me transplantan allá, en mi tierra natal, no evolucione bien después de tantos años fuera, y me marchite” (Carrazana 2015). The underlying argument is that their continuous border-crossing, despite causing them affliction as portrayed in the stories, allows these literary voices to transcend territorial entrapment. In this respect, their uprootedness in terms of place triggers the inevitable uprootedness of their identity as a result of their exile.

In this light, the narrative voice in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017) reveals the conditions of mistreatment and abuse that the Afghan refugee lives in his very own country for the solely fact of being Hazara:

the first layer of his skin had been ripped off in his own country. It is the worst thing in the world- when your own country suddenly doesn’t feel like your own. When you are cast out from within. When you are made a foreigner on your very own soil (Kay 2017: 110).

Nevertheless, despite the struggle of exile, the narrator also highlights that it was at the moment of fleeing from Afghanistan when “it started to flow. One journey blended with the other” (110) and, consequently, the national rules that apply to border-crossing are mocked:

Like he’d found the power to be invisible. Like he was his own card trick. A human card. Somebody called him that one day. You’re a card. It made him laugh. A lot of the things that had happened to him, to be honest, were funny. Laugh out loud and roar in equal measure. They said to him, you really did that? They were astonished. That time with the canisters, it seems he was even able to hide from himself. The man had been in there with a flashlight and had just not seen him. He was excited, thinking back to this, how he’d just got away with it that time, how he’d managed to vanish. Or maybe the man had seen him and decided to let him go. Just him. Like a single fish. Back to the water (Kay 2017: 110).

Thus, the narrator tells how the power to be invisible (that is, the ability to avoid national surveillance) is acquired by the Hazara character after his need of dwelling on borderlands rather than within limited national territories. The character’s continuous mobility on provides him with the necessary “fluidity” and “invisibility” to challenge the nation-state. In this light, he manages “to vanish” from the mainstream national map and leads towards a freer status. To portray the character’s new situation, the narrator makes use of a powerful metaphor that compares the Afghan refugee to a fish back to the water, where water works as a symbol of freedom.

Likewise, the first-person narrator in “Journey To Me” (2017) defies the opacity and rigidity of national borders through the continuous mental mobility across time and space in the story. The narrative depicts a nomadic subject who opens the door of his own soul to initiate a mental journey from childhood to adulthood, where he revisits traumatic experiences that he suffers as a result of war and exile. Indeed, by postulating an autobiographical subject, we can assume that it is a story of border-crossing as a refugee escaping from the Syrian war. As it happens in Kay’s story, the narrator’s free movement is symbolized by the fluidity of water since, in order to penetrate into himself and start travelling, he needs a “diving suit” (48). In fact, mobility across national and time borders is further alluded to through verbs that express dynamism such as dive, slide, climp up and down, run, and walk, as well as sentences like “I quicken my pace” (49) or “I walk forward guided by the light of hope worn out by famine” (50). Therefore, I believe that the narrator’s expulsion from his homeland leads him to occupy a “third space” or “countersite” that is located within himself:

Finally I reach the door. I push it open with all the terror that was in me. I tear off my diving suit. I breathe in, filling my two lungs. I sit on the ground. I look around as sweat pours off me in profusion. Night has fallen. I look at the stars. Surprise catches me and scream, “How small you are, O universe!” (Alomar 2017: 50).

As in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), the first-person narrator acquires a freer status, for his mobility transcends national entrapment. The opening of the door, together with the actions of breathing, filling his two lungs, sit on the ground and look at the stars, evoke peace and quietness. They also suggest that this mobility offers the narrator the necessary calm, and the sentence “how small you are, O universe” (50) reveals that, eventually, the character encounters a vast space within himself that leads to his own recognition as bigger than any nation in terms of the inexistence of limitations but the ones that his mind dictates.

In a similar vein, the first-person narrator in “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015) avoids Spanish and Cuban national entrapment to challenge “el rapto del espíritu nacional” carried out by the Cuban Revolutionary government (Rojas 2006: 32). Importantly, the fact that she oscillates between both nations without placing herself in any of them constitutes a resistance act, in the sense that she reaffirms her Cuban identity despite her political opposition to the Castros’ regime and her exile, and recognizes her placeness in Spain although emphasizing that she is not from there. As the characters in Alomar’s and Kay’s stories, the narrative voice has a nomadic consciousness for, although living in Madrid, she does not feel rooted in Spain: “puedo vivir toda la vida dentro de este microclima, pero no soy de aquí. Nunca seré de aquí” (Carrazana 2015). Unlike the literary voices in Alomar’s and Kay’s narratives, the narrator in Carrazana’s story is physically grounded in Spain. However, building from Chambers’ conception of migrancy, I argue that her mobility is the product of her being a “metaphorical migrant” because of her process of dislocation (Chambers 1994: 1-7). Indeed, her liberation from the national entrapment and its oppressive rules is the result of her continuous oscillation between Spain and Cuba, summarized in the statement “soy una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid,” where she advocates for her right of being in both places at the same time.

In fact, drawing upon the idea that mobility affects identity formation (Kabachnik 2012: 211), the characters’ identity is portrayed as shifting and mutable in the narratives as a result of their physical and metaphorical movement. In “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), in order to cross countless borders, the Hazara refugee needs to get rid of a rigid national identity as mentioned at the beginning of the narrative: “he’d travelled from seven years and crossed countless borders. He’d taken on different names and had often

said he was born in Pakistan” (Kay 2017:105). In this sense, the narrator highlights the mutability of the refugee’s identity as a result of his journey across nations:

Once, he’d tried to smuggle himself across a border, under the belly of the lorry, and he hadn’t made it and had been arrested. It was strange, that time. He had gone to the bathroom in the police station and had not recognized his own face. He was another man in the mirror. The soot covered everything. His face, his hands, black. Totally black. It made him gasp. It startled him, his own strange reflection. There was already something of himself that he did not recognize because parts seemed to be falling off. Perhaps they were left on the road too. (...) When he came out of the toilet they let him have a shower. They said don’t worry everyone that comes here from under the lorries is that colour (Kay 2017: 107).

This excerpt depicts the character’s metamorphosis. The sentence “he was another man in the mirror” and “parts seemed to be falling off” explicitly point at his process of mutability. Also, the soot that covers him is presented as the main cause of his transformation, and it can be understood as a metonymy of the whole journey. Indeed, the trip across borders and the hard conditions along the way reinforce the character and allow him to shake off the national constraints that attach his identity to cards and documents:

He got out the letters and the certificates, the pieces of paper that had once caused him utter shame and embarrassment, which had once made him frightened just to look at his number and his name, which had once made him tremble, just the letter head, just the words Home Office. He left them on the table for her. He would be elated if he never had to look at those types of papers (...) For now, he could leave it behind. And so he did. He left his bag beautifully light after months and years of carrying the weight around with him (Kay 2017: 111).

Once he arrives in Manchester and meets J, he starts feeling a liberating feeling. The entrance to J’s house and the warm welcome he receives there can be understood as a small victory resulting from the character’s ability to mock national borders and their surveillance. This excerpt reflects the moment in which he can shake off the

documentation that had been hindering his walking. He is not a “human card” (110) anymore and, thus, acquires a freer status as an individual.

The mutability of the narrative voice’s identity in “Journey To Me” (2017) is also evoked throughout Alomar’s story. In fact, the narrative is a story of mobility in which different spatial and time scenarios intermingled to allude to a continuous dinamism. It portrays various antagonic situations in the narrator’s life that shift constantly, transmitting a vexed feeling to the reader. For instance, his memories about a peaceful childhood make way to “neighbourhoods chewed up by war” (Alomar 2017: 48), or sentences such as “my father slaps my mother here. Failing the exam. Electrified wires of malice everywhere. Spite... the seizure of the family house... loss of money” (49) contrast with those moments in which his father and him have fun in the public park or the teacher gives him a prize for his hard work. Thus, the anxious tone of the story emerges from these constant and abrupt shifts as well as the interlacement of places and times elicited through the language: “I turn to the disheveled directions, dazzling lights of cars driven by unknown people (...) The shouts of boys at the end of the school day. Hatred... love... success... failure. The future nursing on the lap of a strange woman” (49).

In this light, as it happens in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), we can approach the character as an individual in constant mutability, resulting from a forced journey across spatial and time borders. Indeed, the narrative consists of different images and stages of the narrator’s life, and his change is alluded at some points in the writing: “in places I am grown up... and in others I am a child” (48), “I go back and forth within my four seasons, dazed with fever at the contradictions” (49). Furthermore, despite the difficulties he endures along the journey, his mutability results in the consecution of an identity freed from those national impositions that war and exile had attached to his persona. The metaphor that symbolizes the opening of the door and the action of tearing off his diving

suit at the end of the narrative stand for the overcome of borders with the subsequent achievement of the right to self-determination. In other words, the end of the narrative depicts the reborn of the narrator as a global and boundless citizen who shouts the words “how small you are, o universe” (50) in recognition of his individual greatness.

In a similar fashion, when analyzing “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015), it can be stated that the narrator’s most heroic act is to maintain his Cuban identity despite of living beyond the Cuban borders as a political refugee. Thus, I understand the writing as a literary border-crossing narrative that aims to preserve the identity that the Cuban government denies to the narrator. Bearing in mind some of the studies that have placed mobility as a central element of analysis (Said 1990; Chambers 1994; Sara Ahmed 1999; German Molz 2008; Kabachnik 2012), I claim that her metaphorical mobility allows her to raise her individual voice besides national tyrannical powers. Indeed, when claiming that she is “una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” and that she hates “todo lo que [le] aleja de sus márgenes” (Carrazana 2012), not only is she taking a stance against the Cuban government but also challenging it through the literary construction of her own little Cuba. In this sense, she is expanding the Cuban national borders as the literary voices do in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017) and “Journey To Me” (2017). The former feels how “his heart expanded” (Kay 2017: 112) beyond territorial borders, while the latter travels beyond his own limits to explore a whole universe. In short, I defend that the three literary voices defy the dichotomy created by national borders (in-out / native-immigrant / citizen-exile) (Bhabha 1994; Rojas 2006; Jones 2012; Konrad 2015) through the acquisition of the freedom for self-definition and the empowerment they undergo in mobility.

In order to portray this freedom, I suggest that the authors employ images related to nature that occupy a central position in the stories. To begin with, the story of border-crossing

and struggle that the Afghan character in “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017) carries in his bag takes eventually the form of the injured bird with a broken wing that he finds in J’s cellar:

He picked it up. It was an injured bird. Its heart beating like its wings used to beat. He held it gently and cooed to it, stroking the feathers in the same direction. He didn’t want to frighten it. He was full of wonder. How did you get out of my bag and change into a bird he asked the story? He was shaking. But it wasn’t the same shaking that he’d felt in the prison, or in the detention room, or in the back of the police car, or hidden under the sleeping berth of a train (...) He found to his complete surprise that he was trembling with joy (Kay 2017: 108).

In this excerpt, the character stares at his own story with astonishment because of its conversion into an injured bird. The animal may be symbolizing the character himself in the sense that both birds and illegal immigrants cross borders without documentation, and both the Hazara refugee and this bird have been wounded in the journey. However, rather than the feeling of fear that he has experienced in prison or in detention rooms, the character is invaded with joy. In words of the narrator, this joy results from having found his story “after the freezing snow on the journey from Calais, after all the rains and ice and frost, crazily cold in the wring clothes (...) which had changed into a bird with a broken wing” (2017: 109). The discovery of his story in J’s cellar is presented as a relevant fact in the narrative, as it enhances the character to share his experience of border-crossing with J. He tells her about “the big snow he had been through, the slow traffic in the lorries from Calais,” “the borders he had crossed” (109) and “the places he had hidden” (109). Significantly, the fact that his story is still alive despite the difficulties along the journey means a victory for the refugee:

It is OK, he told his story. It is OK. Out it came, bit by bit, chunk by chunk. He could feel himself lighten. His feet were barely touching J’s red tiled kitchen floor. He was embarrassed by everything he had lost in life. But a smile kept catching the corners of his mouth. He couldn’t help it. The last crossing when he made it

against the odds, after many, many attempts, even the police had started to say *you again* when he arrived at the police station... (...) He was a man on the run from the country, his own country, that was not safe for him anymore. A smile kept breaking like the early light in the sky, and something actually shifted. It was a mysterious thing. Life (Kay 2017: 110-111).

The tone adopted in this final part of the narrative is more lightful and hopeful. Indeed, the author makes use of another natural element, the light, to evoke the character's liberation by means of sentences such as "he could feel himself lighten" and "a smile kept breaking like the early light in the sky." In this excerpt, the Afghan refugee empowers himself when remembering all the odds he has overcome, and this final strength is translated into a smile directed to the world: he is not a victim anymore but a powerful and free individual. His victory is ultimately symbolized once the one-winged bird flies away:

And perhaps because the door was already open, it flew though it, a strange lopsided flight, one-winged, but full of hope, and made it to the slate roof across the back of the terraced houses, and then to a shared chimney, and then paused, as if to say, look up here, look at me, here's your story. And then, astonished, he watched it take the sky; perhaps it crossed the River Mersey and perhaps after that it would cross many other rivers, many rivers to cross, before it landed, perhaps back home. Or maybe it was on a day trip somewhere to Blackpool, or the Lake District, or further north to Scotland or further again to Shetland. He didn't know where it would travel to anymore. It wasn't his anymore (Kay 2017: 111).

As mentioned before, the bird represents the Hazara character in his desire to fly away and the search for his freedom. Like the bird, hope has given him the necessary strength to beat the odds and, in the sentence "it wasn't his anymore," not only can we recognize the bird and his story but the character himself since, having released from the entrapment of a nation where he was mistreated and having mocked countless borders, he has achieved to give away the constricting feeling of belonging. Rather, he has flown away, crossing dividing lines, mocking surveillance, finding "the power to be invisible" (110),

that is, to live apart from the fixity of national parameters. In addition, like it also happens to the bird, whose flight is enhanced by an open door, his conversion into a citizen of the world is unleashed when J. opens her front door. This constitutes a kind act of welcoming and an opportunity for him to speak up and share his story.

In the same way, natural images play an important role in Alomar's short story "Journey To Me" (2017). The narrative begins with the allusion to the character's experience of border-crossing, exile, and war through symbols related to natural elements:

Terrible gusts of air from within beat the door of my sou. Coming back over a great distance, through life's iron mountains, I open it with dread. A forest trembling in the jaws of a desert of pulverized dignity invades me (Alomar 2017: 47).

The author uses the words "gusts of air," "life's iron mountains," or "a forest trembling" to make a reference to the first-person narrator's struggle. I argue that the "iron mountains" evoke the rigidity of borders and the obstacles that he has encountered in war and exile. Significantly, even though the epithets that go with these natural images carry a sense of aggressiveness and hardness ("terrible," "iron," pulverized"), the multiple references to nature in the narrative help the writer achieve a positive purpose, as they allude to his inner revolution that, albeit turbulent, leads him towards a personal liberation.

As the narrative moves forward, other natural elements such as the crow and the sky, water and air become relevant. As in "The Smuggled Person's Tale" (2017), the sentence "an enormous crow flies out from the eye of terror" (Alomar 2017: 48), deploys the image of a bird to suggest the beginning of the character's liberating process. The metaphorical journey towards his liberation from territorial conflict and entrapment that the character undertakes is likewise reflected by the symbols of the water and the air. Water and air as

a metaphorical means for leaving past traumatic experiences behind in a search for mental freedom becomes evident when the narrator mentions that the character puts on “a diving suit” (48) to penetrate into himself, how “waves of gasping rise higher...faster” (50) as he dives deeper into his memories, or the way he breathes in eventually, filling his two lungs of oxygen after his inner journey. Importantly, I claim that the character is positively infected by the fluidity and intangibility of both natural elements and, as the image of the bird in Kay’s short story, water and air in “Journey To Me” (2017) play a similar role in portraying the character’s ability to overcome the constriction of national borders.

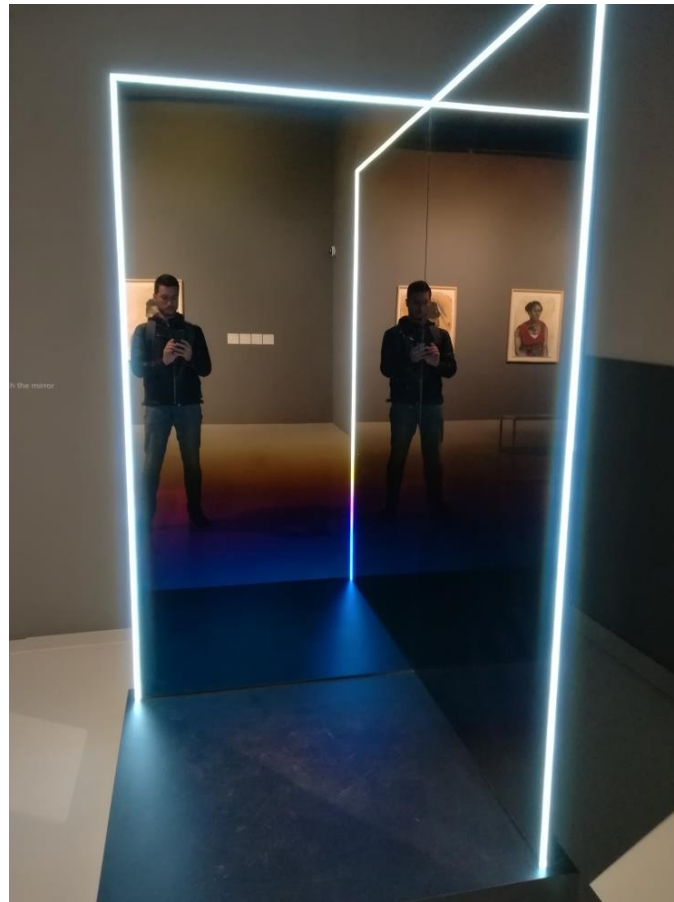
Eventually, nature also constitutes a fundamental theme to symbolize the narrator’s freedom in Carrazana’s short story. The writing revolves around a simile already announced in the title, through which the first-person narrator is compared to a tropical plant in a greenhouse of Madrid. The Cuban narrator relates to this kind of plant in that both have been transplanted from a tropical area to a dry land like Madrid, which can be symbolizing growth in transplantation or movement. She explains how, although she can live all her life within this *microclimate*, she does not feel from Spain, and expresses a feeling of longing for her original territory. However, she mentions that she loves and rejects Cuba at the same time and shares the doubt that haunts her regarding a potential transplantation from Madrid to her native land: “... quizás, si me trasplantan allá, en mi tierra natal, no evolucione bien después de tantos años afuera, y me marchite” (Carrazana 2015). Significantly, despite doubting in other aspects, she claims to be sure of the fact that “viva donde viva, [necesita] que se respire libertad en el aire” (2015).

Therefore, from these statements, I conclude that the nomadic consciousness and the juxtaposition of distant elements that being a tropical plant in Madrid imply, and the fact that she can still be “a tropical plant” in Spain, allows the exile character to defy the

Cuban nationalism. Indeed, she problematizes the dichotomy in / out, based upon the premise that exile Cubans who do not support the Revolutionary Cuban regime are not recognized as part of the national territory, and thus deprived of their Cuban identity (Rojas 2006). Her symbolization as a tropical plant means the preservation of her identity as well as the consecution of her freedom, as this transplantation beyond the Cuban national territorial and ideological borders allows her to breathe “libertad en el aire” (Carrazana 2015).

To sum up, the short stories “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), “Journey To Me” (2017) and “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015) revolve around a refugee who defies the national border system and its physical and ideological entrapment. In their need for leaving their native lands due to the tyranny of governments, war, and conflict, I have argued that these exiles have undergone a process of dislocation in which their identity suffers as a result of the disassociation between them and their original land. Nevertheless, I claim that they take advantage of this dislocation to resist the impositions of the nation-state by their continuous movement aside the physical and mental paralysis to which these national territories force them. In this respect, I have argued that the authors employ natural images to portray the ways in which the literary voices challenge the rigidity of nations, find alternative ways of seeing, being, and knowing, and acquire a nomadic consciousness where they benefit from their dislocation. Ultimately, by avoiding national entrapment, they reclaim their right of redefining their identity, their self-autonomy and achieve individual empowerment.

CHAPTER 9:
BUILDING ACTIVE LITERARY SPACES AS AN ULTIMATE MEANS OF
RESISTANCE.



Warther and Dixon. *Pleasure to Meet you*. 2019, Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art. Africa, Cape Town.

(This mirror reflects our image and acts as a space. It transports us to an otherworldliness from which we can consider our present self).

In previous chapters, I have analyzed the ways in which the authors depict resistant literary voices who defy political and social constraints through various resistance mechanisms. Nonetheless, I argue that their rebelliousness against these oppressive powers, with the consequent enhancement of their own individual voice, would not be successful without the deterritorialization from the hostile environment in which they are inserted to create alternative “active literary spaces,” for “identities themselves, our self-definitions, are inherently territorial” (Agnew 2008: 179).

Indeed, the concept of space as a site for resistance and as closely attached to identity and power has been broadly explored by scholars. Whereas Stuart Hall has argued that the negotiation of a subcultural and alternative identity within a hegemonic order requires to “win space (...) to mark out and appropriate territory” (Hall and Jefferson 1976: 45), Ludger Pries (1999) approaches “space” as a concept that “not only refers to physical features, but also to larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values and meanings that the specific and limited place represents to immigrants” (Pries 1999: 40), adding that “space is thus different from place in that it encompasses or spans various territorial locations” (1999: 67). In this sense, Pries stresses the importance of space in social practices when claiming that:

we cannot imagine any “social facts” that do not also contain a spatial dimension in the sense of an extended surface area. Social institutions such as family, church, school, or business are not “on-point phenomena” in their empirical manifestation. Rather, they can only exist and be conceived as extensions in space. As theoretical, scientific concepts, (...) and other sociological constructs such as norms or social classes always entail a dimension of geographic, spatial extension, for example, in the sense of a sphere of validity” (Pries 1999: 6).

Accordingly, scholars such as David Robert Sack (1986) and Gillian Rose (1995) inform the connection between space and power. Whereas the former claims that “territoriality

is a primary geographical expression of social power” and “it is the means by which a society and space are related” (Sack 1986: 5), the latter understands “territoriality” as “nothing more or less than a claim to control people by controlling an area” (Rose 1995: 100). Along these lines, it can be claimed that, identities, to be strongly defined and empowered, need of a spatiality that allows them to develop.

Thus, as Gillian Rose (1995) puts it, “identity is how we make sense of ourselves, and geographers, anthropologists and sociologists, among others, have argued that the meanings given to a place (...) become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them” (Rose 1995: 88). In this light, Rose adds that “one way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place,” claiming that this place needs to conform a space “in which you feel comfortable or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place” (1995: 89). In this context, Manuel Castells has pointed at the clash between nationalisms and individual identity when claiming that “the reconstruction of national identity is challenged by plural identities as defined by autonomous subjects” (Castells 1997: 243).

This argumentation leads us to believe that identities are currently more and more defined by experiences of migration and cultural changing and mixing, and as a consequence, “the process of Othering- if defining where you belong through a contrast with other places, or who you are through a contrast with Other people- is more difficult to sustain” (Rose 1995: 116). By contrast, “increasing flows of ideas, commodities, information and people are constantly challenging senses of place and identity which perceive themselves as stable and fixed” (1995: 116), thus giving birth to new ways of understanding space that challenges its definition as a fixed, unchangeable and closed concept (Massey and Jess 1995: 1).

Therefore, wandering people produce hybridized spaces (Bhabha 1990). Bhabha (1994) and Stanford Friedman (2007) have approached space as open, porous, and as a “contact zone” “where fluid differences meet, where power is often structured asymmetrically but nonetheless circulates in complex and multidirectional ways, where agency exists on both sides of the shifting and permeable divide” (Stanford Friedman 2007: 273). More specifically, Homi Bhabha coins the term “third space” to define “countersites” that result from the interstitial, erratic movements that signify culture’s transnationality. In this sense, Reece Jones employs the term “spaces of refusal” to define a zone of contact where sovereign states practices interact with alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and being (Jones 2012: 687). In those spaces, people adopt various means for avoiding the sovereignty of the state, even when the traditional response of flight is not available (Agnew 2005; Scott 2009; Jones 2012).

In this light, the spaces that the literary voices construct in this dissertation, and that result from the resistance mechanisms that they use, can be approached as interstitial spaces in relation to their ambivalence and oppositional stance towards the imperant national border system and social or political constraints. In this regard, I claim that these interstitial spaces that the characters create to redefine their identities are “in-between spaces,” in the sense that they “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity” (Bhabha 1994: 1). Bhabha draws upon Victor Turner’s idea of liminality, together with its symbolic registers (rite of passage, limen, communitas, etc), to claim that the symbolic registers “are located in ritual, to explain the vexed, non-dualistic and shifting nature of identity in the modern world” (Kalua 2009: 23). In this vein, I approach these interstitial spaces that the literary voices build as “active literary spaces,” a term inspired by Doreen Massey’s concept of “activity spaces” (Massey 1995: 54), that is, a space “within which a particular agent

operates” (54). Indeed, these narratives themselves are “active literary spaces,” in the sense that they are resistance spaces where the evoked individual voices are given the chance to express themselves freely. The spatialities that the literary voices in the stories create allow them to move towards an identity that is “fluid, relational, and always in flux” (Kalua 2009:23).

Building from the idea that identity and power are strongly related to space (Sack 1986; Rose 1995), I believe that that the characters and first-person narrators in the stories need to construct new alternative spaces to redefine and empower themselves. In this way, they take advantage of their dislocation and the consequent occupation of these alternative spaces (“third spaces” or “counterspaces”) to avoid the identity politics imposed by nations and social and political institutions in order to pursue their right of self-definition and empower themselves since, as previously stated, “territoriality is a primary geographical expression of social power” and a claim to control people by controlling their space (Sack 1986: 5).

In this regard, the process of constructing their own alternative spaces constitutes a final goal to resist oppression. They all transcend imposed boundaries and fixed identities by inhabiting what Bhabha calls “the realm of the beyond” or “third space” (2004), since according to Bhabha:

In place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation “in-itself” and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the “in-between”. The boundary that marks the nation’s selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous. The problem is not simply the ‘selfhood’ of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *it/self* (...) becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference (Bhabha 1994: 198).

Basing myself on these theories, I argue that the narratives in this dissertation are involved in a transnational and global dialogue where they celebrate “dynamic spaces of cultural change characterized by shifting identities” where the literary voices resist “oppressive accounts of their identities constructed by others who hold power over them” (Buckingham 2008: 7) and move towards an identity that is “fluid, relational, and always in flux” (Kalua 2009:23). Even though this space of inbetweenness brings vexation and ambiguity, it also “points up the immense freedoms which come out when contradictions are synthesized and overrun in the Third Space” (Kalua 2009: 25). As a result, I argue that these literary voices take advantage of their interstitial status to build personal territories in search of a place of comfort where they can develop themselves freely.

Importantly, all the literary voices in the analysed narratives are, at first, in conflict with the hostile space that they inhabit. In Adichie’s “Imitation” (2009) and Valencia’s “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004), both the territorial spaces of Cuba and the United States prevent the characters from coming to terms with their own inner voice. In Adichie’s narrative, the United States is linked to fakeness, for Nkem’s decontextualization from Nigeria and recontextualization in America under her marital status problematizes her authenticity and her value as a human being. In fact, the theme of fakeness is further developed when she finds out that her husband lives with another woman while being in Lagos. The connection between the United States and the lack of authenticity is also shown when she wishes her children to say “daddy” “to someone real, not a voice on the phone” (Adichie 2009: 26), or when she tells her house girl how hard it is to find real African yams in America. She gradually seems to realize about their fakeness of her life in the United States and starts aiming for a “real” husband, a “real” dad for the children, “real” African products and even for the “real” her that was lost when she got married and moved to

America: “she does miss home (...) America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin” (2009: 37).

In a similar fashion, “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004) depicts the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and the urge of the main character’s friends to leave the island, presumably because of their oppositional stance towards the Fidel Castro’s government. The cyclop eye (“el ojo del cíclope”) constitutes a metaphor of the tyrannical Castro’s regime political control, that makes itself evident when Luis, Victoriano’s friend, utters his last words before dying: “-No Podemos irnos de Cuba (...) La fatalidad esta ahí, con su ojos de Cíclope” (2004:17). Thus, Cuba is portrayed as a territorial space that represses and hinders them from escaping. The sense of fatality and the inability to trespass Cuban national borders are reinforced when Luis gives some of his literary manuscripts to Victoriano before his death and tells him “me voy a la Ultima Thule” (17). The Thule, an ancient Greek name used for denoting a space located beyond the world’s edge, is used by the author to depict the difficulty of avoiding political and geographical repression.

However, Cuba and the United States as the settings of the stories are not the only spaces that oppress the character’s individual will. On a more specific note, Nkem’s house and Victoriano’s room in Trocadero Street are turned into “museums” by Obiora (Nkem’s husband) and Leoncio (Victoriano’s friend) respectively. The former uses his house to display all the imitational African art pieces that he brings from his multiple journeys to Nigeria, while Leoncio and those friends who manage to leave Cuba entrust to Victoriano the personal objects that they cannot take with them. Moved by the responsibility of taking care of these items, he puts them all in a secret room to avoid the government’s control over them.

In the case of Nkem, I argue that the correlation between her and the African pieces of art that her husband brings home from his journeys problematizes Nkem's authenticity in terms of their imitational status, their voiceless condition (her husband makes all the decision from the moment they got married), and their recontextualization in the United States. Indeed, she becomes part of her husband's "museum," for she becomes a possession and one more decorative piece in the eyes of Obiora and her white neighbourhood. Similarly, Victoriano's secret room turns eventually into "una habitación intransitable" (Valencia 2004: 16) because of the huge amount of objects, and allies with the Cuban government in the sense that both foster Victoriano's immobility.

Therefore, I argue that these characters undergo a process of materialization that is promoted by the objects in these confining domestic spaces. The strong bonds between Nkem and Victoriano and the items turn them into commoditized individuals infected with the objects' immobility, both physical (as they are unable to leave this space) and mental (as the stories that Luis and Obiora tell them about the objects attest Nkem's and Victoriano's dependence on them when it comes to verbalizing all the items that are in the rooms).

In a similar vein, the literary voices depicted in Adichie's "The American Embassy" (2009), Montanet's "Odiar el Verano" (2013), Alomar's "The Union of Our Home" (1999) and "Abogo's "El Sueño de Dayo" (2007) are imprisoned in institutional spaces that constrain their individual choice. In Adichie's and Montanet's stories, this imprisonment is symbolized by the embassy and the custom office respectively. The narrative voice in "The American Embassy" (2009) offers a negative portrayal of the embassy when approaching its workers (guards and visa interviewers) as people who treat visitors in a humiliating way. Likewise, the guard behind the pane in "Odiar el Verano" (2013) is unable to understand the couple who requests asylum and ends up shouting at

them: “-¡¿Pero...serán imbéciles?!- estrujó la plantilla el oficial” (Coro Montanet 2013). Importantly, both institutional spaces are also alluded through the physical dividing lines that conform them (such as windows, walls, gates and panes), which highlight the separation between the resistant literary voices and those who serve the State (guards, administrative workers), and provide a negative image of national and institutional borders as the cause of the characters’ affliction.

Accordingly, in “El Sueño de Dayo” (2007) and “The Union of Our Home” (1999), the literary voices are also oppressed by an institutional space that fails to recognize them as individuals, although their possibility of escaping from these spaces is more reduced in comparison to the Nigerian character and the couple in the previous narratives, since the dimension of the institutions that hinder them is broader. When it comes to Dayo, the narrative voice points at social institutions, particularly History and European prejudices and false beliefs as those that confine him. Indeed, the racial and social constraints that generate the space in which Dayo is anchored (first in his hometown in Africa and later in Europe) impede his freedom for self-determination and action. This fatality is reinforced when the narrator mentions that Dayo feels that the walls built around the African continent by the West will always go with him, as he will always feel that Africa is hanged from his back: Africa is his color and his history and, thus, he cannot avoid the social institutional constraints that result from this determinism. In a similar way, the narrative voice in “The Union of Our Home” (2014) denounces how the Arab national border system confines its citizens by portraying the Arab national institution as a space where he is “obliged to submit to searches and surveillance and questioning” every time he wants to cross “the border of [his] brother’s room” (15). In this sense, the narrator highlights the limitations that himself suffers in the Middle East as consequence of the

strict national demarcations that place him in a confining institutional space that individuals are unable to avoid.

In a similar fashion, the narrative voice in Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013) and the character of Ujunwa in Adichie's "Jumping Monkey Hills" (2009) are depicted in confrontation with the physical spaces that they inhabit. The former describes La Habana and Cuba as claustrophobic and melancholic places, "salgo. Comprimida en estas cuatro paredes no logro respirar" (Carrazana 2013), "la Nación estaba inamovible como tortuga dormida sobre el mar Caribe" (2013)). On her part, Ujunwa alludes to Jumping Monkey Hills, the luxurious resort where the African Writers Conference takes place, as a flippant space that is isolated and does not represent the real South Africa, as it is "the kind of place where she [Ujunwa] imagined affluent foreign tourists would dart about taking pictures of lizards and then return home mostly unaware that there were more black people than red capped lizards in South Africa" (Adichie "Jumping Monkey Hills" 95).

Furthermore, the narrative voice in Carrazana's story points at the Revolutionary Cuban government as the the creator of such a claustrophobic space when mentioning that "el malecón traza bordes a sus ideas" (Carrazana 2013) and "tómenme, hagan de mí lo que quieran, adoctrínenme, otórguenme un destino, una muerte, una ideología" (2013) to denounce the feeling of imprisonment that the Cuban regime imposes on her. Similarly, the narrative voice in "Jumping Monkey Hills" (2009) depicts Edward, the Writers Conference's British organizer, as a tyrannical figure that epitomizes Imperialist Western values by imposing his view of Africa on Ujunwa and the the rest of the African attendees, for he dismisses their narratives when claiming that "homosexual stories (...) [aren't] reflective of Africa" (2009: 108) and that "women are never victims in [a] sort of crude way (...) in Nigeria" (113). Thus, the Cuban government and Edward capitalize the

literary voices' spaces, and both Cuba and the resort inflict one unique ideological version on them by means of silencing their individualities.

Accordingly, Abogo's "La Espesura de la Noche" (2010), Alomar's "Love Letter" (2017) and Carrazana's "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011) pay attention to literary voices who are unable to trespass national borders and thus remain in territorial spaces that prevent them from leaving or accessing a national space that marginalizes them. In other words, I employ Mbomio Bacheng's terminology when approaching the narrators in Abogo's and Carrazana's stories are *exiliados mentales* since, given the impossibility of leaving their homelands, decide to inhabit an alternative reality, and the narrator in Alomar's piece of writing as an *exiliado espacial* in reference to an individual who escapes from his homeland by being physically abroad but unable to return (Mbomio Bacheng 2010).

The necessity of carrying out these exiles comes from the fact that the national spaces that are depicted in the three narratives are controlled by tyrannical powers and the rigid territorial borders that they promote (Jones 2012). In "La Espesura de la Noche" (2010), the narrator shows a negative image of Malabo by addressing it as "una ciudad sin viento" (92) where "[su] vida es un oceano sin orillas" (92) and "el charco de aguas fecales que hay delante de [su] casa sigue alli" (92). This portrayal of Malabo alludes to the representation of a current Equatorial Guinea in which, according to Landry-Wilfrid Miampika, "las condiciones de escritura en el pais siguen estando marcadas por un clima socio-politico bastante hostil a todo tipo de veleidad intelectual o literaria desde la instauracion del Segundo regimen de autoridad, instaurado por Teodoro Obiang Nguema desde 1979" (Miampika 2010: 12-13). Likewise, Cuba is explicitly referred as a tedious and decaying place in "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011), since the narrator offers a negative representation of La Habana when depicting it as

hostile and monotonous: “la lluvia que golpea la Ventana” (72), “salgo a tomar un poco el aire, el que entra por la Ventana ya no me alcanza” (74), “hundido en un butacon, leyendo noticias pasadas” (72). Similar to the way in which authors and scholars have analysed the exile of Equatorial Guineans, Rafael Rojas mentions the work of exiled Cuban authors such as Herberto Padilla and Cabrera Infante when claiming that “el exilio ha sido (...) una experiencia recurrente en la historia de Cuba” (Rojas 2006: 24) and addresses the Cuban government as a totalitarian regime which marginalizes those Cuban living in exile because of adopting an oppositional stance towards the Revolutionary ideology, sustained by the belief that only one Cuba exists and it is located within the Cuban national borders (Rojas 2006: 42).

Also, in “Love Letter” (2017), the narrator alludes directly to a Syria that is destroyed by war as a result of the Arab Spring. Even though this revolution was born to combat the tyranny of Hafez al-Assad, the narrator points out that it eventually turned into another “tyrant who had been sleeping in the depths of the ordinary citizen” (14) and which made “the country entered through the widest gate the hell of sectarian and civil war” (14). Thus, unlike the literary voices in the other two stories, the political situation of his country leads the narrative voice in “Love Letter” (2017) to the inability to return to Syria and the need of speaking up from abroad.

Importantly, the state of anxiety experienced by the three literary voices emerges from the love of a woman who they are unable to reach, since she either lives beyond the borders of their national spaces in Carrazana’s and Abogo’s narratives or within the national spaces where they cannot return to in Alomar’s story. Thus, the spaces that the literary voices inhabit are marked by rigid physical borders and tyrant governments. This are exposed by the literary voices’ suffering as a consequence of their immobility, and

discredited by the love that they feel towards these agents on the other side of the boundary.

In the same way, the literary voices in Abogo's "Hora de Partir" (2007) and Adichie's "A Private Experience" (2009) and "On Monday Last Week" (2009) are in hostile environments marked by group categorization and the religious, racial, and social class intergroup conflicts that result from it and hinders their free agency since, the attachment of people to groups can lead to potential constraints for individuals (Ross 1920; Tajfel 1969; Dovidio et al. 2009). In Abogo's story, Ka (a black African immigrant) and Ariadna (a white European girl) occupy a European territory dominated by prejudices and stereotyping images around race and nationality that are presented as obstacles to the success of their interracial relationship. These images are made evident when Ariadna has to put up with "las miradas inquisidoras tipo ¿Cómo puedes estar con ese negro? (Abogo 2007: 74), or every time that Ka needs to demonstrate that he is "un negro diferente" through the enumeration of his intellectual merits (74).

In a similar fashion, Kamara's lack of education is assumed in Adichie's "On Monday of last week" (2009) due to her immigrant status in the United States. As Ka, Kamara is forced into a categorization made according to the fact of being immigrant that attaches certain prejudices to her, since the ideas about national belonging are often connected to anti-immigrant prejudice (Pehrson & T. Green 2010). In the United States, she dwells in a conflicting space created around this political and social intergroup conflict that promotes an alienation between the protagonist and the family that she works for, and fosters the patronizing attitude that they adopt towards her by assuming that, because of being Nigerian, she does not speak a good English and cannot have a master's degree.

In regards to Adichie's "A Private Experience" (2009), the religious and socio-economic intergroup conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria remain at the core of the narrative. Chika, an Igbo Christian, and an unnamed Hausa Muslim, are forced to occupy an unsettled space epitomized by the market where both are when the riot takes place. Academics such as Oluwaseun Bamidele points at the Muslim-Christian conflict, the Northern region -Southern region difference as the main reasons for Nigeria's fractured society (Bamidele 2015: 7). In this sense, religion is highlighted as the main source of violence since, as Chika finds out after the attack, the riot starts at the motor park "when a man drove over a copy of the Holy Koran (...), a man who happened to be Igbo and Christian" (Adichie 2009: 46) in front of Muslim men. In a similar way, social class also stresses their belonging to different and conflicting categorization groups. The fact that Chika thinks of herself as different from the Muslim woman in social terms becomes evident when the narrator reveals that Chika is wealthy enough to have a designer purse, while her companion regrets the loss of a cheap piece of plastic jewelry.

Indeed, the difficulty that these literary voices experience when establishing bonds is caused by their belonging to differing group categorizations that confine them to social and political categorizing spaces. The struggle for communion is caused by the strong boundaries around religious, racial and social intergroup conflicts that act as demarcations and produce stereotypes and prejudices that hinder the individual's agency.

Likewise, the postulation of an autobiographical subject (and the consequent connection between the narrative voices and the authors in Ndongo's *La Mirada de la niña Tasia*" (2013), Adichie's "The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction" (2016) and Alarcón's "Los sueños inútiles" (2009)) allows the existence of resistant literary voices in these narratives who dwell in a space ruled by tyrannical figures. Indeed, the stories are built around the depiction of three powerful figures who constitute the source of the narrators' affliction.

In Ndongo's piece of writing, the supremacy of the tyrant is evidenced when the narrator mentions how he kills many innocent citizens for the solely reason of being "opositores y discrepantes" (Ndongo 2013: 92) and the fear he exerts on the population of his country is depicted through sentences such as "ya nadie era capaz de decirle la verdad a Ese Hombre" (92). Adichie and Alarcón also portray strong political figures who enjoy a central and privileged position. Whereas the former depicts a fictional Donald Trump as the sovereign of his house and his wife and daughter as satellites that revolve around him to meet his desires, the latter portrays a fictional Second Civil War in a United States ruled by a tyrant who controls the media, imposes his will and instills terror in the population.

Bearing in mind an autobiographical postulation, it can be argued that the literary voices speak up from political spaces controlled by tyrannical leaders who, in many ways, act as caricatures of real political figures to whom the authors attack. In "La mirada de la niña Tasia" (2013), the literary voice offers a negative depiction of a tyrant who reminds to the totalitarian president of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, in his African origin, his old age and the type of government that he imposes on the population. On his part, in an interview made to *Diario Correo* in 2014, Daniel Alarcón refers to his short story collection *El rey siempre esta por encima del pueblo* (2009) as a book where:

hay preocupaciones muy norteamericanas de la coyuntura política de EE.UU. No es por nada que aparezca la Guerra Civil dos veces. Y eso tiene que ver con lo que se vivía en EE.UU. del 2004 al 2008. Son cuentos que si bien no lo dicen directamente son muy de la época de Bush, de su segunda gestión. Un momento en el que yo sentía que el país se venía abajo (Alarcón 2014).

In this sense, the authoritarian political figure in “Los sueños inútiles” (2009) and the environment of tension that the United States experience can be approached as caricatures of both G.W.Bush and the sharp division of the American society under his mandate.

In a similar vein, the literary voice in Adichie’s narrative can be related to the author in the sense that both understand Donald Trump as an authoritarian political leader whose politics can translate into coercitive actions against the author because of her black race and Nigerian origin. In fact, Adichie has expressed her worry concerning the racist government of Donald Trump when arguing that “the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) endorsed Donald Trump. The KKK stands for white supremacy, and that has to be acknowledged” (Adichie “Is Donald Trump a racist?” 2016). In this fashion, she highlights that liberal democracy is in danger as:

parts of the world that have political power are increasingly moving rightward, and while I think there are some worthwhile ideas on the political right, it’s also on the political right that you have ideas about what kind of person deserves dignity and what kind of person doesn’t (Stokel-Walker 2018).

Thus, the three literary voices in these narratives express themselves from hostile political spaces governed by authoritarian political figures who oppress them. Indeed, the national spaces that they inhabit are monopolized by these leaders who, in their messianism and egocentrism, believe themselves “el Padre y Benefactor de la Nación” (Ndongo 2013: 93), the one who “encarnará la Nación” (Alarcón 2009: 159) and the president who will not need the Republican Party to win the elections (Adichie 2016).

Eventually, Kay’s “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), Alomar’s “Journey To Me” (2017) and Carrazana’s “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015) present literary voices who find themselves entrapped in a space of dislocation as a consequence of their political refugee status. Their depiction as individuals who struggle to leave this

unsettled space that forces their deterritorialization is present from the beginning of the narratives. Indeed, the literary voice in Carrazana's story adopts a tone of unrest which echoes the narration's title "soy una planta tropical en un invernadero de madrid" (Carrazana 2015). This statement transmits her anxiety and her feelings towards her forced displacement. When claiming that "tengo sueños y pesadillas con mi lugar de origen. Lo deseo y lo rechazo. Lo anhelo y lo desprecio. Lo amo pero no lo odio; odio todo lo que me aleja de sus márgenes" (2015), she is further showing the uneasiness and perturbation that the fact of living in this space of displacement produces her.

In a similar fashion, from the beginning of "The Smuggled Person's Tale" (2017) and "Journey To Me" (2017) the narrators reveal the multiple obstacles that the Hazara character and the narrative voice in Alomar's story need to face as a result of their displacement. In the former narrative, the feeling of uneasiness that the Hazara character suffers is shown when the narrative voice mentions that he:

had a bad time in Turkey, had caught a boat to Greece, crossed the border to Italy, spent months in Rome. He'd slept under bridges, in train stations, under berths of trains, in the back of lorries. Austria, France. Calais – Christmas 2009. Cold. Very cold. Big snow (Kay 2017: 105).

Also, the first two paragraphs in "Journey To Me" (2017) transmit this restlessness. The anxiety that the narrative voice transmits can be regarded in sentences such as "terrible gusts of air from within beat on the door of my soul" (Alomar 2017: 47), the aggressiveness evoked in "a forest trembling in the jaws of a desert of pulverized dignity" (47), and the forced movement experienced by the narrator is pointed out as the source of his despair in "coming back over a great distance, through life's iron mountains, I open it with dread" (47).

Thus, the despair that the literary voices in these stories experience are the result of their confinement to an undefined space. The fact of having been forced to a continuous act of border-crossing and excluded from their national identity and space reduces their individual agency. In Carrazana's and Alomar's stories, I postulate an autobiographical subject to claim that the literary voices depicted in their narratives work as extensions of their own, since both authors are, or have been at some point, unable to return to their countries of origin (Cuba and Syria) due to their political opinions. On its part, Kay's story also depicts a literary voice who experiences oppression and displacement due to his Hazara condition, as "systematic discrimination, as well as often repeated targeted violence and resulting displacement, has led Hazara community to lose much of their standing in the social hierarchy of modern Afghanistan" ("Afghanistan Hazaras").

In short, I have shown that all the narratives that conform this dissertation depict an individual who is forced to inhabit a hostile space where his free agency is repressed and an identity imposed by different sources of oppression in the form of nation-states and their territorial borders, group categorizations, dominant discourses around patriarchy and imperialism, and institutions. Nevertheless, I also argue that the literary voices portrayed in the narratives take advantage of the liminal space that they occupy to build "active literary spaces," that is, "third spaces" (Bhabha) or "spaces of refusal" (Jones) where they find refuge and can challenge their oppressors by redefining their identities, enacting their subjectivities, and rediscovering their individual voice.

First, in these "third spaces," some literary voices adopt various means for avoiding the sovereignty of the state, even when the traditional response of fight is not available (Agnew 2005; Scott 2009; Jones 2012) and interact with alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and being, for "in-between spaces," "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha

1994: 1). Both the narrative voice in Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013) and the character of Victoriano in Valencia's "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004) feel the need for building "in-between spaces" from where they can confront a nation-state that imposes a unique ideology and a rigid identity on them. While the narrator in Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013) uses her fictional writing as a resistance weapon to construct an interstitial space where she can create a counterdiscourse to that of the Revolutionary Cuban nation, Victoriano turns his room in Trocadero Street into a "capitalist space," where all the material items that belong to the opponents of the Castro's regime are clandestinely kept, enacting subjectivities that differ from the Revolutionary ideology imposed in the country.

Even though the room as a space of in-betweenness brings vexation, in the sense that it ends up commoditizing and materializing Vitoriano (thus causing his territorial rigidity), it also "points up the immense freedoms which come out when contradictions are synthesized and overrun in the Third Space" (Kalua 2009: 25). In this line, both the "capitalist space" in Victoriano's room and the fictional space that the narrator creates in Carrazana's story work as "spaces of refusal," for in these "active literary spaces," the individual voices find alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and being (Jones 2012: 687) to those that the Cuban State enforce on its citizens.

In a similar vein, the literary voices in Abogo's "La espesura de la noche" (2010), Alomar's "Love Letter" (2017) and Carrazana's "Un camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011) take advantage of the ambiguity and in-betweenness that their "mental and spatial exile" (Mbomio Bacheng 2010) provides them to construct "third spaces" that challenge authoritarian national borders. In fact, the postcards, letters and emails that they use as a means of communication with a beloved woman who lives on the other side of the national rigid borders can be regarded as emotional transnational

spaces that confront the territorial fixity that the tyrannical Syrian, Cuban, and Equatorial Guinean governments force on them. Given that the transference of love onto nation-states is a way of hindering individual identities in favor of particular ideals and hegemonic ideologies (Morrison et al. 2010: 515), the transnational love enhanced by these literary voices place them in a resistant space in-between nations, from where they evade the geographical imposition and the ideological entrapment of nation-states (Jones 2012: 689) by means of their emotions.

Similarly, the interstitial space of dislocation that the literary voices in Kay's "The Smuggled Person's Tale" (2017), Alomar's "Journey To Me" (2017) and Carrazana's "Una planta tropical en un invernadero de madrid" (2015) occupy, allows them for inhabiting a "third space" that redefines their identities as a consequence of their continuous national border-crossing. In this respect, Peter Kabachnik calls attention to mobility and the processes of deterritorialization and their connection to identity formation as a topic that has traditionally been overlooked in academia, and that just started to be deeply discussed in recent years. Indeed, he points at the lack of place that derives from mobility as integral when it comes to identity formation (Kabachnik 2012: 210-211). In a similar manner, Germann Molz highlights the possibility of exploring mobility as home for the nomad identity and the consequence of "making [oneself] at home on the road" (2008: 330). Along these lines, I argue that the refugees in these stories take advantage of their dislocation and continuous border-crossing to mock the national entrapment and to construct alternative spaces from where they can challenge the physical and mental paralysis to which national demarcations confine them.

In this respect, the neverending journey that the literary voices carry out in Alomar's and Kay's pieces of writing lead them to occupy a space on the borderland that resists "the fixed essentialisms of fundamentalist or absolutist identity politics" imposed by nation-

states (Stanford Friedman 2007: 273). In “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017), the Hazara character combats the placelessness imposed by the Afghan State by precisely using his displacement condition to inhabit a borderland where he is able to speak up and share with J his story. On his part, the narrator in “Journey To Me” initiates a spiritual inner journey across his past times and experiences in Syria that allows him to retrieve a time and space that the political exile seized him.

Likewise, the in-between space that is metaphorically represented by the greenhouse in “Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid” (2015) and the explicit comparison of the narrator to a tropical plant in alien soil, alludes to the literary voice’s rejection to “accept a binary framing of the State that attempts to create a world of us-them, here-there” (Jones 2012: 687). In this regard, she avoids the Cuban government’s national constraints and denies the State the right to define her as a non-Cuban because of her oppositional stance to the Revolutionary regime and consequent exile.

In other words, the literary voice’s comparison to a tropical plant in a greenhouse constitutes an effective way of empowerment because it enhances her ability for keeping her Cuban identity regardless the territorial demands. Even though the dryness of the Spanish land does not permit a tropical plant to grow, she achieves it by means of the construction of a *microclimate*, that is, a “space of refusal.” In fact, the greenhouse as a space where natural plants grow in spite of the unnatural environment is also a powerful metaphor of individual resistance despite the political territory’s endeavour to define subjects. Consequently, by comparing herself to a tropical plant in a greenhouse of Madrid, the literary voice dictates her right of self-definition and preserves her freedom in an alternative space outside of the nation-state’s scope.

Accordingly, the tyranny of the national power is further showed by the depiction of authoritarian political figures in Ndongo's "La mirada de la Niña Tasia" (2013), Adichie's "The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction" (2016) and Alarcón's "Los sueños inútiles" (2009). In fact, these fictional political figures, evoking a negative image of the tyrannical Equatorial Guinean President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, and W.B. Bush and Donald Trump as democratic leaders who do not cause good to certain national citizens in the views of the authors, intend to embody the whole country by suppressing some individualities within the national territory.

Thus, their intended homogeneity among the population is combatted by the literary voices through the construction of humorous spaces that act as "third spaces" or "countersites" where the leader's enhancement and messianism is caricatured and deconstructed. As a result, the humorous space allows them to resist a hegemonic political discourse and raise their voices "to turn things upside down" (Sorensen 2008: 185) and to consequently be able to express their own version of events.

Also, even though the nation-state and the tyrannical figures that embody it constitute powerful oppressive forces in the analysed narratives, hegemonic discourses around patriarchy and imperialism also repress some of the literary voices in this corpus. Indeed, the Nigerian literary voices in Adichie's "Imitation" (2009) and "Jumping Monkey Hills" (2009) have to counterattack these important narratives who constraint them as individuals. In the former story, Obiora forces his wife into a materialization process, for Nkem is gradually infected by the fakeness and voiceless condition of the art pieces that he brings home from Nigeria. Consequently, she turns into one more imitational art piece in Obiora's collection, which highlights her immobility and dependence on her husband. However, basing myself on the idea that objects become recipients of identity formation (Kopytoff 1986; Appadurai 1986; Watts 2011), I argue that the originality of the Ife

bronze head that Obiora brings with him at the end of the story encourages Nkem's authenticity and value as a human being. Through the projection of her subjectivity on the authentic African art piece (and the reflection that they foster on her), Nkem takes advantage of her in-betweenness as a Nigerian in the United States and her house's interstitial status (which represents an "African museum" in American soil) to create a "third space" where she can redefine herself outside of the patriarchal ideology that Obiora epitomizes, as well as retrieving the African identity that she had lost during the reterritorialization process that she undergoes in her white American neighbourhood.

Similarly, Ujunwa, the main character in "Jumping Monkey Hills" (2009), attends a Writers Conference held in a South African luxurious resort that is depicted as a representation of the colonial power's heritage. Accordingly, Edward, the British organizer, epitomizes imperialist and patriarchal powers in the sense that he patronizes Ujunwa with sexist comments and attitudes that are explicitly revealed throughout the narrative, and imposes his version of Africa among the African attendees. Indeed, Ujunwa does not feel comfortable with the organizer's tendency to an authoritarian behavior, mainly portrayed through the smoke coming from his pipe and its disturbing effects on some of the attendees, which symbolizes how his influence reaches everyone's mind. In this respect, most of the African participants, in their desire to be liked by Edward, behave according to the way in which the Imperialist vision of Africa dictates they should behave (both in their writings and outside of them).

Importantly, despite this ideological oppression, Ujunwa decides to defend the existence of "many Africas" through the constant questioning of Edward's comments. Thus, the narrative that she presents to the rest of the attendees talks about a personal sexist experience in Nigeria regardless its lack of those elements that are believed to be truly African by the British organizer. When Edward, after listening to her story, claims that

“the whole thing is implausible” (Adichie “Jumping Monkey Hills” 114), she dares to speak up and contradict him, revealing that the sexism that she is referring to in her story is completely plausible, as she herself has suffered from it in Nigeria. In this light, I argue that Ujunwa finds refuge in the fictional “third space” that she creates through her writing, from where she eludes a place ruled by an imperialist ideology and gains authority to challenge Edward’s attempt to impose a unique narrative around her African identity and origin.

Finally, political and social institutions constitute another source of domination for the literary voices in Adichie’s “The American Embassy” (2009), Montanet’s “Odiar el Verano” (2013), Alomar’s “The Union of Our Home” (2014) and Abogo’s “El sueño de Dayo” (2007). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the American embassy and the custom office in Adichie’s and Montanet’s narratives work as constraining spaces defined by administrative panes that the literary voices are unable to trespass, and behind which security guards and administrative officer hinder their free will and movement.

Nevertheless, an unexpected shift takes place at the end of both stories when both the Nigerian character in “The American Embassy” (2009) and the couple in “Odiar el Verano” (2013) turn away from the civil servants in the immigration office and leave the institutional spaces. Through this act of resistance, the former creates a “third space” between two governments, the Nigerian and the American, which fail to offer her support after the death of her son and husband. In fact, she enters this space in the last scene of the narrative:

She turned slowly and headed for the exit.

“Ma’am?” she heard the interviewer’s voice behind her.

She didn’t turn. She walked out of the American embassy, past the beggars who still made their rounds with enamel bowls held outstretched, and got into her car (Adichie “The American Embassy” 141).

As this excerpt shows, encouraged by the mistreatment that the visa applicants experience in the embassy, the Nigerian character decides to leave the building. By stepping out of the embassy not only does she stop occupying an American space that patronizes her, but she also enters her own “space of refusal” from where she rejects her territorialization in the Nigerian country because of being ruled by a tyrannical government who has acted against her in the killing of her husband.

On their part, the couple in Montanet’s story give up trying to make the officer understand their climatic reasons to leave the country and step out the custom office while uttering the demolishing sentence “dejalo (...) Hundido en esa cabina y con ese uniforme, debe estar mas fastiado con el calor que nosotros” (Coro Montanet 2013). Indeed, the institutions’ inability to understand these literary voices push them to the occupation of “spaces of refusal” that emerge between the institutional Nigerian and American territory in Adichie’s story and the (presumably) Cuban institutional territory and the foreign space in “Odiar el Verano” (2013). The resistant subjects, feeling misunderstood by their own institutions, find a countersite from where they can confront them and stand for their free movement and institutional recognition.

Interestingly, their depiction as powerless individuals who are subjugated to the administrative workers’ and guards’ will changes abruptly at the end of the narratives, for the three literary voices’ possibility to leave the institutional spaces contrast with the guards’ and visa interviewers’ inability to do it. In this sense, the institutional spaces that these workers occupy behind the panes turn into administrative cages that evidence their submission to the government.

In a similar vein, the “third spaces” from where the narrators in Alomar’s “The Union of Our Home” (2017) and Abogo’s “El sueño de Dayo” (2007) speak are characterized by their anti-institutional stance. In Alomar’s story, this space emerges as an alternative realm on the borderland, from where the narrative voice denounces the rigidity of the Arab border system, for it hinders the citizens’ movement across “the brother’s room” (2014: 15) and contrasts it with the direct allusion to an alternative reality, the European borders, to highlight the permeability that they offer to their citizens. Indeed, the micronarrative itself can be approached as a “third space” that the literary voice creates in order to detach himself from national demarcations that hinder individuals’ movement and mutual communication. It constitutes a “space of refusal” located on the borderland where he can speak up about individuals being “subjected to search,” under a “security’s inquisitive gaze” (15) when crossing borders on their own geographical area and question it.

On its part, the narrative voice in Abogo’s “El sueño de Dayo” (2007) tells the reader about the story of a young African boy who needs to fight the vexation that either social institutions in the form of senseless inherited beliefs and prejudices in his African land, and global political institutions, such as the fictional Potencias Unidas or Western media, bring him and eventually lead him to death. In order to resist the limitations that come in the form of social and racial conventions that prevent him from being in total control of his own life, Dayo finds refuge in his dream. Even though it firstly reveals to him as the vision of an apocalyptic Africa that haunts him in because of reflecting the destruction of his land, and himself, an Africa marked by famines, civil wars, and the Western institutions’ mistreatment, Dayo eventually finds the courage to “enfrentarse al sueño, vencer su miedo” (Abogo 2007: 22). At this moment “se [suma], cual aorta negra, a la muchedumbre que [progresa] hacia el Mayombe” and “[sortea] obstáculos tupidos,

tenaces, espinosos...” (2007: 22). Thus, although the character’s ultimate death alludes to his inability to get the independence that he desires away from social and political institutions, I argue that Dayo himself (and his dream) constitute an outstanding “third space” or “active literary space” from where a literary voice (in this case the narrator) can denounce the unrecognition and denigration that some political and social institutions carry out against individuals.

In a similar fashion, the store where the characters hide in Adichie’s “A Private Experience” (2009), the house where Kamara works in “On Monday of Last Week” (2009) and the interracial romantic relationship between Ka and Ariadna in Abogo’s “Hora de Partir” (2007) constitute “third spaces” where these literary voices are able to establish strong links with outgroup members, thus challenging the rigid boundaries between group categorizations that hinder individuals’ agency (Tajfel 1969; Rosenthal & Levy 2010; Peery 2011; Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers 2012). In this light, they can be approached as “active literary spaces” where the resistant voices find refuge from the tyranny of group categorization through the penetration into theoretically antagonistic realms. In other words, the “third spaces” in these narratives emerge from the communion among individuals who dare to trespass their categorizing borders and establish intimate relationships with outgroup members.

In this sense, the store where the Igbo Christian girl and the Hausa Muslim woman hide as a consequence of the riot in “A Private Experience” symbolizes a “third space,” for it fosters an intimacy between the characters that mocks the binary spatialization among religious and ethnic groups and intergroup conflict. The narrator shows their communion when the Muslim woman wishes that Allah keeps the Igbo Christian’s sister in a safe place after the riot, while Chika avoids answering with an “amen” and simply nods as a sign of respect for her companion’s religious practices. Their union is further addressed

to when both women pray together hoping that their relatives have not been damaged by the attacks, as well as through the continuous questions that they make to each other as a proof of their mutual interest in their cultural backgrounds and lifestyles.

In a similar way, there is a genuine interest between Ka and Ariadna in Abogo's "Hora de Partir" (2007) and a curiosity on behalf of Kamara about the American family that she works for in Adichie's "On Monday of Last Week" (2009). The interracial relationship that Ka (a black immigrant in Spain) and Ariadna (a white native Spanish) have in the European territory allows them for the construction of a "third space" where they defy the racial and social intergroup conflict sustained on nationalist and racist discourses.

In the case of Kamara, her penetration into the life of an American family means for her a chance to combat the prejudices that Tracy and Josh have towards her as a Nigerian immigrant and the strong bond between Tracy's son and herself also delegitimizes categorizing constrictions based on differences around nationality and social class. In addition, the curiosity that Kamara develops towards Tracy (both cultural and sexual) and her desire to reach her, despite her distinctions in terms of nationality and social class, also portray Kamara's willingness to cross categorization boundaries. As a result, by means of an interest in outgroup members and the construction of an intimacy between them, these literary voices give shape to "counterspaces" that are located inbetween group categorizations. The transcultural environments that these spaces generate involve an intergroup dialogue that resists any attempt to constrict individuals' agency.

To conclude, I have argued that the resistant literary voices in the analysed narratives for this dissertation take advantage of their interstitial status to which the hostile places that they occupy confine them to construct alternative "active literary spaces." These "third spaces," which emerge from the different resistance mechanisms that the literary voices

use, allow them to redefine their identities, enact their subjectivities and speak up against the oppression of tyrannical governments, national borders, sexist and imperialist practices, demarcations around group categorizations and social and political institutions. In this regard, these literary voices combat the physical and mental paralysis to which these hegemonic powers force them by means of finding refuge in alternative counterspaces where they can avoid ideological and territorial entrapment. Consequently, this leads them towards the achievement of their freedom for self-definition and the right to offer an alternative version to the “unique discourse,” thus supporting a more democratic way of understanding the world.

CONCLUSION

By focusing on a selection of short stories between the beginning of the century and 2017, this dissertation has aimed to explore the non-violent mechanisms that resistant voices use to build alternative spaces where they can avoid the impositions of a hegemonic ideology. Given that their struggle is marked by the rejection of an “oppressive account of their identities constructed by others who hold power over them” (Buckingham 2008:7), these spaces of resistance (or counterspaces) that they create to protect themselves from racism or gender, sexual, and ethnical inequality, allow them to redefine their identity at a narrative level.

Therefore, I have sought to demonstrate a resistance in fictional literature, understanding *resistance* as “an implacable demand for *justice* with actions characterized by *fortitude* or the ability to sustain courage over a long period of time without any certain outcome, along with a *prudence* in the choice and deployment of limited means” (Caygill 2013: 97) and “one of the most important and enduring expressions of the twentieth-century political imagination and action and one ever more important in the struggles of the present century” (6). This capacity to resist at a narrative level is fostered by literary voices (in the form of characters or first-person narrators), who constitute examples of civil disobedience and non-violent resistance. In this regard, the stories analyzed here also work as creative spaces where human agency is fundamental to resistance. Given that the negotiation of an alternative identity within a hegemonic order requires winning a space (Hall 1986), I have demonstrated that the resistant voices’ freedom depends on the construction of literary spaces where they can reclaim their right to self-definition in their fight against social injustice, tyrannical governments, and new forms of colonialism and imperialism.

More specifically, these oppressive forces have appeared in the form of border or institutional systems, such as the visa interviewers and the guards in Adichie’s “The

American Embassy” (2009) or the rigid Arab border system depicted in Alomar’s “The Union of Our Home” (2014); tyrannical nations and national rulers, like the African tyrant in Ndongo’s “La Mirada de la Niña Tasia” (2017) or the repressive Cuban government alluded to in Valencia’s “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004); imperialist and sexist behaviours epitomized in some characters such as the British professor in Adichie’s “Jumping Monkey Hills” (2009) or Obiora in “Imitation” (2009), and intergroup conflict as a consequence of dominant ideologies like the racial prejudices that the interracial couple in Abogos’s “Hora de Partir” (2007) are forced to combat.

On another note, this study has been structured in nine chapters. While chapter one and two presented an introduction and a theoretical framework, respectively, chapters three to eight have focused on the different weapons that the literary voices use in the narratives to construct their alternative literary spaces. Finally, and chapter nine explored more deeply the way in which their resistance mechanisms lead them to the final construction of counterspaces where they achieve physical and mental independence. Therefore, the resistance mechanisms they use occupy a central position in my analysis, since they function as both the starting point and the pattern according to which the narratives are grouped in chapters for close comparison.

To start with, chapter three has tackled the use of objects in the identity formation process as a means of resistance. Building on theories that conceive of objects as recipients of identity formation (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986), I postulated that decorative items play a central role in Valencia’s “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004) and Adichie’s “Imitation” (2009) when it comes to encouraging the literary voices to adopt a critical stance towards their oppressors. While the female protagonist in Adichie’s story finds the courage to face her husband once she sees herself reflected in the Ife Bronze Head’s authenticity and high value, Victoriano’s rebellion results from his conversion into the custodian of all the

objects that his friends, being opponents of the Castro's government, entrust him to before going into exile. In this light, I have argued that the connection that Victoriano in Valencia's "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004) and Nkem in Adichie's "Imitation" (2009) establish with surrounding objects challenge the constraining borders that the Cuban Revolutionary regime and a patriarchal marriage (epitomized by the figure of Obiora) respectively impose on them.

Chapter four revolved around a severe criticism of institutional powers such as security guards, administrations, organizations and settled social conventions and beliefs that do not meet the literary voices' needs. In the first section, I analysed how the couple in Montanet's "Odiar el Verano" (2013) and the Nigerian woman in Adichie's "The American Embassy" (2009) confront visa interviewers and security guards by refusing to dance to bureaucracy's tune. In the second section, this rejection of institutions is shown from a broader perspective since, while the narrative voice in Alomar's "The Union of Our Home" (2014) denounces the rigidity of the Arab border system, the narrator in Abogo's "El Sueño de Dayo" (2007) implicitly addresses global institutions (such as the United Nations) and informal institutions based on inefficient and hypocritical social constrictions. Bearing in mind that institutions of any kind work as fundamental pillars upon which the nation-state is constructed (Mayer 2014: 37), I highlighted the non-cooperation with the institutional authorities depicted in these narratives as a powerful resistance mechanism (Corona 2011: 79).

In chapter five, I explored fictional writing as an additional form of rebelliousness. Both the narrative voice in Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013) and the Nigerian character in Adichie's "Jumping Monkey Hills" (2009) write fictional stories to question the hegemonic order. In this regard, their writings provide them with the necessary self-

confidence and space to express themselves freely and resist the imposition of the unique political discourse or “the single story” (Adichie 2009: 4).

Similarly, in chapter six, I argued that the love and adoration that the respective narrative voices in Abogo’s “La Espesura de la Noche” (2007), Alomar’s “Love Letter” (2017) and Carrazana’s “Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)” (2001) show towards a woman who lives on the other side of rigid national demarcations helps them challenge the nation’s unique discourse and the rigidity it imposes on its citizens. More specifically, Equatorial Guinea, Cuba and Syria are addressed as isolated places where free movement is hard to achieve due to the extreme control that the tyrannical governments exert on their borders. Consequently, the exaltation of the literary voices’ transnational love, together with the lack of appreciation that they show towards these countries, challenges the unconditional and forced love upon which tyrannical nations base themselves (Morrison et al. 2012: 515) and fosters a more global way of understanding the world.

Chaper seven explored the establishment of intergroup relationships, that is, the connection between individuals whose categorization in different racial, religious, or social groups is imposed, and how this process constitutes an effective resistance weapon to combat dominant ideologies around group categorization. By building a close relationship with an outgroup member, the interracial couple in Abogo’s “Hora de Partir” (2007), the Muslim and the Christian character in Adichie’s “A Private Experience” (2009), and the foreign character and the native couple in Adichie’s “On Monday of Last Week” (2009), delegitimize the stereotypes and prejudices that result from categorizations and demolish category boundaries in favor of the coexistence of different individuals.

In chapter eight, I analyzed Ndongo's "La Mirada de la Niña Tasia" (2013), Adichie's "The Arrangements: A Work of Fiction" (2016) and Alarcón's "Los sueños inútiles" (2009) to examine the ways in which the literary voices in these stories use humor to empower themselves against an authoritarian political figure who represses them. On a more specific note, I argued that they build a caricature of these tyrants based on their clumsy sexual behavior and childish attitude, as well as constant references to their physical weakness and selfishness.

Finally, in chapter nine, I focused on border-crossing and transnational movement as a means of resistance. Kay's "The Smuggled Person's Tale" (2017), Alomar's "Journey To Me" (2017) and Carrazana's "Una planta tropical en un invernadero de Madrid" (2015) each depict a refugee who, forced to leave their native land due to political problems, takes advantage of their placelessness to defy the fixed identity that the nation-state imposes on national subjects (Rojas 2006; Jones 2012). Therefore, the disassociation they undergo from their original lands fosters a nomadic consciousness that releases them from a mental and physical paralysis while allowing them to redefine their identities.

Even though I have referred to some of these literary voices, such as Victoriano, in Valencia's "El Ojo del Cíclope" (2004), Dayo, in Abogo's "El sueño de Dayo" (2007), or the interracial couple in "Hora de Partir" (2007) as being not entirely successful when it comes to defeating their sources of oppression, I believe that all of them manage to construct a space where they can acquire a critical and strong voice against their oppressors. Indeed, projecting their subjectivities onto the surrounding objects, refusing to collaborate with institutional powers, writing fiction, adoring a woman across national borders and over national territories, establishing an intergroup relationship, using humor to mock tyrannical figures, and continual border-crossing all constitute interesting ways in which they give shape to alternative literary spaces.

Consequently, I devoted the last chapter of this dissertation to a deeper exploration of the spaces that the literary voices construct in order to resist. Inspired by D. Massey's notion of "activity spaces," I have defined an active literary space as a space that is born in fictional literature and within which "a particular agent operates" (Massey 1995: 54). These spaces are literary resistance spatialities where "dynamic spaces of cultural change [are] characterized by shifting identities" (Buckingham 2008: 7). Indeed, I have approached them as "spaces of refusal" (Jones 2012) or "in-between spaces," for they "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha 1994: 1). In this light, I have shown how the resistant subjectivities depicted in the narratives take advantage of their interstitial state to which they are confined to offer an alternative version to the hegemonic discourse, since "the frontier between differences also operates figuratively as a conceptual space for performative identities beyond the fixed essentialisms of fundamentalist or absolutist identity politics" (Stanford Friedman 2007: 273).

Therefore, this study highlights fictional literature as an outstanding device for constructing an alternative space where an oppressed individual can be provided with a critical voice. The study clearly illustrates Fredrick Mayer's understanding of fictional literature as "an empowering tool of mind" (2014: 79) or Julia Borst's belief that literature has the potential to unsilence "immobile voices" (2019: 113). I have approached these fictional (and more specifically postcolonial) narratives as relevant socio-political documents, since they not only allude to current socio-political conflicts and events (such as the Syrian migration crisis or Cuban exile), but also convey powerful ideological messages that could offer further support to some of the ongoing studies within social and political science.

In fact, the writers of these stories shape a literary voice that fuels a resistance movement by providing an alternative point of view to that of the hegemonic power concerning, for instance, the Cuban Revolutionary Regime in Carrazana's "Grafomanía" (2013) or the Equatorial Guinean government in Ndongo's "La mirada de la niña Tasia" (2013). In this sense, their fiction also allows them to bring the story of disadvantaged (and sometimes minority) groups to the center, such as the harassment of Afghan Hazara people in Kay's "The Smuggled Person's Tale" (2017) or the humiliating process that some immigrants experience when applying for a visa or refugee status in Adichie's "The American Embassy" (2009).

Significantly, the twenty short stories that make up this study were selected according to some common patterns. Firstly, I have proved that they all depict resistant literary voices that project alternative messages to those imposed by hegemonic powers. Indeed, the stories provide disadvantaged individuals with the opportunity to speak up and be critical of their sources of constraint, thus offering another version in contrast to the dominant narrative of the nation-state, tyrannical governments, intergroup conflicts and their resulting stereotypes, and sexist and imperialist ideologies. Indeed, the narratives bring a focus to unsilenced voices: opponents of the Cuban Revolutionary regime or the Equatorial Guinean dictatorship, refugees, exiles, immigrants who were forced to leave their countries of origin because of war or political persecution, individuals who denounce the lack of institutional recognition, and those who challenge group categorization or power relations based on sexist and imperialist attitudes.

In addition, the texts under consideration here can be regarded as postcolonial in the sense that they are:

writings of and by people who have been dominated by white, Euro-American cultures, and which explore the various modalities of power, identity, subjectivity

as informed by race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual preference (...) and cast by the “other” by and within regulating Euro-American discourses (Nayar 2008:8).

Nevertheless, I have highlighted that they all avoid the traditional binary thinking in the postcolonial field, based on a division between Europe and its others, colonizer and colonized, the West and the rest, one that, according to some scholars, such as Stephen Slemon, shape a foundational principle in postcolonial criticism that is, at heart, insufficient (1990: 34). On the contrary, this study clearly illustrates Homi Bhabha’s call to acknowledge the hybridization between Western and non-Western entities and, more recently, the words of Christian Moraru, who highlights some approaches within comparative literature and postcolonialism (Susan Stanford Friedman’s new modernist studies, David Damrosch’s world literature, or Spivak’s planetary thinking) as challenges to the old colony / metropolis dichotomy (Moraru 2017: 129).

Along these lines, I have argued that the oppressors in the narratives are not only embodied by Western dominant figures, such as the British professor in Adichie’s “Jumping Monkey Hills” (2009), but also appear in the form of what traditional postcolonial studies would understand as “victims,” such as the old African leader in Ndongo’s “La mirada de la niña Tasia” (2013) or the Nigerian government in Adichie’s “The American Embassy” (2009). Also, the resistant voices in the narratives are depicted as strong individuals who dare to confront their sources of constraint regardless of their origin. In this light, the dividing lines between the West and its “others” and colonizer and colonized blur and, moreover, my research evidences “the failure of hegemonic discourses to create stable and complete subject positions for the subaltern, who [should be] instead seen not as victims but as individuals capable for agency” (Sánchez 1999: 324).

Interestingly, this comparative analysis has revealed that, despite the existing differences between the texts in terms of the diverse social and political conflicts that they deal with in a variety of geographical scenarios, the fact that they have been published both in English and Spanish, in print and on the internet, and by nine different authors, they all address an imagined international audience and present common themes and motifs to evoke similar resistance mechanisms. I have approached the term “imagined audience” as “a mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating” (Litt 2012: 331), and I share the belief that an imagined audience can be as influential as the actual audience when it comes to determining behavior (Fridlund 1991). Thus, these narratives depict a current resistant voice that takes advantage of being in a conflicting position of in-betweenness to construct a “third space” (Bhabha) where it acquires a critical voice aimed at a tyrannical power. Indeed, I have approached this group of contemporary texts as part of a transnational network of resistant voices that rebel against similar sources of oppression and “push beyond national [and social] boundaries to engage the global character of modern experience, contemporary culture, and the [transnational] identities they produce” (Jay 2010: 92).

Therefore, this dissertation has aimed for a broader and more accurate approach that matches the new mandate in literary studies for a “planetary thinking” (Friedman 2007: 261) and the ultimate challenge to parochialism, “even the enhanced parochialism of Eurocentric comparative literature” (Bush 2017: 172). As Julia Borst (2017) and Juliane Tauchnitz (2017) suggest, to approach a comparative analysis from a transnational perspective can provide revealing insight. In this light, this dissertation challenges the traditional ways of approaching humanities (specifically literature) through its regionalization. While the most conservative academic studies in humanities regionalize the history and politics of particular spaces (such as “the Middle East,” “America” or

“West Indies,”), my research provides revealing and enriching insight by fostering “a contemporary revision and reconstruction of regions based on new political and cultural realities” (Wilson 2002: 248) that better reflects “the new globalization (...), the effects of deterritorialization, new modes of travel and communication, and the issues of national borders and citizenship” (Friedman 2007: 267).

Likewise, this dissertation provides an original comparative approach that builds on the ongoing discussions that comparatists in ACLA (American Comparative Literature Association), such as Michael Swacha, are having about the state of comparatism today. They remind us of the comparative literature’s duty to transcend national and linguistic boundaries (Saussy 2017: 24; Thomsen 2017: 119), within what Jessica Berman calls a “trans” orientation, that is, the need for transdisciplinary scholarship to become “importantly transnational by examining texts outside national or imperial circuits of travel, nonprivileged migrations of people and texts, or trajectories outside the usual metro-centric routes of travel” (Berman 2017: 106). Some scholars within the field believe that comparatists should support “the members of the profession who (...) fit together unaccustomed bodies of work” (Saussy 2017: 28) and suggest approaching literature as a window that can “reveal specific types of content beyond the literary” (Swacha 2015) while highlighting the need for expanding the scope of literary analysis by considering other disciplines and domains of knowledge at the same level of the literary text.

In fact, in my comparative analysis, the narratives work as a launching point, since it is through the application of social and political theories that my literary corpus *speaks*. The interdisciplinarity and planetary character of this dissertation illustrate Michael Swacha’s and other comparatists’ point of view, because although literature has a fundamental role in my research, I also “consider[s] various disciplines and domains of knowledge” at

the same level of importance (Swacha 2015), and thus “the study of literature is not necessarily for the sake of literature itself” but it also addresses some larger socio-political questions (Swacha 2015) that contribute to a better understanding of some of the ongoing issues in the world today.

Thus, both the authors and the literary voices of these narratives engage in a global dialogue. Their conversation informs a transnational framework where a network of resistant voices join forces to build alternative spaces from which to launch a critical voice. As my research focuses on postcolonial texts, further research comparing postcolonial and non-postcolonial narratives written and published contemporaneously might be necessary to determine whether the scope for transnational comparison can be opened. In addition, it might help redefine and update the lines that divide these areas of study.

Likewise, my research would benefit enormously from further studies that shed light on the places where these texts are published and a more specific knowledge about the type of reader who receives them and the modes of circulation. As I base my study on an imagined international audience, the analysis of specific and technical data (number of writer’s blog visitors and their location, or number of printed books sold) could offer more specific insight and further support to my analysis.

Finally, to better understand the potential contribution of literature to other areas within humanities and to help clarify certain issues in today’s globalized world, I believe that future comparative literary studies should also go beyond the literary to address social and political issues, such as the role of social technologies or the representation of political leaders in the twenty-first century prose fiction on a global scale. Further comparative literary studies within the interdisciplinary framework recently proposed by

the ACLA (American Comparative Literature Association) would provide a clearer understanding of current political and social issues, could help highlight the potential socio-political nuances that fictional texts convey and, more specifically, could shed light upon what Homi Bhabha calls “the histories of the excluded” (Bhabha 1994:6).

Resumen en español (Summary in Spanish)

Esta tesis doctoral se centra en estudiar la representación de voces resistentes en el relato breve del siglo veintiuno, así como en el análisis de los mecanismos que estas emplean para la formación de espacios alternativos de resistencia en la literatura. Dichas voces literarias (encarnadas por narradores en primera persona o personajes en las historias), se sirven de estos espacios literarios activos para lograr la construcción de sus identidades al margen de las imposiciones provenientes de ideologías dominantes. Basándome en el concepto de “espacios activos” de Doreen Massey (1995), defino el espacio literario activo como un lugar de resistencia que nace en la narración, caracterizado por su liminalidad, su naturaleza dinámica, y desde el que un individuo puede adquirir libertad de agencia. Dado que la negociación de una identidad subcultural dentro de un orden hegemónico necesita de un espacio (Hall 1986) y que nuestras identidades son inherentemente territoriales (Agnew 2008), postulo que estos espacios literarios permiten expresar puntos de vista alternativos basados en las experiencias propias de personajes y narradores, con el objetivo de resistir contra actitudes fundamentalistas relativas al racismo, sexismo, homofobia, conductas xenófobas y desigualdades sociales.

Por lo tanto, postulo que las subjetividades plasmadas en los relatos que analizo emplean diversos mecanismos de resistencia que resultan en estos espacios intersticiales desde donde pueden desarrollar una voz crítica. De manera importante, entiendo su modo de resistencia como pacífico, ya que hacen uso de armas no violentas basadas en el empleo de los objetos como proyectores de identidad, la no colaboración con figuras institucionales, el uso de la ficción para expresar sus opiniones, relaciones sexuales y románticas interraciales, relaciones transculturales entre miembros pertenecientes a grupos en conflicto, la caricaturización de un líder autoritario, y el nomadismo como medio de vida para burlar las fronteras territoriales y la fijeza territorial de la nación. El

modo en el que despliegan estas armas para ensalzar su voz propia constituye un pilar central en mi investigación, puesto que me permite agrupar los textos en capítulos de acuerdo a estos mecanismos de rebeldía con el fin de servir a una rigurosa comparación.

Cabe destacar que las fuerzas opresoras que impiden la evolución de estos individuos como agentes libres vienen representadas por la nación-estado, las rígidas fronteras y las entidades institucionales sobre las que se asienta (personal aduanero, entrevistadores para la solicitud de visados, guardias estatales), ideologías sexistas y sociales hegemónicas, gobiernos dictatoriales, y pensamientos sesgados en torno a la categorización grupal. Así, por ejemplo, la protagonista en el relato “Imitation” (2009), de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, debe luchar por una identidad propia liberada de las limitaciones que el régimen patriarcal, epitomizado por su marido, impone sobre ella. Otros personajes, como el protagonista en “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004), resisten contra la inmovilidad mental y territorial que un gobierno autoritario les impone, esforzándose por combatir prejuicios racistas y otros obstáculos generados por la categorización grupal, como le ocurre a la pareja interracial en “Hora de Partir” (2007) de César Mba Abogo, o adquiriendo una voz crítica contra la rigidez institucional al servicio del Estado en el caso de la pareja en “Odiar el Verano” (2013) de Gleyvis Coro Montanet.

Más específicamente, estas narraciones arrojan luz sobre voces alternativas silenciadas dentro de un orden hegemónico: oponentes al régimen revolucionario cubano o al gobierno dictatorial ecuatoguineano, refugiados, exiliados, emigrantes forzados a abandonar sus lugares de origen por razones bélicas o políticas, individuos a los que la institución no reconoce, y aquellos que retan la categorización grupal y las relaciones de poder basadas en actitudes imperialistas, sexistas y nacionalistas. En este sentido, los relatos que analizo en esta tesis doctoral pueden entenderse como ejemplos de literatura postcolonial, en tanto que tratan sobre individuos, o transcurren en lugares, que están o

han estado dominados por culturas euroamericanas blancas y en los que se exploran modos de poder, identidad y subjetividad derivados de cuestiones como raza, género, etnia, y preferencia sexual (Nayar 2008: 8). No obstante, postulo que estos escritos no pueden enmarcarse dentro del pensamiento binario tradicional desarrollado en este campo, principalmente fundamentado en divisiones como Occidente / Oriente, Europa / los otros, colonizador / colonizado, etc. Por el contrario, tal y como señalan Stephen Slemon (1990) y Homi Bhabha (1994), sostengo que estos principios de la crítica postcolonial tradicional son simplistas e insuficientes, y que las voces representadas en estos relatos se rebelan contra dominios de poder más amplios que atienden a ideologías racistas, patriarcales, nacionalistas, así como otros modos de soberanía que erosionan la igualdad social del individuo y su autodeterminación.

Por consiguiente, a pesar de que las historias y sus personajes o narradores están ligados a territorios postcoloniales (Cuba, Guinea Ecuatorial, Oriente Medio, Nigeria, Sudáfrica), y de que las temáticas son de índole típicamente postcolonial, como la representación de inmigrantes, exiliados y otras voces resistentes, defiendo que muchas de estas voces literarias no están solo en confrontación con Occidente sino también con sus propios gobiernos. Así, la protagonista en “The American Embassy” (2009) de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, debe enfrentarse al personal de la embajada estadounidense y al gobierno de su Nigeria natal por igual. Del mismo modo, Victoriano, el protagonista de “El Ojo del Cíclope” (2004), de Leonardo Valencia, resiste contra la tiranía del propio gobierno cubano y, por su parte, la voz narrativa en “The Union of Our Home” (2014), de Osama Alomar, se queja de un sistema fronterizo árabe opresor que impide la libertad de movimiento entre sus *hermanos*, a la vez que señala a la Unión Europea como modelo a seguir en este aspecto.

Mientras que los estudios de literatura comparada dentro del campo de la literatura postcolonial se han centrado más comunmente en analizar las fuentes de opresión o los modos en los que la voz del subalterno es acallada o potenciada, mi investigación ofrece un análisis original. Esto se debe a que esta tesis doctoral se concentra en las herramientas que las voces literarias emplean para retar al poder hegemónico dentro de un marco transnacional, otorgando la misma relevancia a las teorías y aspectos sociopolíticos tratados que a la literatura en sí. En este sentido, esta investigación demuestra el potencial de la literatura para propiciar un diálogo global y la posibilidad de representación de una resistencia política y social a nivel narrativo. Partiendo de este argumento, mi investigación se basa en las teorías de Barbara Harlow (1987), Jacques Rancière (2004), o Frederick Mayer (2014) con el objetivo de constatar un estrecha relación entre la política y la literatura de ficción y la concepción de este tipo de narrativa como una herramienta eficaz para edificar subjetividades y llamar al activismo político (Mayer 2014).

Por esta razón, abordo estas narrativas de ficción como documentos con una carga sociopolítica significativa, ya que no solo aluden a conflictos y eventos sociopolíticos actuales (como la crisis migratoria siria o el exilio cubano), sino que también transmiten mensajes ideológicos potentes que podrían dar apoyo a algunos de los estudios llevados a cabo dentro de las ciencias políticas y sociales. Por lo tanto, estos relatos dan protagonismo a historias de grupos desfavorecidos (y a veces minoritarios), como el maltrato de los Afganos Hazara en “The Smuggled Person’s Tale” (2017) de Jackie Kay, o el proceso humillante que algunos inmigrantes experimentan a la hora de solicitar visado o refugio en “The American Embassy” (2009) de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

En lo que concierne a la metodología empleada, mi investigación se centra en el estudio comparativo de veinte historias cortas, escritas por nueve autores entre los años 2000 y

2017. El haber seleccionado relatos escritos en este marco temporal se debe a mi interés por explorar los matices políticos y sociales de la narrativa contemporánea que hable sobre temas sociopolíticos actuales, tales como los crecientes flujos migratorios o las fuertes ideologías nacionalistas, homofóbicas o racistas que emergen en oposición a los derechos humanos. Considero significativo que, a pesar de la variedad de escenarios geográficos en los que las historias transcurren y el hecho de que los textos están escritos en inglés y español por autores diferentes pertenecientes a países heterogéneos, los relatos presentan temas y figuras comunes. Así, los relatos evocan mecanismos de resistencia similares, presentan voces literarias alternativas al orden hegemónico y promueven un objetivo de liberación y autodefinición común. Tal y como han señalado académicos como Juliane Tauchnitz y Julia Borst, trascender limitaciones geográficas, culturales, y lingüísticas a la hora de estudiar literatura podría ofrecer resultados reveladores tanto a nivel narrativo como teórico-conceptual (2017: 7). Además, bajo mi punto de vista, todos los textos seleccionados están dirigidos a un público internacional imaginado, entendiendo el término “público imaginado” (imagined audience) como una conceptualización mental del destinatario del mensaje (Litt 2012: 331), y apoyando al mismo tiempo el argumento de que la influencia de un público imaginado es comparable a la de una audiencia específica en lo que respecta a determinar el comportamiento (Fridlund 1991).

No menos importante es la heterogeneidad de estos relatos cortos (publicados tanto en formato físico y digital, en inglés y español, o en lugares geográficos distantes) y el abanico de teorías pertenecientes a otros ámbitos de estudio que aplico en mi análisis (sociales, políticas, psicológicas, etc) con el fin de demostrar una fuerte correlación entre la narrativa de ficción y la sociopolítica. Ambas características de esta investigación atienden a los nuevos mandatos transnacionales e interdisciplinarios que comparatistas

como Michael Swacha o Ursula K. Heine están introduciendo en los debates en torno a al estado de los estudios literarios comparados llevados a cabo por el ACLA (American Comparative Literature Association). Mientras Heise anima a la mezcla de estilos y formatos para hacer uso de todo el potencial que la literatura comparada puede brindar en el mundo actual (2017:2), Swacha llama a extender el alcance de este campo de estudio, ya que considera que la investigación sobre literatura comparada se beneficiaría enormemente de su relación directa con otras estructuras de conocimiento o, dicho de otro modo, que las teorías de otras áreas de estudio deberían posicionarse al mismo nivel que la propia literatura analizada, más que usarse como mera herramienta al servicio de una demanda exclusivamente literaria (Swacha 2015).

Por consiguiente, con ánimo de alcanzar una perspectiva más extensa y certera del mundo de hoy, marcado por la nueva globalización, conflictos de ciudadanía, asuntos fronterizos y nuevos modos de viajar y comunicarse (Friedman 2007: 267), en esta tesis doctoral he querido prestar atención a un grupo de textos contemporáneos que ejemplifican la construcción narrativa de espacios alternativos donde el carácter transnacional de una red de voces resistentes niega a distintos poderes hegemónicos la tarea de definirlos. En este sentido, me sirvo de la teoría del “regionalismo crítico” (critical regionalism) de Rob Wilson (2002), que defiende que los estudios académicos han regionalizado la historia y la política de espacios particulares como el Medio Oriente, América, o el Caribe. Asimismo, esta teoría apela a la necesidad de promover una revisión de estas regiones de acuerdo a realidades políticas y culturales que reflejen de forma más óptima el mundo interconectado de hoy y que aboguen por estudios que apliquen lo que Spivak o Friedman han denominado un “pensamiento planetario” (planetary thinking).

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APPENDIX:

INTERVIEWS WITH THE CUBAN AUTHORS LIEN CARRAZANA AND

GLEYVIS CORO MONTANET

Entrevista a Gleyvis Coro Montanet

-¿Cuándo y por qué dejaste Cuba?

El 4 de septiembre de 2009, casi seis meses después de haber tenido que abandonar mi casa -un 8 de marzo negro: me gusta significar la fecha-, por razones de discriminación familiar y social -laboral-, vinculadas a la no aceptación de mi identidad de género.

Vivía mal en Cuba, como todos -y en algunos aspectos más mal que muchos-, pero contaba con un notable reconocimiento profesional y literario, un cierto saber hacer en más de un ámbito, cosas que me concedían una felicidad de vida y determinaban mi arraigo; pero sucedió que todo se vino abajo y se volvió inviable e invivible al punto que una persona que jamás había alimentado la mínima intención de emigrar, terminó en España, de emigrante.

-Críticos como Rafael Rojas afirman que cuando el arte se distancia de la política este adquiere autonomía. ¿Qué opinas sobre este asunto?

Creo que cuando el arte se distancia de todo lo que lo "empozoña", adquiere universalidad y autonomía. Soy una defensora de la representación de la idea fija en cualquier manifestación artística. Un tipo con una idea fija "saludable" dispone del mejor argumento para recrear. Un tipo que conoce a profundidad y en detalle su idea fija, puede generar, con una dosis no excesiva de talento, una obra maestra en un par de meses. Y entre las ideas fijas más lcelebérrimas está la política, porque no es una cuestión de minorías, es un gran tema, del que se lee, se escucha y se opina mucho y puede ser tratado como un gran asunto del arte, por supuesto.

La necesidad de distanciamiento entre lo político y lo artístico, se da, a mi juicio, cuando el daño causado por un estado político de las cosas, ha terminado por demoler la objetividad del creador; cuando el artista se enferma de "politicismo". Pero eso ocurre con cualquiera de los grandes y los pequeños grandes temas: la muerte, el amor, la inmortalidad del cangrejo, etcétera.

-Tu relato corto 'Odiar el Verano' me parece una alusión a la lucha del individuo contra una comunidad que se apoya en barreras burocráticas y nacionales para anular al primero. ¿Hasta qué punto estoy en lo cierto? ¿Es tu literatura anti-institucional?

Parto de decirte que yo estoy viva aún gracias a uno de los mecanismos institucionales contados entre los más truculentos donde los haya: el Ministerio de Cultura de la República de Cuba.

En ese hueco negro -a partir de aquel 8 de marzo- cuando cada noche pensaba que acabar con mi vida era la mejor salida y vivía en un cuchitril donde tenía que matar una rata -y nunca la misma- cada mañana, la única respuesta amable, piadosa, la única ayuda grande que recibí vino de parte de una institución de lo más institucional: ¡Un ministerio cubano creado y acorde con la sistemática fidelista -fidelista, de Fidel Castro-!

Toda mi obra anterior había sido anti-institucional, pero nacionalista. Y yo, como autora, no era anti-institucional, pero era nacionalista. Era miembro de la Unión de Escritores (UNEAC) y era reaccionaria en muchas cosas. Mi proyección de vida dentro de Cuba, en la Universidad, en los círculos de creación, era la posición de una chica reaccionaria. Luego, acá en España, comprendí muchas cosas que han atenuado mi intransigencia en términos de asimilación de lo institucional y creo que sigo siendo reaccionaria cuando

escribo y que ya no soy, para nada, nacionalista. Pero cada día me llevo mejor con lo institucional "bien llevado"; no sé si por conmiseración con los que un día fueron mis benefactores, o porque una se va disuadiendo con los años.

Pero "Odiar el verano" surgió de la lucha contra todos los obstáculos que identificas - sobre todo, los mentales- y ha sido un relato premonitorio de lo que iba a ser un momento de mi vida, y un sarcasmo de mi posterior evolución.

-¿Te consideras revolucionaria, en el sentido más puro de la palabra?

No. Jamás. Prefiero ir de innovadora. Voto por generar los cambios -como decía, Pushkin-, a través de la mejora sosegada de las costumbres. Una revolución, hasta en el sentido más puro de la palabra, es una bosta de res gigante que impone la fuerza loca y bruta y mata y perjudica a troche y moche. Fue lo primero que aprendí en la vida, a través de la viuda de la revolución que fue mi abuela.

Además, en la revolución caben desde la improvisación hasta la falta de educación de sus adláteres. Y yo soy muy intransigente con ambos estados de la materia.

Entrevista a Lien Carrazana Lau

¿Cuándo y por qué saliste de Cuba?

Pues en 2007. La primera vez que salí de Cuba y decidí quedarme, porque aquello no tiene futuro...

¿No?

En Cuba el futuro está condicionado a que un colectivo decida cambiarlo, y como la sociedad o colectivo ha decidido no cambiarlo en cincuenta y seis años que llevamos de dictadura... Cuando me fui no era tan formada en mi opinión, simplemente quería irme como tantos jóvenes cubanos. Tenía veintisiete años y quería irme. Quería probar otras suertes.

¿Entonces la razón principal fue política?

La razón principal es vivencial, visceral. Es que no puedes vivir, es que sientes que te asfixias por todas partes.

Parece que Cuba está viviendo cierto aperturismo. Unos lo ven con escepticismo, otros como esperanza. ¿Qué opinas tú sobre la situación actual de Cuba?

Ahora mismo estamos transitando por un periodo donde estamos los cubanos quedándonos bastante solos. Tenemos las posibilidades para de una vez y por todas tomar las riendas de nuestra situación y empezar a cambiarla o estar quizá cincuenta años más y que nos inscriban en el libro Guinness de los récords como la dictadura más longeva del hemisferio norte occidental.

¿No tienes esperanza con este diálogo que se está produciendo con Estados Unidos?

Es que... tendría que producirse un milagro, y yo como que los milagros en términos sociales no me los creo. Las revoluciones y todo eso... vengo de una malograda revolución. Yo creo que hace falta un cambio muy fuerte en la sociedad cubana desde dentro, desde los individuos, y ese cambio lo veo bastante distante. A ver... los movimientos políticos ya son otra cosa, a ver qué sucede. Yo creo que están premiando a una dictadura que no ha hecho nada en cincuenta y seis años por mejorar la situación de su pueblo.

¿Y sobre la situación artística?

Los artistas, ese es otro punto. Hace muy poco fue la Bienal de La Habana, un evento que aglutina las artes plásticas. Y a este evento fueron muchos galeristas norteamericanos porque, como resultado de las relaciones nuevas que se han abierto entre los dos países, hay un gran abanico de posibilidades para los cubanos y para los norteamericanos. Y en este caso los galeristas cubanos tuvieron grandes posibilidades en esta Bienal para vender obras en Estados Unidos, hacer negocios y para poder entablar ese necesario intercambio cultural. Lo que sucede es que todo trae un trasfondo político, y que en Cuba no se está intercambiando muchas veces con los artistas, sino con las instituciones del régimen, que tienen como un guión del cual no pueden salirse muchos artistas. El ejemplo de esto son personas que han sido censuradas hoy, y estamos hablando de 2015, por intentar hacer una obra por tener contenido político. Entonces cuando me preguntaste antes por qué me fui, podría decirse que me fui para que no me castigaran. Hay muchos artistas hoy en día censurados en Cuba y otros autocensurados.

¿Crees que hay mucho artista autocensurado en Cuba?

Ellos mismo deciden no hacer una obra cuyo contenido puede ser problemático. Siempre ha habido cierta tendencia en una parte del arte cubano a no profundizar en ciertas problemáticas, o tratarlas de una manera muy sutil para no caer en el terreno de la censura. El artista crítico cubano siempre acaba emigrando. Ahora ha cambiado un poco porque ahora la gente puede entrar y salir, al haber tenido lugar la reforma migratoria por parte de Raúl Castro. Los artistas y cualquiera pueden tener la posibilidad de salir durante dos años, tener el derecho de entrar y salir de Cuba. Si eso no lo haces pierdes tu derecho a vivir en la isla y pierdes tu derecho a ser cubano, teóricamente... para ellos eres un cubano de segunda, que fue lo que me pasó a mí. Ellos no conciben otra cosa que lo de que tú estás desertando de tu patria.

¿Crees que la ficción puede ser un arma de resistencia importante?

En Cuba es de sobrevivencia, el oasis que la gente necesita es la creación para el artista cubano, como el oxígeno. Yo creo que por eso muchos artistas se aferran a vivir allí, porque a pesar de que la isla está tan mal, el artista necesita de esa podredumbre, de ese contexto, de esa realidad. Digamos que hay muchos artistas que están ligados a su contexto, a su medio. Es muy difícil hablar de Cuba, que es una realidad tan distinta por las características tan específicas que tiene, y a la vez ser universal.

¿Esa es quizá una de las luchas del artista cubano, y del artista general, hoy en día?

Exacto. Porque siempre estamos nutriéndonos de lo que tenemos cerca pero a la vez queremos que eso llegue a mucha más gente. Y eso tiene que mucho que ver con la época en que vivimos en la que estamos todos conectados, y lo mismo te lee alguien en Chicago o en México, y tú quieres que eso llegue a ambas personas.

¿Qué podrías decirme de tu relato “Grafomanía”?

Es un cuento al que le tengo mucho cariño porque es bastante autobiográfico. Tiene muchas cosas de mi vida. Es muy autobiográfico porque tiene muchas cosas de mi familia, y de mis orígenes, y un poco es también una transición. Yo lo escribí en Cuba pero ya había ahí el deseo y la aspiración de irme, la proyección de hacerlo, y finalmente lo hice.

En este relato usas la metáfora de “la isla flotante,” usada también por otros escritores cubanos como Cabrera Infante o Reinaldo Arenas. ¿De qué manera te inspira el concepto de isla en tu literatura?

El otro día estaba conversando con alguien y le dije que no quería vivir nunca más en una isla. Si no puedo vivir en Cuba, no quiero vivir más en una isla. Aunque vivir en un continente tiene sus cosas también, y te sientas más isla en un continente. O sea, tú como individuo eres isla porque yo necesito ver el mar, entonces como me meta en Madrid dos o tres años sin ver el mar es demasiado. Ese refugio, que es la literatura, a veces la gente lo usa para evadirse, para crear un exilio dentro de la isla. Los dos últimos años en Cuba vivía así. Me creé como una isla dentro de la isla, un lugar, una burbuja, donde yo prácticamente ya no pertenecía. Me relacionaba muy poco con mi gente, y además muchas personas se van, entonces es esa sensación, la isla eres tú porque la gente se va.

Te sentías aislada...

Sí, porque si no entras dentro del sistema, estás out, y eso pasa con el arte también. Si quieres insertarte en el mundo editorial es nulo el esfuerzo que hagas si no quieres estar con las institucionales gubernamentales porque todas las editoriales son del Estado. No te imponen una ideología marxista-leninista como en los sesenta. Lo que sí que pueden es apartarte hacia un lado porque tu discurso no se presta a sus intereses. Yo no llegué a

publicar allí. Iba a publicar un libro pero como me fui no lo publicaron. Las cosas esas sin sentido de que tú te ganas un premio que era un dinero que además tuve que esforzarme para conseguirlo... y además, como me dijo un editor, no, ya tú no vives en Cuba, lo sentimos mucho. Es como, dejaste de ser cubana. Una cosa que a mí, en ese momento recién llegada a Madrid, me chocó bastante y me abrió. Eso me puso en mi lugar en el sentido de que esa es la realidad, y hoy por hoy no tengo interés en publicar en Cuba porque es que no tiene sentido. Porque te obligan a posicionarte del lado de los que no quieres estar. En ese sentido yo prefiero estar sola y posicionarme donde quiera.

¿Crees que el arte puede ser una amenaza real para un poder autoritario?

No, yo cada día estoy más desilusionada de ese pensamiento que quizás tuve cuando tenía veinte años. Cuando vivía en Cuba tenía la ilusión de que las cosas se pudieran cambiar, pero luego me di cuenta de que estaba rodeada de mierda. Yo creo que el arte puede ayudar a los cambios sociales, no en el sentido de que pueda ser un motor, sino en que puede dinamizar, si se mezcla. Es una manera de hacer activismo, y todo activismo debe ser bienvenido. Yo quiero que mi arte sea arte, y si tiene algo de crítica social es porque era necesario comunicar eso, pero creo que las herramientas para cambiar las cosas están en la sociedad, en la política y los sistemas sociales, que por ahí se encauzan mejor las cosas.